

Keeping the Faith in Policing

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Address to the St. Thomas More Forum

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Thank you, Bill, and thank you for the opportunity to be here. The invitation for me to be here came around October-November last year. It didn't come as a result of recent events to do with the Australian Federal Police, as tragic as they might be and I was happy and honoured to accept it.

It's interesting that the values of St Thomas More way back then are not so different to the values that our organisation has adopted today. The AFP's values are integrity, commitment, excellence, accountability, fairness and trust. And whilst we didn't have St Thomas More in our mind when we created those values, the values that we as an organisation embrace have become very important to the organisation.

The fact that I'm here speaking to you tonight as a Catholic is something we share but, I wouldn't want you to misunderstand or misinterpret me. I'm not standing here saying that I'm a better Catholic or a perfect Catholic. I struggle with my religion as much as anyone else who practices their religion. A couple of years ago I read the biography of our former Governor General, Sir William Deane. If I understood his biography correctly, I understood that he, in his own mind, was making a mental shift to be someone more ecumenical. For me, it has been a similar experience. As you will learn from what I tell you, in the job that I've had and the job that I'm doing, religion plays a significant role, not only in my own faith but also in working with the people of other faiths and from different countries.

The AFP, is some 30 years old. It's not a big organisation by any stretch. We used to be the ACT Police. We were amalgamated in 1979 to become the Australian Federal Police, moving together with the Commonwealth Police, and my career started in the ACT Police as basically a 19 year old boy coming from Sydney here to Canberra.

It wasn't my first trip to Canberra. My first trip to Canberra was with a redemptuous priest by the name of Father Joe Carroll. Joe took me to Galong in an attempt to enlist me into the Redemptorist Order. And I was taken back when he came via Canberra and he parked in the parking lot of the Commission for Taxation. It was in the old Taxation Offices down in Parkes and he parked in the Commissioner's spot and he assured me that he knew the Commissioner. We stayed and had lunch with the Commissioner for Taxation. I don't recall his name although I did raise it with Michael Carmody one night over dinner and Michael certainly remembered his name.

I never knew that I would come back to Canberra to join the police and I certainly never knew that I would one day become Commissioner of Police.

Religion has played a significant role in developing my own values, but it's also created a lot of challenges in terms of the tension between what we do and I guess what I believe in. As much as I go to church and pretty much have done where ever I am in the world the issue of going to mass presents its own challenges especially if I am under protection which is often the case. Sometimes it is because it is warranted but many times it is a courtesy offered by the host police agency.

So in those situations it is difficult telling people that you want to quietly go to a Catholic church. In some countries that's more difficult than others. I recall one time in Jakarta, just after the Bali bombings, and I was in Jakarta and said that I wanted to go to a Catholic church, and of course the Christian church was just at the end of a bombing campaign that was a prelude to the Bali bombings. The security people said, "This is going to be very hard to do." I said, "Well, if we do it unobtrusively then no one will know that it's me who is at the church. I'll just dress like everybody else is dressed and I'll quietly walk into the back of the church and I'll sit down and go to mass." Speaking through an interpreter, they all assured me that they understood what was going to happen. I left my hotel room, went down to the foyer, and here were all the motorcycles and the escort cars. Not only that, but the streets were blocked off between the hotel and the church. As we left the hotel the sirens were activated on the escorting cars and motorcycles. As we approached the church I said to the driver, "Can you radio ahead and ask them to turn the sirens off before we get

to the church?” So, with that, they turned the sirens off. When we arrived at the church I noticed that it was a cathedral. Now if you are like me and you have a busy schedule, perhaps a cathedral mass is not exactly what you are looking for. Anyway, I walked into the cathedral and of course a third of the cathedral was roped off with this large roll of crime scene tape.

I walked past the congregation and moved into the middle of this roped off section, standing by myself, because all my guards, of course, were Muslim. So I'm standing there by myself. The next challenge came when the plate was handed around. Here I was surrounded by the local congregation who was no doubt expecting that this VIP is going to have wads of dollars to put on the plate. Not having any of the local currency one of the protection officers saw my dilemma and walked over to surreptitiously hand me some local currency.

So, practising our religion in my position does have some strange challenges. In Cambodia, in Phnom Penh, I went to mass. It was held in a Russian Orthodox centre and was conducted by an American priest. I have also been to mass in North Vietnam in Hanoi so if you try - you can still practice your faith at least in terms of going to church but of course our faith requires a whole lot more.

In the language of terrorism, one of the many solutions proffered concerns inter-faith dialogue. There's a place in Bali where I've been to church called Kampale – it is in Nusa Dua, and I don't know if any of you have been there, but when you go to the Catholic Church, there is a very large car park shared by a number of churches. There's not only a Catholic church, there is a Buddhist temple, a Hindu temple, and a Mosque. If you talk about inter-faith dialogue, the Indonesians and certainly the Balinese have had it for a lot longer than we have. It just becomes a bit difficult when the call to the prayer in the Mosque is happening at the same time that the priest is trying to deliver the homily. But it works and I think it could be the way of the future especially when so many churches are rationalising and amalgamating parishes..

If I talk about the things that I've seen and the things that I've done it really makes you think about your religion: How did I become a Catholic? How was it that I be raised as a Catholic? I am beginning to think it has more to do with fate than faith.

Whether you adhere to the faith beyond your adolescent years into your adult years I guess is a matter for the individual. But for most of us our religious faith is as much a product of where and when we were born as opposed to some conscious effort on our part to take a particular faith.

I remember when I studied in the United States at the University of Virginia as part of the FBI program that I was undertaking one of my fellow students was a Jordanian. It was probably the first time, way back in the early '90s, that I became very close to a Muslim. One afternoon we were seemingly alone studying the library. I recall that it was snowing outside and we talked about this being the first time he had experienced snow. I told him that I really didn't have an appreciation for the separation of the religions, from Judaism to Christianity to Islam. He showed me a copy of the Koran and he started to walk me through it. The next day one of the FBI agents came over to me and said, "We noticed that you've befriended our Jordanian colleague." It was then that I discovered that we were not alone in the library discussing our practitioner's view of theology!

But I was genuinely interested in where the religions separated and what made our religion something different to his. It is all about the two degrees of separation.

Just recently I went to Dubai to meet with our people who have been working in Jordan training the Iraqi police. It never ceases to amaze me the commitment of our own people and the passion that they have for the job. They told me about the classes they were running that had been plagued by insurgency in the ranks. The classes are conducted over a period of eight weeks. The students are paid \$100 US to undertake the training as police.

After the course the students, now graduated as police officers are placed on a bus for the return trip to Baghdad. Sometimes the bus is attacked or blown up before they get to Bagdad - so they don't even actually get to serve in their first day of duty. But my staff told me that they are never short of students for the classes- the volunteers keep coming to serve as police officers, which is just truly amazing. It actually fills you with, I think, a deep belief in humanity that you've got these people who are so willing to step up and do something for their community as police officers. Equally

important is that we have our own Australian people who are so willing to travel there and teach them, as futile as it might seem.

While I was there I talked about going to Amman and they were talking to me about the excitement of visiting Petra and being so close to the centre of our religion, but not being able to quite get there. Perhaps the greatest tragedy in the Middle East is not only the loss of life – in their thousands- but also that the area is so restricted in terms of pilgrimages. To be able to visit our history, whether it be visiting war sites or war graves or the genesis of our faith, I think is very important.

In terms of policing there's another side of it that has been quite difficult for me in recent years. It is a challenge to get people to understand that how we do things in Australia is but one way. I think if we're guilty of anything it's that we find it very difficult not to see things exclusively through Australian eyes. The Bali Nine is a classic example. I'm a Catholic. I don't believe in the death penalty but I'm a Commissioner of Police.

And yet if I go to Bali and I talk with the police in Bali and I say to the police in Bali, "We don't have the death penalty in Australia. This is not what we intended as an outcome of our joint operations together", they say to me, "But this is Bali. This is where Australians in their hundreds, in their thousands, have come year in, year out for their holidays. This is where many Australians have come to get married. This is where many Australians have come to get away from Australia. This is their playground for Australia. We don't understand why Australians wouldn't want us to keep the playground clean."

Unless you sit there and talk to them, you won't see it through their eyes. I'm not saying that this makes it right, but it is important that you actually get a balance in understanding the competing interests that face us all.

I would say it's the same every where I go. There's a place in Phnom Penh called K11. They call it K11 because it's 11 kilometres outside of Phnom Penh. That is where some of the more complex trafficking of women and young girls occurs.

I travelled there one day to look at what was happening in terms of the trafficking of

young girls. I'll come back to their origins in a moment. To drive down the street and see in shop fronts young kids aged 9 to perhaps 14 dressed up as adults, paraded basically for white Caucasian males from all sorts of places – Europe, Australia, all around the world - was distressing.

The clients – if I can put it that way - were educated and seemingly understood their piece of space in terms of what they were about to do. When you then look at why these girls are where they are, many of them are Vietnamese who've come across the border. Some, maybe many of them are Catholic who have become part of a family of ten where the parents can no longer afford to provide for all their children. So they will sacrifice one child for money paid by the people smugglers who then take the girls across the border.

For me, the most difficult part about this is rationalising what role, if any, religion has taken in the families of these girls being placed in the predicament in which they find themselves. That does not exonerate those who create the demand of the people smugglers for prostitution but it raises the question about supply without meaning to be crass and speak of the trade as economics. But, sadly, it is a market.

Is it because of the practice of their faith in that Catholic part of Vietnam that they have ten children when they can't afford to have ten children? Does that force them to sacrifice a child? Or is it because of their socio-economic circumstances? Is it their inability to practice birth control? Whatever the reason the result is that we never ever really know the ultimate destiny of these young girls. They may be used for sex but I suspect many of them never ever live for much longer than their 15 or 18th birthday, when they would get to the point where they can actually call out for help or tell somebody about what's happened to them. I cannot help but ask “What is driving this?”

But, it's not only in sexual servitude; it's not only in the trafficking of women and girls. It's also about trafficking in narcotics. While ever you've got a commodity that will be traded - it will be traded.

That is what I mean when I say that the role I have challenges my faith. We are doing what we can to stop some of this at the source through prosecuting the people smugglers, but we in the AFP are not going to change the social drivers nor any religious beliefs that may or may not contribute to the problem.

When you go to the Pacific you see exactly the same thing. You see, in the Pacific and in Papua New Guinea, places that have been if you like settled by missionaries, regardless of their denomination, but the way they've been settled and the way that they've been brought up in their religion, leads you to ask yourself whether or not it's actually been the best outcome for them in terms of how they exist today. Because what's happened is they've been overtaken by a very developed and modern world and as the global village has occurred, it's left these little communities behind.

In trying to catch up they really don't have the ability to do it because of the way that they've been if you like skilled and educated in a way that is an absolute mismatch with the world in which they now exist. It challenges you to say, "Well, maybe we should have been a little bit more realistic in the way that we settled these places. Maybe we should have been a little bit more realistic in terms of how we introduced religion to their cultures."

So, all the while, when you're travelling around looking at these different law enforcement issues, it does bring you back to question your own religion and whether we actually started off the right way, or whether by dint of where we were born is perhaps the most influencing factor in what religion you adopt as a person.

In having said all that, it hasn't swayed me away from being a Catholic. It hasn't swayed me away from being a Christian. But has helped me to at least reflect upon the values of people like St Thomas More and other roles models in our church to say, "Well, there's got to be a way through this."

One of the more difficult aspects of my job is the tragedy and the negativity that seem to go with jobs like mine. The challenge in policing is to find positive outcomes for everybody. That is a very big challenge and I don't think you could do that unless

you had the values to begin with, because it would be so easy to just destroy your values and go along with the flow. Somewhere along the line it is necessary to stop and question your direction and ensure that you're actually going in the right way.

There has always been a co-existence of different religions in policing. In the time that I joined policing you were either Catholic or a Mason. Around that time, even in the UK, you had to actually declare if you were a Mason because it was seen, obviously by the Catholics, that if you were a Mason you were part of a secret society, and if nepotism was going to get you to the top then that had to be openly declared.

So for good reason most people never declared their religion because they didn't want to get caught up – certainly I didn't want to get caught up – in the Catholic versus Mason issue. Whether Catholicism was thought to influence the decisions about promotions, etcetera, was a big issue in my day. But in today's police organisations, if our graduation ceremonies are any indication, more recruits are taking the affirmation rather than the oath. To me, this indicates that we either have more diversity of religions or a larger cohort of people who simply have no religion.

So the space where we're working now is different. One of my best colleagues in the Indonesian National Police is a fellow called Made Pastika. Pastika was the head of the Bali police but prior to that he led the investigation into the Bali bombings. Pastika is a minister of his own religion. He is a Hindu. He strictly prays each day. The investigation team always knew when he was in the temple because it seemed to coincide with the arrest of a terrorist. If they got stuck in the investigation, they'd say to Pastika, "Can you go to the temple and pray because we need a breakthrough in the investigation?" It was fabulous to see. I think we've become subjective about our own religion; if we can transcend your own subjectivity and understand more broadly what religion is in terms of values, in terms of how it gets people to think about life and sociology in a very different way, I think we can be much more accommodating than what we are.

That is one of the reasons why I've been very disciplined in trying to separate religion from terrorism. Religion has absolutely nothing to do with terrorism. It is being used as a vehicle for terrorism. Religion is being used as an excuse for terrorism. But this

brings with it some extraordinary consequences. I guess some of the most palpable examples of that was two years ago when the cartoons were published that offended the Islamic religion. There was no obvious communication between Islamic groups in one part of the world with those in any other part of the world. But Muslims in very different parts of the world were mobilised almost immediately to demonstrate, in some cases quite violently, against those cartoons. It didn't need someone to ring up and organise demonstrations. It actually developed a momentum of its own.

If you talk to the futurists, the futurists will tell you that in the last century we were dominated by bipolar powers between perhaps the US and Russia, the US and China, but by 2050 we'll see a significantly different number super powers. If the US is still there, it may be one, China will definitely be another. Indonesia perhaps will be another. India will perhaps be another, but the Jihadists will be another, because they won't go away. They – in terms of their numbers, in terms of what they're trying to achieve – will remain united for some significant period of time at least according to some futurists.

But we ought not to be fearful of that. We actually need to work our way through that because in one sense it's no different to what the Communists might have been in the '50s: a group of people who were united with a common purpose, didn't necessarily know each other, from different countries, but believed in a way forward, and took their part of the world in a particular direction for a significant period of time. Our future could be similar to that.

I think the important thing for us to do is to remain as objective as we possibly can. I've done some things, some of them I guess driven by my own values, but they've ended up being perhaps more significant than what I ever thought they were. After September 11 I went to a bookshop in Lakemba in Sydney and I spoke to an Islamic Imam in the bookshop. I asked the Imam, Sheik Khalil Sharmi to join our AFP chaplaincy service. I had no idea at that period of time the significance of that question. It has become so valuable to us.

There were five Australians and 16 Indonesians killed in the Garuda plane crash in March this year: One of the Australians was a lady by the name of Allison Sudradjat.

Allison who was a practising Muslim had been working for AusAID. In keeping with what we were trying to do in terms of the dignified return of the deceased, we sent a Christian chaplain and also the Muslim chaplain. It was a natural decision, nothing extraordinary about it. Like in the Defence Force, our chaplains wear the uniform, but they wear crosses or in the case of our Islamic chaplain he wears the crescent on his shoulder, on his epaulet. Sheik Khalil Sharmi and his Christian counterpart presided over the service in AFP uniforms.

The feedback from the Indonesians was unbelievable. I'd never thought of this, but here was a person in an Australian Federal Police uniform, an Imam, conducting a service in their country, and they thought that was absolutely fabulous. They thought it was brilliant. But we didn't do it for that reason. We did it because it was the right thing to do for Alison Sudrajat.

Five years ago when I was in the bookshop in Lakemba I had no idea that one day this would have such a profound effect on the Indonesian people. The ceremony was broadcast by satellite all around Indonesia, which is obviously the largest Islamic population in the world.

And so doing things because you know they're right can often have unintended but positive impact. Do you know what that is? It is actually living your faith. It's actually delivering what you believe, not expecting or even planning on an outcome, but just trusting that the outcomes will be right. We can all do that. You don't have to be a Commissioner of Police to do that either. It's important, as I said at the outset, that you don't see me as someone different because I'm not. I'm just one of you. I try and do what I can in terms of practising my faith, but I try and be as anonymous as I possibly can when doing so because I'm a member of the community, I'm a Catholic member of the community, and I happen to be a Commissioner of Police, and I hope that never changes.

Thank you.