



Anglican Primate Preaches | Says It Challenges Modern Society

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Modern societies could learn a lot from a sixth-century monk, according to the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.

In a lecture delivered at the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Anselm, Williams used passages from the Rule of St. Benedict to comment on the idea of authority in the world today.

He said that "what the Rule distinctively does is that it ... asks what is the style of authority that will enable 'faith beyond resentment.'"

Williams continued: "The pressing issue is how we sustain a civilization capable of asking itself questions about its purpose and its integrity; only a civilization that can do this will generate people -- citizens -- who can turn away from individual instinct and self-protection ... because they know what sort of beings they are, mortal, interdependent, created out of love and for love."

The Anglican archbishop said the Rule of St. Benedict both defended those in authority and provided a voice for those being governed.

"There is a clear and unambiguous assumption that there is such a thing as a common good, and that therefore each distinct diverse perspective is open to challenge; that is what obedience is about," he said.

Regarding globalization, the archbishop of Canterbury said that "it is hard to deny that economic powerlessness of the kind that rapidly and insensitively enforced globalization breeds may be fertile ground for destructive behavior."

Williams said a civilization which took a more Benedictine approach to authority would develop the ability to deal more stably with distinct minorities within it.

Good government

"Good governance and government is always about an engagement with the other that is neither static confrontation nor competition, but the production of some sort of common language and vision that could not have been defined in advance of the encounter," he said.

The Anglican archbishop added: "The migrant group that is prepared to work within the civic

framework of a host society, that aspires simply to citizenship, is one whose voice in the community overall is of significance alongside those who have a longer history and a political or economic advantage.

"Once within the relationships of purposeful common life, the facts of coming from ethnically or religiously different backgrounds should not disenfranchise them."

"What we can reasonably ask, in the light of the Rule," said Williams, "is that political order should recognize that it cannot survive without space for some exploration of what human identity is."

Religion, he said, could not be sidelined: "A laissez-faire reduction to market principles is not neutral in regard to human self-understanding."

Oblates

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