

# Atheist Richard Dawkins Loses Religion Debate to Former Anglican Head

Former Archbishop of Canterbury **Rowan Williams** defeated prominent atheist professor **Richard Dawkins** Thursday night in a debate about religion.

A vote taken at the end of the debate at the University of Cambridge ruled that religion does, indeed, have a place in the 21st century.

Dawkins lost the debate by a vote of 324 to 136. About 800 people—mostly students—made up the audience at the Cambridge Union Society's chambers, the U.K.'s independent newspaper reports.

"Religion has always been a matter of community-building, a matter of building relations of compassion, fellow feeling and, dare I say it, inclusion," said Williams, who stepped down as the leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion on Dec. 31. "The notion that religious commitment can be purely a private matter is one that runs against the grain of religious history."

Williams, who started as Master of Cambridge University's Magdalene College this year, noted that the respect for human life and equality is evident in all organized religion.

"The very concept of **human rights** has profound religious roots," he said. "The convention of human rights would not be what it is were it not for the history of philosophical religious debate."

Dawkins, a vice president of the British Humanist Association, described himself as a "cultural Anglican," saying that if he

were a cultural Muslim, he'd take issue with the faith's "appalling attitude to women and various other moral points."

The emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, told the audience his main concern was whether **religion**—which he called a "cop-out"—was true.

"It is a betrayal of the intellect, a betrayal of all that's best about what makes us human," Dawkins argued. "It's a phony substitute for an explanation, which seems to answer the question until you examine it and realize that it does no such thing."

"It peddles false explanations where real explanations could have been offered, false explanations that get in the way of the enterprise of discovering real explanations," he added.

Also participating in the debate were Tariq Ramadan, professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Oxford University; Andrew Copson, the chief executive of the British Humanist Association; and Centre for Social Cohesion founder Douglas Murray.

Williams and Dawkins also debated last February, at Oxford University. The former archbishop pressed Dawkins on the idea that humans are unlike any other creatures, in that they can reflect upon themselves and their own purpose.

The discussion also turned toward the question of why God allows suffering, which Williams said he did not have any easy answers about. Dawkins attacked religion for providing a "terrific illusion of design which fooled humanity into the 19th century."

Click below to watch the full video of the debate.