

Adolf Keller

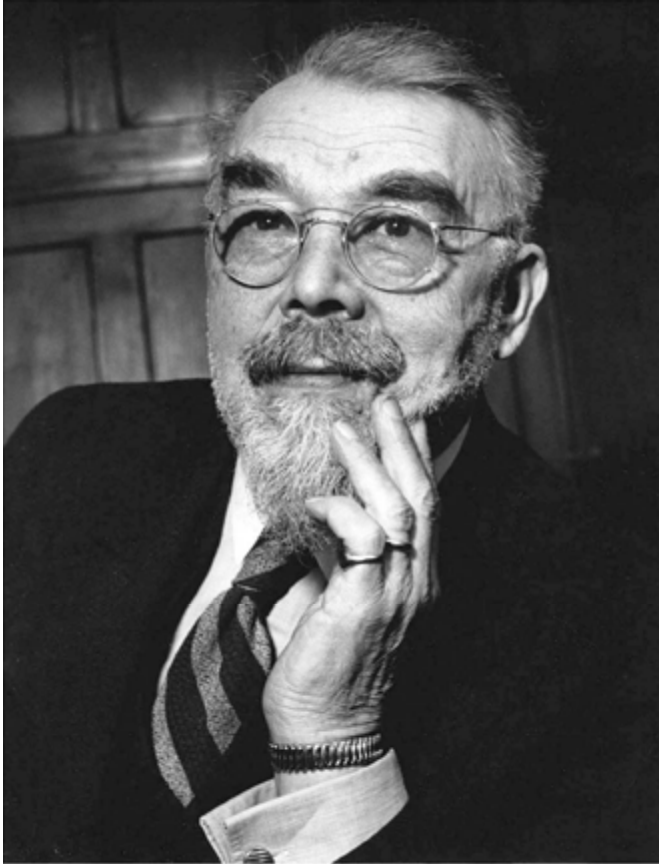
Ecumenist, World Citizen, Philanthropist

Marianne Jehle-Wildberger

Translated by Mark Kyburz with John Peck



Adolf Keller (1872-1963)



Adolf Keller, about 70 years old (archive Dr. Pierre Keller)

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Introduction

THE AMERICAN THEOLOGIAN WILLIAM A. BROWN, himself an ecumenist, hailed the Swiss theologian Adolf Keller as one of the eight most important pioneers of ecumenism in the decades prior to the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948.¹ Keller (1872–1963) served as a pastor for the Protestant community in Cairo, for a church in his native canton of Schaffhausen and then in Geneva, and finally at St Peter's parish church in Zurich. Already from the outset of his career, he sought to promote social justice and world peace. After the end of World War I, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America entrusted the well-educated, multilingual, and open-minded Keller with cultivating relations between churches in America and Europe. He retired from parish work at the end of 1923 to play a key role within the ecumenical Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work (hereinafter abbreviated as Life and Work), which was steadily evolving at the time. At its inaugural world conference, held in Stockholm in 1925, Keller was elected second associate general secretary, in which capacity he later became director of the International Christian Social Institute in Geneva. From 1930 on, his work focused on spreading ecumenism in the churches throughout the world.

In 1922, Keller founded the ecumenical relief agency Inter-Church Aid, which he headed until 1945. It became the cornerstone of his life's work. The agency supported churches in France and Germany that had suffered the effects of World War I. Keller placed particular emphasis on coming to the aid of Protestant minorities in Eastern Europe. In particular, he supported their efforts to recruit and train young ministers. Furthermore, he lent assistance to the hard-pressed Protestant and Orthodox Christians in the Soviet Union. Financial support for these ventures came chiefly from the United States and from the Swiss Protestant community.

1. Brown, *Toward a United Church*, see Index.

Introduction

Like his friend Karl Barth, Keller adopted a clear stance toward National Socialism. He became actively involved in enlightening the English-speaking world about the Nazi regime, and was among the first theologians to tend to the needs of German refugees.

Among Keller's fellow ecumenists were Nathan Söderblom, Charles Macfarland, Henry S. Leiper, Eugène Choisy, Wilfred Monod, Marc Boegner, Adolf Deissmann, and George Bell. Together they aspired to the same overarching objective and shared the ideals encapsulated in Keller's book *Von Geist und Liebe: Ein Bilderbuch aus dem Leben* (1934).²

Keller wrote more than twenty books, dozens of brochures, and hundreds of articles. His copious, unpublished estate is housed in numerous archives, among other places, in Geneva, Bern, Basel, Zurich, Berlin, London, and Philadelphia. The present English version of the biography of Adolf Keller dispenses with an exhaustive appendix. It is an abbreviated version of the comprehensively researched German original, *Adolf Keller (1872–1963): Pionier der ökumenischen Bewegung* (2008).

2. Hereafter abbreviated as *Von Geist und Liebe*.

Abbreviations

APIDEP	Association Protestante Internationale De Prêts
AV	Assembly of Delegates
BAR	Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv in Bern (Swiss Federal Archives, Bern)
CH W	Winterthurer Bibliotheken, Winterthur Schweiz (Association of libraries in Winterthur, Switzerland)
ECLOF	Ecumenical Church Loan Fund
EPD	Evangelischer Pressedienst Zürich (Evangelical Press Service, Zurich)
ETH	Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich)
EZA	Evangelisches Zentralarchiv Berlin (Evangelical Central Archives, Berlin)
Faith and Order	Faith and Order, ecumenical movement
Federal Council	Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America (until 1952, now known as the National Council)
HEKS	Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen der Schweiz (relief agency of the Swiss Protestant Churches; official name: Swiss Interchurch Aid)
ICC	International Christian Committee for German Refugees
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva
ILO	International Labor Organization, Geneva
Inter-Church Aid	European Central Bureau for Relief
KBA	Karl Barth Archive, Basel
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
Kirchenbund	Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (SEK)
Life and Work	Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library London

Abbreviations

NCC	National Council of Churches of Christ in America (since 1952)
NLAK	Estate of Adolf Keller, including documents on ecumenism (held in the private archive of Dr. Pierre Keller, Geneva)
NLDSK	Estate of Doris Stäuli-Keller, eldest daughter of Adolf Keller (archive Stiftung Sulzberg, Winterthur)
NLTK	Estate of Tina Keller-Jenny (held in the private archive of Dr. Pierre Keller, Geneva)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
NZZ	<i>Neue Zürcher Zeitung</i>
Ökumenischer Rat	Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen, World Council of Churches
PHS NCC	Presbyterian Historical Society, National Council of Churches Records, Philadelphia USA
Reformed Alliance	World Alliance of Reformed Churches (= World Presbyterian Alliance)
RGG	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> (encyclopedia)
SEK	Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches
StAZ	Staatsarchiv Zürich (State Archives of Zurich)
<i>Stockholm</i>	<i>International Sociocritical Church Journal</i>
TVZ	Theologischer Verlag Zürich
UTS	Union Theological Seminary, New York
WCC	World Council of Churches, Geneva
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association
Zentralstelle	Central Bureau for Relief, Inter-Church Aid
World Alliance	World Alliance for Promoting Friendship through the Churches
WS	Winterthurer Sondersammlungen

1

From Village Boy to Pastor

CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, AND STUDENT DAYS

RÜDLINGEN IS A SMALL farming village in the Canton of Schaffhausen, situated in northern Switzerland. The village is surrounded by a beautiful countryside only a few miles downriver from the Rhine Falls. Fertile fields extend toward the river, and steep vineyards rise behind the village. The Protestant church sits enthroned high above the village. Almost all of the villagers belonged to the Protestant faith. Adolf Keller was born and raised in one of Rüdlingen's pretty half-timbered houses in 1872. He was the eldest child born to the village teacher Johann Georg Keller and his wife Margaretha, née Buchter. Three sisters and a brother were born to the Kellers after Adolf. A large fruit and vegetable garden contributed to the upkeep of the family.

For six years, Adolf Keller attended the primary school classes taught by his father. The young boy's performance so conspicuously excelled that of his sixty peers that the highly regarded village teacher decided not to award his son any grades. Occasionally, Keller senior involved his son in the teaching of classes. Both parents were ecclesiastically minded. Keller's father took his Bible classes seriously. Adolf was required to learn by heart countless Bible verses. His mother ran the village Sunday School. She was a good storyteller. Unlike her more austere husband, Keller's mother represented an emotional piety. She never missed attending the annual festival of the devout Basel Mission.



The village of Rüdlingen and the Rhine (old picture postcard)

The village pastor taught the young Keller Latin, and his daughter, who had traveled widely in Europe as a governess, taught him English and French. He also took piano and organ lessons with her. Keller attended secondary school in Flaach, a neighboring village situated in the nearby Canton of Zurich. He then entered the highly regarded Humanistisches Gymnasium, the classics section of Schaffhausen Grammar School. The college was also attended by students from further afield. Among these was Conrad Jenny, Keller's future brother-in-law, who attended the college a few years later and commuted there from Zurich.

Keller became one of the best students in his class. He enjoyed all subjects, with the exception of mathematics. He joined the Scaphusia student fraternity, where members not only drank beer but also recited poems, gave talks, and engaged in intense debate. His fraternity affiliation challenged the shy country boy and nurtured him immensely. At Scaphusia, he met Jakob Wipf, who became his first close friend. Upon graduating with flying colors, Keller enrolled in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Basel in 1892, together with Wipf. Founded in the fifteenth century, it is the oldest university in Switzerland. Keller moved into rooms in the Alumneum, a time-honored student house.

Upon his arrival in Basel, Keller suffered a profound shock: the Faculty of Theology was dominated by liberally minded theologians influenced by the Enlightenment, who approached the Bible using historical-critical methods and who took a critical stance toward Christian dogma. Such an attitude was alien to Keller, who had been raised in a theologically orthodox home. Rüdlingen's pastor was also orthodox. While liberally minded in private, Keller's Religious Education instructor at Schaffhausen Grammar School had steered clear of modern theological questions in the classroom.

Quite deliberately, presumably, Keller did not attend any lectures given by the purportedly extremely "modern" Franz Camille Overbeck, who achieved lasting fame. Although he realized that Bernhard Duhm, the moderately liberal professor of Old Testament, was an outstanding scholar, Keller felt more attracted to Conrad von Orelli, his orthodox counterpart. Some of Keller's fellow students shared this experience, including Paul Wernle, who later became one of the most important professors of theology in Switzerland. In the Schwizerhüsli (Swiss Cottage) fraternity, which had been founded by pious circles in Basel, Keller was lent an understanding ear. He discovered, however, that in some respects he was more open-minded than his fellow fraternity members. Much to their dismay, for instance, he advocated the admission of women to the University of Basel.



The Schwizerhüsli (Swiss Cottage) fraternity,
Adolf Keller sitting at the left (archive Dr. Pierre Keller)

Adolf Keller

In spite of his firm theological orthodoxy, the young Keller wrestled with his proposed calling. However, he sought to evade the “bitter struggles and doubts” over whether he had chosen the right profession by pursuing his study of the Bible in “his own way.”¹ For a time, he consoled himself with the idea of being a “pagan . . . with a Christian heart.”² Ultimately, he wrenched himself free from the “rigid doctrine of inspiration,” that is, verbal inspiration of the Bible. He found some distraction from his personal problems by immersing himself in philosophy, attending courses in classical Arabic, and following the last lectures of the great art historian Jacob Burckhardt on the Renaissance and on the Baroque period. In the summer of 1894, he visited Paris and marveled at the paintings exhibited in the Louvre that Burckhardt had described in his lectures.

In late 1894, Jakob Wipf and Keller visited Salzburg, Vienna, and Prague on their way to Berlin, where the latter intended to continue his theological studies for two semesters. At the time, Berlin was shining in the imperial splendor of William II. In Keller’s eyes, the university emanated even greater splendor.³ In Berlin, he thus hoped to form a “unified theological outlook.”⁴

Berlin’s Protestant Faculty of Theology was renowned as the most outstanding of its kind in the German-speaking world. Among its teaching faculty was Adolf von Harnack, the leader of liberal theology at the time. Hundreds of students from across the world, including no less than forty Americans during Keller’s period, attended von Harnack’s lectures. Keller was fascinated:

Here was the great Harnack, whose lectures on the history of dogma I attended. For the first time, I experienced a sovereign mastery of the subject, and such ease in shaping the delivery, like a work of art. Often, one did not feel like taking notes when he brought the great Church Father Saint Augustine to life, extemporizing and performing gymnastics while lecturing.⁵

He was also impressed by Hermann von Soden, the New Testament scholar, but even more so by Julius Kaftan, a systematic theologian, who placed great emphasis on ethics and a faith with practical consequences. Kaftan insisted that the roots of religious belief lay not in the intellect, but instead

1. Keller, “Curriculum vitae.”
2. Ibid.
3. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 6.
4. Keller, “Curriculum vitae.”
5. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 6.

in the “feeling and willing spirit.”⁶ One counterpoint to these liberal professors was Adolf Schlatter, the orthodox Swiss New Testament scholar. Conspicuously, Keller attended more of Schlatter’s lectures than those of any other professor: “His classes were not only remarkably witty, but they also involved the profound exploration of the evangelical truth of the Bible.”⁷ While Schlatter to a certain extent applied the historical-critical method to exegesis, he arrived at conservative conclusions.

Keller also attended the lectures of Ernst Curtius and Heinrich von Treitschke on history, as well as those by Hermann Grimm on art history. Almost every day, he would spend his lunchtime at one of Berlin’s numerous museums. He joined a choir to sing Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*, and often attended theater and concert performances in the evenings. He absorbed literally everything that Berlin had to offer by way of culture.

In 1890, German theologians of all stripes had founded the Evangelisch-Sozialer Kongress (Protestant Social Congress) to discuss the negative effects of industrialization and Manchester Capitalism. Keller became personally acquainted with many of the figures involved in the Congress. He also read the writings of Friedrich Naumann, a German liberal politician and Protestant pastor. Berlin’s working-class districts provided abundant evidence of social misery. Together with Arthur Titius, adjunct professor of theology, Keller visited a range of welfare facilities maintained by the Innere Mission (Home Mission), including hospices, hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the blind. Later, on his return journey to Switzerland, he visited Bethel hospices near Bielefeld: “On this visit, I became personally acquainted with the elderly Bodelschwingh as an incarnation of Christian love. Whoever



Adolf Keller as a student in Berlin
(archive Dr. Pierre Keller)

6. Horn, “Berlin, Universität,” col. 1053.

7. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 7.

Adolf Keller

had looked into his eyes, either when he was delivering a public speech or when he was attending to the sick, can never forget those loving eyes.”⁸

In April 1896, Keller was awarded the second-highest honors by the Examination Board of the German-speaking Reformed Churches of Switzerland. What was his theological stance at the time? In his curriculum vitae, which he was required to submit at his final examinations, he maintains that the diversity of religious convictions is fully justified by the freedom and originality of each and every individual:

I realized that religion rests upon individual personalities and human relationships, and not upon abstract ideas or teachings . . . I therefore understood that while there are presumably different kinds of dogmatists, *the* Christian Dogma can never be found . . . I became increasingly disinclined to systematize my Christianity into a theology as expediently as possible . . . On my path toward attaining these convictions, not only Schlatter but also von Harnack and Kaftan exerted a profound influence on me . . . Berlin afforded me the greatest possible stimulation, without, however, demanding that I swear an oath on the words of any single teacher.⁹

Thus, Keller’s hope for a unified theological outlook had remained unfulfilled. His curriculum closes with the words uttered by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:12: “Not that I have secured it already, . . . but I am still pursuing it.” From this point on, Keller was spared existential crises of faith. He joined a group of young Swiss theologians around Paul Wernle committed to mediating between orthodoxy and liberalism. This approach was also shared by the widely read *Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz* (Church Magazine of Reformed Switzerland), to which Keller later often contributed articles.

8. *Ibid.*, 12–13. The theologian Friedrich von Bodelschwingh (1831–1910) founded Bethel in 1872 and was its director. Bethel was (and still is) a large complex of several hospitals and different homes for handicapped or elderly people and the working poor, as well as a faculty of theology and social work. His son Friedrich von Bodelschwingh Jr. (1877–1946), also a theologian, was his successor, and in 1933 for some months *Reichsbischof* of the German Evangelical Church, as such opposing Hitler. See below, pp. 81, 166–69.

9. Keller, “Curriculum vitae.”

IN COSMOPOLITAN CAIRO (1896–1899)

In the autumn of 1896, Keller was appointed auxiliary pastor at the German Protestant parish in Cairo.¹⁰ The congregation also included German- and French-speaking Swiss citizens. Presumably, Keller had negotiated his posting to Egypt while still in Berlin. During his time in Berlin, he had written his first book, *Der Geisteskampf des Christentums gegen den Islam bis zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge* (The Spiritual Struggle of Christianity against Islam until the Time of the Crusades). He undertook this treatise, which extended to approximately a hundred pages, at the suggestion of the Reverend Wilhelm Faber, director of the German Oriental Mission. Keller later distanced himself from his fledgling work, since he had lacked the necessary critical judgment at the time. It is nevertheless worth examining.

Keller's reflections on his subject begin with a reference to Islam as an "arrogant religion."¹¹ While it had brought "relative morality" to the peoples of the world, he further observes, it had barely afforded them "life, freedom, and full satisfaction." It was a "humanitarian duty," particularly toward women, to acquaint Muslims with the blessing of freedom and with the gospel. Moreover, the Christian church had an "explicit, absolute Great Commission."¹² Islam had ossified, and therefore the point in time for missionary work was favorable.¹³

However, he continues, one should not underestimate the "truth content of Islam," since it originated in Judaism and Christianity, both of them revealed religions. Mohammed had also possessed "creative power."¹⁴ The church had been mistaken in considering Islam its greatest enemy for centuries and in neglecting the "common elements of both religions."¹⁵ Particularly the Latin West had remained uninformed about Islam, falsely branding Muslims as pagans.¹⁶ Keller approvingly cites the medieval theologian Peter the Venerable: "Aggredior vos, non ut nostri saepe faciunt, armis, sed verbis, non vi sed ratione, non odio, sed amore."¹⁷ Keller

10. See Acta 1896–1899 on the German Protestant parish in Cairo (EZA Bestand 5 3085/3086/3092).

11. Keller, *Der Geisteskampf des Christentums*, 4.

12. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

13. *Ibid.*, 8.

14. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

15. *Ibid.*, 4.

16. *Ibid.*, 40.

17. *Ibid.*, 7 and 54. The famous words uttered by Peter the Venerable (1092/94–1154), abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny, translate into English as follows: "I

condemns both the “holy war” waged by the Muslims and also, albeit less explicitly, the Crusades. Often, however, the Muslims had been “more magnanimous and more tolerant than the Christians”; moreover, the Crusades had brought about the bankruptcy of Oriental Christendom.¹⁸

Presumably, Keller did greater justice to Islam, owing to his reading of the Koran and Jacques Paul Migne’s sourcebook on patrology,¹⁹ than those commissioning him had anticipated. Keller’s booklet and his entry into the interreligious World Brotherhood, founded after World War II, were thus not miles apart. Significantly, he learned modern Arabic during his time in Cairo. Acquiring the language allowed him to engage in conversation with the bedouins on his journey to Sinai in 1898. While they too submitted to the will of Allah, he wrote, their submission was softened by their faith in His benevolence. “The naiveté and simplicity of Islam” were magnificent, Keller observed, even though all kinds of superstition clouded this religion in his eyes.²⁰

And thus to Cairo! At the time, Egypt was under British rule. Cairo and Alexandria were cosmopolitan cities, whose populations, besides sizeable British contingents, included Greek, French, German, and Swiss nationals; along with the native Muslims, religious denominations included Jews, Copts, Anglicans, members of the Greek Orthodox Church, Catholics, and Protestants. Amid this rich panoply of nationalities and denominations, Keller acquired an extraordinary cosmopolitanism and learned to deal with a broad cross section of people. His Protestant parish included agronomists, apprentices, archaeologists, Arabists, artists, bankers, diplomats, doctors, engineers, geologists, governesses, historians of religion, lawyers, mechanics, merchants, university professors, watchmakers, and Swiss hotel proprietors. Most parishioners attended services only rarely. At Christmas, however, a large congregation gathered around the Christmas tree, which was traditionally imported from Europe.

Keller preached alternately in German and French, not only in Cairo but also in Heluan, a health spa where numerous German and Swiss tuberculosis patients spent the winter months. He also ran the Sunday school and visited the sick at the Hospital Victoria, run by deaconesses, in Cairo. He devoted most of his time, however, to the parish school, which was

attack you, indeed, but not, as our people often do, with weapons but with words, not with violence but with rationality, not with hatred but with love.”

18. *Ibid.*, 36–37, 23, 31, and 84.

19. Keller also familiarized himself with Joseph Assemani’s *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* and with the relevant secondary literature.

20. Keller, *Sinai-Fahrt*, 89.

attended by children of different nationalities. He taught German, religious studies, mathematics, Latin, natural history, singing, and drawing; the language of instruction was partly German, partly French. Fortunately, his father had introduced him to the art of teaching back home in Rüdlingen.



Adolf Keller bound for St. Catherine's Monastery near Mount Moses
(from Adolf Keller, *Eine Sinai-Fahrt*, 23)

He also spent time visiting the mosques and museums, enjoyed riding out to the pyramids with friends in the evenings, and joined the Cairo Music Society. He would often play four-handed piano with Felix von Müller, the German general consul. He organized two concerts, including a performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, for which his German friend Carl Hasselbach provided the score.²¹ A mixed choir was established for the occasion, and the performance was accompanied by the British Regimental orchestra. Keller conducted the whole affair "with the unconcerned impertinence of an inexperienced apprentice," as he later admitted.²² Among Keller's best friends in Cairo were the von Bülowes. Otto von Bülow, a lawyer by training, was a member of the international tribunal in Cairo. Following his death, Keller socialized with Elsa von Bülow for decades.²³

In the spring of 1898, Keller was "deeply moved" when he set foot in the "Holy Land."²⁴ Under the supervision of Hermann von Soden, his

21. On Olga Hasselbach, the wife of Carl Hasselbach, see below p. 188.

22. Keller, "Aus meinem Leben," 19.

23. On Elsa von Bülow, see below p. 257.

24. Keller, "Aus meinem Leben," 25.

former New Testament professor in Berlin, he visited the Temple Square and the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, as well as Bethlehem und Galilee. And Keller was indeed enthralled by the prospect of spending several weeks doing research at St Catherine's Greek Orthodox Monastery. Located in the Sinai Peninsula, the monastery was still untouched by tourism in those days. In midsummer, and accompanied by bedouins, he reached the monastery on a camel. Commissioned by von Soden, two young theologians were already immersed in comparing texts based on old Bible manuscripts.²⁵ In the monastery's library, the three young scholars would sit hunched over the materials during the morning and evening hours. In the afternoons, they would retire for their siestas and spend the nights in a tent pitched beneath an olive tree in the monastery's garden. They climbed Mount Moses (Jebel Musa) several times:

I remained . . . at the summit, alone, while the sun set in unforgettable glory and the moon rose above the thin strip of sea at Akaba. Only at the summit was there still light; the valleys and canyons below soon lay shrouded in black, silent darkness. At this moment, the many theories, hypotheses, and critical questions arising in connection with our work sank into the night. One forgets one's disputes over Moses and Israel, the Revelation and the Commandments, and the situation of the real Sinai. One wants to experience . . . what distinguishes the pure religious and spiritual content of the narratives of Moses, the man of God, who speaks to Yahweh as to a friend.²⁶

“AUF BURG” AND GENEVA: ALBERT SCHWEITZER, KARL BARTH, AND PSYCHOLOGY

In 1899, Keller was appointed to serve the parish auf Burg beside Stein am Rhein, a small town on the River Rhine in the North of Switzerland (Canton Schaffhausen). The church “auf Burg” sits on a hill, amid the ruins of an ancient Roman fort. Medieval frescoes decorate its interior. The view from the adjacent rectory onto the Rhine and the small town lying opposite is magnificent. But the contrast to cosmopolitan Cairo could not have been greater. Most of Keller's parishioners were farmers. The congregation was very affectionate. One day, after the vicarage had been burgled, Keller

25. Von Soden revised the Greek New Testament. See above, pp. 4 and 9–10, and below, pp. 29–30.

26. Keller, *Sinai-Fahrt*, 67–68.

was presented by way of consolation with a mighty piece of gammon and veal roasted on the spit; he was also given a white Pomeranian to guard the rectory.

Keller filled his time by writing an account titled *Eine Sinai-Fahrt* (A Journey across the Sinai), playing the piano, and copious reading; among many others, he read the writings of Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish social critic. He taught religious studies at Schaffhausen Grammar School, and regularly contributed articles to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, one of the most renowned German-speaking newspapers. Most important, however, he made important friends. These included the Curtius family in Strasbourg. Friedrich Curtius, a lawyer and the son of professor Ernst Curtius in Berlin, was the president of the Evangelical Lutheran and Evangelical Reformed Churches of Alsace-Lorraine, which was still German at the time. Curtius's wife was Swiss. Their son, Ernst Robert Curtius, later became a well-known scholar of Romance languages and literature (he translated T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* from English into German), with whom Keller corresponded until well beyond World War II. "The Curtius family home in Strasbourg was a bridge between countries and minds."²⁷

At the Curtius's, Keller met Albert Schweitzer, who paid the family almost daily visits. Schweitzer had been adjunct professor of theology in Strasbourg since 1902. Keller observed:

If one had spent the afternoon sitting on the organ bench [at Saint Thomas] with Schweitzer, where he brought to life the idiosyncracies of the old Bach, in the evenings he acquainted one with the modern Bach, who bridged the old strict style with marvelous fioritura which . . . represented the full scale of human emotions . . . Schweitzer had something of Bucer's ecumenical and modern manners, the latter being the actual reformer and precursor of the ecumenical movement. It was in those days that he conceived the plan to travel to Africa.²⁸

Thereafter, Keller and Schweitzer saw each other only seldom, but they corresponded from time to time. When Keller attended the large ecumenical congress hosted by Life and Work in Stockholm in 1925, Schweitzer wrote to him: "However, here I sit in Lambarene, where I treat boils, build huts, houses, and latrines, and steadily lose the use of my pen."²⁹

27. Keller, *Geist und Liebe*, 191.

28. *Ibid.*, 191–92.

29. Schweitzer to Keller, "Am Tage nach Johanni," June 25, 1925 (WS, MS Sch 153/48).

In 1904 Keller was offered a position at the “German Reformed Parish”³⁰ in Geneva. He accepted without hesitating, since he was attracted by the city’s urban atmosphere. Keller was fortunate enough to belong to the *Vénéralable Compagnie des Pasteurs*, the association of Protestant Genevan clergymen going back to the time of Reformation. There he met Eugène Choisy, who became perhaps his closest friend and a lifelong companion.³¹ Keller held his services in the *Auditoire*, as Calvin’s lecture hall was called, which is located adjacent to the cathedral. Much work awaited him. The parish extended across the city, and from 1908 across the whole canton. On paper, its membership totaled several thousand parishioners, but approaching them proved difficult. Membership fluctuated significantly, and those who remained became *Romands* (French-speaking Swiss) within a few years. Owing to his considerable efforts, including many house calls, Keller managed somewhat to pull the parish together. In 1907, at least sixty-nine male parishioners attended the parish assembly meeting. On public holidays, attendance was far greater so that services had to be held at the Madeleine, the old city church.

Keller received much support from Theophil Fuog, president of the parish council. Fuog greeted the proposals of his enterprising new pastor with great enthusiasm. Among Keller’s ideas were the enrichment of the liturgy, the accompanying of church services with more singing, the founding of a church choir, the introduction of a parish bulletin, the establishment of group discussions on “the difficult questions of spiritual life,”³² and the organization of concerts, exhibitions, parish evenings, and a lecture series. One of the cycles was devoted to the prophet Elijah, of whom Keller had grown fond on his ascents of Mount Moses during his earlier spell in Egypt. Another cycle focused on “The Image of Christ in Art.”³³ Keller’s most daring wish was for a parish hall, which was a new idea at the time. The parish council embraced the idea, and the investment proved worthwhile: the hall, which exists to this day, soon became indispensable.

Keller often resorted to humor to rouse his somewhat passive parish. In the parish bulletin, he published a piece titled “A Dream,” which envisioned a gathering of the parish in the *Auditoire*:

30. The parish has been known since 1940 as the German-Swiss Protestant Parish of Geneva; see Göhring, *75 Jahre*.

31. Keller and Choisy were both active in the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, in the ecumenical movement, and in Keller’s relief agency.

32. Minutes of the Church Council, February 1, 1905 (archive of the Geneva Church Parish).

33. *Ibid.*, February 21, 1907.

All of a sudden, a noise descended from the gallery as if someone had banged their fist irately on the cornice. Look at how everyone raises their heads—now would that not be the great Johann Sebastian Bach himself, he who has blessed us with such magnificent chorales . . . ? “What, is this supposed to be a hymn *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, to the greater glory of God? If this be the case, then the dear Lord will surely hold his hands over his ears . . . True evangelical church singing is pure delight, strength, and merrymaking emanating straight from the heart. Sometimes, it must resound through the edifice like blaring trumpets, . . . sometimes like affectionate shawms . . .” Then, everything set in powerfully, and I, too, joined in the singing, until I awoke from hearing my own voice, and realized that it had only been a dream.³⁴

The majority of parishioners were craftsmen, factory workers, or nannies. For the first time since becoming a parish pastor, Keller was confronted with poverty. He observed with great concern that many workers, disappointed by its lack of interest in their predicament, turned their backs on the church. It was precisely at this time that a religious-social movement began to emerge in Switzerland.³⁵ Keller was close to the movement. In his sermons, he demanded higher wages and called upon the affluent to have “a subtle conscience”: he considered the divide between rich and poor “the most pressing problem.”³⁶

The Geneva popular vote on the separation of church and state, held in 1907, presented another problem: the motion was approved owing to the votes of the free churches and of the secular part of the electorate. Like the majority of his parish, Keller was disappointed. While he made no qualms about his dismay, anger, and fear, he also sought to offer his congregation encouragement: “If we can summon the feeling in such a predicament that Jesus is with us, then we are safe.”³⁷ Not only should the church be “the Lord’s home for all,” but there was also a need for a “wide, open church.”³⁸

34. Keller, “Ein Traum.”

35. The movement was founded in 1906 by, among other theologians, Leonhard Ragaz and Hermann Kutter.

36. Sermons delivered by Keller on the Day of Prayer and Repentance of 1904, and on Mark:10,17–27, November 27, between 1904 and 1909 (NLAK A 3 Early Sermons).

37. Sermon on Matthew 8:23–27, delivered on July 7, 1907 (ibid.).

38. Sermon on the Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat, Matthew 13:24–30, delivered on June 30, 1907, (ibid.).



Adolf Keller at the age of about 35 (archive Dr. Pierre Keller)

Notwithstanding his many duties, Keller resumed his attendance at lectures on theology and classical Arabic. Throughout his five years in Geneva, he attended all of Théodore Flournoy's lectures and seminars on psychology, in order to become a better pastor. Like Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung, Flournoy had trained as a medical doctor.³⁹ One of his friends was William James, who was among the first to speak of the "unconscious mind."⁴⁰ James and Flournoy were among the founders of the psychology of religion. Flournoy's lectures were always listed as *Psychologie expérimentale* (experimental psychology), his seminars as *Exercices pratiques dans le laboratoire de psychologie expérimentale et recherches spéciales*

39. Edited by Flournoy and Claparède, the *Archives de Psychologie de la Suisse Romande* was the first journal of psychology to be published in Switzerland.

40. Keller, "Aus der Frühzeit der psychoanalytischen Bewegung." William James is credited with founding American pragmatism.

(practical exercises in the experimental psychology laboratory and special research).⁴¹ In his classes, Flournoy discussed current affairs, reflected on contemporary debates, and explored parapsychological and pathological phenomena. Like Freud, he considered dreams to hold the key to the unconscious. Keller was impressed by Flournoy, whom he described as “a warm-hearted and upright Christian with a liberal disposition,” and who stood for a “theology of experience.”⁴² Noticeably, Keller’s sermons all of a sudden included references to “Jesus, the doctor of the soul,” or to Jesus as the one who had recognized man’s “paralyzed soul.”⁴³

Then a highly significant event occurred: on September 26, 1909, the young Karl Barth took up his appointment as an assistant minister in the Geneva parish, a position that had been created to ease the burden on Keller.⁴⁴ For a few weeks, Barth thus officiated as Keller’s curate. These few weeks were decisive, not least because Keller had met the young, “mercurial” violinist Nelly Hoffmann through Theophil Fuog, the acting president of the parish council. Keller and Nelly would often play music at her family’s home.⁴⁵ After Keller left Geneva, Nelly attended the confirmation class taught by Barth, and a few years later she became his wife. The couple was married by Keller in Nydegg Church in Bern on March 27, 1913. Some years later, Keller observed that Barth had “exhibited a refreshing lack of respect for both what used to be and what had come to be,” and had “started the world over from scratch.” Furthermore,

To him, the whole of famous Geneva, the center of Calvinism . . . , was no more than an international hodgepotch that lacked spirit and character. He added salt and pepper . . . The acting minister [Keller] introduced the curate to his duties and responsibilities as a parish pastor, to the impoverished attics of St Gervais, to undertaking social welfare and pastoral work . . . , that is to say, to a thoroughly well-defined position. In turn, the young curate soon introduced the acting minister to other affairs and concerns, including the social tensions that he had experienced far more strongly in Germany as a young adherent of the religious-social movement than we were accustomed to

41. “Programme des Cours de l’Université de Genève” (1904–1907; archive of Geneva University Library).

42. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 49.

43. Keller, “The Healing of the Paralytic.”

44. See Marianne Jehle-Wildberger, “Karl Barth und Adolf Keller. Geschichte einer Freundschaft.”

45. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 53.

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in Switzerland . . . Barth's sermons brought home to his listeners the urgency of his message, and they left no place for incidental considerations . . . He was capable of grasping an older colleague . . . by the scruff, and challenging him: "Where is your impetus?" . . . Today, I no longer know who was whose curate.⁴⁶

Keller regretted that he was unable to continue his cooperation with Barth after assuming office in Zurich at the end of October 1909.⁴⁷ Conversely, Barth hailed Keller as "an immensely rich and multifarious spirit," and asserted that "we also had a good understanding in theological affairs."⁴⁸ Barth preserved Keller's humorous style in the parish bulletin; like his predecessor's, his contributions also made frequent reference to everyday experience. Following Barth's appointment as pastor in Safenwil, a blue-collar, working-class village, Keller wrote to him thus: "Your Safenwil sermon is well conceived, well structured, and persuasively formulated, but it is the work of a young man and an outgrowth of your study. I wonder how your folks are supposed to understand you."⁴⁹ Keller and Barth remained lifelong associates, even though their relationship was not always free of conflict.

It was with quite some reluctance that the Geneva parish allowed Keller to leave. He departed with mixed feelings, since the post had permitted his creative imagination to run free. On relocating to Zurich, at the age of almost thirty-eight, Keller was still young, and yet already highly experienced. His appointment to St Peter's Church in Zurich had astonished him, since the parish was a "citadel of liberal Christianity."⁵⁰ Keller, however, did not consider himself a liberal theologian. Jakob Escher-Bürkli, president of St Peter's Parish, came down firmly on his side, because he considered Keller "a strong personality," a pastor endowed with a vivacious and original mind.⁵¹ And thus, Keller accepted the appointment. He was to remain at St Peter's until the end of 1923.

46. Keller, manuscript, presumably dating from after 1919 (NLAK A Folder Unpublished Manuscripts).

47. Keller to Paul Walter, Geneva, June 10, 1910 (BAR J.2.257, 1989/211).

48. Barth to W. Spoendlin, November 12, 1909; cited in Busch, *Karl Barth, His Life from Letters*, 53.

49. Keller to Barth, undated letter, presumably written in the spring of 1915 (KBA 9315.38).

50. Minutes of St Peter's Parish Council, July 16, 1909, vol. 1902–1920 (archive of St Peter's Parish).

51. *Ibid.*, July 7, 1909.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

In the autumn of 1911, Keller was visiting Conrad and Albertina Jenny in Thalwil, a village situated on the Lake of Zurich. He had taught their son religious studies at Schaffhausen Grammar School. The younger Conrad Jenny, who had meanwhile entered law school, was enthusiastic about Keller's sermons at St Peter's. He arranged for Keller to visit the family, and also invited his older sister, Tina Jenny, who was aged twenty-four at the time. After supper, Keller sat down at the piano, as so often on such occasions.⁵²

Keller thus entered an upper-class milieu. The villagers referred to the Jenny villa as the "castle." Tina Jenny's parents both came from families of textile manufacturers in the Canton of Glarus. "I was born in a Victorian-style home," she later observed in her autobiography.⁵³ As a young man, her father had spent several years in India and in England. While he modeled himself upon the English gentleman, her mother styled herself as a nineteenth-century lady.⁵⁴ Tina Jenny and her three younger siblings received private tuition at home. At the age of sixteen, she realized that she wanted to break out of the bourgeois "aristocracy" and belong to the common people. At the age of eighteen, she was sent to Cheltenham Ladies College in the South of England. One of the principal aims of the College was to awaken a sense of social responsibility among its students. Tina decided to become a nurse. In her autobiography, she noted that "my parents could not understand this."⁵⁵ At the age of twenty, she became a hard-working hospital nurse and discovered a hitherto unknown happiness. She went on to do an internship in a slum in the East End of London. She spent several weeks in shared accommodation in Saint Hilda's Settlements. The tenements had been established to systematically combat social misery and to provide purposeful poor relief.⁵⁶ Their resident staff were mostly young people, who often followed a religious calling and worked gratuitously. Every Monday, Tina Jenny visited twelve families, each of which had a disabled child. She looked after elderly people, often spending long hours with a "sweet elderly couple" who occupied a tiny room up many flights of stairs in a back alley. "Probably, the greatest misery occurs

52. Keller, "Aus meinem Leben," 70; see also Tina Keller, "In Memoriam."

53. Tina Keller, "Autobiography" (version of summer 1981), 1.

54. Sträuli-Keller, *Erinnerungen*, 7.

55. Tina Keller, "Autobiography," 5.

56. Tina Keller, "Soziale Arbeit in Ost-London," 23.

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where illness exacerbates poverty . . . ; particularly where tuberculosis and infant mortality are rife.” Tina Jenny entered a new world, and began contemplating the meaning and value of life.⁵⁷

On the occasion of his first visit to the Jennys, Keller played a Beethoven Sonata. “I fell in love with my future husband while he played the piano.”⁵⁸ She told him about London. He admired her ability “to empathize with the unfortunate and to embrace their distress,”⁵⁹ and suggested that she furnish a written account of her experiences among the poor. Tina, who was fifteen years younger than Adolf, lacked the confidence to do this, and so he offered to help her. The account was published in *Neue Wege* (New Paths), a religious-social journal. “As we were writing down these experiences, we entered each other’s hearts so completely that the decision to ask for her hand fell into my lap like a ripe apple.”⁶⁰ Adolf Keller and Tina Jenny were married in January 1912. “Far from being a large and glamorous wedding, we were married in Thalwil church; after the ceremony, there was a hearty reception for our dear friends at Castle Thalwil; we took off on our honeymoon the same day.” The newly wed couple traveled to Egypt, where they enjoyed “unforgettable days and hours.”⁶¹

Following her husband’s death, Tina Keller wrote: “I was very happy in my marriage . . . I was nearly breathless as I stepped from such a very narrow home into such a wide space . . . Everything seemed so wide that I was bewildered for joy und excitement . . . There was something so healthy about my husband, everything was so natural. He was a spirited man, but his ideas and also his religion were natural.”⁶² At the end of 1912, their first child, Doris, was born. Two years later, Paul was born. “During the first three years we had two children that were a delight. My babies thrived and my pregnancies were among my healthiest times.”⁶³ Over the years, two more girls, Margrit and Esther, were born, followed by another son, Pierre, in 1927. In the first years of her marriage, Tina Keller-Jenny attended almost exclusively to her children. Years later, her husband regretted not spending more time with his children. Nevertheless, family

57. *Ibid.*, 33.

58. Tina Keller, “Autobiography,” 60.

59. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 70–71.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, 71–72.

62. Tina Keller, “Autobiography,” 6ff.

63. *Ibid.*

life had been warm and affectionate.⁶⁴ In her recollections, Doris wrote: “We were often embraced . . . My parents promised each other that their children could remain spontaneous . . . We talked about everything.”⁶⁵

Tina Keller-Jenny wanted to emulate her husband: “His knowledge, his tremendous commitment to work, and his concentration seemed to be like . . . a distant wonderland. I envied him.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, “my husband’s harmonious spontaneity demonstrated a more pleasant kind of life, which I wanted to acquire also.”⁶⁷ “He worked with ease and joy, but he did not force himself . . . More and more I wished I could also find such creativity.”⁶⁸ “Gradually I now came to the insight that I needed more education.”⁶⁹ She earned her baccalaureate after only one and half years of study.⁷⁰ “Adolf received me with pride, with a Latin inscription he had written for my homecoming. He could show such joy and warmth.”⁷¹ Now, however, the mother of three wished to study medicine. At first, Keller “was angry, hurt, disappointed.”⁷² But he realized that Tina’s idea was not a passing fancy; thus he needed to give her a free hand if she was not to become unhappy.⁷³ “True loyalty,” he wrote later, “accompanies the development and transformations of our fellow human beings.”⁷⁴

While pursuing her medical studies, Tina Keller also ensured that her children suffered no lack of “emotional affection.”⁷⁵ One of her teachers was C. G. Jung. She became one of the first female psychiatrists in Switzerland, and soon made a name for herself. She was now her husband’s equal. But the hours they spent together were few, not least owing to Keller’s increasing professional commitments. “I would like to add, that in spite of being often lonely, of having difficulties in accepting many absences of

64. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 76ff.

65. Sträuli-Keller, *Erinnerungen*, 8.

66. Tina Keller, “Zusatz” (supplement) to Adolf Keller’s “Aus meinem Leben,” 3 (NLTK).

67. Tina Keller, “Autobiography” (version of summer 1981), 84.

68. *Ibid.*, 16.

69. *Ibid.*, 17.

70. Tina Keller, “Zusatz,” 3.

71. Tina Keller, “In Memoriam.”

72. *Ibid.*

73. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 77; see also Tina Keller, “Autobiography,” 17 and Tina Keller, *Wege inneren Wachstums*, 16.

74. Xenos (=Keller), *Auf der Schwelle*, 87.

75. Keller, “Aus meinem Leben,” 80.

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my husband, I was happy to be the wife of a man who was consecrated to a great humanitarian work.⁷⁶



Adolf and Tina Keller with their children Esther, Doris, Paul, and Margrit (ca. 1924) (archive Dr. Pierre Keller)

SOCIAL COMMITMENT: ST PETER'S CHURCH IN ZURICH (1909–1923)

St Peter's was a proud, tradition-conscious parish. Seating over a thousand people at the time, the parish church—with its massive tower and enormous clock—is one of Zurich's landmarks. In the Middle Ages, St Peter's had been *the* parish church in Zurich. During the Reformation, Leo Judae, Huldrych Zwingli's friend and associate, had officiated there, while the late eighteenth century witnessed the appointment of Johann Caspar Lavater, who became famous for his *Physiognomische Fragmente* (Physiognomical Fragments) and for his friendship with Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Upon his arrival, Keller took up residence in Lavater's rectory. His study was the so-called "Lavaterstube"; the growing Keller family soon filled the large house with cheerful life.

The parish consisted of two very different parts: the old-town parish, which consisted largely of ordinary people, and the so-called friends, who

76. Tina Keller, "In Memoriam." See below, chapter 3, p. 68–81.