



## GRADUATION 2011

### **Presentation speech for Baroness Helena Kennedy for the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa***

#### **Chancellor**

When Helena Kennedy was elected Principal of Mansfield College Oxford in 2010, she declared, 'The glory of Mansfield for me is its dissenting tradition.' My own work on the History of Oxford University and – in particular – on C A Selbie of Mansfield, leads me to agree with her completely.

Helena Kennedy is one of Britain's most distinguished lawyers and active public figures. She has spent her professional life giving voice to those who have least power within the system, championing civil liberties and promoting human rights. She has used many public platforms, including the House of Lords, to argue with passion, wit and humanity for social justice and constitutional reform. She has also written and broadcast on a wide range of issues, from medical negligence to terrorism, to the rights of women and children. In her wider public life, Helena Kennedy is active in arts and literary organisations, including Chair of the British Council between 2004 and 2009 and judge of many literary prizes. Her involvement in education has included being the first Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University and President of the School of Oriental and African Studies. The Helena Kennedy Foundation, established in her name, helps disadvantaged students to enter Higher Education. This is surely an objective that all connected with this University must heartily endorse.

Our Law School – its students and alumni, teachers past and present and, of course, Law Honorary Graduates – is one of the great glories of Buckingham. Notable Law Honorands in recent years have included Sir Sydney Kentridge, Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss and Baroness Scotland. Each of our Schools of study has its own distinctive ethos and I would say that that of the Law School is especially close to the values of our honorand today. Of course, Helena Kennedy is a member of the Labour Party – and there are perhaps not so many

of those at Buckingham. I note however that she sometimes dissents from her party – and we tend to approve of dissent.

Helena Kennedy stands for human rights, for decency and respect. Of course the most pressing question is how these causes are to be advanced – through state action or by limiting the powers of the state? Every legal philosopher since Bentham has appreciated that it is not really a case of ‘either/or’. There are times when it is better for the advancement of freedom and human dignity that the state should be given more influence and power and there are times when the power of the state needs to be restricted. I note in passing, however, that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Mansfield College (with all of its traditions of Dissent) was founded, non –intervention was associated with the political Left and intervention with the political Right. But, however, defined and whatever the means to the end, the goal of good people remains the same.

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to call upon you to confer upon Baroness Helena Kennedy of Shaws QC the degree of Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa*

**Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil**  
**25 February 2011**