



# HOLY LAND

## Christians in the Holy Land Conference 2011

### *Video Transcript*

RELEASED: 12 JULY 2011

**Archbishop Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, and Archbishop Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, introduce the International Conference on Christians in the Holy Land, which takes place at Lambeth Palace from Monday 18 July to Tuesday 19 July.**

#### *Full Text*

##### **Archbishop Rowan Williams:**

The rate of emigration from Christian populations in the Holy Land has been growing steadily for a long time. It's now really reaching a proportion where one can talk about a haemorrhage of populations from there.

##### **Archbishop Vincent Nichols:**

People are leaving, Christians are leaving, and we want to say the Christian presence in the Holy Land is important to its balance, to its – not just its historical reality but to its presence and future viability.

##### **Rowan Williams:**

We want Christians in congregations in this country, the sort of Christians who are likely to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to have a better understanding of how critical the situation is for our brothers and sisters there.

##### **Vincent Nichols:**

A few years ago I was back in the Holy Land for the first time in many years. I went with 100 people on a pilgrimage, and every single one of us came back saying, "What can we do?" Now the nature of our pilgrimage was quite deliberate. We went not simply to the holy sites, but we went to see the Christian and Catholic communities living in and around those places. So our response was a very person to person response, it was "What can we do to help these, our brothers and sisters, with whom we've sat and ate and prayed."

##### **Rowan Williams:**

I'd want to say to Christians in the Holy Land that we treasure enormously their presence and their witness. A witness which has gone on throughout Christian history, literally throughout Christian history, often in conditions of great trial and great stress. We value that, we see it as part of what we celebrate when we visit the Holy Land. We don't simply go to see the sites; we go to see 'living stones' as has often been said, to celebrate the witness that they offer. And we want them to know therefore that we give thanks to God for them, that we want their position to be strengthened, their presence to be supported.

##### **Vincent Nichols:**

This moment seems to be very opportune in which to hold a conference like this because there is such a tension on the issues around the Holy Land. And I think and awareness that the struggle to find peace, and at least a living pattern of cooperation there is really important for the stability of communities right round the world. There's something quite neuralgic about this central bit of the Mediterranean. So there's that wide public attention, but more importantly from the perspectives of this conference is the situation of the Christian communities there is very serious.

**Rowan Williams:**

I hope that what will emerge from this is a much deepened awareness among Christians here of the situation of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land. But not just awareness, also some possibilities of giving practical help and support. People need resources for education; they need the kind of resource that will allow them to invest for their future in the place where they are that will give them hope and possibilities on the ground in the Holy Land. So we're hoping very much that there'll be concrete steps that people can take as a result to this. There'll be paths people can adopt to give that effective and practical support.

**Vincent Nichols:**

I hope that this conference will let the voices of the Holy Land be heard, and therefore in response to that achieve a number of things; greater understanding of the ordinary person's experience on the ground in the Holy Land, and willingness to respond to that experience, and means by which that response can be challenged. So we will really be trying to give ourselves some priorities for the next few years in the practical ways in which we, the Christian communities here, can offer understanding and support to our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

**Rowan Williams:**

Christians in the West I think need to be aware that the Christians of the Holy Land are an intrinsic part of our Christian family. That if they were not there, pursuing that witness with the courage and persistence that they always have, the whole body of Christ throughout the world would lose because of that. So it is important to stand with them, it is important to understand what they endure, and it is important to keep up our prayers, as well as our practical support for them.

**Vincent Nichols:**

The message I would like to offer to Christians in the Holy Land is to say we are with you in spirit and in prayer. We understand a little, and this conference will hope us to understand a little more the difficulties that you face but also the courage and the depth of faith that you have. So we give thanks to God for your courage and your faith and we want to say to you, that is an encouragement to us, and in response, we want you to know you are in our hearts and in our prayers today.