

Christianity Has Not 'Had its Day,' Says Archbishop of Canterbury

The leader of the Church of England on Tuesday said a vote last month that struck down proposals to allow women to become bishops had been “deeply painful”, but that Christianity was still relevant in Britain despite falling numbers of believers.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who leads the global 80-million-strong Anglican Communion, said in his Christmas day sermon that the answer to the question of whether Christianity had “had its day” was a “resounding no”.

The Church of England narrowly voted against allowing women bishops last month—to the dismay of Williams and Prime Minister David Cameron—in a move its leaders said risked undermining its role as the established church in society with clerics in parliament’s upper chamber.

The media, many politicians and some members of the public have criticized the **Church of England** for failing to allow women bishops and for failing to back government plans for **gay marriage** at a time when it is under pressure to modernize.

In separate comments aired on Tuesday but recorded earlier, the Roman Catholic Church’s leader in England and Wales, Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols, said the government’s plans to allow gay marriage were a “shambles” and had no mandate.

No religious organization or cleric will be forced to conduct gay weddings under the plans, but critics fear that clause could be challenged under European human rights laws.

A census showed earlier this month that the number of people in England and Wales describing themselves as Christian has declined by 13 percent over the last decade, but Williams warned secularists not to become “too excited”.

“There are a lot more questions to ask before we could possibly assume that the census figures told us that faith was losing its hold on society,” Williams said.

“In the deeply painful aftermath of the synod’s vote last month, what was startling was how many people who certainly wouldn’t have said yes to the census question turned out to have a sort of investment in the church,” he said.

Williams, 62, is stepping down after 10 years in his post, and will be replaced next year by former oil executive Justin Welby.

Williams has agonized over schisms in the Anglican Communion and has said he hopes his successor has “the constitution of an ox and the skin of a rhinoceros.”

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