

## Personal Tributes

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I CREEP IN at the end of this lovely Festschrift, for a lovely person, in the double capacity as Convenor of the Field of Church History at Union Theological Seminary, and as a friend of the 'Festschrifted-One.' There must be a German word for such an auspicious thing as a 'Festschrifted-One', though I don't know it; and in any case, I prefer the older and more elegant Latin, 'Laureata'—she who is to wear the crown of laurels. Having got them, of course, now may she long rest upon them, in a pleasant and evergreen retirement.

Rosemary Keller's career and writings have unquestionably made a mark on the field at both the national and international levels. The impact of that achievement will also go on for a generation to come, if not longer, by means of the important works of reference that she has taken care to bring to her world of studies—an intellectual strategy that looked, with no small degree of scholarly generosity, to the future of the field, not merely to ephemeral relevance. We are very proud of her, in this respect, and salute her achievements as a scholar and editor of eminence.

In her capacity as a Dean of School, we will miss her constant energy, always seeking after the best way to resolve matters and foster human, communal, and spiritual goals; never afraid, or embarrassed, to admit that all three of these values were as important to her as high academic standards. *O si sic omnes*. As a bearded Orthodox Priest and Byzantinist, I do not know how else I could have managed to creep into these pages of Festschrift, alongside stars of the world of women's religious studies, except as one who is given the final task of giving a little blessing of farewell. I do it in a heartfelt way, Rosemary, and on behalf of the many here who hold you in deep affection and respect. It is what the Byzantines used to say to departing friends as they took ship from the Bosphorus: *Chaire kai Chronia Polla*. Be happy, and enjoy many years!

**John McGuckin**

*Union Theological Seminary, New York, New York*



It is a rare gift in the academic life to be able to come near to full circle with someone professionally. This has been the case for me with Rosemary. I first met her after I had completed my Doctor of Ministry at the University of Chicago Divinity School. She was on the faculty of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, just up the shoreline in Evanston. She and Henry Young were responding to the students' request (probably more of a demand) that given the numbers of Black women attending G-ETS, there should be a Black woman on the faculty. My name surfaced as a possibility and I interviewed with Henry and Rosemary to see if there was a match in terms of needs and interests. Rosemary was very precise in that meeting: they needed someone who could bring something to the faculty and to the student body that would be academically rigorous and relevant to student needs and development. I was impressed that neither she nor Henry were interested in simply getting someone to fill a slot, but were concerned that the students not be cheated out of being pushed to think through their faith journeys in light of the Black Church and also as ministers of a gospel, which is grander than human design and can never be captured in any one church home.

It was Rosemary's early insistence on excellence in preparation for ministry that caught my imagination in new ways. It was in that first class at G-ETS that I experienced a profound call to the teaching ministry of the church. Rosemary was a solid colleague for an adjunct professor like myself. She checked in periodically to see how it was going and she graciously shared her insights on pedagogy and class preparation. When I later began my doctoral studies at G-ETS, Rosemary became my advisor as I pursued an interdisciplinary program that combined history and Christian social ethics.

I could not have asked for a better role model and mentor. Rosemary was not only my teacher, she also modeled for me what good advising looks like. She encouraged me to build on my strengths while I attended to my weaknesses. She listened to my initial bitter disappointment when it became clear that the professor I wanted to work with in the anthropology department had no interest in working with a Black woman. She turned that disappointment into a strategy to forge ahead with my program and reconceptualize how I might look at the religious lives of Black women historically and ethically.

Rosemary's meticulous attention to detail could be exhausting, but I

am a better scholar and teacher for it. She taught me to be very careful with history—to respect it and to recognize that part of my job as a Christian ethicist is to take the “stuff” of what has come before us to craft more faithful ways to respond to the challenges and joys of today. In Rosemary’s classroom, you went on a deliberate ride with figures and events to try to dig deep into an era and come to know people, issues, and events on *their* terms and not through contemporary eyes. She sometimes had to goose us into examining our presuppositions about history and the study of it. This became even more so when we addressed matters of church history and the fact that we are, far too often, bad historians of our traditions within Christianities.

The gift that Rosemary gave us was the space to fall flat on our face but to provide, as well, a supporting hand to help us get up again and return to developing our craft as historians. She also gave us the room to soar when we captured a historical moment or figure with precision and rigor. In other words, she allowed us to grow up as young scholars and teachers and did not do the work for us. She placed the challenge before us and then gave us the structure to succeed.

And so, it was with great delight that I joined the Union faculty with Rosemary as dean some ten years later. In those intervening years, Rosemary always kept me in mind for book projects she was working on. She gave me many opportunities to get my work into the public realm of academia and to find avenues of feedback and growth in the process. This was a great gift for a junior scholar and teacher. We touched base periodically and kept up with parts of each other’s work. When I accepted Union’s offer, a great influence on my deciding to leave a school I loved and a city that is a hidden gem of the Midwest, was the fact that I could work with Rosemary again—but now as a colleague.

It has been an incredible five years that we have shared together. It was not long before I realized that Rosemary views her doctoral students as junior colleagues from the beginning. This last bit of modeling what a good advisor can be guided me as I took on the responsibilities of helping students think through ministerial formation and academic formation. Although not mutually exclusive, the audiences can be very different and I have always marveled at the grace with which Rosemary moves from churches to the academy—expecting excellence in both, but also sharing a deep pastoral concern for each.

Rosemary’s ministry thus far has truly been one of head and heart. She has modeled what it means to love God not only with your soul but with your intellect as well. Her work to bring the lives of women in the

church to life for a new time and place speaks for itself. Be it Abigail Addams, Georgia Harkness, or Dorothy Day, she has lifted the veil covering the lives of laywomen in the church and given us fresh insights into their ideas and their lives.

Most of all, Rosemary brought her humanity to Union. She helped craft a faculty that values working together while maintaining high academic standards for our students as well as for ourselves. We are still on that journey, but we are farther down the way because of Rosemary's belief that it can happen here and should.

I will miss her Okie plain spokenness and dry wit. However, we are all blessed with her enduring legacy as scholar, teacher, administrator, and colleague.

**Emilie M. Townes**

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Some persons possess gifts to be leaders in both academia and the Christian church. It is a special blessing for both when someone with extraordinary theological and historical talents is able to interpret each to the other. Rosemary Skinner Keller is one of those remarkable people.

There are many ways in which Dean Keller has effectively served the church through her ministry in the academy. She has deeply influenced the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of students in the classroom and as an administrator. Countless students have moved on to serve the church as pastors and lay leaders. All benefited from insightful lectures from someone who cares deeply about her discipline and the mission of the church.

Dean Keller's research and writing on the history of women in the church has extended her influence far beyond the institutions in which she has taught. As co-editor of the two-volume *Women in New Worlds* (1981-1982), she was instrumental in narrating the historic role of women in the United Methodist Church and its predecessors. Two other volumes, *Methodist Women: A World Sisterhood*, *A History of the World Federation of Methodist Women* (1987) and *Spirituality and Social Responsibility: Vocational Vision in the United Methodist Tradition* (1993), illumined other dimensions of Methodist women's history.

Reaching beyond Methodism, the volumes which Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether edited together, *Women and Religion in America* (three volumes, 1981, 1983, 1986), and *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writings* (1995), were received with gratitude and acclamation by academic and ecclesiastical communities. With Gerald Moede and Mary Elizabeth Moore, she authored, *Called to Serve: The United Methodist Diaconate* (1997). Dean Keller's biography, *Georgia Harkness: For Such a Time as This* (1992), masterfully called new attention to one of Methodism's most important theologians. Characterized by clarity and sound scholarship, Rosemary Skinner Keller's books and other writings have not only enriched the scholarly community, but, in the best sense, they have been scholarship for the church.

A committed United Methodist, Rosemary Skinner Keller has been active in local churches throughout her life. Consecrated a Diaconal Minister in 1977, she received ordination as a deacon in 1997, thereby becoming a clergy member of United Methodism's Northern Illinois Annual Conference. She has served on two general agencies of the denomination. From 1984 until 1992, she was a valued member of the denomination's General Commission on Archives and History, assisting it to pay more attention of the historic contributions of women. As a sign of its esteem, the General Commission on Archives and History presented Rosemary with its 1997 Distinguished Service Award. Her commitment to ecumenism is evident in her four-year term (1992-1996) as a member of General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-religious Concerns. In countless ways, Rosemary Skinner Keller has been, and is, a guide and leader in theological education and scholarship for the church. Her contributions, especially to United Methodism, will be treasured for generations.

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.  
*General Secretary, General Commission on Archives and History*  
*The United Methodist Church*



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