

# MailOnline

## Priest outrages police by telling congregation: 'My advice to poor is to shoplift'

By [Graham Smith](#)

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**'Highly irresponsible': Father Tim Jones has been criticised after advising his congregation to shoplift following his Nativity sermon**

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A clergyman has been criticised as 'highly irresponsible' after advising his congregation to shoplift following his Nativity sermon.

Father Tim Jones, 41, broke off from his traditional annual sermon yesterday to tell his flock that stealing from large chains is sometimes the best option for vulnerable people.

It is far better for people desperate during the recession to shoplift than turn to 'prostitution, mugging or burglary', he said.

The married father-of-two insisted his unusual advice did not break the Bible commandment 'Thou shalt not steal' - because God's love for the poor outweighs his love for the rich.

But the minister's controversial sermon at St Lawrence Church in York has been slammed by police and a local MP, who say that no matter what the circumstances, shoplifting is an offence.

Delivering his festive lesson, Father Jones told the congregation: 'My advice, as a Christian priest, is to shoplift. I do not offer such advice because I think that stealing is a good thing, or because I think it is harmless, for it is neither.

'I would ask that they do not steal from small family businesses, but from large national businesses, knowing that the costs are ultimately passed on to the rest of us in the form of higher prices.

'I would ask them not to take any more than they need, for any longer than they need.

'I offer the advice with a heavy heart and wish society would recognise that bureaucratic ineptitude and systematic delay has created an invitation and incentive to crime for people struggling to cope.'

He added that he felt society had failed the needy, and said it was far better they shoplift than turn to more degrading or violent options such as prostitution, mugging or burglary.

Father Jones cited the example of an ex-prisoner who had been forced to live on less than £100, including a crisis loan, over six weeks after his release from jail.

He continued: 'My advice does not contradict the Bible's eighth commandment because God's love for the poor and despised outweighs the property rights of the rich.

'Let my words not be misrepresented as a simplistic call for people to shoplift. The observation that shoplifting is the best option that some people are left with is a grim indictment of who we are.

'Rather, this is a call for our society no longer to treat its most vulnerable people with indifference and contempt. Providing inadequate or clumsy social support is monumental, catastrophic folly.'

But a spokesman for North Yorkshire Police said: 'First and foremost, shoplifting is a criminal offence and to justify this course of action under any circumstances is highly irresponsible.

'Turning or returning to crime will only make matters worse, that is a guarantee. We recognise some people find themselves in difficult circumstances but support is readily available and must be sought.'

Local Tory MP Anne McIntosh, who has campaigned in Parliament for stronger sentences for shoplifters, admitted that there had been an 'over-commercialisation' of the festive period which encourages people to spend.

But she said: 'I cannot condone inciting anyone to commit a criminal offence, shoplifting is a crime against the whole local community and society.'

This isn't the first time Father Jones has courted controversy.

He hit the headlines in May 2008 when he protested against a shop stocking Playboy stationery aimed at youngsters. He tossed the items onto the floor complaining they were 'cynical and wicked'. The shop bowed to his one-man protest and agreed to stop stocking Playboy-branded merchandise.

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God was poor, did he steal or encourage it??? If I'd have been in his congregation I would have stood up and walked out in

disgust.

- Betzy, The Real World, 21/12/2009 13:32

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"Thou Shall Not Steal" Father Jones. Not "Thou Shall Not Steal unless desperate".  
You are a disgrace to your church and your community.  
RESIGN!

- Helen Donovan, Evesham UK, 21/12/2009 13:30

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Let's see if the Bishops and the Vatican back this mixed up cleric up!

Jesus (the highest authority) states:

Mat 15:3 ... Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

Mat 15:4 For God commanded, saying, "Honor your father and mother"; and, "He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him die by death."

Mat 15:5 But you say, Whoever says to his father or mother, Whatever you would gain from me, It is a gift to God;

Mat 15:6 and in no way he honors his father or his mother. And you voided the commandment of God by your tradition.

Mat 15:7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,

Mat 15:8 "This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.

Mat 15:9 But in vain they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15: 3-9. See also Mark 7: 1-13

- Louis, Aldershot, 21/12/2009 13:30

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I would never advocate shoplifting. However, knowing how much food the large supermarkets actually waste, it wouldn't hurt them to deposit all their excess in a free food share-out scheme for those in need.

- Sarah, York, UK, 21/12/2009 13:28

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You find the majority of criminals that steal do not live in abject poverty they take expensive drugs watch sky TV on 50 inch plasmas and take a foreign holiday at least once a year all paid with benefits but supplemented with theft. I don't know how the church disciplines its ministers but this advice is grotesque and he should be struck off for this advice

- Mr Rolf Kitching, Gosport Hampshire, 21/12/2009 13:24

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people are shoplifting more than ever.. middle aged, underaged, students, mums, elderly, you name it.... sadly i don't blame them

- Marcia, Ringwood, UK, 21/12/2009 13:24

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