

# Archbishop of Canterbury: The cross has become a fashion symbol

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December 3, 2013

c. 2013 Religion News Service

CANTERBURY, England (RNS) The Christian cross has become little more than a piece of jewelry worn around the necks of celebrities, said Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

In the foreword to a new book about Christianity, the head of the world's 85 million Anglicans presents the symbol of Roman torture upon which Jesus died as "the moment of deepest encounter with radical change."

And he regrets that after 2000 years, the cross has become trivialized.

"For those early Christians it was a badge of shame," Welby said. "Today, it is more commonly seen as a symbol of beauty to hang around your neck. As a friend of mine used to say, you might as well hang a tiny golden gallows or an electric chair around your neck."

Although Welby made no reference to specific celebrities, several British papers set his comments alongside pictures of Madonna and other stars who wear crosses and who decorate stage costumes with glitzy religious symbols. High-end Italian designers such as Dolce & Gabbana, and Versace have used the cross on dresses and ornaments.

Welby's comments were published in a foreword to the book "Looking through the Cross," written by Graham Tomlin, dean of St. Mellitus College in London, a meditation on Lent. In that essay, Welby asks: "Are we now living with a symbol emptied of power by time and fashion? Christianity with a powerless cross is Christianity without a throne for Christ or an aspiration for Christians."