

- 1878 Jan. 20. Cornelia pronounced in danger of death; received the Last Sacraments.
Jan. 24. She received Holy Viaticum.
- 1879 Jan. 20. Dr. Danell cancelled prohibition of perpetual vows which had been issued by Dr. Grant in 1859.
- 1879 April 14. Cornelia was anointed for the second time in her long illness.
April 16. Cornelia received Holy Viaticum for the last time (Leo XII's Jubilee).
- 1879 April 18. Easter Friday. Cornelia died, leaving a religious congregation which 100 years after her death would be continuing Christ's mission on the continents of Europe, Africa, North and South America.
- 1883 Pierce died in Florence, Italy, having been rector, since 1868, of a Protestant Episcopal Church in Florence, Italy.

"PENETRATED BY AN APOSTOLIC SPIRIT"

Caritas McCarthy, SHCJ

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus has clear emphatic statements from Cornelia Connelly starting as early as 1846 and marking its history at intervals up to the time of her death, that she had founded one of the new "lately approved active orders" as distinct from the "old cloistered orders." Very much influenced by the Jesuits and by her active engagements in the missionary life of the American frontier, she seems to have caught the vision which religious women especially are still trying to implement under the direction of Vatican II:

. . . the entire life of . . . these communities should be penetrated by an apostolic spirit. . . . /They/ should skillfully harmonize their observances and practices with the needs of the apostolate to which they are dedicated. (PC 8)

In Mother Connelly's own time a perceptive canonist, the Abbé Craisson, published a manual of canon law to instruct the new active orders in France because he noted the confusion caused by the application to them of legislation proper only to cloistered religious under solemn vows.¹ She obtained his manual after the Chapter of 1874 and she and other Society superiors were much helped by it.

¹ Des communautés religieuses à voeux simples: législation canonique et civile (1869), pp. ix-x.

But the English bishops under whom the Society lived were not so perceptive of the distinctions regarding the new active orders as was the French abbé. One sees Mother Connelly throughout the 1850's, 60's and 70's attempting outgoing apostolic initiatives only to be set back into a monastic pattern. The ecclesiastics over her were sincerely concerned that her sisters be recognized as "real religious" by the people of her time who knew no other than a monastic pattern; and not to be so recognized was a serious threat to the young Society.

In the summer and fall of 1856 Mother Connelly and her community ventured out of cloister and were firmly returned to it by Bishop Grant:

I am glad you have had your day at Fairlight /a seaside resort near St. Leonards/, as I could not have agreed to it if you had asked for it. Nuns are never allowed to take amusement beyond their own walls, and altho' they may leave them to travel to other houses, for all other purposes they are always on the footing of enclosed Nuns. I am sorry that I cannot hold out any hope that the Church will relax her rules in this particular. (July 2, 1865, D 43:53)

And on September 9, 1856, the bishop returned to the same theme:

I was so much delighted with everything yesterday that I had not the heart to mention my regret that the prohibition against leaving the Convent had been ineffectual, and that

in consequence the newspapers had described that one of the community had narrowly escaped drowning. In my time in Rome a Convent Infirmary fell in and several Sisters who were there against rule, were crushed under the ruins. It is quite certain that the Sisters ought not to go out of the Enclosure except when they travel from one house to another, or when one or two are required to accompany the children in their walk. But even those are not to go into the water or to do more than is necessary to watch over the children.

The rules of the Church respecting Religious are very clear and positive, and if they are not observed, it is necessary to enforce them by severe sanctions.

Your Sisters are such good and faithful children of the Church that I am quite sure you need not do more than tell them that they are not to go beyond their own Garden, to secure full and complete obedience to your words.

They have a good willing spirit, and I am quite confident that they give you many consolations. (D 43:55)

In the next decade the Bishop is still guarding enclosure:

Feb. 9, 1863

I will not object to the singing by the Sisters in the Church, provided first--that they alone occupy the Choir, to the exclusion of every one else, even as spectators, unless some

of the children under their charge could be useful there. Second, that they confine themselves to simple and edifying music all of which is certainly easy. (SHCJ Archives, Rome)

Mother Connelly was gradually learning that Bishop Grant, with less apostolic perceptiveness than she, was guarding not just physical enclosure for nuns, but an "enclosed" education reaching back to the monastic, and since the 17th century, to the Jansenist past and drawing students into its pattern. The following letters show how little understood or approved was her wholesome apostolic approach to "the life in the world for Christ" for which she was preparing most of her students.

/Bp. Grant to C.C./ Confid.

Enquire prudently as it is said that in one of your houses (either St. L. or Harley St.) the pupils have been taught to waltz and dance the polka as well as to play Whist.

If you discover this to be true, stop it quietly.

/In C.C.'s hand:/

Red Dec. 14th

1865

(D 42:36)

Dec. 15, 1865

Rev. M. Sup /C.C./

. . . I do not think the Cards in Vacation time, provided the Sisters merely watch & restrict the Stakes, can be objectionable.

But as the Archbishop of Dublin has

made waltzing a reserved case in his Diocese & good Protestants refuse to waltz, make sure that it is not done in your Houses.

Blessing all

T. Grant (D 42:37)

Since she was preparing her religious for the apostolate in the world, it had never occurred to Mother Connelly to lock the noviceship doors. Bishop Danell's rule prescribed this; Mother Theophila Laprimaudaye reported that "it first seemed contrary to our spirit." The sequel to this story reveals the response which Mother Connelly consistently gave throughout all the misunderstandings and setbacks to the apostolic way of life in which she was endeavoring to form her community:

It is in accordance with the spirit and wish of the Church and that's enough. (D 71:38)

She also said repeatedly:

Unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

(D 78:17)

She had penetrated the mystery of redemption and she knew that for the apostolic vitality of her Society she must pursue her apostolic initiative in faith and in sacrifice.

Her total identification with the mind of the Church as expressed through ecclesiastical superiors seems never to have dampened the irrepressible spontaneity of Mother Connelly's sisters, for the bishops were ever

discovering the sisters at variance with the expected monastic pattern.

/C.C. to Danell, 1874/ I heard indirectly last week that your Lordship did not like our Sisters going out in the Pony trap, which we have used occasionally during the last two years.--If this is correct, we shall part with it immediately,--yes, or no will be sufficient.

/In Bp. Danell's hand at the bottom of the letter/

Answer

I am pleased with your promised obedience to my strong wish that it should not be used for the future.

(CC 17:6)

Regarding the matter of receiving and training future apostles without the dower which had become so fixed a practice in a monastic situation, Cornelia seems to display fully her perceptiveness of the true nature of the newer apostolic congregations, and of the need for adaptation. It is here that she shows her greatest conviction regarding the exigencies of the apostolate: that security lay in following the Lord, that a dower for the apostolate lay in other things besides money; here she had constantly to represent her case to an unwilling bishop.

/C.C. to Grant, Sept. 9, 1860/

I should be very glad if we had thirty to offer your Lordship for vows instead of three, and I should willingly take the responsibility of their old age though in all probability they

would never reach it. . . . I wish you wld remember My Lord that we only want to labor for our support as mendicant orders beg, and above all as Our Blessed Lord himself laboured for thirty years. If we sink into making a provision for our support, not imitating Our Blessed Lord, we shall not be blessed. . . . Now my Lord will you be generous & consent to our taking our own considering it as a debt, which we shall pay back to the Community! (CC 12:25)

/C.C. to Grant, Mar. 25, 1861/

The responsibility of rejecting valuable vocations like these, some of which have been trained by us for seven years, is no trifle-- Neither does it seem according to reason & justice - The dowered untrained vocations we have to begin to educate, while these have in themselves a rich dower - It is you my Lord who are not to fail in sustaining the good you have done & that you still have to do with us. (CC 12:72)

July 18, 1867. . . . I wish with all my heart I had 500 to take over to America this year--Ah my Lord if you only knew the wants of a vast & new country your heart would warm with zeal for the souls of the poor children in utter ignorance of the true faith - There religious are valued for their works and they need no dower. . . . Do not fear

the need of Dower my Lord, with those who can command none; while the missions are begging for Sisters we have none to spare.

(CC 14:52)

Mother Connelly's ardent pleas regarding the dower reveal her insight into the larger area of the whole matter of financial security--or, to some extent, of insecurity--which was characteristic of the "new active orders." The bishops were more familiar with, and felt safer with the assured financial security--usually through dowers and endowments--which the Church had consistently sought for cloistered monasteries especially of women, who did not work for their living. She was pleading for the thrust of the future for congregations like hers when she wrote: "We only want to labour for our support, . . . above all as Our Blessed Lord himself laboured If we sink into making a provision for our support, not imitating Our Blessed Lord, we shall not be blessed"(CC 12:25).

"Imitating Our Blessed Lord," "having the mind of Christ Jesus," sharing through total self-dedication in his redemptive mission through the Church--these were the wellsprings whence Mother Connelly's apostolic insights and initiatives came. Courage, spontaneity, creativity, enterprise, flexibility, sensitivity to her times and to the Spirit speaking in them--these she retained and deepened even as she grew in that creative love which is total, free obedience to the Lord in his Church. From these same springs her sisters today draw the renewal of their apostolic vitality in Christ and in his Church. □

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The Christian is called in each age to express a new credo. This is a new person, supporting and supported by new relationships, possessed of a new understanding of the structure of reality. Fresh articulations of truth provide new frames of reference in which today's reflective person lives and knows and loves. Thus, transsignification shows that in the Eucharist Jesus is present for the person who will receive his Body, for the community which is becoming his Body.

Process theology lights up the flow of present reality, that river made up of drops of human experience. The river bed is not the river, although its course serves as a useful guide. But the direction can change. The reality of the river, too, its content flowing past a given point at a given time, is constantly renewing itself. Except for the occasional uprooted tree or bit of jetsam carried along by its enthusiastic surge, the river flowing past point X today is generally similar in content and substance to what flowed past yesterday, but it is totally new in its constituent elements. One correlative of process theology when applied to the Christian life holds that a commitment must be renewed continuously. The unexamined life is unacceptable. The form of the evangelical life, to be congruent with the gospel and the basic beliefs of persons living it, calls for renewal of the elements of human experience which constitute it.

There abound scriptural references which undergird the universal invitation to holiness extended in Lumen Gentium, but specific citations from scripture referring to what we