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Press release

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams contributes to CSI essay series on “persecution and the unity of believers”

Williams explores how, in situations of persecution, barriers between Christians “dissolve”

Christian Solidarity International (CSI) released today a new essay by Dr. Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, as part of its ongoing [international series](#), "Persecution and the unity of believers."

Responding to the series' inaugural [essay](#) by Cardinal Koch, Dr. Williams explores how the “gift” of martyrdom challenges Christians to overcome divisions between different church bodies.

Williams [points](#) to the recently translated journal of Nicolae Steinhardt, a Romanian intellectual who converted to Orthodox Christianity while imprisoned by the communist regime. While in prison, he was baptized, in a sacrament witnessed by Catholic and Protestant priests.

"Clearly," Williams writes, "in extreme situations, some barriers dissolve almost without question; mutual recognition is made simple if all are paying the same price for their commitment to the new life in Christ."

Williams also insists that persecution must be named and contested, “for the sake of justice for all.” He criticizes the “fantasy” believed in some circles, “that Christianity is intrinsically a tool of colonialism, capitalism, [or] American hegemony.”

“It is especially dispiriting to have to explain this to government ministers, or even to some religious leaders,” he comments.

As the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury (2002–2012), Dr. Rowan Williams led the 100-million-member Anglican Communion for a decade. A distinguished scholar who has served as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford and Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, Williams is widely recognized as one of the world's leading theologians.

The essay series was initiated by CSI International President Dr. John Eibner to address the urgent reality of anti-Christian persecution in today's world. Eibner described the initiative in his introductory [essay](#) as a project "to stimulate deeper conversation about the 'ecumenism of the martyrs' among Christians of all traditions."

"Even if Christians today are divided by confession, politics, economics, and history, they can find unity by focusing on those who have been martyred because of their common faith," wrote Eibner. "I would encourage Christians from all traditions to read this series not just as a theological exercise for the mind, but also as a call to action."

The series will continue in the coming months with contributions from Archbishop Angaelos, the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London.

He will be followed by Professor Yusuf Turaki, a renowned Nigerian theologian who has documented the systematic persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria.

The full text of Dr. Rowan Williams' essay is available now on the CSI international website.

About CSI

Christian Solidarity International is an international human rights group campaigning for religious liberty and human dignity.

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