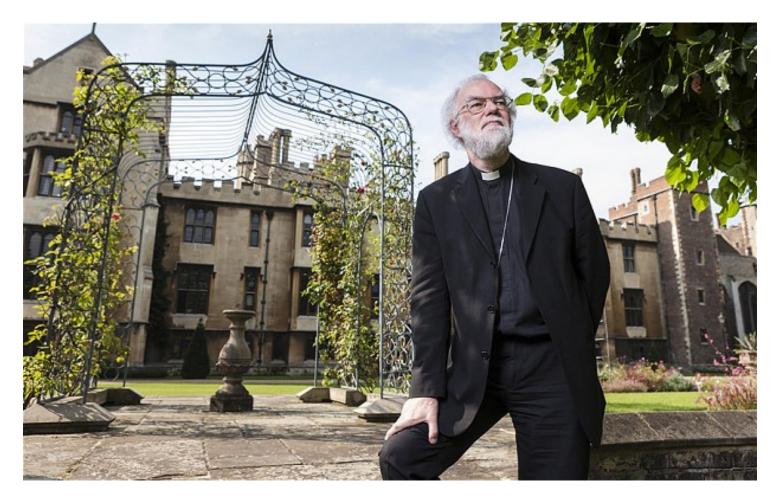**Goodbye to Canterbury**

Gerard O'Donovan reviews Goodbye to Canterbury, BBC Two documentary in which Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams reveals the hidden corners of the cathedral.

Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In its own way, Goodbye to Canterbury (BBC Two) was – very surprisingly – absorbing. Given the opportunity to say a public last farewell to the cathedral that was his HQ and home for the last 10 years as Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams certainly made the most of it.

Beginning with the saving of the cathedral from German bombs in 1942, Dr Williams delved further and further back in time to reflect upon the significance – historical and spiritual – of this 1,400-year-old "mother church of England", slowly bringing his observations into a grand meditation on the place of the church in English life.

This was beautifully written. The weaving together of word and image, art and architecture, politics and spirituality captured the majestic sweep of Canterbury's place in English history – the monks who founded it as a "factory for prayer", the Reformation that changed everything, Becket's martyrdom, the ceaseless flow of people, prayer, hope and desire through its doors.

Looking for "hidden messages" in the ancient walls, Dr Williams found time to plant a few of his own. Nudges about the need to leave space in our lives for the deeper things, barbs about the complacency of the banks, and his own treatment at the hands of the media. But what shone through most clearly,

apart from his own glinting intelligence, was his love for this institution and the building that enshrines it.

Nothing captures that better than his own words: "Canterbury is much more than a functional building. It is an effort to make sense of the cosmos and reach out to its maker. Whether or not you want to talk about God, you can't help but stand back and admire what humans can achieve in pursuit of transcendence."

[Watch the Goodbye to Canterbury, BBC Two documentary](#)

Gerard O'Donovan