

To the Reader of this Report on the Commission for the Legacy of Slavery at Rosemont College,

The need and desire for this Commission arose in spring 2018, when the early research of the students in Professor Michelle Moravec's Digital Humanities class who had been assigned to research Cornelia Connelly was first developed. Dr. Moravec had guided the students' research into areas and times in Cornelia Connelly's life that were less well known by the public than her later life's work as Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Several of the documents used by the students and the Commission are from the Society's archives, both in Rosemont, PA and Oxford, England, and I would like to thank the Society for sharing them with the Rosemont College Commission. In particular the students focused on Cornelia's early life as the wife of an Episcopalian minister, eventually mother of five children, in Natchez, Mississippi and Grand Coteau, LA. At that time, Cornelia's husband had owned, and they both had been served by, enslaved people. I should note that this information had been already known and acknowledged by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus from the first written biography in 1922 and researched more thoroughly since the 1970s when Religious Congregations were encouraged by Vatican II to probe their histories and charisms. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus has been in contact with the descendants of Sally and Ignatius Goff since 1930. In recent years we have shared historical research with each other.

In the meantime, over the past four to five years, there has been a growing movement among American colleges and universities, that those who find themselves to be part of those communities today realize that they must confront the fact that their college or university has benefitted, over years and years, from the institution of slavery. In some cases, these colleges and universities had revered leaders who had been slave owners, or their campuses had buildings actually built by enslaved people. Over time, many universities have set up their own Commissions in order to research, in order to understand their history, acknowledge this history, and then propose recommendations by which they can begin to address making that university's future a more cognizant and honest identity. Brown University was the first to accomplish this process as in 2006. There was an expectation that many other institutions would follow with Commissions of their own, but this didn't happen. Then in 2013, historian Craig Steven Wilder published a book titled *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. This seems to have made it clear that each college or university with any ties to slavery needs to identify and deal with them (and most scholars would state that this is every institution because we all live in the United States with ties to slavery that might benefit some or deeply harm others – what has been called the “afterlife of slavery”). So by 2018, when we first announced the Commission, similar studies had been, or were being conducted by Georgetown, Rutgers, Columbia, and our neighbor Bryn Mawr College. Last year, in 2018, Harvard hosted a major conference on Slavery and Universities.

When I first heard of the class research, my immediate reaction was that nothing should be done in any way that would influence the ongoing research. At that time I did say that, when the class had ended, my intention was to establish a Commission with a diverse membership representing all constituencies of our campus community.

I did this in June 2018, writing a charge for the work that I would ask the members of the Commission to do in the next academic year.

I am very proud and especially thankful to the members of the Commission for their work over the past year. This was difficult work, sensitive work, and they have done an admirable job.

President Sharon Latchaw Hirsh

(Additions by Eileen McDevitt, shcj shown in red)

## Report from the Commission on the Legacy of Slavery at Rosemont College

(updated)

In reflecting upon Rosemont College and its links with enslaved people, the Commission has considered the fourfold historical context of Catholic teaching and practice, specifically in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia where the college is located, the life of Cornelia Connelly, the composition and ministries of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and the composition of the student body and faculty of Rosemont, along with its curriculum. The Commission acknowledges past benefits of institutional connections to the American legacy of slavery and also advocates for specific actions which flow from this acknowledgment.

### Catholic History

Rosemont College is a sponsored ministry of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, a religious congregation of women, formally approved as such by the Catholic Church in 1877. Hence, a history of the Church's complicity with slavery in United States and even in Philadelphia, as well as a history of racism within the Church itself, is important to acknowledge from the outset. This history gives us context for Rosemont College, as well as Cornelia Connelly's conversion to Catholicism while participating in America's slave economy and the enslavement of seven people in two families.

Slavery was a reality in the ancient world and the Roman Empire. However, it was not linked to physical differences among people, but rather with other markers that divided people like religion, tribe, or allegiance to ruling powers. Christian theologians reflected on the challenges that slavery presented to the central tenets of the faith. Some provided a prophetic witness; others accepted it as a natural part of social reality. In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas deduced that slavery was a sin, and a series of popes upheld his position, beginning in 1435 and culminating in three major pronouncements against slavery by Pope Paul III in 1537. There are many examples of saints buying slaves and then setting them free, (e.g. St. Nicholas, the Trinitarian Fathers and the White Fathers).

The concept of "race" emerged as European Christians--primarily Catholics of the empires of Spain, France, and Portugal--encountered peoples of the African, Asian, and South American continents in a growing global economy. European explorers, merchants, and missionaries classified and ranked all peoples "discovered" using arbitrary categories linked to physical traits. Lighter skinned people were understood as superior in culture, intellect, morality; darker skinned people were understood as less fully human and therefore less deserving of political, economic, and social rights. European Christians, including Catholics, used these categories to justify their tactics for expanding the reach and wealth of their empires. An estimated 20 million indigenous people were exterminated in the Americas in the processes of European colonialization.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 12.5 million Africans were shipped to the "new world" through the transatlantic slave trade.

The Catholic hierarchy held conflicting positions on slavery during this period of discovery. For example, Pope Eugene IV in 1435 wrote to Bishop Ferdinand of Lanzarote in his Bull, *Sicut Dudum*, that the "natives" of the Canary Islands, who had been subjected to "permanent slavery," should "be totally and perpetually free and are to be let go without the exaction or reception of any money..."<sup>2</sup> In his Papal Bull *Dum Diversas* (1452), Nicholas V granted apostolic permission for the kings of Spain and Portugal to buy and sell Africans, setting the stage for the slave trade. Ultimately, Pope Alexander VI's 1493 papal bull, also known as the "Doctrine of Discovery," declared all land not inhabited by Christians as available to be "discovered", fueled and indeed blessed the enslavement of indigenous people and Africans in the

name of European colonization and Christian/Catholic evangelization. The Vatican did not apologize for it until the approach of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, long after its impact became entrenched in national and global structures of power.

### **Cornelia Connelly**

Although Protestant Christians affiliated with the British Empire primarily settled in the North American colonies, Catholics also contributed to the growth of chattel slavery here. Some of the first Roman Catholics to arrive in the United States brought enslaved Blacks with them to work their plantations, smaller farms, and workshops. John Carroll (1735-1815), the first bishop of the United States, owned two enslaved persons - Charles and Alexis. In his will, Carroll bequeathed Charles to his nephew, Daniel Brent, and specified that Brent emancipate Charles within a year of Carroll's death. He also requested that Charles be given \$50 from his estate at the time of his freedom. Alexis served as Archbishop Carroll's servant until he was sold in 1806 to a wealthy Baltimore gentleman known as Mr. Stenson.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the ministries of a variety of communities of Roman Catholic priests and religious women--both to early Catholic settlers in the 18th century and later to Catholic immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century--would not have been possible without the enslaved labor of the Black people these congregations owned.

Roman Catholics on *both* sides of the Mason Dixon Line managed and profited from enslaved people.... Despite Germantown, PA Quakers making the first protest by Whites against slavery in the colonies in 1688, Pennsylvania did not officially abolish slavery until 1848, yet Philadelphians retained ties to slavery.

In the case of Cornelia Connelly's family, those bonds were quite literal. Cornelia Peacock was born in 1809 to Mary Swope Bowen Peacock and Ralph Peacock. **She was brought up in the Presbyterian church.** Cornelia's mother was the widow of John Bowen, owner of Bowen Hall, a Jamaican plantation that relied upon the labors of approximately 130 enslaved people. Upon the death of John Bowen in 1794, his widow, Mary Swope Bowen (who later became Cornelia's mother), began to receive an annual sum from Bowen Hall. This continued until her death in 1823. The administration of Bowen Hall passed to John Bowen Jr., Cornelia's half-brother. **At the time of Mary's second husband's death (Ralph Peacock, 1818) the family's financial situation was precarious due to Ralph's unsuccessful business ventures.**

In 1831 **Cornelia converted to Episcopalianism** and married Pierce Francis Connelly, an Episcopalian priest. Pierce **was assigned by the Episcopal Bishop to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Natchez, Mississippi.** Here Cornelia and Pierce became directly involved with the institution of slavery. On the occasion of the birth of their first child, Mercer, in 1832, Dr. William Mercer gave the family two of his slaves: Phoebe Grayson and her daughter, Sarah (also called Sally.) **Dr. Mercer, the owner of several plantations which had slaves, was Mercer's godfather.** Between 1832 and 1835, Pierce purchased Jenny and Abraham, although nothing more than their names has been discovered about them; he sold Jenny and Abraham in 1835 when the Connellys began their first trip to Europe. Phoebe and Sarah were not sold. It is presumed that they returned to live on the Mercer plantation **while the Connellys were abroad.**<sup>4</sup>

In 1838, after their conversion to Catholicism, the Connelly's took up residence in Grand Coteau, Louisiana. The following year Pope Gregory XVI condemned and prohibited the international slave trade; however, several U.S. Bishops at the time, including Philadelphia's own Bishop Francis Kenrick, actively rejected the Pope's teaching, indicating that it did not—and could not—apply to the domestic trade of

enslaved people in the United States. In fact, Bishop Kenrick of Philadelphia wrote a moral manual, or textbook, that was used in the country's fledgling seminaries to assist priests with the moral quandaries slavery created, particularly in the sacramental life of the Church.

In Grand Coteau, the Connellys lived among Catholic slave owners. The employers of Pierce and Cornelia, the Jesuits of St. Charles College and the Religious of the Sacred Heart, owned slaves. Sarah and Phoebe were returned to the Connellys during this period. Cornelia is listed as the baptismal sponsor for "Sara" on her baptismal certificate of March 29, 1839.<sup>5</sup> Sarah was married on June 2, 1839, with Pierce's permission, in the Catholic Church to Ignatius (called Nace) Goff, who was owned by the Jesuits of St. Charles College, Pierce's employer. Sarah and Nace had three surviving children, George, Mary and James Henry. In 1842, before returning to Europe to pursue the priesthood, Pierce sold Sally and her children to the Jesuit community at St. Charles College where her husband Ignatius lived and worked. Phoebe, by then in her later years, was given to the Jesuits. **The Society has no material that indicates Cornelia's view of slavery but there is a letter by Pierce that reflects his "paternalistic" view of Black people.**

### **Society of the Holy Child Jesus**

Cornelia Connelly founded the Society of the Holy Child Jesus in 1846 in England. In 1862 Cornelia missioned the first six sisters to America, her "own dear country". These women did not enslave any Americans, nor did enslaved peoples construct any of their buildings. The SHCJ American Province ministries expanded and spread across the country without any relationship with African Americans, except as pupils in some of the large inner-city parish schools, **especially in New York and Philadelphia.** The Catholic Church discouraged Black persons from entering "White" religious orders, both for men and women, as well as the diocesan priesthood. Nevertheless, Black women began their own religious orders and were pioneers in carrying the faith to their children generation after generation without much support from the institutional Church. Valiant leadership among Black Catholic women such as Sr. Elizabeth Lange, founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in 1829 for "free women of color," persevered in spite of prejudice and racist treatment, to keep the Catholic faith alive among Black Catholics.

There is no evidence that women of White religious congregations, including the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, made any effort to racially integrate their orders for decades after their founding or coming to the United States. For example, in 1891 Katherine Drexel, a White heiress from Philadelphia, unique in her day for founding a religious order which served Black and Indigenous children, refused to admit Black women into her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>6</sup> The Society of the Holy Child Jesus provided the religious formation for postulants to the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus in Nigeria as early as 1937. Then in 1964, the General Chapter of the Society stated that "The Chapter, having been asked to state the policy of the Society in regard to Negro Aspirants for admission, considered that as the Church has said that differences of race and colour have no relevance in spiritual matters, it is not for us to lay down any other policy. Negro candidates for admission to the Society, like all others, will be accepted if they show signs of a true vocation."<sup>7</sup>

**The Society began its ministry in Africa in 1930. (Nigeria, 1930; Ghana, 1946; Chad, 1991; Lesotho, 1974-1998; Camerouns, 2001-2005). At first the African Bishops were not supportive of the Society accepting African women into the Congregation. With African Bishops the SHCJ assisted in the founding and formation of two indigenous African orders until they were constituted independent Congregations—the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, Nigeria (1931), foundress Mother Mary Charles Magdalen, HHCJ**

and the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, Ghana (1950s). The Handmaids referred to themselves as “daughters” of the SHCJ. The SHCJ gave their original property in Calabar to the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus.

The first African sister to enter the Society of the Holy Child Jesus was in 1962, Teresa Okure, shcj.

In the mid-to-late 1960s, two African women from Nigeria did their Formation in the Society in Rosemont, Pennsylvania; they were joined in the Novitiate a year later by a Black Hispanic American woman from Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, in New York City, where the Sisters of the Holy Child were teaching. The three women took some Rosemont College courses. Each of them left the Society before professing religious vows. We have clear documentation that Aquila Peterson, an African American, who had applied to the American Province of the Society, began her candidacy as a Postulant in 2002. Over the last several decades, the American Province has taken many steps to address racism, including, for example, a special issue of Source on “Racism” in 1995.<sup>8</sup> On August 29, 2016, immediately after participating in a recent meeting of the LWCR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious) the American Province Leadership Team of the Society, considered its own stance; in solidarity with the position of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious with respect to Race, the Leadership Team posted the LWCR Assembly Resolution on the American Providence website.<sup>9</sup>

The Society taught newly immigrant populations both in the American and European Provinces since its beginnings. In the US this was the Irish, Italian, Polish, children, etc in the Parochial and Diocesan schools since 1862. These populations moved out while African American and Latino families moved into these poor urban areas. In the 1980s-1990s, SHCJ could no longer sustain personnel in these schools, while Dioceses were also closing these schools and parishes. In 1992-1993 the American Province made the decision to open a Holy Child School for Latino girls (Connelly Middle School in the Lower East Side of NY) and a Law Firm serving indigent people within the immigrant community (Casa Cornelia Law Center, San Diego, CA). This was followed by other schools and works in urban underserved areas that were opened in conjunction with other religious and non-religious groups: Washington School for Girls, Anacostia, DC; Hope Partnership for Education, North Philadelphia, PA; Henriette DeLille Middle School for Girls, New Orleans, LA; Cristo Rey, NYC; Cristo Rey, Waukegan, IL; LAMP, Los Angeles, CA; Providence Center, North Philadelphia, PA.

## **Rosemont College**

We often associate stringent racial segregation with the Deep South, but by the time the Society founded Rosemont College in 1921, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, like most northern dioceses, was also a racially segregated place, which was reflected in its schools. One of the city’s first maps that captured residential demographics in order to protect white neighborhoods from an influx of blacks from the South was drawn in 1903 by a Jesuit, Joseph Emerick, who collaborated with St. Katherine Drexel in opening a new school for “colored Catholics” in North Central Philadelphia. The Jesuits wanted to ensure that her “colored mission” was a safe distance from the Church of the Gesu. Much as his predecessors had refused to apply church teaching to the context of the slave trade, Philadelphia’s Cardinal Dennis Joseph Dougherty (1865-1951) refused to comply fully with a 1917 addition to Canon Law abolishing “national parishes.” While Dougherty managed to integrate European ethnic groups-- Italian, German, Polish-- into a vast network of territorial parishes, he was reluctant to integrate them racially. Instead, he funneled Philadelphia’s Black Catholics into six “national” parishes, which were rarely staffed with diocesan priests. Dougherty also had his own demographic maps, which he used to purchase territory in surrounding counties that were developed, with the help of the Federal Housing

Administration and the Veterans Administration in the 1930s and 1940s, for Whites only. Rosemont College was located in one of those new green lined suburban territories.

At the same time, Dougherty encouraged a variety of religious congregations, including the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, to establish and staff an extensive network of schools across the diocese--from elementary schools and high schools to vocational schools and colleges--in order to accommodate the tremendous growth in the white Catholic middle class in the post-war years. He required these schools to racially integrate in 1934, but parishes were so thoroughly segregated by then that his mandate was ineffective. Rosemont College did not admit its first African American student, Vera Coppedge, a graduate of Hallahan Catholic Girls High School, until the fall of 1945. She graduated as its first African American alumna in 1949.

American Catholic Bishops released their first statement on racism in 1958, after four years of backlash against the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* and upon the request of Pope Pius XII. They condemned racial segregation but unlike their Protestant counterparts offered no concrete recommendations for how to address it in Catholic communities beyond "quiet conciliation."<sup>10</sup> Their 1979 *Brothers and Sisters to Us* reflected an understanding of racism as simply a largely interpersonal dynamic that can be overcome through a conversion of hearts. While this document offered more guidelines for action, the Bishops continued to operate with an individualistic frame of reference. In the ensuing 30 years, only 18% of bishops issued individual or collective statements about racism.<sup>11</sup> "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love, A Pastoral Letter Against Racism" released in 2018, continues to address racism on an individual basis rather than addressing root causes in institutional and structural racial inequality.

## **In Summary**

Although Rosemont College did not own enslaved persons, the Rosemont College Community has a responsibility to know and understand the legacies of enslaved peoples and racism in its history as a College:

- The Catholic Church has a sinful history when it comes to the racing of peoples of indigenous and African descent.
- It is apparent that, as a convert to Catholicism, Cornelia Connelly benefited from the services and sales of enslaved persons. She did so during a period when the morality and legality of slave holding were being debated in the United States and the abolition movement was reaching its peak both here and in England.
- While the Society of the Holy Child Jesus did not own enslaved people, neither did the community in the United States accept an African American candidate until the late 1960s.
- As an institution of Catholic higher education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Rosemont College is located in proximity to racially segregated parishes, neighborhoods, and schools and that location continues to impact its community.

## Acknowledgements

The Rosemont Commission on the Legacy of Slavery acknowledges:

1. Pierce Connelly once owned Phoebe Grayson and her daughter, Sarah Goff, as well as Phoebe's grandchildren, George, Mary and James Henry. Pierce also owned two additional people outside of this family unit, Jenny and Abraham. All of these people labored for Pierce and Cornelia, who eventually sold or transferred ownership of all of them.
2. Vowed religious life for Catholic women in America was apparently not open to Black women, because very few, if any, entered already established congregations. Courageous Black women were pioneers in founding their own religious congregations. Because the Society of the Holy Child Jesus did not accept a Black member into the community until the late 1960s, it seems to have accepted the status quo regarding Black Catholic women in the United States.
3. While we found no concrete evidence of the impact of slavery on Rosemont College—such as enslaving people, relying on slave labor to build campus infrastructure or to care for campus properties—as is the case with other Catholic institutions, Rosemont has benefited from our national economy supported by a system of slavery. Moreover, we note this is not an exhaustive account of the connection between Rosemont College and institutional racism and we encourage continued efforts in this regard.
4. In light of our mission to meet the wants of the age, Rosemont College might have done more to address the structural inequalities arising from a system of slavery by: actively enrolling and supporting Black students; recruiting a more diverse faculty, staff, and administration; offering a multicultural curriculum; and raising questions of social justice around racism in the Church and society.
5. The College currently enrolls a significant number of Black students. This presents an invitation to face our past with an intention to create a different future.

Additions, etc by Eileen McDevitt, shcj shown in red

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<sup>1</sup> Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company) 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Panzer, Joel S., *The Popes and Slavery* (Staten Island: Alba House/St. Paul Books) 1996. Page 8; also pp. 75-78 with original critical Latin text

<sup>3</sup> See the final report produced by a working group at John Carroll University in 2018 titled "Slavery—Legacy and Reconciliation": <http://webmedia.jcu.edu/mission/files/2018/08/WGSLR-Final-Report-Spring-2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Flaxman, p 34, states that Dr. Mercer kept Phoebe and Sally when the Connelys sailed for Europe; however no documentation is presented.

<sup>5</sup> Cornelia is also listed as the sponsor for Sally's son James Henry who was baptized on 11 September 1840. A copy of the baptismal certificate is in the SHCJ American Province archives.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Katherine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament went on to found Xavier University (Louisiana), the first and still only Catholic Black College/University.

<sup>7</sup> Society of the Holy Child Jesus, *Notes from the General Chapter of 1964*. Rome: Privately printed, 1964. Page 8, number 63.

<sup>8</sup> Lancaster, Judith, SHCJ, ed. "Racism", *Source*, no 30, 1995.

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<sup>9</sup> 2016 LCWR Assembly Resolution: “Grounded in our belief that action on behalf of justice is a constitutive element of the Gospel, we [women religious in the United States] affirm the interrelatedness of the justice concerns addressed by our recent Assembly Resolutions. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, we commit ourselves to examine the root causes of injustice, particularly racism, and our own complicity as congregations, and to work to effect systemic change as we struggle to establish economic justice, abolish modern-day slavery, ensure immigrant rights, promote nonviolence, and protect Earth and its biosphere. We pledge prayer, education, and advocacy and commit to using our collective voice, resources, and power in collaboration with others to establish justice which reflects God’s abundant love and desire that all may have life.”

<sup>10</sup> See Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 50-55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.