

Shouldering Responsibility: Advancement through Retreat

Peter Heslam provides here a reflection on the recent Faith in Business Leadership Retreat, held at Westminster College, Cambridge, 5-7 April 2019. The retreat, entitled 'Devoted Living – Work as Worship' had Ken Dickson, a business leader who is part of Faith in Business' Executive Team, as its Rapporteur. Ken summarises his reflections on the retreat in the shaded box below.

Leaders carry responsibility. This statement may be obvious, but it is also metaphorical. Leaders do not necessarily carry anything, and no one can carry something intangible, like responsibility.

In many cultures, the responsibility leaders are said to carry rests on something equally metaphorical: their shoulders. That's the strongest and most stable place for the human body to carry heavy things.

Reflecting this, authority in military and uniformed organizations around the world has for centuries been symbolically displayed on shoulders. In ancient Israel, for instance, the vestments worn by the high priest included shoulder pieces with onyx stones set in gold (Ex 28: 9-14).

This is the background against which Isaiah celebrates God's shattering of the oppressive yoke across his

people's shoulders, and looks forward to the coming Messiah, for whom 'the governance shall be upon his shoulders' (Isa 9.4-6).

Therefore, if all leaders bear responsibility, they do so because it has been delegated to them by Christ, on whose shoulders supreme authority rests. This has practical implications for leaders – they are to exercise that authority in accordance with Christ.

