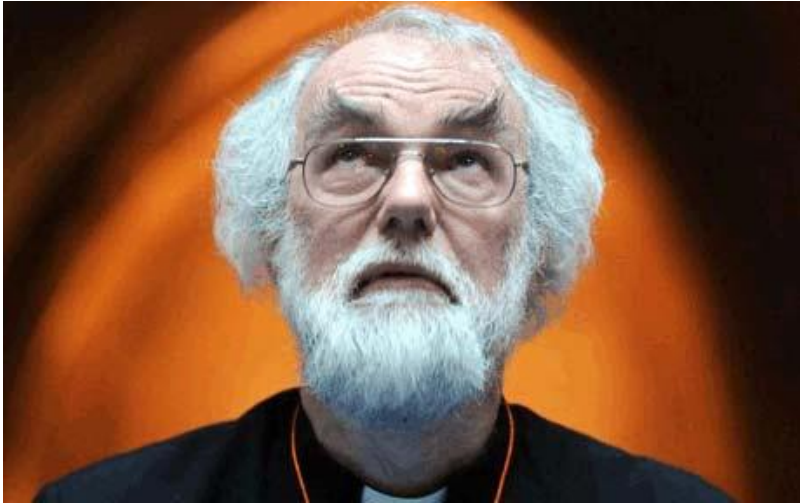


William Shakespeare was probably a Catholic, says Archbishop of Canterbury



William Shakespeare was probably a Catholic, according to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who discussed spirituality and secularism in the Bard's plays with the actor Simon Russell Beale.

Little is known of Shakespeare's life and there is no direct evidence of his religious affiliation, but Dr Rowan Williams said he believed him to be a Catholic. "I don't think it tells us a great deal, to settle whether he was a Catholic or a Protestant, but for what it's worth I think he probably had a Catholic background and a lot of Catholic friends and associates.

"How much he believed in it, or what he did about it, I don't quite know. He wasn't a very nice man in many ways – it's always very shocking, that. The late Shakespeare was hoarding grain and buying up property in Stratford – it was not terribly attractive."

However, he went on: "The extent to which I want to call him a Christian is not [an attempt] to kidnap him for the tribal trophy wall, but a) because everybody at that time was some sort of Christian, and b) there are things in his plays you can't understand without understanding the notions of forgiveness and free grace.

"He wrestled with human questions and he ends up saying there is a great deal more to all this than some might think. That mysteriousness is part of what the plays are about. That seems impossible without something of the sacred."

Asked which Shakespearean character he found most compelling, Dr Williams chose Macbeth, but quickly added: "That's not to say I identify with him, because you don't really want a serial killer as the Archbishop of Canterbury."

Anita Singh - The Telegraph