

Interview with Lady Williams of Oyster Mouth and The Rt. Rev. & Rt. Hon. Baron Williams of Oyster Mouth

(CSI Life is happy to publish the interview conducted by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad, Hon. Director of the Department of Ecological Concerns of CSI, with former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams and his wife Jane Williams at his residence in Cambridge on 8th October 2016. Ms. Jane Williams was born in Trivandrum, India, one of five sisters. Her father, the Right Reverend Geoffrey Paul, former Bishop of Bradford, was then serving as a missionary priest at Palayamkottai and later Kerala. Her father was a member of the faculty and later became the principal of the Kerala United Theological Seminary at Kamnamoola, where she spent part of her childhood. Reverend Geoffrey Paul was the Godfather of Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu. In 1956, Reverend Geoffrey Paul travelled from Trivandrum to Ellumburam CSI parish (Now in East Kerala Diocese), where Dr. Koshy's father was serving as a pastor, to attend the Baptism. Ms. Jane Williams was happy on seeing the letters of her father written in 1956. Williams is entitled to the style and title of Lady Williams of Oyster mouth.)

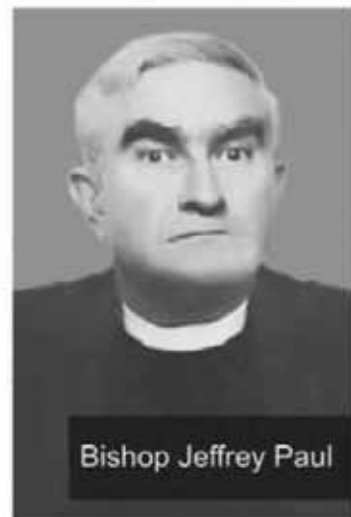
Can you tell me something about your Childhood?

I was born in South India to missionary parents, so I was baptised into the Church of South India. All the protestant denominations in India came

together under a pioneering unity scheme, which was the church I was born into. My father was principal of a United Theological College and my mother taught English there as well.

What about your studies and job?

I studied theology at Clare College,



Bishop Jeffrey Paul

Cambridge and then worked in theological publishing and education. Now I am the assistant dean and lecturer at St Mellitus College (formerly St Paul's Theological Centre) in London.

What motivated you to study theology?

I have never been so sure about how that distinction works. I am not sure it works

for me. I find God very exciting when I study God discovering that God is always bigger than the questions I can ask. For me, study is experiential. During my time as a student I did have a profoundly important encounter with what we would call the charismatic movement, which reached a part of my



Jane Williams

spirituality that had not been reached before speaking in tongues and such, which requires that you throw yourself on the mercy of God and throw away thinking for the time being. This was and continued to be hugely significant to me.

Do you think a woman can contribute better than a man to theology?

I am not sure. I think having more women doing theology over the last



century and a half has certainly changed some of the orthodoxy you just notice that there are women in the Bible.

When it comes to theological differences, I don't think I believe in a fundamental difference between men and women. What I have found important is to have role models women doing these kinds of jobs. If you don't see women doing these kinds of jobs you don't think that it is possible for yourself; that is why it is also important to have people from different kinds of cultural backgrounds in church leadership so that people can see that it is a job that they can do for themselves.

Why didn't you opt for ordination?

When I was 18 and I started studying theology, I think I assumed that was what would happen. I couldn't see what else I could do with my theology really. Then, as time went on, and it became possible, God never asked me to become a Clergy. But I feel very comfortable in my role as a lay preacher. I have actually ended up doing what I want by teaching as a church-based teacher of theology.

How did you meet Rowan?

I was studying in Cambridge when I met Rowan; I was doing my doctorate when he was a chaplain at Westcott House. He used to come to graduate seminars in the divinity school and we met there.

You've won an award in recognition of the role of women in the Anglican Church?

One of the advantages of travelling with my husband is that I get to see things that he might not be able to see; I get to join in with women and see them work and worship and what it is like to be a woman working in the church. Most development specialists would tell you that if you are able to build and raise the capacity of women in any situation you create the possibility to change things for generations.

You have written a book on Bread, Wine and Women?

I was actually quite unprepared for how important it was for people who don't go to church. I wrote a book with a friend, Bread, Wine and Women. We were totally taken aback by the reaction of women who didn't go to church and that

these symbolic roles profoundly affect the perspective of women and what they are able to do.

You have written a book called Approaching Christmas. What is so important about this season of Advent?

I think part of it is rescuing Christmas, Christmas is a big deal and it is hard not to get drawn into the materialism of it. Part of me doesn't mind getting drawn into the materialism of it, provided that I am not getting into debt or getting carried away with it. It is very easy to think all of that month of December is about shopping rather than preparing. I think Advent gives us a chance to remember what Christmas is about. I think it is a chance to imagine what the world would be like had Jesus not been born. It is a time of preparing for what a difference it would make.

Finally, what gives you hope for the future?

Well... God. That is a serious answer. If you look at God, who was willing to die, and how it looked when Jesus died that appeared to be the end, and it was, in

terms of the humanly end of God on earth. Yet God raised him from the dead, so anything is possible. I also get a lot of hope from my students; they are very young, most of them preparing to offer their lives to the strange institution that is the Church of England. It is a glorious privilege to see their witness and them offering their lives to God.

In India Hindu fanatics are becoming stronger and they are working against the minorities. Christian evangelisation is not possible as earlier. How would you comment on that?

I am not a proper person to answer this question. My father when he was in India, he used to talk with different religious leaders and they were very close friends. They were not against evangelisation.

There is a decline in attendance in the Anglican Church. Some Churches have been converted into Mosques and business centres?

I think there is a whole range of issues,

and not all of them are easily categorised. What church requires of people is no longer natural to people, such as sitting in a pew and taking things from above every week. Very few people can do that anymore, so I think churches are beginning to learn that going to church needs to change. However nice our services are, or how good the coffee is, if we are not introducing people to God then we are not really giving them anything that isn't available elsewhere. God is really what we have to offer.

Former Arch bishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams also joined and expressed his views.

After the second world war the attitude of people changed a lot. Church is not the only centre of the activity of the people. People are spending 12 to 15 hours daily in their official work. They are not getting time to attend the Church Service. Once there was a big community in a particular place and they built a big Church. Due to many

reasons, the people in that area migrated to different places. Now maintaining such a big Church in that area is a burden. One way to solve the issue is to sell the Churches. I admit that some people might have lost their faith in the church and left the Church. But while I was the Archbishop of Canterbury, I dedicated three new Churches.

CSI is Celebrating the 70th anniversary this year. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury and a person well acquainted with CSI, we would like to get a message from you.

One of the big challenges that still faces the CSI is to find a new common identity. CSI does wonderful work in ecology. I think as it grows it will find a deeper and deeper unity in worship. Everything comes from that. I hope and pray for that.

◀◀◀ News Scan

Stand up for someone's rights today!



International Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December. It commemorates the day on which, in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1950, the Assembly passed resolution 423 (V), inviting all States and interested organizations to observe 10 December of each year as Human Rights Day. This year, Human Rights Day calls on everyone to **stand up for someone's rights!** Many of us are fearful about the way the world is heading. Disrespect for basic human rights continues to be wide-spread in all parts of the globe. Extremist movements subject people to horrific violence. Messages of intolerance and hatred prey on our fears. Humane values are under attack. We must reaffirm our common humanity. Wherever we are, we can make a real difference. In the street, in school, at work, in public transport; in the voting booth, on social media. The time for this is now. "We the peoples" can take a stand for rights. And together, we can take a stand for more humanity.

It starts with each of us. Step forward and defend the rights of a refugee or migrant, a person with disabilities, an LGBT person, a woman, a child, indigenous peoples, a minority group, or anyone else at risk of discrimination or violence.

Stand up for someone's rights today!

Follow [#Standup4Rights](#) [#HumanRightsDay](#)

(courtesy: <http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/>)