

To Whom It May Concern:

With great pleasure and deep sincerity I submit the following letter in endorsement of Dr. Christopher A. Rollston, Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Studies at Emmanuel Christian Seminary (ECS). I came to ECS (then Emmanuel School of Religion) in 2001, transferring from East Tennessee State University's History Department, to study specifically with Dr. Rollston. I earned my MAR under his advisement from 2001-2005, and also served as his research assistant during that time.

I have benefited from Dr. Rollston's tutelage in various ways. As a student, I could never want a better mentor. He challenged me to maintain the highest standards in both my scholarship and my work ethic. Knowing that I came to ECS in order to prepare for further graduate work at the PhD level, he worked diligently to prepare me for that work, often offering independent-study classes in addition to his full teaching load, so that I might receive the classes that I needed but that could not be offered regularly, as he was the only Old Testament and Semitic Studies faculty member at that time. Furthermore, he supported me in every effort to attain admittance to graduate programs, writing many letters and personally introducing me to various faculty members at institutions to which I applied.

Moreover, I found his teaching powerful and transformative, as he invited me to explore the biblical texts—the sacred literature of my faith—to turn them inside out, to apply rigorous and scholarly examination to them, and to fearlessly ask of them deep and challenging questions. Also, not only did Dr. Rollston invite students to critically examine the biblical text, but also frequently shared his sense of marvel at the wonder and mystery of the universe, which he says proclaim the grandeur of God, a grandeur which cannot be reduced. Though, initially such an approach was difficult and unsettling for me, over time, the wrangling and wrestling with the Bible, alongside the contemplation of the mystery of God, re-formed and deepened my personal faith in a life-changing way. I am forever grateful.

Dr. Rollston not only discussed the aforementioned with me in the classroom but outside of it as well. His office door was always open, and he always welcomed me in —along with countless other students, faculty, and staff—with a cup of coffee and big smile. He was always ready to talk about the biblical text, as well as the very real impact it has upon our own lives and upon the world at large; but he was also always ready to talk about anything else that one might need, offering counsel and encouragement in various matters. I and many in the ECS community have been blessed and refreshed by his words of wisdom and care.

As I finish my graduate studies this year, I am both conducting research and teaching. Though I have been gone from ECS for seven years, Dr. Rollston has not ceased to serve as a mentor. He regularly makes himself available for any research (or otherwise) questions that I might have and offers thoughtful feedback on my work. Additionally, he works to open the academy to me by inviting me to publish various articles and monographs with him and to serve on various panels at the annual meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). His generosity and desire to aid me in my vocational goals astound me; however, they do not extend to me alone, as I have seen him serve many others in this way, including not only former students but others in the fields of Biblical Studies and Ancient Near Eastern History.

In this respect, I am not alone in my appreciation of Dr. Rollston and am constantly pleased at the high regard with which he is held among his peers. Last year while attending the annual meetings of ASOR and SBL, I found that I did not meet a person who did not know of and admire his work. Whenever I shared that I was his former student, I was met with smiles, nods, and words of esteem for both his scholarship and his person.

As a teacher, I find my own classes powerful and transformative because of Dr. Rollston's modeling. My students, both Christian and non-Christian, are profoundly impacted by my biblical studies courses. I watch those of faith wrestle with and personally own their faith tradition; I watch my non-religious students take active interest in biblical studies—often for the first time, as they see the scriptures being handled in honest and rigorous ways.

It is easy for me to write a letter of endorsement for Dr. Christopher Rollston, but it is not easy to keep such a letter short. His generosity of both time and spirit, his humor, his true care for others can hardly be described in a couple of pages. To be sure, this letter barely covers the many ways in which he touches the lives of all those with whom he comes in contact. It is my great privilege and honor to call him teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend.

Sincerely,

Heather Dana Davis Parker  
PhD Candidate, Near Eastern Studies  
The Johns Hopkins University