

ROSEMARY GOLDIE (1916-2010)

By MICHAEL COSTIGAN

Rosemary Goldie, who died at the Little Sisters of the Poor, Randwick on Saturday evening 27 February at 94, will be remembered as a great champion of the Catholic laity.

Born in Manly on 1 February 1916, raised by her maternal grandmother and educated by the Sisters of Mercy at Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta, she went on to make a huge contribution to the Church internationally, mainly during the second half of the 20th Century.

One of the highlights of Rosemary Goldie's fifty years as a Rome-based Church bureaucrat came in 1964, when she was one of the first women appointed an auditor at the Second Vatican Council. After the Council she served for several years as Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council of the Laity. No woman had ever occupied a higher position in the Roman Curia.

Rosemary took up residence in Rome in October 1952, after being recruited to work for the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate ("COPECIAL").

Coincidentally, in that same month I began a nine-year stay in Rome, as a seminarian at Propaganda Fide College and as a student at two Pontifical Universities.

It was not Rosemary's first time in the Eternal City. In 1938, at the age of 22, she had attended a triple canonisation ceremony performed in St Peter's Basilica by Pius XI, the "Pope of Catholic Action". In 1951, she had been brought to Rome from Fribourg, Switzerland, to assist in running the First World Congress of the Lay Apostolate. She was nearing the end of a six-year appointment in Fribourg as an employee of Pax Romana, the international organisation of Catholic university students and graduates.

Much in Rosemary's life up to 1952 had helped to prepare her for what lay ahead. Her earlier life had included her days as an Arts student at Sydney University and the awarding of a French Government scholarship which took her to Paris and its Sorbonne University in 1936 at the age of 20. There, among other things, she sat at the feet of Jacques Maritain, the renowned scholar, philosopher and expert on the laity's part in the Church.

Especially important in this period were the beginnings of her long associations with the Grail, the organisation of active Catholic lay women, and with Pax Romana.

While back in Australia during the Second World War and doing further University courses, she did much to promote both the Grail and Pax Romana, neither of which had been previously well known or active in this country. A member of the Grail for 20

years, she retained her links with that organisation after withdrawing from membership in 1959. She always valued what it did for women working in the world.

After returning to Paris with what ended as the unfulfilled aim of completing a French Literature doctorate at the Sorbonne, Rosemary Goldie was prevailed on to go to Fribourg as an employee of Pax Romana. Unexpectedly, the appointment lasted six years instead of a few months.

Nobody would have guessed it at the time, but it was all a superb remote preparation for the part this small Australian woman, fluent in French and later in Italian, was to play in the central Church event of the 20th Century, the Second Vatican Council.

I met Rosemary early in her Roman sojourn. A few of us invited her to give some of the seminarians at Propaganda College a briefing on her work and, at a later stage, on the preparations for the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, which was involving her in much world travel. The Congress was held in Rome in 1957.

Three of the people with whom Rosemary was closely associated in those years were her immediate superior, the Italian lay leader and future Director General of UNESCO, Vittorino Veronese, the founder of the Young Christian Workers, the Belgian priest and future Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, and the Vatican Under-Secretary of State, Monsignor Montini, the future Pope Paul VI.

After Pope John XXIII's stunning announcement in January 1959 that he was convening an ecumenical council (Vatican II), the Permanent Committee was given a role in preparation for the event. They had input at the Council on matters relating to the laity, chiefly in regard to the proposed Decree on the Lay Apostolate, and eventually in connection with what emerged in 1965 as the great Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

COPECIAL was also consulted on the appointment of lay auditors at the Council. In 1962 and 1963, only men attended the Council sessions in this capacity. The big breakthrough came in 1964, at the third annual gathering, when women auditors were invited to be present – a move without precedent in the Church's history. It was no surprise when Rosemary Goldie was one of the first appointed.

The auditors, male and female, did more than just listen. They also played a key role in helping the commissions drafting some of the Council's documents, like the two named above.

Rosemary Goldie not only played her part in the preparation for and conduct of the Council, but she also devoted her life in the following decades to its implementation.

The third and final International Congress of the Lay Apostolate took place in 1967. Again, Rosemary was part of the organising group. It was in the same year that the Committee for which she had been working was replaced by the new Pontifical Council of the Laity, to which she received the historic appointment as one of its two Under-

Secretaries. She was also giving occasional lectures in the Pastoral Institute of the Pontifical Lateran University.

In 1975, some changes occurred at the Pontifical Council. It was re-named the Council for the Laity instead of the Council “of” the Laity, and Rosemary’s Under-Secretary position was given to a priest – a surprising and somewhat retrograde step. As a form of compensation, she was promoted at the Lateran University to the position of Professor of Pastoral Theology. Rosemary spoke firmly but respectfully to her old friend, Paul VI, about the regrettable absence of lay people, in particular women, from the Laity Council. It was a number of years before this omission was corrected.

At the Lateran University, Rosemary collaborated with the Rector, Monsignor Franco Biffi, on several projects. One was a summary, translated by her into English, of the socio-economic teaching of Biffi’s predecessor, the future Cardinal Pietro Pavan, who had been the principal drafter of John XXIII’s epoch-making encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*).

Even after her retirement from teaching, Rosemary continued to supervise the thesis work of some of the Lateran’s students.

In those final years in Rome, approaching the new Millennium, Rosemary was still active. Working in a crowded office in the Palazzo San Calisto, overlooking the façade of the beautiful old church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, she researched the history of the many decades in which she had laboured for the Church and in particular for the Catholic laity. The resulting book, *From a Roman Window*, appeared in 1998.

Rosemary also prepared for publication the autobiography of her largely absentee mother, Dulcie Deamer, a novelist and famous Bohemian identity of the 1920s in Sydney. Titled *The Queen of Bohemia* and also published in 1998, the memoir is enhanced by Rosemary’s own personal prologue, her notes on the text and an account of the history of Deamer’s hitherto unpublished manuscript. Rosemary’s inscription on my personal copy reads: “From Dulcie Deamer’s not-so-Bohemian daughter! With warmest wishes.”

Even after returning to Australia early in 2002 and taking up residence in the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Randwick, where her mother had died 30 years earlier, Rosemary continued to serve the Holy See from a distance as a consultant to the Council for the Laity.

Late in 2002, she made her final journey to Rome, to attend an Assembly of the Laity Council. Her failing eyesight and increasing frailty made this trip something of a trial, but she was pleased to renew her acquaintance with her many friends in Rome. Late in 2003, she accepted an invitation to address the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council in North Sydney.

Among her many honours, she was appointed an Officer in the General Division of the Australian Honours system (AO). She was also awarded an honorary doctorate by the Australian Catholic University.

Much could be said about Rosemary Goldie's associations over the years with eminent and not so eminent people. Pope Paul VI called her "our co-worker". Blessed John XXIII famously described her as "la piccinina" ("the little bit of a thing"). Bishop Albino Luciani, long before he became the short-lived John Paul I, defended her staunchly in a letter to chaplains of women's associations. John Paul II visited her in her Trastevere office in 1979 and received a copy of her autobiography from her own hands 20 years later. And she was one of the celebrities living with the Little Sisters in Randwick whom Benedict XVI visited privately during the 2008 World Youth Day. She had known the present Pope well during her days in Rome,

In her memoir she writes of many other Catholic women who worked for the same causes as she did so selflessly.

A journalist once called her "la bambina Vaticana", while the London *Tablet* described her as "tiny, wise, spirited and elfin". Sister Carmel McEnroy, author of *Guests in Their Own House: the Women of Vatican II*, which drew extensively on Rosemary's research, wrote that "this powerful little woman" was known to many at the Council as "a walking encyclopedia of information, especially about the laity all over the world". Father Edmund Campion said her life was dedicated "to elucidating the possibilities of being a lay Catholic in today's world".

Although small in stature, Rosemary was a giant in the service of her Church and in her advocacy on behalf of the laity.

As a distinguished Australian Catholic woman, Rosemary Goldie occupies a place in our nation's Catholic story alongside the likes of Caroline Chisholm and the soon to be canonised Mary MacKillop.

More than that, few others here or elsewhere can be said to have matched what she did to prepare for an age in which a globalised Church will give proper recognition to the role of lay people, especially women.

From: Dr Michael Costigan, 18/1 MacKenzie Street, Lavender Bay, NSW 2060. TEL: 99294918.

Dr Costigan is a former priest, journalist, public servant and Church bureaucrat, who knew Rosemary Goldie for almost sixty years. He is an Adjunct Professor of the Australian Catholic University.