

Alan Harpham (1945-2014)



Every tribute to Alan Harpham needs to begin by saying that he was a big man who cast a big shadow. His influence in so many areas of public life was multi-faceted and deeply considered. Everything Alan did arose from his strong Christian faith. That faith was exercised and applied as much in the world of work as in the life of our churches. Alan was a civil engineer who began his working life on North Sea projects and petrochemical construction schemes. He studied for an MBA at Cranfield University and later returned there as Director of the MSc programmes for Project Management. This change of direction led to many years consulting in project management aiming to transform organisational cultures.

Alan's burning desire to change organisational cultures was also applied to the life of the churches he encountered both local and national. He was the 'right person in the right place' when discussions began to begin a new organisation which would create a healthy exchange of practice between the churches and business. CORAT was about to become reborn as MODEM – Managerial and Organizational Disciplines for the Enhancement of Ministry and Alan was the right person to drive that transformation. His chairmanship ensured the establishment of an influential organisation which 'leads from the edges', is a critical friend of the churches and which supports Christian people in their everyday work.

When John Nelson formed a group to produce the book *Leading, Managing, Ministering* for MODEM he asked Alan to write the first chapter. He began it with his challenging testimony:-

I have been a Christian longer than I have been a businessman. However, in many Christian circles that I move in, one would be forgiven for thinking that anything to do with business was corrupt, evil, came from the devil and was wholly un-Christian! This I have found difficult to take – did I choose to enter an evil profession, despite being a Christian?

Alan's search for robust answers was demonstrated throughout his working life and also in attempts to transform the anti-business culture which he perceived in some of our churches. It took him into chairing and redeveloping his regional initial ministerial training scheme, to an active role in the life of theological colleges, to contributions to consultations at St George's House, Windsor Castle, to writing and publishing and to the support and defence of asylum seekers. In all this he was firm in his faith and a committed member of his parish churches, and to those where his wife Di served after her ordination.

We are fortunate that Alan did commit many of his thoughts and experiences to paper. He lived in the world of faith that had to include 'faith in business' and, somehow, 'faith in the Church'. He did not do this in an uncritical way. He brought a robust critique to both and - when encountering pretentious or in his view incompetent senior clergy – did not take hostages, but somehow managed to win respect and remain a friend.

At the end of that same paragraph at the opening of *Leading, Managing, Ministering* Alan wrote:

I believe that my Christian faith has added value to my contribution and working practice. It has sustained me through difficult times and helped me to think and pray through dilemmas. It is an integral part of the ME that presents himself for work each day, not something I leave behind for my 'days off'.

Anyone who had their life touched by an encounter with Alan also knew that his friendship and support had added value to a special part of life for them. It was my great privilege to follow him as Chair of MODEM and within the robust structure he had created to be able to help make his vision a reality.

Malcolm Grundy
Former Chair, MODEM