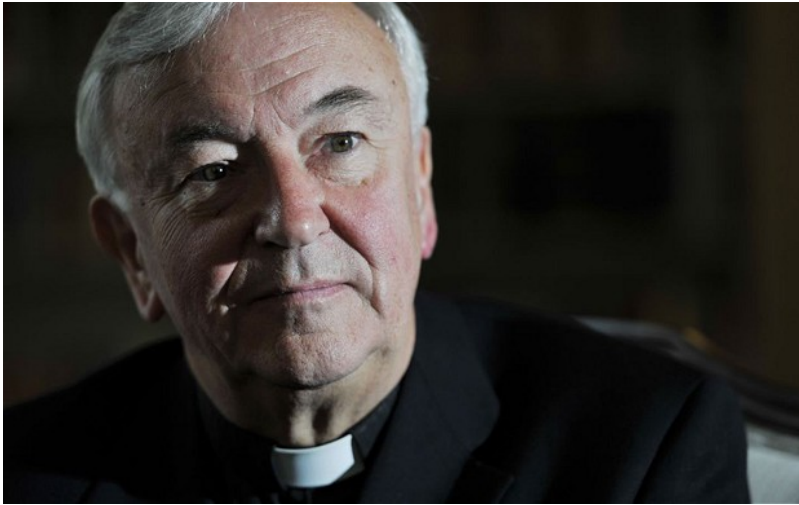


Archbishop: 'Christianity faces extinction in Middle East'

Head of Catholic Church says it is "probably true" that the religion could cease to exist in the area

Politicians face 'test of civilisation' over elderly care, says Archbishop



The Archbishop of Westminster, the Most

Reverend Vincent Nichols Photo: DAVID ROSE

The head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales has warned that Christianity could become extinct in the Middle East.

The Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, said that it was "probably true" that the religion could cease to exist in the area, which has seen an exodus of Christians according to some reports.

He praised the "mediating factor" Christians can play between different Islamic sects and called on the West not to back governments in the region that were "intolerant" of neighbours.

Archbishop Nichols was reacting to comments by the foreign minister Baroness Warsi who is expected to warn that Christianity faces extinction in some parts of the world in a speech on Friday.

Asked on the BBC's Today programme if she was right, Archbishop Nichols said: "In some parts of the Middle East I think that is probably true, yes.

"There are real challenges for Christians in this part of the world to support and get alongside them, and also for politicians to understand that the presence of Christians is a great mediating factor often, for example, between different sections of Islam."

He continued: "It is a mix that has lasted for a 1,000 years and no Western Government should promote a course of action in the Middle East which would end with a new government that was intolerant to its historical neighbours and colleagues within a territory."

The Archbishop's comments follow a stark warning by Lady Warsi, who is minister for faith and communities alongside her foreign office commitments, about the future of Christianity.

“A mass exodus is taking place, on a Biblical scale. In some places, there is a real danger that Christianity will become extinct,” she will say at a speech at Georgetown University in Washington.

Writing for Telegraph.co.uk, Lady Warsi highlighted the bombing of All Saints Church in Pakistan, killing 85 congregants, in September and the gun attack on a Coptic wedding party in Egypt as the latest outrages by militants who have turned “religion upon religion, sect upon sect”.

“There are parts of the world today where to be a Christian is to put your life in danger,” she wrote. “From continent to continent, Christians are facing discrimination, ostracism, torture, even murder, simply for the faith they follow.

“Christian populations are plummeting and the religion is being driven out of some of its historic heartlands. In Iraq, the Christian community has fallen from 1.2m in 1990 to 200,000 today. In Syria, the horrific bloodshed has masked the haemorrhaging of its Christian population,” she said.

Ben Riley-Smith - The Telegraph