

Cornelia Connelly

Her Educational Principles

By

Mother Marie Thérèse
S. H. C. J.



"To see Jesus in each of the children whom we have to train..." Mother Mary Simon at St. Wilfred's Preston, Lancashire — one of Mother Connelly's foundations.

As the ensuing paper was being prepared and read to the Tunbridge Wells Branch of the English Newman Association on 10 January 1960, Holy Child Convents in three continents were busy putting these principles into practice — as our illustrations show. In order to give Parents Associations and others the benefit of the whole text the second half will be published in the Summer issue.

I suppose Cornelia Connelly is one of the more controversial figures of the Nineteenth Century, in which controversial figures abound, especially in Catholic history. To some Catholics she was first the woman "responsible for the greatest scandal of the age," and later a "bold and reckless innovator"; to the clergy, she was a woman who knew her own mind, and stuck to it, a trait which did not always endear her to the leaders of the flock. To the solid Protestant core with whom the family was everything, she was the woman who had, so they believed, committed the unpardon-

able sin of breaking up the home and abandoning husband and children. No accusation was too far-fetched to bring against her; no calumny too unjust or even too grossly fantastic. She died without being vindicated, and the silence which fell around her name outside the Society for nearly thirty years is one of the strangest things in the whole story. Her biography was first published in 1922, admittedly not fully documented, as many episcopal archives were closed against enquirers and the nuns were advised not to try to rake up old scandals. But within the Society, hearts remained for the most part loyal to her memory, and slowly, almost painfully, the truth began to emerge. With the setting-up of the Historical Commission by the present Bishop of Southwark in December 1953, a flood of material has come to light, all of which tends powerfully to confirm the view of Cornelia Connelly as a woman of great ability and greater sanctity.



Luciano Photo Studios
Mission Sunday at Our Lady of Lourdes, New York.
Third Grade "Missionary" and "Handmaid"
teaching the spirit of the Holy Child.

Her educational achievement was very remarkable in an age when educational theory was only just beginning to be thought out, and that on the Continent. In England we were only at the stage of trial and error, particularly as far as girls were concerned. Everybody realised that girls' education was at a very low ebb, but no one had

a clear idea of how to improve matters. Miss Buss of the North London Collegiate School thought the only way was to imitate the curriculum of boys; Miss Beale of Cheltenham believed that the curriculum should be wider. Girls continued almost to the present day to suffer from the combined effects of both these theories. But Mother Connelly had a definite aim in view from the start and principles on which to found her system.

Definite Aim

She states her basic principle in the Rule: "The Society (has) chosen education as a means of gaining souls to God," and elsewhere, "The particular means... will be to strive to see Jesus in each of the children whom they have to train." Note the word *train*, not merely *teach*.

That word indicates the fundamental spirit. It is twice repeated that the "principal work of the Society is thorough Christian instruction and education." That goes for the London street urchin, the West African piccan, or the sophisticated daughters of the upper middle class; and therefore the same thoroughness, the same finish, the same solidity of educational practice applies to each. The Rule gives the ideal and the principle. The practice is clearly stated in the *Book of Studies* which Mother Connelly drew up in 1863, after fifteen years experience in building up a



"...train, not merely teach."
St. Joseph's, Lancaster,
England.

Mother Mary Monica teaching "line by line" at Preston, Lancashire.

school. She probably meant it to be periodically revised and brought up to date as far as syllabuses and textbooks went, but it does not seem to have been altered over the years. Though now most of the practical prescriptions are outmoded, the spirit remains applicable to-day, and in the 'sixties' it must have been revolutionary. In the Preface she describes it as "simply the same sort of guide as a chart is to the traveller. We must *use* it in the same way to assist us in the sweetly laborious duty of education." She then goes on to state another of her fundamental principles. . . "Line by line, and step by step, in all learning and in all virtue, form the whole educational system." And she elaborates elsewhere: "In training and teaching the children, it is absolutely necessary to walk step by step, to teach line by line, to practise virtue little by little, in act after act, and only by such acts of virtue as are suited to the age and stage of moral and intellectual development of those we are guiding."



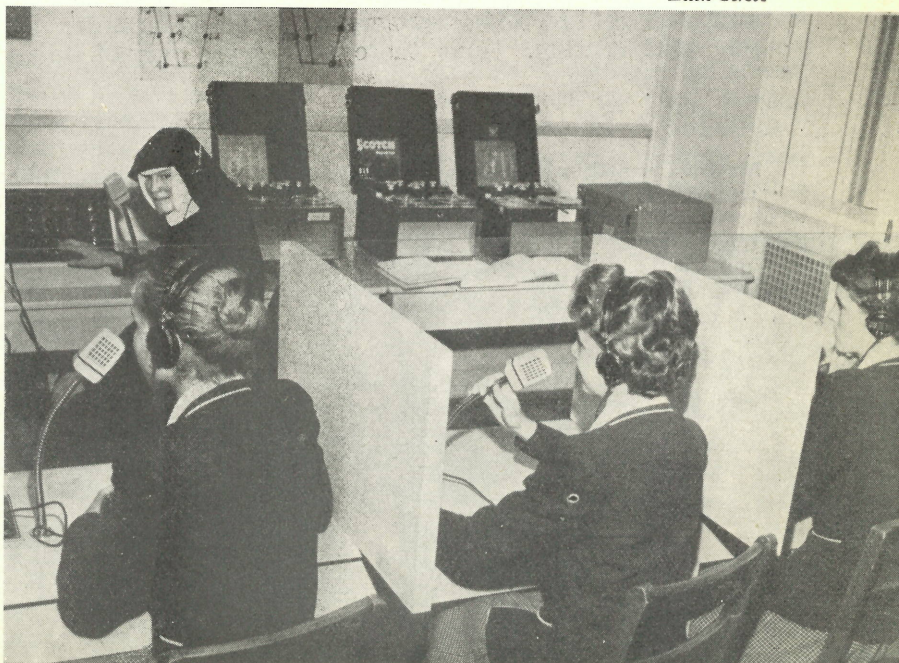
Arthur Winter

Character Training

Here we may notice that she never loses sight of the *moral* aspect of education. Important as the studies were, they were only means to an end, and the end was the training of character. The last of the Rules for the Schools of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus runs thus: "All should diligently, constantly and seriously apply their minds to study. Let them renew their acts of diligence, ennobling their good resolutions, and inciting others to high sentiments of religious promptness in overcoming all inferior and degrading habits of indolence and pusillanimity. Let us not decline from the noble sen-

Elton Sevell

"Meeting the Wants of the Age" in the Language Laboratory. Every incentive to hard work as Mother Mary Emmanuel gives French, German, and Spanish directives to her Fourth Year students at Mayfield, Pasadena, California.



THE PYLON

timents of the children of God." The *acts* of virtue she insists upon represent the progressive training of the *will* which she recognises as the foundation of the "true piety and solid virtue" to which we are lead our children.

Moral training, a phrase which Mother Connelly never uses, means to her simply the conquest of self (passions) and the acquisition of strength of character by repeated acts. The virtues inculcated are above all strong, solid virtues. Words like "diligent", "constant", "serious", "noble" re-appear in all her recommendations in the *Book of Studies*. Self-conquest, self-discipline - it was a spartan regime, morally speaking, and very bracing. "We have to learn to make strong women... who, while they lose nothing of their sweetness and gentleness, should have a masculine force of character and will." "Do not make milksops of the children", she warned the nuns. "By labour the body is strengthened and by study the mind is improved." Self-control must be inculcated as the foundation and the end.

The intellectual content of the *Book of Studies* has been admirably analysed in the *Life*, particularly the 1922 edition. But there are



Tidiness also. The Class President gives a pin "Good Grooming," at Holy Child Academy, Portland, Oregon.

two outstanding features of it that may not have been pointed out. One is the insistence upon *acts* already mentioned, i.e. the use of the *will* upon comparatively trivial matters, such as the observance of the school rules from religious motives. The other point is the appreciation of the influence of *mental* effort on *moral* improvement. We might also add the importance attached to *order*, not in the limited sense only of *tidiness*, but the right

Mother Connelly would have been quite at home in our clay-modelling classes but rather astonished at the Science Laboratory, Holy Child High School, Waukegan, Illinois.





Alf Reynolds

"Cheerful Obedience" is learnt the hard way — when the whistle blows to end evening recreation at St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex.

ordering of things. "It is necessary", says the Rule for mistresses, "to drill all children in the external beauty of order and reverence." Under this head come silence, quietness of movement, avoidance of "clamour and confusion." For this end the children are to be "inspired with a spirit of ready and cheerful obedience and a love of order."

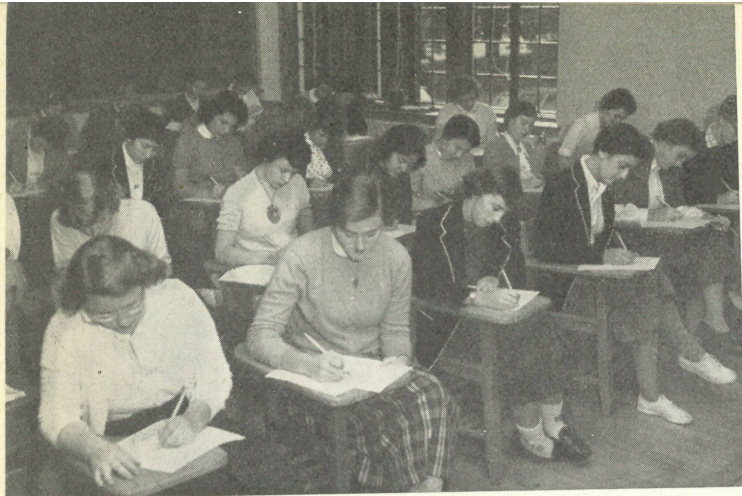
Trust

The part Mother Connelly intended the children to play in the government of the school and the maintenance of discipline should be an admirable training in that true obedience, the obedience which recognises and upholds the dignity and necessity of submission to authority. A sense of personal responsibility is what she wanted to develop, and so she would have authority shared and delegated according to the capacity of the child or the adolescent. Hence of course, a mutual trust — the children must have confidence in the power of the authority delegated to them, and the mistresses confidence in the good faith of the

children — the *honour* to which they, the mistresses, should be able to appeal. Mother Connelly held that children will always respond to trust.

That system is in practice in the schools to-day. The children take a large part in the government of the school on the plan inaugurated by Mother Connelly, of badges for good conduct and leadership, for which the children's votes count largely. To-day in many of the schools the holders of these badges form the School Council, a great help to the Prefect. The hierarchical effect goes down through the school, with the election of what Mother Connelly called the "preceptor" and the "guardian" of each class. She explains that "the Preceptor is the *moral* instrument of the mistress" ... "she shall have the power of the mistress in her absence". The Guardian is "her *material* instrument."

There is the minimum of formal supervision. The children report their own breaches of school discipline, and take the penalty in a sportsmanlike spirit. Strange to say in this age of anti-totalitarianism,



Thomas C. Walsh

At Rosemont College, Pennsylvania, students call at the office for their examination questions and write the papers in unsupervised examination rooms. The system works.

there have been protests or at least criticism of this idea from some of those whom one would have expected to know better. "Why", they say, "should the children be obliged to expose their own guilt?" Such an attitude subscribes to the axiom in English law that you are innocent until you are proved guilty, and that other easy-going modern principle. "It's all right as long as you're not found out." In Mother Connelly's view, and therefore in that of her Society, a thing is objectively right or wrong. Infringement of School rules, is in itself not a moral fault - the fault lies in the disobedience and the lack of responsibility; and the idea of owning up or reporting on oneself is to give the children just that sense of personal responsibility for their own actions which the modern world practically denies. It is a training for later life when a girl will have to take responsibility for her own actions in far graver matters. It is not discipline for discipline's sake, but it is giving discipline a meaning and a moral content.

We might here say that this use of free discipline is far from being the line of least resistance. It does not make the running of the school easier, because it involves the tak-

ing of great risks. There is always the odd child, even the odd class, which does not respond, which abuses the trust shown and the liberties given. When that happens, the discipline of natural consequences takes its own course; the privilege or the liberty is withdrawn, and that may affect more than the delinquent, who thus gets a glimpse into social relationships. This applies both to the school rules and to the studies. As the girls go up the school they are given more and more responsibility for their own

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private study. Lower down the school they are supposed to have acquired those habits of "diligence" to which Mother Connelly attached so much importance; then by degrees, supervision is relaxed until in the Upper Forms girls are given their private study times and assignments, and it is their own responsibility to make good use of them. Again, there are sometimes disappointments, but the chief sufferer is the delinquent herself who probably fails in her examinations.

This may be hard on the School, which may not achieve a glittering chain of scholarships or awards; but those are not the essentials in

a "thorough Christian education". The real successes of the system may be hidden from the world, known only perhaps to God. They are the girls who can stand up for their principles or make sacrifices for what is right. It may be that the nuns themselves never see the result of their efforts; and then they are heartened by their Rule which bids them to have "a patient and persevering zeal. . . which without being discouraged when labour is not crowned with success, continues to sow and water, waiting in patient hope for the increase that God will surely give to those who confide in Him."

(To be continued)

God Alone. An Anthology of the Spiritual Writings of CORNELIA CONNELLY, London, Burns & Oates, Paternoster Series No. 19, 2s.

When Mother Cornelia Connelly's remains were exhumed in 1935 and the actual features of her face 1) were seen by the bystanders they came away saying that they felt as though they had known her in life. Through the pages of this unpretentious little book others may say the same. It is as though one had the privilege of listening to snatches of her conversation with a variety of people - her family, friends and her religious children. From one point of view, this concentrate of her spiritual mind reveals her better than her letters *in extenso*. Here, you are brought face to face with her convert loyalty to the Church, and her thrill of discovery of the blessings of religious life seen across the experience of many happy married years. For her, the Counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are a personal gift: "It was by an act of perfect love that our Lord gave us these *Counsels* to show us how we might try and hope to be perfect" (p. 24). They are "the thrice-blessed road" into the obscurity

where "the Divine Light shines and in this hidden life we are clothed with our coat of mail, that we may be enabled to fight spiritually in the Army of God's Church Militant." (p. 22) The vocabulary gives away her enthusiasm for the things of God, her reverence for the individual's relationship with God upon which she will not intrude, and, above all, her "jubilee of heart which has not been bargained for in this life of accepted suffering" (p. 47).

M.M.U.

Note: 1) There were possibly chemical explanations of this phenomenon.

Cornelia Connelly

Illustrated Booklets

English Edition.

By Mother Mary Eleanor, S.H.C.J.
10 cents or 6d.

Italian Edition.

By Franca Urbani, 50 lire.

French Edition.

By Mother Marie Marthe, S.H.C.J.
(ready May)

German and Spanish Editions
(later).