

PRESS RELEASE

Stand-up comedian Frank Skinner to join academics and clerics for major celibacy debate

Pope Benedict XVI recently said that celibacy is "The sign of full devotion, the entire commitment to the Lord." Is he right or has the time now come to openly challenge that view? Leading Catholic thinkers, clerics and celebrities to have a live public debate on the vow of celibacy

Film director, John Deery, is staging a debate on the contentious and topical issue of celibacy in the Catholic Church on **Tuesday 14 September 2010**, two days before the visit of the Pope to the UK.

The motion for the debate will be: ***'Celibacy should no longer be a compulsory requirement for the Roman Catholic priesthood'***.

Speakers *for the motion* are:

Professor Tina Beattie, Roman Catholic theologian, writer & broadcaster, Roehampton University

John Deery, award-winning writer/director

Helena Kennedy QC, leading human rights lawyer

Fr. John McGowan, Order of Carmelite (OCD), Roman Catholic priest

Speakers *against the motion* are:

Bishop Malcolm McMahon, Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham

Frank Skinner, stand-up comedian and broadcaster

Jack Valero, Communications Director Opus Dei UK and Coordinator Catholic Voices

Fr. Stephen Wang, Dean of Studies, Allen Hall Seminary

Chaired by **Ernie Rea**, broadcaster and presenter of BBC Radio 4's *Beyond Belief*.

The debate will take place at the Odeon West End Cinema, 40 Leicester Square, London WC2H 7LP and will be preceded by Deery's critically acclaimed film *Conspiracy of Silence*. The film has received awards at international film festivals including winning the Freedom of Expression Award from the prestigious National Board of Review (NBR) in the USA, which was shared with Mel Gibson for *The Passion of the Christ* and Michael Moore for *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Deery's film is inspired by true stories and real events researched from Catholic priests in the

UK, Ireland and Italy. The screenplay was developed at the Sundance Screenwriters Lab in the US and deals head on with the issue of celibacy.

John Deery comments I am delighted that so many leading Catholic thinkers have agreed to debate this most important of subjects facing the Catholic Church. The celibacy issue has become increasingly contentious as vocations to the priesthood have fallen so dramatically. The Church's refusal to face this growing crisis, alongside its alleged culpability in multiple child abuse scandals points to an internal inertia and denial which must be challenged. Sexuality and celibacy are at the heart of the matter. +

Bishop Malcolm McMahon adds I am pleased that I have the opportunity to put across the Catholic Church's view on the vow of celibacy at this important time in our history. The speakers John and his team have assembled are first class and I am sure we will have a most enjoyable and enriching evening. +

Running order:

6pm . Arrival

6.30pm . 8pm . *Conspiracy of Silence* screening

8.00pm . 8.30pm . refreshment break

8.30pm . 10pm . Celibacy Debate

Tickets £30 available from 020 8392 1936 or on line at www.conspiracyofsilence.co.uk

For press enquiries please contact: Conspiracy of Silence Ltd on 020 8392 1936 or email: info@conspiracyofsilence.co.uk

For more information about the film please visit: www.conspiracyofsilence.co.uk

Ends

Notes for editors:

Set in Ireland and inspired by true events, *Conspiracy of Silence* tells the story of a young trainee priest torn between the love for his girlfriend and his vocation to the Catholic priesthood. The film highlights the Catholic Church's controversial doctrine on celibacy. With a superb ensemble cast, this provocative and timely drama exposes the human impact of breaking the vow of celibacy . an issue the Catholic Church remains reluctant to address. On the eve of the Pope's visit, this beautifully acted and directed film speaks loud and clear. The cast includes Academy Award™ winner Brenda Fricker, Hugh Bonneville, John Lynch and Sean McGinley.

Made in 2003, the film didn't have a UK/Eire release. Distributors perceived it as too narrow a subject matter to warrant a cinema outing. The film sat on the shelf until last year when director John Deery acquired the rights from the financiers and decided to put together the film and debate to coincide with the Pope's visit in September. Deery was a former altar boy and at one point considered the priesthood. He is a practicing Catholic.