



Rowan Williams:

## “The Church and Human Rights”

### Summary

Baron Williams of Oystermouth, former Archbishop of Canterbury, delivered the opening speech at a conference hosted by St. Antony’s College in Oxford on the “Future of Religious Minorities in the Middle East,” in which His Eminence emphasized the importance of defending human rights and pluralism in these troubled regions.

In his lecture, titled “The Church and Human Rights,” Baron Williams explored the issues surrounding the term “human rights,” which has been criticized for being a Western and individualistic concept. “The West has an uneven record of bringing democracy to the rest of the world,” he said, “which is why the discourse on human rights is seen as shabby and deeply suspect. However, we should not accept this passively.”

To remedy the weaknesses in human rights discourse, Baron Williams said, “Human rights language has to focus on the protection of human beings by others,” and less on questions of individual entitlement.

In addition, Baron Williams emphasized that democracy does not equal human rights, and said that “a good democracy is not one that only appeals to the majority.” Rather, the ideal democracy will defend minority rights, and protect both the civic and religious identity of its citizens.

Williams said of civic identity that “it should be recognized that this identity is not the only one people have – they are not only citizens but religious, social beings.”