

Catholic bishop hits out at 'gay conspiracy' to destroy values preached by Christianity

ONE of Scotland's most senior Catholics has launched an attack on the "gay lobby" in Scotland, claiming there is a "huge and well-orchestrated conspiracy" against Christian values.

The Rt Rev Joseph Devine, Bishop of Motherwell and president of the Catholic Education Commission, said gay rights organisations aligned themselves with minority groups, such as Holocaust survivors, to project an "image of a group of people under persecution".

He warned that the gay lobby – which he labelled "the opposition" – had mounted "a giant conspiracy" to shape public policy.

He singled out the actor Sir Ian McKellen, who was given a New Year honour for services to gay rights, pointing out that Oscar Wilde was locked up only a century ago for homosexual acts. The bishop said he would "not tolerate" the "behaviour" of a child struggling to come to terms with his or her homo-

"We neglect the gay movement at our peril"

Bishop of Motherwell

sexuality. Last night his views were attacked by gay rights groups, which branded them "un-Christian" and "deeply out of step" with the views of ordinary Scots.

In the fourth of the Gonzaga Lectures held at St Aloysius' College in Glasgow on Tuesday, Bishop Devine said: "The homosexual lobby has been extremely effective in aligning itself with minority groups.

"It is ever-present at the service each year for the Holocaust memorial, as if to create for themselves the image of a group of people under persecution. We neglect the gay movement at our peril.

"I want to ask you if you are able to see the giant conspiracy that's taking place before our eyes, even if we didn't see it at the time. I take it you're beginning to see that there is a huge and well-

TRISTAN STEWART-ROBERTSON

orchestrated conspiracy taking place, which the Catholic community missed."

He went on: "In this New Year's honours list, I saw actor Ian McKellen being honoured for his work on behalf of homosexuals, when a century ago Oscar Wilde was locked up and put in jail. "It's a very small group of people, but very active and organised – and extremely indulgent. The opposition know exactly what they're doing. We don't."

Calum Irving, the director of Stonewall Scotland, said the bishop was "deluded", pointing out that the Catholic Church had much greater wealth and political influence than the gay rights lobby. He said: "So Bishop Devine has decided it's time to have a go at lesbian and gay people again.

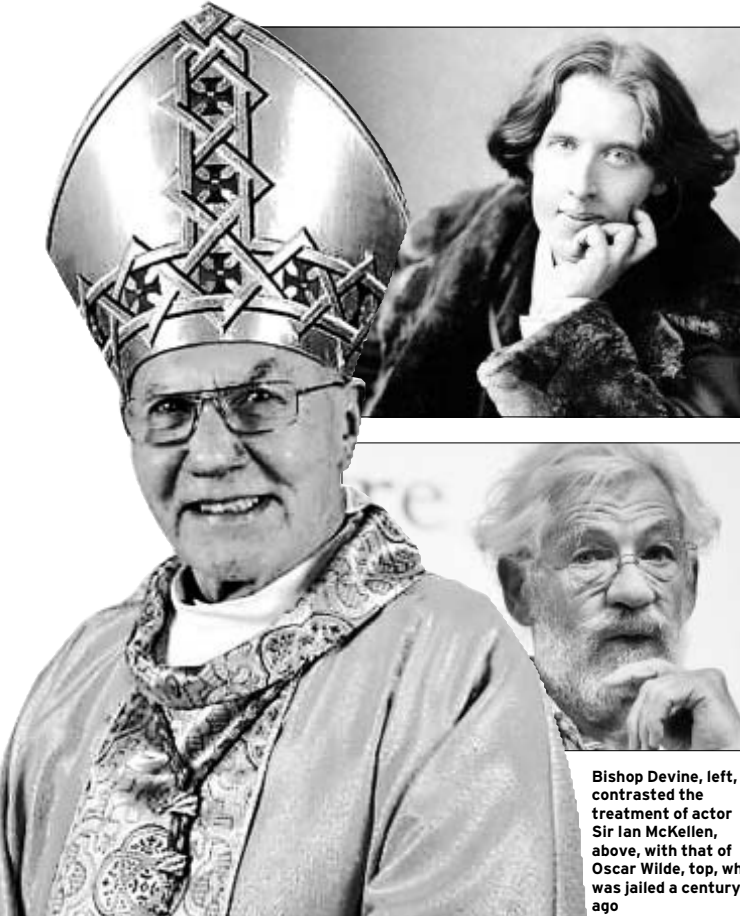
"I'm flattered that the bishop thinks we could mount a 'huge and well-orchestrated' conspiracy, but he is much deluded. After all, which 'lobby' really has the greater resources and political access?"

"Such a continued attack on gay people is distinctly un-Christian and deeply out of step with the views of most Scots today. There is no war on Christianity – just the bishop's own fevered paranoia.

"I would defend the bishop's right to practise his faith and yet he would deny me basic dignity and respect. Worse, he appears to hanker after an age when Oscar Wilde was put in jail for being gay. Worse still, he seems to infer that gay people have no right to be remembered as victims of the Holocaust."

After Bishop Devine's lecture, entitled *Sectarianism and Secularism: Bugbears for the Catholic Church in Scotland*, one audience member asked how Catholic parents should "come to terms with a child's mission to become homosexual".

The bishop replied: "This must be a nightmare moment



Bishop Devine, left, contrasted the treatment of actor Sir Ian McKellen, above, with that of Oscar Wilde, top, who was jailed a century ago

for any parent. There are many days when I'm glad to not be a parent. I would try to handle it with a degree of compassion, but I would not tolerate [it]."

Bishop Devine also cited the battles over Clause 28, legalising civil partnerships and same-sex adoption.

He said prominence had been given to the "supreme moral values of liberty and equality"

replacing "truth and goodness" as supreme moral values.

Bishop Devine continued: "It was bound to result in state-sponsored morality at war with Christian values. We must resist being corrupted by secularism."

Asked about how Christians could influence politics, he commented: "It was once thought that the Labour Party was a Christian democratic party.

Sadly, it's not that anymore. Certainly in terms of leadership, the SNP are much more responsive to us."

He vowed to fight on against the "forces of secularism". He concluded his lecture stating: "Like Mel Gibson, who said, 'I'm going to pick a fight, so am I'."

A Holocaust Memorial Day Trust spokeswoman said: "Holocaust Memorial Day is about re-

OUTSPOKEN CHURCHMAN

THE Rt Rev Joseph Devine is no stranger to controversy.

Last year, he dealt a blow to Labour's hopes in the Holyrood elections by saying he would not be voting for the party on religious grounds, as it had a "morality devoid of any Christian principles".

He had previously branded the Labour administration as "moral vandals" and "politically correct zealots".

The year before, he became embroiled in a row with other senior figures in the Catholic Church after condemning the actions of a senior Church aide who, he claimed, had failed to express opposition to plans to let gay couples adopt.

In an unprecedented move, the Church's two most senior clerics, Cardinal Keith O'Brien and Archbishop Mario Conti, moved publicly to rebuff Bishop Devine by releasing a public statement backing the aide.

Previously, he became personally involved in a row with Jack McConnell, the former first minister, over plans for mixed-faith, joint-campus schools in Lanarkshire.

membering all victims: be they Jewish, gypsy, gay or lesbian.

"It is also about learning the lessons from the past, encouraging society to tackle all forms of prejudice, such as antisemitism, racism and homophobia."

A spokeswoman for Sir Ian McKellen said the actor was out of the country.

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Tommy Sheridan's wife questioned on '150 stolen miniatures' claim

GAIL Sheridan, the wife of the former Scottish Socialist Party leader Tommy Sheridan, was questioned by airline officials yesterday over claims she stole alcohol miniatures.

Mrs Sheridan, who has been suspended from her cabin crew job with British Airways, was interviewed as part of the airline's disciplinary process.

ALASTAIR DALTON

It is understood the meeting in Glasgow was for preliminary "fact finding" and BA has yet to decide whether to call a disciplinary hearing. Mrs Sheridan was yesterday reported to have had 150 miniature bottles in her home, reportedly gifts from friends.

Several days before the theft allegations emerged last month, she was charged with perjury in connection with her husband's defamation case against the *News of the World* two years ago.

Mr Sheridan was charged with perjury in December – around 16 months after he won his £200,000 action against the

newspaper at the Court of Session in Edinburgh.

Police have refused to comment on claims the miniatures were found at the Sheridans' Glasgow home by officers investigating perjury allegations.

Mrs Sheridan was reported to have amassed a collection of miniatures which she kept in a glass display case in the house.

Last night, the couple's lawyer said Mrs Sheridan believes she is the victim of police harassment. Amer Anwar said the couple were determined to prove their innocence, adding: "Gail Sheridan has a 23-year unblemished record with British Airways, whom she has represented as part of their promotional team, as well as serving as a shop stew-

ard and now as a senior cabin crew member."

Mrs Sheridan said a procedural hearing had taken place yesterday, but no decision was likely to be taken for several weeks as to the next step.

Yesterday, BA would say only that a member of its cabin crew had been suspended as part of an ongoing investigation.

A Budget for entrepreneurs?

Ask David Glen 0141 242 7301 david.a.glen@uk.pwc.com



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