

Thou SHALT shoplift: Priest tells congregation it's better than robbery or prostitution

By Chris Brooke

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Poor people who are desperate for cash have been advised to go forth and shoplift from major stores - by an Anglican priest.

The Rev Tim Jones said in his Sunday sermon that stealing from successful shops was preferable to burglary, robbery or prostitution.

He told parishioners it would not break the eighth commandment 'thou shalt not steal' because it 'is permissible for those who are in desperate situations to take food that they might not starve'.

But his advice was roundly condemned by police and the local Tory MP. Father Jones, 42, was discussing Mary and the birth of Jesus when he went on to the subject of how poor and vulnerable people cope in the run-up to Christmas.

'My advice, as a Christian priest, is to shoplift,' he told his stunned congregation at St Lawrence and St Hilda in York.

'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. I offer the advice with a heavy heart. 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.

'When people are released from prison, or find themselves suddenly without work or family support, then to leave them for weeks with inadequate or clumsy social support is monumental, catastrophic folly.

'We create a situation which leaves some people little option but crime.'

The father of two, whose parish has a wide mix of social conditions, said his advice to people in dire circumstances is that 'they should not hurt anybody and cope as best they can'.

He added: 'The strong temptation is to burgle or rob people - family, friends, neighbours, strangers.

'Others are tempted towards prostitution, a nightmare world of degradation and abuse for all concerned. Others are tempted towards suicide. Instead, I would rather that they shoplift.

'The life of the poor in modern Britain is a constant struggle, a minefield of competing opportunities, competing responsibilities, obligations and requirements, a constant effort to achieve the impossible.

'For many at the bottom of our social ladder, lawful, honest life can sometimes seem to be an apparent impossibility.'

Anne McIntosh, the Tory MP for Vale of York, has campaigned in Parliament for stronger sentences for shoplifters.

She said: 'I cannot condone inciting anyone to commit a criminal offence.

'Shoplifting is a crime against the whole local community and society.'

A North Yorkshire Police spokesman 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.'

The Archdeacon of York, the Venerable Richard Seed, said: 'The Church of England does not advise anyone to shoplift, or break the law in any way.'

'Father Tim Jones is raising important issues about the difficulties people face when benefits are not forthcoming, but shoplifting is not the way to overcome these difficulties.'

'There are many organisations and charities working with people in need, and the Citizens' Advice Bureau is a good first place to call.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1237470/Priest-advises-congregation-shoplift.html#ixzz0agspaASz>