

Dear Pope,

Excuse us writing to you but you see we have a nice little offer to make. All strictly legit – especially as you are the one who can make it so.

We are a consortium of Scottish businessmen – well not exactly Scottish, more like Norman in origin and not exactly businessmen, more like murderous warlords – and we are going into real estate in a bigger way than our previous dealings as individuals. We have assembled a consortium to pool our resources of ruthless exploitation and armoured cruelty to maximise our power over the local peasants and of course their women. In this way, we will install ourselves one of the leading warlord syndicates in these islands. And as long as there a hundred of us murderous psychopaths to do so, we won't give it up to any other murderous psychopath.

So what's in it for you as top Pope of the moment? Well, that's the clever part. Although our plans are purely aimed at rapacious exploitation and self-enrichment, you can also benefit. Our scribes here – top men, got all the legal cant off pat – have drafted a script claiming our objectives are freedom and justice and other ideas which don't really exist yet – a bit like Scotland and other future nations -and won't come along until the end of the Middle Ages or possibly the Enlightenment. But when they do, we will all be admired and praised as the brainboxes who invented America's (where?) Declaration of Independence (what?) and Christ knows what. That is publicity that money cannot buy: for us, for you, for the church (that's you too). Winner, winner, lamprey dinner!

Oh, just one more word in your shell-like. There are some lovely little monasteries and churches around these parts. Very pretty, it would be a shame if anything happened to them. Like a fire. Just in case you were thinking of turning down what we're sure you'll agree is a very fair offer - and if we can all stay friendly, the only things that will be burned will be some witches.

Best wishes

Warlords R Us (Arbroath) Ltd.

aka Peter Russell