

## 'Policing & Spirituality'

*[Ecclesiastes 3: 1-11 / 1 Corinthians 13]*

Thank you for the invitation to be with you this evening.

The British policing model was inaugurated by Robert Peel when, in 1829, he established, a full-time, professional and centrally organised police force for the Greater London area, known as the Metropolitan Police. The Peelian principles summarise the ideas that he developed in his attempt to define an ethical police force. The principles express the notion of 'policing by consent'. There are 9 'principles' of which No.7 reads *'To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.'*

Those principles have shaped British Policing since that time and continue to inform present government policy with the key themes of empowerment and accountability.

Policing is a unique occupation where in the harsh reality of life we see ordinary people doing extraordinary things. They do not always get that right for alongside the capability of the greatest displays of human endeavour; officers and staff can also display our common human frailties and fail in their responsibility and behaviour. It would be easy to base our opinion and view of the Police on what hear in the media. That would be quite wrong. Like all organisations we do not always get it right and there have been some very public and costly mistakes BUT that is not the whole story. We do not stop building and aspiring for the best in human relationships despite our frequent experience of getting things spectacularly wrong. Neither should we set aside the

aspirations of British Policing in the face of failings by individuals or the institution.

I consider Policing to be, regardless of the faith, belief or absence of such, on the part of any individual, to be a spiritual occupation or vocation.

Why would I suggest that?

Many consider their role within the Police to be a 'vocation' rather than just a 'job' – true also I know of others doctors, nurses, educationalists, aid workers, etc

So I add to that the issues that make up the 'daily round'. Big issues such as right/wrong; good/evil; truth, justice, mercy; compassion; wrongdoing, punishment, forgiveness; retribution/restorative justice. Exercise of power, control, freedom and captivity. Decisions of life and death including the capacity for some of our officers to use lethal force should that be required. It involves love in communities and peace in society whether Anti Social Behaviour or Counter Terrorism. It involves dealing with those on the margins of society the homeless, those addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, those with serious mental health issues.

These things, as a Christian, I would set in the context our NT reading. Love in action. Practical realities of kindness, caring, compassion etc. Love not as a feeling but as an act of our will.

The OT reading from Ecclesiastes reminded us that there is a 'time for everything'. Police work involves being there at a 'moment in time' in the lives of people. Often, in all manner of varied ways, a life-changing moment in time. It means that we see the very best in people in the most harrowing and tragic of circumstances. In Thames Valley alone we 'knock' on around 80 doors to tell people that their loved ones will not be returning home having been killed in an RTC and that says nothing of the many other things we deal with.

Sadly, it also means that we see the very worst in people both what they are capable of doing to themselves and to others.

Last week I attended the Police Bravery Awards, where each force makes one nomination, from amongst many others, for consideration. What struck me as I listened to the accounts was that none of these tremendous acts of courage, bravery, heroism, tenacity, patience, kindness, self-sacrifice were part of pre-planned operations they were everyday 'business as usual' in the Police world. Incidents that were 'moments in time' for all those involved.

So often Police officers and staff are people who run towards danger whilst others are running away. The words I used a moment ago are not always associated with the workplace. Yet they ought to be for they express that elusive concept of spirituality in the workplace – love in action; love not as a feeling but as an act of your will.

Officers and staff come in day by willing to give their all to protect the peace of our country and if necessary, sacrifice their lives doing so. At the end of September I led the National Police Memorial Day Service where over 2000 people including Prince Charles, Home Secretary and other senior figures gathered alongside families and colleagues to remember 9 officers who have died on duty in the past year and over 4000 who have died on duty since Robert Peel first put Police on the streets of our country.

My role as Chaplain in all of this? Very varied!

- To provide personal, practical and where appropriate spiritual support;
- To be a resource where faith/spirituality and operational issues come together.
- To assist following major incidents including disaster victim identification.

For Commanders a voice whom can be trusted, someone who they - with the 'loneliness of command and leadership' can speak with in confidence about the issues they face and the decisions they make. For the front line staff in addition to the above things as someone said at the start of one operation 'you being here reminds us of our humanity and the reality of life beyond what we do'.

It hopefully helps them bridge that gap and connect with themselves as ordinary people, to connect with society/communities in their unique role of the *'police are the public and that the public are the police'*.

As people if we fail to 'connect' with ourselves then we will never, whatever our role and vocation in life, 'connect' , or exercise love as described in our NT reading, with the people and the world around us in a constructive way.

The greatest commandments – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

These verses are a 'deep mine' - The reference point to the 'other' outside of yourself; the acceptance and connection with yourself – itself a big thing; and the working out of that connection in the lives of the people we encounter is a powerful and lifelong work.

A Greek philosopher and teacher ended a lecture asking, “Are there any questions?” “Dr. Papaderos, what is the meaning of life?”

“The usual laughter followed, and people started to go. Papaderos held up his hand and stilled the room and looked at me for a long time, asking with his eyes if I was serious and seeing from my eyes that I was. ‘I will answer your question,’ he said. Then taking his wallet out of his hip pocket, he fished into it and brought out a very small, round mirror, about the size of a ten pence piece. Then he said, ‘When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found several broken pieces of a mirror from a wrecked German motorcycle. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept only the largest piece. This one. And by scratching it on a stone, I made it round.

I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would not shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

‘I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I

grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life.

I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. But light – truth, understanding, knowledge etc – is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.'

'I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have, I can reflect light into the dark places of this world – into the black places in the hearts of men and women – and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.' "

And then he took his small mirror and, holding it carefully, caught the bright rays of daylight streaming through the window and reflected them onto my face and onto my hands folded on the desk."

May you, and the light you reflect, 'connect' to a needy world. Amen