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COUNTERBLAST: A Modest Proposal: Open Letter to The Home Secretary Calling for the Expansion of ‘Prayer for Policing’

GRAHAM FARRELL and KEN PEASE

Graham Farrell is Professor of Criminology and Ken Pease is Visiting Professor of Criminology, Loughborough University

Dear Mr Johnson

We write with praise on hearing how your Home Office recently funded the Christian Police Association with £10,000 to promote ‘prayer for policing’ (*Independent* 2010; *Daily Telegraph* 2010). You appear to have already inspired other police officers to claim prayer reduces crime (*Daily Express* 2010; *Western Morning News* 2010). However, we are concerned that your effort may be too limited, particularly insofar as it may be supporting only one religion. Britain’s multicultural society has many and varied faiths, so to avoid discrimination all their prayers must be answered with Home Office funding. This will require additional expenditure, so here we offer some preliminary guidance on a broad agenda of research and evaluation. Then, if the per-prayer crime reduction impact of some religions is better than others, you will have the information needed to allocate taxpayers’ money accordingly.

Among your more pressing aims must be to determine whether the Union of Burglars and Allied Trades can offset police prayer by prayers of their own. We also need to know whether any prayer effect has a geographic range. If not, the Home Office should establish a Central Prayer Unit to cover the country.

With regard to prayer style, we need research to identify whether a neatly-worded effort works best. There may also be a premium for originality or, conversely, for tradition. Does lengthy prayer stem serious crime? Can more fervent prostration temper terrorism? The comparative effects of major religions should also be assessed – do prayers of Christians, Muslims, Hindus and the Baha’i all impact uniformly? Is the impact greater for crimes of which particular Gods disapprove most? If so, maybe Mormons are more effective against illicit drug-related crime (but not polygamy)? Perhaps pagan chanting is the panacea for environmental crime. There already seems to be a link between child sexual abuse and praying Catholic priests.

You will garner much support from The Natural Law Party (NLP) which has long claimed transcendental meditation and tantric flying reduces violence around its temples. With your support, academic suggestions that NLP research is pseudo-scientific twaddle can be laid to rest. You should also ignore randomised controlled trials which find prayer has no impact on other social problems: any deity worth its salt can hide its operations from white-coated scientists. So it matters not one jot that there is no identifiable mechanism by which prayer affects crime. Perhaps the 45% fall in all crimes since 1995, as measured by the British Crime Survey, might be retrospectively attributed to more prayer.

It is a truth *universally* acknowledged that Jedi Knights are the finest law enforcement practitioners. In the last UK census over 390,000 citizens denoted their religion as Jedi, making it the fourth most reported religion ahead of Sikhism, Judaism or Buddhism. Jedi mind tricks are compatible with your prayer-for-policing, and tackling anti-social Sith hoodies should not be limited to galaxies far far away. For a small fee (similar to the sum you gave the Christians), they can surely be focused on some of our more problematic housing estates.

Robert Peel, one of your predecessors as Home Secretary, instituted the world's first professional police in 1829. You continue his visionary tradition, for which you must be widely commended. Yet there are so many advantages to looking at crime through a religious lens that we must press you for the immediate expansion of prayer-for-policing. In time it can be buttressed by community policing which holds inquisitions into the unorthodox activities of non-believers. Together we can then look forward to the day when magical supernatural powers and unproven assertion are on an even footing with scientific method, reason, and evidence-based policing. And of course, you should not limit yourself to crime because it follows that all social problems can be cured by prayer – in which case you will be a shoo-in for Prime Minister.

Yours faithfully,

Graham Farrell and Ken Pease

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