



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 29, 2011

UK Police Harass Christian Coffee Shop Over Bible

In what appears to be another incident in a troubling trend across Great Britain, police in the community of Blackpool in northwest England have threatened the owner of a Christian coffee shop with arrest for displaying Bible passages on a television screen in his shop.

As reported by the UK's [Daily Mail](#) newspaper, Jamie Murray (left), owner of the Salt and Light café, "was warned by two police officers to stop playing DVDs of the New Testament in his cafe following a complaint from a customer that it was inciting hatred against homosexuals."



Murray said that the officers, who arrived during a busy time and questioned him for nearly an hour, said that the Scripture display violated Britain's notorious Public Order Act, a 1986 law which prohibits the use of language that is "insulting" or may cause "harassment, alarm, or distress."

Murray recalled to the *Daily Mail*: "I told them that all that appeared on the screen were the words of the New Testament. There is no sound, just the words on the screen and simple images in the background of sheep grazing or candles burning. I thought there might be some mix-up but they said they were here to explain the law to me and how I had broken it."

As the incident escalated, Murray found himself asking the officers, "Are you really telling me that I am facing arrest for playing the Bible?" He said the officer responded by fixing him with a stare and warning him: "If you broadcast material that causes offense under the Public Order Act, then we will have to take matters further. You cannot break the law."

Murray ultimately turned off the Bible DVD following what he called an increasingly "aggressive inquisition," explaining: "I was worried about being handcuffed and led out of the shop in front of my customers. It wouldn't have looked good so I thought it was better to comply."

He said that as the police left the shop, they "told me they would continue to monitor if we were displaying inflammatory material. At no stage had they spoken to me like I was a law-abiding citizen trying to earn a living. I felt like a criminal."

The café has played the 26-hour-long Watchword Bible DVD series for years, mostly with the sound turned down so only the words flash across the screen. While no one had ever complained in the past, Murray said someone may have been offended after the book of Romans had been played the week before. That New Testament epistle includes a strongly worded admonition against homosexual activity ([Romans 1:24-28](#)).

Murray is being represented by the [Christian Institute](#) (CI), a UK-based legal advocacy group, whose attorney assured Murray that he is free to display the Bible in his shop, and is not in violation of any laws. Mike Judge, a spokesman for the group, told the *Daily Mail*: "I have no problem with the police looking into a complaint, but once they realized it was just the words of the Bible being shown on the



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screen then they should have walked away.”

He pointed out that the investigating officers “did not even look at the offending DVD. They simply told Mr. Murray that he had to stop showing the Bible and warned him that they would continue to monitor what he was doing. This is intimidatory and completely unacceptable.”

After being informed of his rights, Murray told reporters that “I am not going to be bullied by the police and the PC lobby out of playing the Bible silently in my cafe. It’s crazy. Christians have to stand up for what they believe in.”

A spokesman for the police explained that officers were “duty bound” to investigate the possibility that the café was in violation of the Public Order Act. But he insisted that the officers “took a commonsense and objective approach in dealing with the complaint. We believe our response and the action we took was completely proportionate....”

Nevertheless, according to the [Christian Institute](#), the police did issue a somewhat belated apology for the actions of the officers in the case. “Police visited the café owner on [September 27], admitted they got the law wrong, and said sorry for the ‘manner’ of their investigation,” the CI said. “But they refused to apologize for launching the investigation and they also denied banning the display of the Bible texts in the café.”

A police spokesman told the [BBC](#): “It appears that the officer has misinterpreted the Public Order Act and we have apologized to the cafe owner for any distress we may have caused.”

While Murray has accepted the apology, the CI’s Mike Judge added that there must be some consequences. “Mr. Murray is obviously pleased that the police have admitted to some of their mistakes,” Judge said. “He is certainly relieved that he doesn’t face arrest for displaying Bible verses in his Christian café. As a Christian he accepts the police’s apology, as far as it goes, and he forgives them.”

But, added Judge, “there are some issues that the police have not acknowledged or apologized for, and some important details remain in dispute.” He emphasized that the café manager “doesn’t want to see this happen to anyone else, so he intends to lodge an official complaint with the police. He isn’t doing this for himself, he’s doing this so that we can live in a free society where the text of the Bible can be publicized without police interference.”

This is the third high-profile incident in the UK in less than a year in which the Christian Institute has defended Christians against the controversial Public Order Act. As reported by [The New American](#), in December 2010 “police in Birmingham, England, were ordered to pay local street preacher Anthony Rollins £4000 (more than \$6,000) plus legal expenses for wrongful arrest and imprisonment,” after he was hauled to jail for supposedly violating the ill-advised law. Rollins was arrested “after a citizen complained to police about his message that homosexual conduct is sinful,” reported *The New American*. Although police quickly dropped the charges after realizing they had overstepped their boundaries, Rollins sued “for wrongful arrest, unlawful imprisonment, assault and battery, and infringement of his human rights — winning in court on all counts,” reported *The New American*.

And in a similar case the same month, “street preacher Dale Mcalpine was awarded £7,000 (more than \$10,000) in damages after he sued police in Cumbria, England, for wrongful arrest, unlawful imprisonment, and infringing on his human rights,” reported *The New American*. “Mcalpine was arrested in April after responding to a comment about homosexuality from a passerby, saying that it was listed in the Bible as a sin.” ([View his arrest below.](#))



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As in Rollins' case, charges under the infamous Public Order Act were quickly dropped once police realized that no court would find Mcalpine guilty of using "threatening, abusive or insulting" words "to cause harassment, alarm or distress" against another individual.



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