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## Interview: Peter Kearney

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# Against the 'Effective Silencing Of the U.S. Catholic Church'

*Peter Kearney is the Director of the Catholic Media Office of the Bishops Conference of Scotland, in Glasgow. In 2000, he ran unsuccessfully for Deputy Leader of the Scottish National Party. He aroused controversy at that time when he gave an interview to EIR, in which, among other things, he backed Lyndon LaRouche's proposal for a "New Bretton Woods" monetary system as helping provide a framework for a viable independence for Scotland (see EIR, Aug. 25, 2000). On June 7, 2002, Kearney responded to questions submitted by Mark Burdman.*

**EIR:** If one follows the American media, or BBC, these days, one of the biggest stories is the so-called "Catholic sex scandal," or "pedophile priests scandal." The mood about this has become so intense in America, that Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law lives in a virtual state of siege at his home, a Catholic priest in Baltimore has been shot by a claimed "victim of sex abuse," another priest committed suicide, and so on. Can you give us some idea, what you think is really involved in this uproar?

**Kearney:** I should begin by pointing out that as I work for the Bishops Conference of Scotland, I can only speak for the Catholic Church in Scotland. Having said that, as a concerned Catholic and someone outside the U.S.A., I do have personal views on the subject. It seems to me that a media frenzy and talk of "pedophile priests" has obscured the reality of what is a very real problem for the Catholic Church in the United States, namely, homosexuality among the clergy.

It is worth quoting from a recent article on the subject in the *Catholic Herald* by John Haldane, who is Royden Davis Professor of Humanities at Georgetown University and Professor of Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews. He summarizes the situation accurately, when he writes: "It is common to read that the matter of priestly and religious abuse is not a gay issue but one of pedophilia. This is unconvincing. Most of the cases of sexual vice among clergy involve homosexual approaches and acts involving teenage boys. There have been cases of heterosexual pedophilia but the major problem is homosexual [behavior] and even this seems to be a matter of clergy taking opportunities with adolescent boys because of lesser risk of exposure than might be posed by soliciting adults. This is one reason why activists are keen that sexual vice not be deemed a gay issue: They hope for

acceptance of homosexual activity among religious [i.e., those who have taken vows] and don't want that imperiled by widespread repugnance at what is now being revealed."

Meantime, the supporters of married priests and the ordination of women, as well as dozens of self-styled "experts," blame abuse on celibacy. This superficial conclusion flies in the face of reality. Most pedophiles are married men; being a priest doesn't make a man a pedophile, but the priesthood as a trusted profession that can give access to children, may attract those with such an inclination. Forces at odds with the teachings of the Catholic Church are clearly trying to use the present situation to their own narrow advantage.

**EIR:** In an international webcast on May 1, our editor Lyndon LaRouche, a U.S. Presidential pre-candidate, stated his view that this "sex scandal" issue smells of a classic political operation, with the aim of silencing the Catholic Church, particularly in the United States, at a time of great political and social conflict, typified by the recent Israeli siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. He pointed out, that Cardinal Law would be the natural spokesman, in America, on issues pertaining to the Middle East. What is your reaction to LaRouche's assessment?

**Kearney:** There is absolutely no doubt in my own mind, that a side effect of the recent "revelations" has been the effective silencing of the Catholic Church in U.S. public debates. Many members of the American hierarchy now feel that they can't challenge society about its values and policies. As a result, the voice of Catholicism is growing weaker.

**EIR:** One of the key features of the terrible events of Sept. 11, is that the hegemonic policy grouping in Washington has exploited these events to unleash what they call a "Clash of Civilizations," beginning with a campaign by "the West" against the Islamic nations. This "Clash of Civilizations" concept was formally elaborated by Harvard University Prof. Samuel Huntington. The recent siege in Bethlehem extended that clash to include targetting Christianity. Do you see this strategy as a factor in why the "Catholic sex scandal" has become such a gigantic issue?

**Kearney:** The current comprehensive "neutering" of a normally powerful and influential U.S. Catholic voice may simply be coincidental, though I accept that the present situation

does indeed serve the purposes of those who would end inter-faith dialogue and pitch Christianity against Islam in an apocalyptic struggle.

**EIR:** Has the Catholic Church in Scotland been silenced on Middle East issues, or have there been initiatives taken, that are not reported by the “reputable” media?

**Kearney:** Initiatives have been taken which have been given little or no coverage in the secular press. On April 8, Bishop John Mone, President of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Agency (SCIAF), spoke out on the crisis in the Mideast. He said, “The violent and frightening events in the Holy Land are truly shocking. It is imperative that the leaders of both communities renounce any hope of achieving their aims by violence and commit themselves to dialogue as the true way to peace.

“It is imperative also that the international community redouble its efforts to assist in this search for a just peace in line with United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1397 and 1402. Any settlement must recognize both the rights of the Palestinians to live in a state of their own, free from domination and military repression, and the right of Israel to peace and security. Violence will only lead to more violence, and, as is often the case, it is the most vulnerable groups in society, especially women and children, who suffer.”

Then on April 15, in a joint statement issued by Scotland’s Catholic Bishops, the following comments were made: “The Bishops Conference of Scotland joins all those around the world who can only look on with horror at events unravelling in Israel and Palestine. Not without reason is the region called The Holy Land. It is sacred to the three great traditions of the Children of Abraham who are now locked in conflict.

“The violence now seems to have a life of its own, whether the desperate fanaticism of suicide bombers or the fearful oppression of the modern military machine. This living violence begets itself, bringing death and suffering for many without any sign of resolution. It seems pointless to plead and perhaps too easy to condemn from a distance. But at some point, normal life must begin again; Israeli and Palestinian must co-exist.

“We can only express our earnest hope that the violence should cease. We send our prayers and sympathies to all those who suffer and grieve. In the name of that God we all revere as a God of Peace, we implore those involved to search for constructive and reconciling ways of true peace, which can never come through violence.

“In union with Pope John Paul II, we ask all people of good will in Scotland to unite in prayers for peace at this time, in an hour that is so serious for the whole of humanity. In this way a message of stable and lasting peace may reach that land that is dear to the faithful of the three monotheistic religions.”

In both cases the full text of the statements were released to the press in this country and were comprehensively ignored. I even received complaints from Catholics in Scotland

asking why our bishops weren’t speaking out on the conflict and had to reassure them that they had indeed addressed the situation, but the media had chosen to ignore their action!

**EIR:** What is your view of how the “sex scandal issue” would best be resolved, or laid to rest?

**Kearney:** The issue of clerical homosexuality must be dealt with; again I quote from Professor Haldane who concludes: “In many cases it is too late, and only heroic corrective efforts assisted by grace will enable individuals to curtail their active proclivities. Their superiors, some of whom may themselves be in the same moral danger, need to encourage asceticism, to insist upon it in the seminaries and to require the departure of those who are unable or unwilling to take the necessary measures, either as staff or students. One reason for reluctance, additional to possible compromise and fear of controversy, is the concern over the perilously low number of vocations. It is hard to predict outcomes, but I suspect that a determined treatment of the issue of sexual disposition—homosexual and heterosexual—with effective ascetical training, would in fact make the priesthood and religious life more attractive to those of well-ordered sexual character. One might also hope that as it became known that having had this problem the Church had dealt with it, the priesthood might again enjoy the prestige that once gave it a kind of nobility. At any rate no good outcome can be hoped for until this painful nettle has been grasped.”

I can only agree with this assessment.

**EIR:** Mr. LaRouche’s wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute and a candidate for Chancellor in the September 2002 German national elections, has put forward an initiative for a “Dialogue of Religions and Cultures,” as a response to the Huntington scenario. What is your assessment of the value and necessity of such a proposal at this time?

**Kearney:** Inter-faith dialogue is certainly essential. Ever since the events of last September, the Pope has condemned terrorism and has, with his universally recognized moral authority, urged everyone to choose peace, justice, and forgiveness. He summoned Catholics to a Day of Fasting and Prayer for the sake of peace—undertaken on 14 December last year. Then he invited the representatives of the world religions to make a pilgrimage of prayer to the City of Assisi, saying, “I wish to announce that I intend to invite representatives of the religions of the world to come to Assisi on 24 January 2002 to pray for the end of conflict and the promotion of true peace, and to come together, especially Christians and Muslims, to declare before the world that religion must never become a cause of conflict, hatred, and violence.” The Pope’s call was heeded, and over 100 representatives from more than a dozen religions and denominations attended in a tangible demonstration of the importance of understanding and ongoing dialogue.