

Rowan Williams criticises Duncan Smith's attack on food banks



The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has rebuked the Works and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith for his recent attack on the food bank charity, the Trussell Trust.

Dr Williams, who is patron of the Cambridge City Food Bank reportedly said Mr Duncan Smith's criticism of the charity was "disturbing" and amounted to an attack on its volunteers. Before Christmas Mr Duncan Smith accused the trust of scaremongering and said it was politically motivated after it linked growing demand for emergency food aid with the Coalition Government's welfare reforms.

Dr Williams said Mr Duncan Smith's remarks were "extraordinary". "It is not political point-scoring to say that these are the realities of life in Britain today for a shockingly large number of ordinary people – not scroungers, not idlers - but men and women desperate to keep afloat and to look after their children or their elderly relatives. "The real scaremongering is the attempt to deny the seriousness of the situation by – in effect – accusing those seeking to help of dishonesty as to their motivation." Dr Williams told Cambridge News.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury who is now Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, reportedly challenged Mr Duncan Smith to visit a food bank to witness the situation for himself.

"It may not change his policies but it might at least persuade him not to attack the motives of hard-pressed volunteers and generous donors," added Dr Williams.

The Trussell Trust says that it has distributed food supplies to more than half a million people since April, one third of them children from its 400 food banks across Britain. It has said that the welfare reforms being introduced by Mr Duncan Smith's department are a major factor in the soaring demand for food aid.

Mr Duncan Smith has declined requests for the Trussell Trust for a meeting and in a letter to the charity's chairman, Chris Mould wrote: "I strongly refute this claim and would politely ask you to stop scaremongering in this way. I understand that a feature of your business model must require you to continuously achieve publicity, but I'm concerned that you are now seeking to do this by making your political opposition to welfare reform overtly clear."

Dr Williams told the Cambridge News that the trust is simply trying to respond to "real and acute

needs”. Speaking of the food bank in Cambridge he said: “All who come to the food bank have their needs independently assessed. All the people I speak to who use the food bank will say that they never expected to find themselves in this situation and would rather not have to turn to it for help. “Many are 'working poor', whose low incomes mean they have no flexibility to deal with unexpected crises such as family sickness. Many are confused and left stranded by the benefit system.”

Elena Curti - The Tablet