

**Lord Rowan Williams** Hon LLD  
**Oration by Reverend Kate Pearson**  
**University Anglican Chaplain**

You may have noticed that a referendum took place recently on the UK's membership of the EU recently.

You may also have noticed one advocate proposing that the people of this country have had enough of experts, meaning that it's quite sensible to make a decision without reference to people who have made the topic a lifetime's study. I think this is bonkers. And I'm certain you will too when you've had the opportunity to hear from the expert in the nature of God and religious belief that we are honouring today.

He is an outstanding theologian, poet and writer and, apart from Welsh, speaks and reads another nine languages, including Russian, Biblical Hebrew, ancient and modern Greek and was an admired leader of 85 million members of the Anglican Communion for ten years.

Today, we honour the former Archbishop of Canterbury and current Master of Magdalene College at the University of Cambridge: The Right Reverend and Right Honourable The Lord Williams of Oystermouth. To us today, Lord Rowan Williams.

Lord Williams was born in Swansea, where a prodigious academic career began at Dyvenor School. Early on, his school recognised his huge talents but realised that the sporting field was not a place to show them off at their best; so encouraged him to walk in intellectual conversation with a friend around the playing fields whilst fellow pupils knocked lumps out of each other with hockey sticks. He later went on to Cambridge, where he studied theology, followed by a doctorate at Oxford, after which he lectured at Mirfield in West Yorkshire, and later returned to Cambridge and Westcott House.

Lord Williams was ordained as a priest in 1978 at Ely Cathedral, and the subsequent years were engaged in academic and parish work. In 1991 he was elected Bishop of Monmouth and in 1999, Archbishop of Wales. In 2002, he became the most senior archbishop of the worldwide Anglican Communion. He was the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury and is considered by many to be the "most distinguished occupant of Augustine's chair since St Anselm in the 11th Century, who framed the ontological argument for God's existence," no less.

Throughout his decade-long tenure, Lord Williams faced up to controversy. When I was a newly-ordained Deacon in the Church of England, our governing body voted against allowing women to be bishops. It was a devastating time as we listened to debates rehearsing old arguments that previously I believed had long been settled. The light came in the realisation that my Archbishop's heart was also breaking. Lord Williams' academic rigour is met by his extraordinarily compassionate heart. Always turned towards the margins, always listening out for the voice as yet unheard. Here is a leader who dares to be vulnerable. Inspired and encouraged, I, and thousands of clergy up and down the country, picked ourselves up, dusted ourselves off and carried on, ready to rejoice with the next, successful, vote two years later.

Lord Williams spoke up against military action, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He has been prepared to criticise human rights abuses perpetrated by despotic regimes. He promulgated relations between Christianity and other faiths and led the way to an alternative vision for peace and reconciliation.

Lord Williams has become a respected figure of enormous stature throughout the world. Not just for his role within the Church either: he's also a noted poet, translator of poetry and writer. He's a person who shares links with our University, having made keynote speeches and held study mornings at the campus. But he also shares many of our strongest attributes. Our intellectual curiosity. Our willingness to ask difficult questions about ourselves, and about the world. Our desire to broaden the conversation, to widen the debate.

These are values that have helped our University gain greater international recognition in recent times. For the esteemed person we have with us today, they are amongst the values that have cemented his place in international history for all time. Radical and orthodox, with the heart of a poet.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, *The Right Reverend and Right Honourable* The Lord Williams of Oystermouth.