

# THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

## LEADERSHIP IN TURBULENT TIMES

WEDNESDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> JUNE 2010

### INTRODUCTION

- May I begin this morning by thanking the Trustees of the National Prayer Breakfast for Scotland for inviting me to address you today, and taking the risk of not only an Englishman, but a retired soldier at that, to be your speaker this morning. I am greatly honoured and privileged to be here, and it is always a huge pleasure to return to Edinburgh.
- Now the title that I have chosen for this morning is “Leadership in Turbulent Times” and this seems to me - at a time of intense political activity, at a time of deep economic uncertainty and at a time of much personal uncertainty for many individuals – an important subject to dwell on. Most of us either consciously or sub-consciously need a degree of leadership in our lives, and need it especially during turbulent times. Many was the time during my Army career, that faces turned to me with that unspoken question: “What do we do now?” And, if leadership is to be of any real value, if leaders are to really earn their pay, then it is in turbulent times that their real qualities will out, where the real value will be added, where true leadership will be displayed – and not when everything is going swimmingly, and according to plan.

So I would suggest that leadership is for turbulent times, and turbulent times are the context in which effective leaders should thrive for the benefit of those

around them. After all, where in the history books would Winston Churchill have sat without the threat from National Socialism, or where would Margaret Thatcher have been without the challenge from Argentina, or may I suggest the challenge from The National Union of Mineworkers.

- So let me offer some views on today's leadership challenge from a number of angles as a lead in to the subject (and our subsequent discussion, for those who are able to stay for the seminar, later).
- Of course, at the outset, not only do we all recognise that leadership is an important subject, but I suspect we can also agree that it is also a difficult area:
  - Discussion has long raged as to whether leaders are born or made, and
  - If they are made how is it done, and what qualities and characteristics should they exhibit?
  - But whether leadership is gifted or acquired, perhaps it is more useful to consider what leaders actually do
- Not surprisingly, I first came across leadership as a subject to be considered formally while I was a Cadet at Sandhurst. It was treated differently to other subjects we studied – for leadership discussions, we didn't sit in the classroom, but we sat around in armchairs, in the Company Bar, or

Anteroom as we called it, and we were asked for our ideas, as opposed to just being told what to do and what to think. And, I believe, that immediately sets leadership apart – it is a personal thing, it is an individual thing, it is an intuitive thing, but, despite that, I don't go as far as to subscribe to the notion that leaders are born, not made. Yes, a bit of natural leadership ability helps, and a lot of natural leadership helps a lot – but if you have any leadership ability, then thinking about the subject, studying the subject, experimenting, modelling yourself on a leader you respect, all those things can really pay dividends.

- But when we sat in our armchairs at Sandhurst we had a range of erudite discussions, on the one hand listing the qualities of a leader and, on the other hand, debating the merits of a more functional approach to leadership techniques. I recall extensive discussion about the thoughts of one of my predecessors as Head of the Army, the late Field Marshal Lord Harding, who had produced an impressive list of the qualities – in his view - to be exhibited by a good leader, based on his experiences. He said a good leader needed:

- Absolute fitness
- Complete integrity
- Enduring Courage
- Daring Initiative

- Undaunted Will-Power

- And, interestingly as an aside, he stressed the Adjectives, as well as the Nouns – Absolute Fitness, Complete Integrity, Enduring Courage, Daring Initiative, Undaunted Will-Power, but to these he added three other pre-requisites – Knowledge, Judgement and Team Spirit. Now, all that is good stuff from a soldier's perspective – certainly applicable in the battle space, but I suggest, probably also widely applicable in the business-space and elsewhere.

### **BEHAVIOUR NOT QUALITIES**

- But as respected and useful as possession of a large number of key qualities is, our discussions at Sandhurst also turned to functional models of leadership behaviour. At that time, the Action Centred leadership model put forward by Professor John Adair of The Industrial Society was very influential. His Three Balls Venn Diagram approach of the individual, but over-lapping and inter-locking leadership elements, had much resonance. His model required the identification of the need to blend:

- Identifying and Achieving the Task, while
- Maximising the efforts of the Team, and while, most critically,
- Looking after the interests of the Individual - all this seemed like a winning formula to us.

- And that single construct of Task, Team and Individual still, I believe, retains great merit – but, one wonders, is that enough?

### **WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO?**

- Now while a dry debate about the merits of a qualities approach to leadership or a functional approach is very interesting, it remains essentially theoretical and, by definition, not that useful.
- However, I think a key question that roots our discussion rather more, is to analyse what it is, that the leader is actually trying to do?
- And to answer that, I suggest there is need to have an understanding of what level of activity the leader is trying to lead within and to lead at.
- In my sphere of work, we separate out activity into three levels – the Strategic, the Operational and the Tactical.
- Now the first and last of those are well known. The Strategic level is where the big thoughts are thought, and every business endeavour or large organisation seems to be well supplied with Strategic thought – strategies for this, strategies for that – probably too many strategies. And then down below, where it all happens, is Tactics – where the rubber hits the road – and in this sense the tactical level is about Delivery.
- Alan Leighton who is a very talented leader but has struggled to make a go of the Post Office was very interesting on this in a lecture I heard him give

a few years ago. His view is that 20% of a business is about Strategy and the other 80% is Delivery, but critically, in his view, the glue that holds it all together is Communication – successfully communicating the Big Idea to those who have to make it happen. And if Communication is delivered by leaders, or managers who know their stuff, who can inspire their staff and who can drive through to their objectives, then this is probably another commendable formula.

- But in my construct, this overlooks the key level of activity, and this is the Operational level, which sits between the Strategic and the Tactical, and which is the level that sits between the ideas and the action – it is the level which turns the ideas into action, and in my book that is the level which lifts the mediocre to the exceptional, it is the level that lifted Nelson, Wellington and Montgomery into the history books, and the likes of Bill Gates and Richard Branson into the Worlds Rich List.
- Because, It is at the Operational level where the General or the Captain of Industry does his real work, and where an End to End plan is formulated to transform the original idea – the Big Idea – into success on the battlefield, or to serious profit on the balance sheet.
- And it requires intellectual rigour to do this – to devise a plan – a campaign plan – to take one in a series of steps, which we, in the Army, would call battles or engagements, to the pre-identified End-State – and success in the Campaign. But the compilation of the Plan is nothing without

the application of energy, drive and inspiration to take the team on the journey, and this aspect of leadership is key – and it begs the question: will those who are integral to your plan actually come on the journey with you? Because Leadership is one thing, but successfully promoting follow ship is another. To arrive with no-one behind you is a very lonely experience! And many a young officer has only been followed out of curiosity.

## **DELIVERY**

- But then the question is: how to do all this?
- In my organisation – and this is where I am a victim of my own experience - we exercise leadership through a process known as Mission Command – and we aim to do this both in barracks and in the field – but I would apply the principle more widely still.
- That said, and in a general sense, I have already touched on the key elements of this – but essentially there are three components to what we call Mission Command, all of which hinge around the leader:
  - First, the Commander, the Senior Manager, the Leader needs to think through his problem and convert his strategic goals into the front end of his Operational or Campaign Plan, and this results in him clearly setting out his Intent. He needs to have applied sufficient analysis and intellectual rigour so that he can set out to his subordinates or his employees his statement of what needs to

be done and his overall intentions as to how it is to be done. This, I suggest, is more than just a rather wishy-washy Vision Statement.

- The second stage, in a non-prescriptive way, is to separate out the tasks that need to be done and delegate them to subordinates along with the necessary manpower, equipment and financial resources to carry out those tasks.

But he doesn't tell them what to do – he tells them what they are to achieve; this is output or outcome focussed, not input focussed.

- And finally – and this is where the process can go wrong – having delegated the task appropriately, he needs to supervise the execution of those tasks – not in a way that stifles the initiative of the subordinates to whom the tasks have been delegated, but in a subtle way, remembering that while tasks can be delegated, responsibility can never be delegated – the buck always stops with the boss.

- Actually without going down a rabbit hole unduly, I think that the degree of ownership and responsibility for a plan, and its consequences, came home to me most starkly in July 2000 when I gave evidence for the Prosecution at the trial of one Radovan Krstic before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. General Krstic had commanded the

Drina Corps of the Bosnian Serb Army at the time of the capture of Srebrenica and the subsequent massacre in Eastern Bosnia in July 1995. He was about the same age as me, had a professional military background in the Yugoslav National Army that had begun at the same age as mine had in the British Army, and in 1995 was commanding a formation very similar in size and organisation to 3<sup>rd</sup> (United Kingdom) Division which I was then commanding. His mistake – on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1995 – was to accept a mission from his superior and develop a plan that led directly to the massacre of 7000 to 8000 Muslim men and boys. He had accepted ownership of the operation, became responsible for the plan, mistakenly based his defence in Court on having delegated his responsibility, and - was convicted and sentenced to 42 years imprisonment for a variety of war crimes.

- When we say glibly, "the buck stops here", for Radovan Krstic it stopped for him in spades on the day he was convicted! That said – and as an aside – I know, he knows, and the Court also knows that his real failure was a complete collapse of personal moral courage. Had he refused to accept the Mission from General Ratko Mladic, or talked his superior out of the idea, then he would not be in prison now, and upwards of 8000 people would still be alive. The risks of the morally correct line were obviously high, but on the day he failed the test.

## **LEADERSHIP – THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION**

- Now, Viscount Hambleden who founded the WH Smith empire, also had much to say on leadership, and one of his key contentions was that “Character and integrity are as important in a manager or leader as capability”. I sense that, I have already touched on both aspects of character and integrity in what I have said so far. A leader does indeed need certain qualities, of which integrity is key, and at the same time there are certain capabilities that a leader needs as well – to understand the objectives, to map out the route from strategic end state to tactical decisions, and above all to communicate his intent clearly while delegating responsibly, but knowing that he never delegates responsibility.
- But I wonder if these qualities and capabilities that I have suggested are enough? Fitness, Integrity, Courage, Initiative and Will-Power – these things, and more, are all really important, but are they enough?
- Indeed as an organisation the British Army, which it was my privilege to lead for three years until last summer, has itself identified six Core Values which are the heart of the ethos of the Army. These values define us, and what we do.

Indeed they are so important to us that we now educate our soldiers formally in certain core values that in a previous generation they may well have picked up in their family or wider community.

But I wonder if these six Core Values of Selfless Commitment, Courage, Discipline, Integrity, Loyalty and Respect for Others, are themselves enough?

- Well my own feeling is that a range of leadership qualities and those core values provide a very sound moral baseline – a baseline that is acceptable to all, albeit quite a challenge to live up to.

But, and this is a question I often ponder, is a sound moral baseline enough? Should there not also be a spiritual dimension to this? I believe there should.

- And, of course, it is that word “believe” or “belief” that is at the heart of any spiritual dimension.....
- For some, belief in the Cause, belief in the Leader or even in my organisation within the tribal nature of the British Army, belief in the Regiment – will be enough. But I am not so sure. What really sustains, in my view, is something more than this – something far bigger than ourselves, something bigger and deeper than we can imagine or rationalize for ourselves.
- This first came home to me as a young platoon commander in Belfast in the early 1970’s (...7 Platoon / Tapper Hall). My platoon and I got caught in a vicious and protracted gunfight that lasted several hours. At the end of the day, at least two gunmen and one of my soldiers had been killed and, although we didn’t admit it to each other, we had all be frightened at one stage or another!

- That experience told me - and it has been shared by many in Iraq and Afghanistan in recent times - that even the toughest of men, when the chips are down and the reality of life and death confronts, then people are reaching out into the spiritual dimension, beyond the rational and the moral! And I don't think this just applies to Armies in a combat situation, but I think there is an application to any situation of pressure, stress or challenge when individuals are stretched to their physical or psychological limits. Where do you go to when you have lost your job or your firm has gone bust or your investments are now worthless – let alone when your friend is shot dead beside you?
- And I think the truly effective leader needs to recognise this question. But he is, of course, personally challenged to provide what is needed – if he does not have some empathy with or some experience of a spiritual dimension to his life himself – where does the leader go to provide strength and guidance for those he is responsible? – so this is very much a personal thing – but any of us in these difficult circumstances should remember, we are not the first to have trodden this path.

### **THE ULTIMATE ROLE MODEL**

- One aspect of leadership development – accepting that others may have trod where we now step – is the identification and deliberate modelling on someone that is really respected as a leader. In my experience a number of people left a lasting impression on me:

- I can recall a Brigade Commander – a wonderful man but with a fearsome temper, and no fuse at all, which had the effect of really scaring the younger officers, such that their performance really nose-dived.
- But I also recall a brilliant Battalion Commander, again with a fearsome reputation. But if you made a mistake he would explain, teach and encourage you to get it right next time. However a repeat of that mistake was best avoided!
- But if we are lifting the discussion to a spiritual dimension then there is one obvious role model to look to as far as I am concerned, and that is to look at the person and example of Christ himself. And, as experience of the last few years has taught me, I offer this as my personal opinion.
- Christians quite rightly put huge emphasis on the death and resurrection of Christ, but his life also provides the model that I believe leaders will do well to try to emulate.
- The motto of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst is “Serve to Lead”. Christ, in his lifetime, is a very clear example of that maxim. When Christ washed his disciples’ feet, he was doing the most menial and humble task – and by serving his disciples he was earning the right to lead them. He would ask of others nothing that he would not do himself.

- And his style of leadership? It was to say quite simply “Follow Me”. It was not said in a macho way, but it was said in a way that gave people the opportunity to look at him, to look at what he stood for, to look at what he promised and to decide for themselves whether to follow Him, or not – and this is key, since, as I have said, the flipside of Leadership is Followership, and the real trick of being a successful leader is to make people, out of their own free choice, follow – not out of curiosity – but out of belief and confidence that the direction of travel is right, and that the objective is worth the cost along the way.
- Following his Father’s plan and doing what he had to do cost Jesus Christ his life, but his belief and confidence in his Father’s plan led to Him opening up the way to peace and purpose in this life – and life beyond – for those who also are prepared to put their trust in Him.
- In my business, asking people to risk their lives is part of the job, but doing so without giving them the chance to understand the meaning of life and death is something of a dereliction of our wider duty of care to our people, and therefore I think there is very much an obligation on the leader – certainly on a Christian leader – to include a spiritual dimension into his people’s general conduct of their lives, and, in my case their preparation for potentially life – challenging operations.
- Qualities and Core Values are fine as a universally acceptable moral baseline for leadership, but the unique life, death resurrection and promises

of Christ, provide that spiritual opportunity that I believe takes the privilege – and the demand – of leadership to another level.

- But if a leader or indeed a follower is going to take that privilege and demand to another level then, I believe, he or she needs to be properly equipped for that and as a military man, I would say that he or she needs a personal concept of operations – a framework for one's own life – to make sense of the turbulent times around us.
- I suggest we need to consider three things – and they are tough. We need to ask ourselves, whether we are prepared to be:
  - Obedient to God,
  - Committed to Christ, and,
  - Open to the Holy Spirit,
- A couple of thoughts on each of those three propositions.

### **OBEDIENT TO GOD**

Consider the story of Gideon in Judges Chapters 6-8, part of which we heard read earlier by Brigadier Hugh.. On God's instructions Gideon, despite being faced by a huge tactical problem, reduced his army from 22,000 to 10,000 and finally to just 300 men.

On God's instructions he endorsed an amazing Concept of Operations, deploying his tiny force at night-a force equipped more like the Regimental band and Quartermaster's Department than crack troops! The result was that 135,000 Midianites were defeated, with 120,000 casualties. This was a fantastic victory stemming from obedience to God-and I could quote so many other examples. But listening to God and doing what He prompts you to do is the baseline. Remember the boy, Samuel, in the Temple? "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!"

### **COMMITTED TO CHRIST**

- But hearing is one thing, doing is another, and what Christ wants from us is full commitment and not a half-hearted compromise. I have been down that track and it does not work. But, commitment is so much easier to talk about than to put into practice. Forgive me for talking personally for a couple of minutes. In my last two years at school I made two decisions that materially affected my life. One was that I wanted to be a soldier. The second was that I wanted to follow Christ, and I made a decision to try to do just that.

- As I have already said, I found that this was a much easier thing to say than to do. If I am being honest, I was a pretty unsatisfactory Christian, too often compromising what I believed in and not living up to the standards that Christ had set. In fact, to use an obvious analogy, I was a very half-hearted soldier in Jesus Christ's army.

- I knew that the way I was living my life was wrong and that to be effective for Christ I had to let Him have complete control of my life, but it was too difficult-or so I thought until one day eight years after I joined the Army and just six months after I was married, I had a major stroke. I was almost completely paralysed down one side and was carried off to hospital with blue lights flashing. I was stationed in Berlin at the time and the German consultant in the main hospital there said to my wife that night, "Tis how you say in England, 50-50 - we win some, we lose some". The shock of that really concentrated my mind, because at the point that I thought I might lose my life I realised how I had wasted so much of it up to then. As I gradually recovered, my thoughts kept taking me back to my relationship with God and I realised then how half-hearted I had been. As I thought things through I realised that on several occasions in the past God had challenged me about my half-hearted commitment to him.

- One day in 1973, towards the end of a particularly violent and difficult day on operations in Belfast, two gunmen outflanked the temporary position I had taken up as my Platoon Headquarters, and open fire. What seemed like a hail of bullets leaped down the street. The Corporal on my left, whom I was in the process of briefing, fell with a bullet in the chest and my driver, who was kneeling down beside me acting as sentry, was hit in the back and later, very sadly, he died.

When I got back to our barracks that night, after the operation was ended, many conflicting thoughts and emotions crowded in, but one kept recurring: had I just been very lucky, or was someone trying to say something to me? Should I take advantage of my fortunate escape and perhaps sort out my relationship with God? But after a while I just shrugged it all off.

- Days, weeks and months went by until some two years later, this time operating from Crossmaglen in the border area of South Armagh in Northern Ireland, my Company was carrying out an operation to neutralise an explosive device near a crossroads. My Company Commander and I moved forward with the Bomb Disposal team to show them what we thought was a safe vantage point for them to start their work. As we moved forward my Company Commander stopped me and gave me an air photograph, telling me to stay where I was and study it in preparation for another operation in the same area that weekend. He and the others went on. They had only gone another thirty yards when, some half a minute later there was a tremendous explosion. I looked through the clouds of dirt and falling debris to see that all four had been instantly killed. Again that night, back in Crossmaglen Police Station, I wondered, had I just been lucky or was this another chance to get sorted out with God? But again, after a while, I just shrugged it all off.

- However two years later, in Berlin, I could not shrug anything off. It was me this time who was paralysed, frightened and unable to speak or move, or shrug anything off.

As I lay in bed in hospital I found myself in the unusual position of being a spectator on life, unable to move and with plenty of time to think. I received many letters from friends, one from an elderly retired Major in the Coldstream Guards. He suggested that I looked at Hebrews chapter 12 verses 5 and 6, and then later to look at verse 11.

- The first two verses read, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline for the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12:5,6). To start with, if I am honest, I was a little irritated. But I gradually realised that having decided earlier in my life that I wanted to try to follow Christ, God had accepted me then as a son. However, in the intervening years I had often let Him down and I had compromised what I professed to believe in. Then, as invited, I turned to verse 11, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant: later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11)

- The day I was taken ill was 11<sup>th</sup> November 1977. You will remember that 11<sup>th</sup> November each year is the anniversary of Armistice Day, when at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month in 1918 the surrender of Germany to end the First World War was announced. A surrender is two things: it is the end of the fighting and the beginning of the peace.

After years of fighting with my Creator, compromising and ignoring His challenges, I found that a far better way of life was to commit myself wholeheartedly to Him, to surrender my will to His will and thereby gain the peace and purpose in life that only complete trust in Jesus Christ can give.

### **OPEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT**

- But, obedience and commitment are not enough unless transformed by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. One of my favourite passages in the Bible - again, which we heard earlier - is the closing verses of John's Gospel, Chapter 14, especially Verse 27. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the World gives do I give to you". To me this verse helps make real sense of the turbulent times in which we live, but that passage from John's Gospel 14, also contains these verses. "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (v25,26). Here Jesus is saying that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to those who are obedient to God, committed to Christ, and prepared to be open to the Holy Spirit. The Father wants us to use the abilities that we have been given to work to bring peace to the lives of individuals, whether we are doing so as a leader at the Strategic or Operational levels, or as a fighter at the Tactical level.
- The Holy Spirit will guide, direct and inspire us, if only we are open to Him.

## **THE CROSS**

- These three aspects, obedience to God, commitment to Christ and openness to the Holy Spirit are like three interlocking balls of a Venn diagram with the centre section still blank. I firmly believe that the focus that makes sense of all this is the Cross of Christ, and to be truly effective as a leader or foot soldier this must be at the centre of our lives. Kneeling at the foot of Christ's Cross is the recruiting office where our spiritual journey and duty begins. This is where our spiritual pilgrimage is focussed and where the real challenge of spiritual warfare begins. Jesus lived as the perfect man, died on the Cross taking the weight of our sin on His shoulders, but rose again, breaking the power of death, guilt and sin. In doing so He charted the path to peace, everlasting peace, peace with justice, for those who believe and trust in Him.

It is my experience that an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ at the Cross changes lives. It can change individuals, and it can have a strategic effect not only on individuals but, through individuals, on the lives of nations. The Cross also brings peace, Gods peace to those prepared to meet Christ on the Cross and to surrender their lives to Him, to say, "Not my will, but Thy will for my life."

## **CONCLUSION**

- So let me try to pull these thoughts together – “ Leadership in Turbulent Times”.
- There are traditional ways of understanding and developing leadership – the qualities approach and the functional approach are but two. But in today’s more complex environment in both the business-space and the battle-space, I believe there needs to be more.
- I contend that the leader needs to analyse very carefully, at any moment in time, what he is trying to do and at what level of leadership. The Strategic, the Operational and the Tactical levels of activity make different demands on the leader, and he needs to know this and understand the differences.
- But what really gives the leader his authority – his right to lead – does at the end of the day come down to him, or her, as a person – the nature of their character and the degree of their integrity – and this is very different from media enhanced image.
- In my book, Character defines the person – and answers the question as to whether this is someone to emulate or to follow, and with what enthusiasm.
- Moreover, integrity establishes the moral baseline to lead. Is this someone who can be trusted? Is this someone whose instructions are honourable? Is this someone to commit too? Do they really have legitimate

interests at heart, or is this person simply a self-seeker, or purely interested in the bottom line? These are all judgements for the subordinates, the employees, the followers, the voters to make. Their judgements, I submit, will ultimately define success or failure in the enterprise – perhaps not in the short term, but most certainly in the medium to long term.

- So the onus is on the leader. The employees, the subordinates, the followers, in these turbulent times may increasingly turn to him or her and ask – what do we do now? He or she may understand leadership theories; he or she may have embraced core values that provide a sound moral baseline, but is that enough. It is my experience that without a spiritual dimension to one's life and leadership, there is something lacking. It is up to each of us to work out what that spiritual dimension is, on a personal basis. But it is what or who, that is in our *hearts* that will direct what we do with our *heads* and with our *strength* in these turbulent times, when leadership – is most definitely – required.

- It is my experience that a life which is obedient to God, committed to Christ and open to the Holy Spirit sustains and guides in these turbulent times. But, and there is no getting away from it, leading such a life comes at a cost – remember Christ's words in Mark 8, Verse 34, "...if any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me". There is no doubt that there is a cost to following Christ today – such a path is counter cultural to many in our increasingly secular society.

- But if that cost seems daunting then remember, too, the promise of God in Revelation 2, Verse 10, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life”.
- Now that is really worth having - in these turbulent times.