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CORNELIA CONNELLY'S WORK IN 364 EDUCATION  
1848-1879 (vols 1 & 11)  
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PH.D 1984  
UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS INTERNATIONAL  
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#### CHAPTER 10

##### CORNELIA CONNELLY'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Much of Cornelia Connelly's thinking began from a religious level. This is especially true of her approach to education. Her attitude to children, her ideas on girls' curriculum and on an appropriate school society all came from her understanding of the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. Given the theological climate of the nineteenth century this is remarkable. In this chapter her thought is followed from its roots to its full flowering in an education philosophy.

In theology the great movements of the day were basic. Schleiermacher and Hegel had raised fundamental questions about the possibility of religion, echoed in England by Coleridge who saw Christianity as primarily ethical.<sup>1</sup> It was especially Strauss who introduced the second stage of fundamental studies which concentrated on the possibility of christology, with major writers like Feuerbach and Kierkegaard causing reactions among English Protestant writers.<sup>2</sup> The Oxford Movement, while it produced many works on the nature of the church did not immediately concern itself with christology, though the influential work of H.P. Liddon as a late contribution is not to be overlooked.<sup>3</sup> Certainly the nineteenth century was a fertile era for Protestant theology, but the basic questions which were being discussed did not seem to provide an ideal base for the construction of a theology of education. By contrast Catholic studies took a line of their own. Denied the use of the historical and critical

methodologies, the theologians eventually turned to a revival of the thirteenth century scholasticism especially associated with Thomas Aquinas. The early writers in this movement were Matteo Liberatore and Joseph Kleutgen, and although there were other writers with different approaches like de Maistre, Bonald and de Lamennais in France, and M hler at T bingen, scholasticism eventually became dominant. Between 1855 and 1866 when Cornelia was at the height of her constructive work, there were many interventions by Rome to condemn a variety of theological ideas, traditionalism, ontologism, G rther's dualism and Frohschammer's rationalism. The restoration of Thomism was in part made possible in Catholic circles by the crushing of other systems of theology.<sup>4</sup> While this destructive process was taking place there was little in the theology of the day to encourage a nun seeking a deep religious basis for a vocation in education. The one figure in England who bridged the religious divide was Newman, and his theology was not based upon any single tradition but on a deep and extensive reading of the Fathers of the Church.

There is no suggestion that Cornelia was in any way a patristic scholar. But she had benefited greatly from the work of Ventura, and did know something of the Fathers. Her knowledge of scripture was wide and had been realized and activated through prayer; her spirituality was based upon the great classical writers, and this gave her a christology which was quite independent of any of the contemporary controversies. All this has been detailed in the second chapter, and is further illustrated by the catalogue of the authors which she used in an appendix. Equally important was the actual point of departure for her thinking. Many Christians had approached education from a religious position. Often the starting point was the doctrine of original sin, which was in

part responsible for the strain of deep pessimism in Victorian literature, evidenced in the works of Matthew Arnold, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy which followed either a loss of faith or a joyless outlook on Christianity.

In contemporary literature the figure of the child very often occurred in situations associated with discussion of the fall of man and the brevity of life. All this was a tradition which smacked of the Calvinism of the sixteenth century, and had often given rise to an oppressive form of education. Rousseau had reacted against this to the wildly simplistic view that "everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man". He transferred original sin from the child to society. Any theory of education starting immediately from the child was likely to be torn between the optimism of Rousseau and the Calvinism of many writers. Rousseau's Émile was widely influential, but would not easily be reconciled with the classical teaching on either the Incarnation or the Redemption. In France the tradition of Rousseau was carried into public education by Condorcet and Jules Ferry. In a speech 19 April 1870 Ferry committed his life to this belief in the perfectability of mankind. He said that we shall be truly emancipated:-

when humanity appears to us, no longer a fallen race stricken with Original Sin ... but as an endless procession striding on towards the light; then we feel ourselves part of the great Being which cannot perish, Humanity, continually redeemed, developing, improving; then we have won our liberty, for we are free from the fear of death.

It was not an outlook which the Fathers of the Church would have recognised as Christian, and it is doubtful whether it had a lot to offer to education.

The point of departure for Cornelia Connelly was not original sin, but was expressed in the title of her society, the Christ child. This provided a beginning which was basically very optimistic, and yet in view of the doctrine of the Redemption one which did not take an unrealistic view of life. It began first with Christ the object of religious worship, and the motivation of the teachers was to serve him specifically by working for his children. So the pupil was seen first and foremost as a child of God and through the saving grace of Christ an heir to the kingdom of heaven. The vision of Christ also provided the answer to the question of human existence, and so to the ultimate purpose of education. This outlook did not deny the fact of sin and the possibilities of evil inclinations in the pupils, as well as within society at large, but it did provide a first basis which was full of hope and promise. It provided a deep motive for the respect for the individual which characterized the teaching of the Society H.C.J., and also for the policy of working to develop the talents of each person rather than of implementing some abstract curriculum. One of Cornelia Connelly's dicta was: "Be yourself, but make that self just what our Lord wants it to be".<sup>7</sup> On one occasion she sent a water colour to the novitiate with instructions for it to be copied by everyone. Some of the novices had never held a paint-brush, and there were protests. Her reply was "We must seek for hidden talent".<sup>9</sup> A part of her education philosophy was that God had given talents to the pupils; the teachers had to find them; an encouraging outlook. According to Sister Berchmans, who died in 1904, her three mottoes were CCC, Courage, Confidence and Cheerfulness, and she acted on the principle of encouraging any talent she could find.<sup>10</sup> This attitude sprang from her devotion to Christ as the Holy Child, and a respect for others as children of God.

As the point of departure for Cornelia was the Christ child, her philosophy is basically a child centred one, but differs from Froebel and Pestalozzi. There was no suggestion that the child would determine the content of the curriculum, but because of respect for the individual the curriculum in The Book of Studies is open to wider development, and as the examples of students' work has shown there was no question of restriction; her philosophy was that all things were possible. Her emphasis on activity methods as shown in her approach to the learning of reading was based upon her own experience as a mother, rather than on a theological or philosophical premise, but in a general sense it was a recognition of the needs of the individual, and so child centred. Unlike Rousseau she did not propose to restrict reading to a stage when sense activities had all been developed, but she integrated the learning of reading and writing, and with considerable use of activities to assist in sustaining interest for the young. But the most basic conclusion which she drew from her starting point was that of the respect due to the child, and by children to each other. This determined the ethos of the schools.

Teacher attitudes were founded upon this before all else. From the start the novices were trained in this outlook which in terms of spirituality was especially characteristic of St Francis de Sales, and although there is no direct reference to him, the Salesian influence is certainly to be found in both The Rule and The Book of Studies. Characteristic injunctions are:-

The Mistresses shall at all times strive to gain the hearts of their pupils to the love and imitation of the Holy Child Jesus by the practice of humility, sweetness, gentleness and love.

Let them generally lead their pupils by love rather than fear. The pupils must be watched over and spoken to with great sweetness and charity, the



Mistresses thus fulfilling the office of guardian angels. In dealing with offences against the rules of the school, the Prefect is advised to do what she has to do in the spirit of lenity and charity.<sup>11</sup>

Cornelia wrote to a sister suffering from discouragement in 1877 on this theme.

If I have never seen them, it is always the same. That they may learn the joy of loving the God who died for us and of being happy in the Convent where He dwells in His most loving form of Holy Childhood. Stiffness and rigour will not bring forth love, and these are not the spirit of the Holy Child. But pains-taking for the eagerness of love will always bring forth delicious fruit.<sup>12</sup>

The devotion to the Holy Child was the basis in the Society for Christian optimism, and for attitudes to the pupils. It was a first guide as to how pupils should be treated, and even of what subjects were appropriate for the curriculum.

The curriculum for middle class girls in Victorian England lacked all guidelines. The findings of the Schools Inquiry of 1864-67 revealed the sad state of chaos which passed for girls' education, and showed the lack of direction and of competent teachers. Miss Buss and Miss Beale met the situation by attempting to do anything which the boys' schools were teaching. This did not imply a solid philosophy of the curriculum, but only raised basic questions about the coherence of the work done in boys' schools and colleges. As late as 1867 Charles Kingsley was commenting; "British lads, on an average, are far too ill-taught still, in spite of all recent improvements, for me to wish that British girls should be taught in the same way".<sup>13</sup> To bring subjects into a curriculum on these grounds might be a bid for female equality, but it was certainly no way to construct a curriculum.

By contrast Cornelia Connelly had a philosophy of the curriculum. The prime concern was the development of the individual. She saw this as essentially moral and intellectual together; one without the other was a distortion. Intellectual development required the growth of the powers both of understanding and of expression, and again to develop one and not the other was false. She thus established a general arts programme in which reading and writing, learnt simultaneously (which was not always the case at the time) developed naturally into literature, elocution, drama and music. According to her philosophy there was another mode of expression, even more international than reading and writing, to be found in the wide field of art. So she insisted on this as an integral part of the curriculum as it demanded both careful observation and understanding as well as skills of expression. In her thinking art was so important that it included geometry, map making, and geology, and associated with the school drama in the making of scenery. It was regarded both as an integral part of education, and also as a relaxation so that it often came at the end of a day's work.

As the aim was personal development there was considerable variety in the range of subjects which some pupils studied. Some of the more gifted eventually studied classics in both Latin and Greek, and one or two the gospel of St John in Greek; for sixth formers there were considerable courses in architecture, the history of art and of music, some philosophy of history and a little logic. The literary studies included classics from these and some European languages at least in translation, so that a pupil who had completed a full course at St Leonards would have an outline knowledge of classical literature and some acquaintance with the literature of France and Italy; while English literature ranged from Chaucer to Macaulay. The accumulated experience of the school theatre

would also have included plays in both French and Italian with a wide variety of English drama.

Music too was seen in terms of personal development, but this subject had a special place because of its part in the liturgy and in the devotional life of the school, which was on a daily basis and not just a matter of Sunday worship. It was encouraged both in school choirs for recreation, school concerts and liturgy. Instrumental music, mostly piano at first, was an extra, and was supported by a succession of music masters, mostly foreigners. It was prized for the contribution which it made to the happiness of the school. In Cornelia's philosophy a happy school was necessary for good learning. In 1869 she wrote to Mother Xavier Noble at Sharon in America to give an account of the visit of Father Carter who was helping the development of the SHCJ there. At the end of a long seven page letter she concluded; "After we had had a long talk, I said it was of great consequence to make people happy and that they would always succeed the better for being happy".<sup>14</sup> The underlining was characteristic: so too was the philosophy. It was for this reason that she was prepared to run the risk both of ecclesiastical censure and Victorian disapproval by allowing card playing, dancing and sea bathing in her schools.

The curriculum also included mathematics, needlework, some domestic science, and, while science in general might seem absent from The Book of Studies, there was actually more done than it would suggest. The reason for this was the way in which the art programme had developed. In The Book of Studies it is inaccurately described as drawing, while in actual fact it was a very full scale study of art in various forms which included painting, both water colour and oils, tapestry work, principles of



perspective and illumination. It was perhaps the question of perspective which led Cornelia to include geometry with art and to allow the two to develop a study of architecture. In a similar fashion maps were regarded as an art form so that the geography in the school became closely involved with art. The final development was to include some natural history, astronomy and geology. There are sufficient surviving examples of pupils' work in these fields to demonstrate that The Book of Studies is only an outline, and that some pupils did achieve impressive standards. The inspector Marshall, a Catholic convert, was delighted to find geology studied at St Leonards, and commented upon the fact.<sup>15</sup> Bishops might have been less encouraging, but seemingly never noticed its place in the school curriculum. The strength of this art programme is highly unusual if not unique at this time. One of the great formative influences upon Cornelia's own development had been The Spiritual Exercises, which have been considered in the second chapter. These eschewed abstractions and started from graphic gospel scenes of which the retreatant was directed to make a "composition of place". Others might meditate on truth, justice and Divine beauty; those who followed the paths of Ignatian spirituality looked into the cave at Bethlehem, watched the Master call his apostles, wept at Calvary and pictured for themselves the last judgement. This graphic and visual approach appealed to Cornelia, became a part of her spirituality and inspired her approach to art which was seen as having a deeply religious nature. Her application of Ignatian spirituality to education in this field would seem to have gone further than the traditions of the Jesuit schools had taken it, and is probably an original contribution made by Cornelia. One of the many effects was to establish a link between religious studies and art and create another centripetal force within the curriculum.

The programme of basic religious studies began with the basic diocesan catechism, but even here Cornelia showed independence in using a number of texts written by non-Catholics for the youngest children. If noticed this was very likely to attract ecclesiastical censure, but because of her insistence on texts suitable to the child Cornelia was willing to take the risk. So there was in use David Blair's First or Mother's catechisms and Mortimer's The Peep of Day. The dryness of the diocesan catechisms was relieved by considerable use of pictures. Once the girls reached middle juniors there was a start made in both bible and ecclesiastical history. Later the English catechisms were replaced by some of the larger French catechisms as the pupils had progressed enough to be able to handle these texts usefully in French. Ecclesiastical history was a major part of the religious studies, and Cornelia stressed that the bad example of Judas was as important a lesson as the good work done by the saints, and that the pupils were to know of both. Although religious studies obviously had a very important place in the curriculum, it was never considered that good teaching of religion was enough in itself. Dorothea Beale contrasted the approaches of Froebel and Rosmini. "Froebel's religious teaching is very beautiful, but he brings out less clearly than Rosmini the priority of the personal: if Nature speaks to a child of the All-Father, it is because he knows that all has come to him through persons".<sup>16</sup> Although Cornelia's copy of Rosmini remained with the pages uncut, she certainly agreed with this principle, and concluded that not only did true religious teaching involve knowledge of persons, but it also demanded a personal response if it was to be genuine. So the curriculum here was not concerned so much with religious knowledge but with formation. Again it was the outlook of The Spiritual Exercises. This called for a response on the part of the pupils to the mysteries of

the Incarnation and Redemption.

For Froebel everything has an outer and an inner aspect, and is a symbol of a hidden spirit; all things share a single inner unity because they manifest the single spirit of God. True knowledge is to be found by seeing through to this unity of spirit, and the natural sciences and mathematics greatly assist in this vision. Cornelia is probably closer in her educational philosophy to Froebel than to Rousseau or Pestalozzi, but she is far more christocentric than any of them. The vision of reality was Christ, who revealed God in human form, and because of his Redemption the whole of reality was sacramental. This meant that all was seen in relation to the saving work of Christ; created nature not only spoke of God but related to Christ. And true education was to be based upon this vision, and followed the principle of using the concrete to reveal the spirit. This gave Cornelia a very confident and open attitude to teaching. In the archives SHCJ are notes given by an old sister in 1916 who could look back to the earliest days of the Society and to Cornelia's leadership, with sufficient distance to begin to assess her qualities.

Rev. Mother Foundress was not only up to date in the Catholic World, but in advance of date. Higher studies, best books, needlework, machines, even sculpturing statues - "We never know what we can do till we try" - "Perseverance gains the crown". Her bright encouraging spirit - every little effort (counts) etc. The energy of the sisters over work was most striking, and had to be checked.<sup>17</sup>

The quotations from Cornelia suggest the quality of her leadership, but it is only the conjunction of her spirituality and her educational philosophy which reveals its source.

The curriculum was based upon a recognition of what was worthy of

the children of God, a basic outlook which gave her teaching a strongly intellectual slant against the prevailing stress of the day upon memory work. So in 1858 she wrote to Marshall:

Cultivating the understanding and the judgement rather than the memory has been the first point upon which instructions have turned during the past two years. I do not mean that the memory has not been cultivated, but simply it has held a subservient position to the understanding and the judgement.<sup>18</sup>

Cornelia was writing of policy and theory in the training college at St Leonards, but she was also expressing her own philosophy which governed the method in The Book of Studies. She saw this as true to the nature of the human person and appropriate to the dignity of the pupil as a child of God. It was in the light of her theology stemming from the contemplation of Christ Child that she saw it as a duty of the teacher to make children happy. It was not just that happy children work better but rather that love was creative, and all was to be seen in the light of Christ, who was the love of God made visible. He provided the pattern for the person, the school and society at large. So in school the shared recreation of pupils and teacher which could have been a matter of strict surveillance was in the recollections of past pupils a matter of delight. One of the alumnae of the first SHCJ American school at Towanda gave an account of the various studies and concluded; "Our daily recreations were joyful and exhilarating events sponsored by one of the sisters".<sup>19</sup> Others, it will be recalled, remembered Cornelia dancing round a room with a pupil to a waltz tune. All the evidence points to remarkably happy schools, notably free from the blight of the Victorian Sunday, and stern injunctions that children were to be seen and not heard. It was a society designed for children.

There is an obvious danger of a children's society degenerating into sentimentality and softness. The corrective here was the realistic vision of a mother, and Cornelia's theology of the Redemption. Both intellectual and moral effort was required of the pupil. Cornelia is remembered as saying: "Do not make milksops of your children; labour strengthens the body and study the mind".<sup>20</sup> A very early entry in one of her notebooks, about 1843, reveals her mind in respect of the response required by God.

True liberty is that of the children of God: it consists in commanding the inclinations of the heart, in raising itself above all human fear and in walking with agility in accordance with the precepts of God.<sup>21</sup>

The purpose of the Incarnation was to restore union between man and God, and through God's mercy that restoration was made by the mystery of our Redemption. The vocation of the sisters in the Society H CJ was to share in the merciful work of God, in the redeeming office of teaching in the church. This idea of vocation was strongly fostered in The Spiritual Exercises where the retreatant is asked to make a choice between the following of Christ and other paths in life, and after this "election" to seek through prayer to find a precise vocation within the divine plan. This would mean giving a priority to following the leadings of grace and often involved considerable renunciation of natural desires. In a Puritan or Jansenistic sense this could lead to a joyless outlook, but from her own experience Cornelia was able to write of "this jubilee of heart ... not bargained for in this life of accepted suffering". A part of the school life consisted in initiating the pupils into this mystery of the Cross, and so in encouraging them to gain some experience of the truths by which the nuns lived. This was a far more subtle matter than mere instruction, and it raised the questions of the conditions in which



real moral education could best take place.

Rousseau considered that all a child needed was protection from the corrupting influence of society; Cornelia was both mother and Christian enough to believe in sin, and her outlook was more realistic. The comments in the school reports show that the pupils were a very normal mixture with some who were lazy, others bad tempered, rude or disobedient. This was a situation which called for redemption. In Cornelia's theology the sisters were called to mediate God's grace in the particular circumstances of the school. It would involve suffering and sacrifice, but this was not only the cost of following Christ in this vocation, but also a part of the process of gracing the pupils. Within the Christian tradition various reactions had followed a consideration of the needs of the young. Luther concluded that since the young did not possess conscience they required discipline.<sup>22</sup> And many a school master had turned quickly to the biblical injunction "Spare the rod and spoil the child" without looking for any further suggestions from Holy Scripture. From the start Cornelia was strongly against corporal punishment, and this was eventually written into The Book of Studies. The transfer of moral values was to be achieved in a very different way.

The school society was to set values and uplift the pupil. Many things were to contribute to moral formation, an attitude of trust by the teachers, a shared religious life, the confraternities, the school theatre and the religious life: all contributed. Cornelia's basic philosophy here was constructive, and by the standards of the time she did not produce many school rules. One of the sisters writing her life in French summarized her attitude.

She did not seek to subdue but to direct, not to break but to develop, and to the youth overflowing

with life, who surrounded her she did not urge living less but living more.<sup>23</sup>

"Be yourself, but make yourself all that God wants you to be" was her challenging saying which suggested the channelling of energies to a divine purpose. This was the psychology of The Spiritual Exercises with a stress on the positive, which might call for mortification and sacrifice in the achievement, but which was fundamentally a very positive outlook and therefore more capable of attracting the heart. To communicate it in school was an overall responsibility of staff. It was something which school spirit and life might achieve when a lesson might not. Cornelia gave unusual freedom to the pupils, who were not spied upon but were themselves responsible for their own observance of school rules. This was very unusual, and commented upon by some French girls at St Leonards. It was also a part of the criticism which Stokes had levelled at the training college; the students were not closely supervised. Despite the criticism Cornelia strove to maintain this approach to moral training based upon self motivation. Towards the end of her life she spoke of "pains-taking for the eagerness of love" in the service of God. This was the vision she sought to give her pupils, and because of the very unusual circumstances of her own life she could speak with great conviction.

It has been suggested that moral education is impossible without the habitual vision of greatness.<sup>24</sup> The vision offered to the pupils was above all that of Christ, a vision which was to be seen reflected in the lives of the saints. This was both part of the religious instruction in class and also part of the devotional life of the school in chapel. The vision was reinforced by the lives of the nuns. Sister Christina, Coventry Patmore's daughter, is an example which has been quoted already.

The power of the example is illustrated by the steady supply of vocations which the Society received from its schools, indicating that the nuns were both liked and admired. In a closely shared life pupil and teacher knew each other well, and there was ample opportunity for the young to see how genuine the sisters were in their vocation. From watching Mother Connelly in church many pupils concluded that she was a saint, and former pupils spoke of the help she was able to give.

When I was at school at St Leonards at the age of 12, I had a big sorrow. I lost a small sister of three that I loved very dearly. I fretted a good deal, till one day I met Mother Connelly in the garden. She called me and asked me about my little sister, and I soon found myself chatting freely to her about the child's beauty and charming little ways. Then Mother Connelly told me in a gentle loving way that our Lord loved her far more than I did, and that He had taken her away to make quite sure that she would be with Him in Heaven for all eternity, and that He did not want her to be hurt or spoiled by any of the ugly stains of the world. Then she drew a lovely picture of how happy she was with our Lord. I was quite comforted and never forgot her words.<sup>25</sup>

There is a suggestion here of Cornelia combining her moral vision with an outlook of beauty, speaking of some of the ugliness of the world and the lovely picture of heaven.

The role of the school theatre in moral training has already been treated in the appropriate chapter, together with the reply of Cornelia to the sisters who thought that the plays were disturbing the girls and causing them to have airs and graces. Cornelia argued that the theatre presented a useful forum for moral training, and various accounts from the pupils themselves support the validity of this judgement. The plays also often served to present high ideals and noble sentiments which could easily be lost in a classroom situation. The Jesuits had been the first to use the theatre as an instrument of education, and there is considerable

evidence that even in the sixteenth century they were beginning to appreciate the different contributions a theatre could make to the life of a school.<sup>26</sup> Certainly the Holy Child theatre, though not treated in The Book of Studies, became an integral part of the system of Cornelia Connelly, and its value for moral training was recognised.

Another major factor in religious formation was the role which the various sodalities played in the life of the schools. It is hard to overestimate their influence. The school confraternities, begun by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, represented the most significant attempt of a religious community to share its spiritual life with others. It provided a valuable forum, other than the classroom for an exchange of ideals and for the practice of common religious exercises. Works of charity were done together, and there was the stimulus of a shared experience. They provided a channel through which the lives of the saints could be popularized, so reinforcing the vision of greatness necessary for spiritual development. Some of the lives were of people who in the past had belonged to the same confraternity, and this tended to create something of an esprit de corps. The celebrations of saints' days then became something of a family occasion. It is evidence of the importance of the sodalities in the eyes of the pupils that alumnae often continued to sign themselves e. de M., enfant de Marie, and still regarded themselves as members of the Children of Mary sodality. It was obviously appropriate that in a Catholic school the leading society should be a strongly religious one, and in Victorian days, and for many years afterwards, the sodalities certainly fulfilled this role. They provided considerable backing and support for Cornelia's policy of trusting the pupils, placing them on their honour and leaving them with no close supervision. The resulting self discipline was perhaps the most valuable

training which a school could give.

Because of the presence and acceptance of religious ideas and ideals it was possible to do things with pupils which in other circumstances might have been dangerous to them, emotionally upsetting or unacceptable to their parents. One year just before the summer holidays it became clear that Sister Mary Agnes was dying. Some of the pupils wished to see her, and then had second thoughts feeling that the request would be regarded as madness. But Cornelia knew of their affection for the sister, and unexpectedly sent a message that if the senior Children of Mary wished, they might be taken to say goodbye to Sister Mary Agnes. An eye witness wrote of the occasion later.

I was one of the privileged four, and recall, after over fifty years, every detail of those five minutes which have ever been remembered among the most impressive of my life! It was past 9 o'clock. Mother (Cornelia) met us outside the Infirmary door, and said that Sister was pleased and wished to see us, but we must go to her separately and only stay a minute or two; that it was a great grace to see one who would so soon be with God, and that we should ask her to pray in Heaven for us that we might always remain God's good children, and do God's holy will. It was all so mysterious, and yet so real - it was something I had never come in contact with before - death! - and without any attractive surroundings, it was beautiful, and there was a peace unfelt before, as kneeling by her bed, her hand rested on my head. I forget now what I said to her, but she said in a low whisper to me, "I think the Holy Child will have you for Himself". She seemed so calm and happy, asked me to pray for her, and then made me a sign to go and kneel at the window opposite her bed, which looked down into the Chapel and faced the Altar. There was not a sound to be heard. All the lights were out, save the Sanctuary Lamp, and one lighted at the feet of a lovely ivory crucifix which stood on an Altar prepared for our Lord's visit to her in Holy Communion, the following morning. In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament a faithful soul awaited the Heavenly Bridegroom.<sup>27</sup>

The two Christian mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption provided



the basic structure for Cornelia Connelly's educational thinking. From these she drew an understanding of what was appropriate for the curriculum for girls, with its strong stress upon art. They were children of God, to be treated with reverence, and lovingly educated. To do so was an act of divine mercy, and a vocation which shared in the redeeming work of Christ. The optimistic and happy outlook derived from the primacy given to Christ and signified in the title of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Reverence as a primary attitude to children had been stressed by some of the Renaissance humanists and was characteristic of Erasmus's philosophy.<sup>28</sup> But Erasmus insisted that a student's mind should be treated with respect as a God-created thing. Cornelia had a christological basis which provided for an even deeper philosophy as it takes the thought into the heart of the Christian mystery. By contemplating the love of God incarnate in Christ the sisters were to find the source of the love which they were to expend upon the pupils. And like Christ's love to death on a cross, the vocation of the nuns was sacrificial, and was to mediate the mercy of God no matter what the cost to themselves. In a letter to the nuns in Blackpool, perhaps in 1857, she offered points for meditation during Lent.

2ndly Let us as a continuance of the points ... encourage ourselves with the remembrance of our high calling, which Our Lord has so particularly blessed that He promises, that we shall shine as stars. Let us ask ourselves whether we trample upon all inferior motives in fulfilling our duty to our children. Have we endeavoured to form them according to our Divine Model. Have we represented Him in our conduct to them? Have we led them to that union of prayer which must secure their virtuous and pious resolutions? Such as we are such will be our children.

3rdly ... The more we love God the more perfectly we shall be in the joy and liberty of His children ... forgetting ourselves and rejoicing in Him. We must take the joyful song of the lark soaring high in the heavens as a resemblance of our recreation joy, and his

descent into the hollow of the grass to build his nest, as a picture of our silent humility out of recreation. That is of what we wish and aim at.<sup>29</sup>

The phrase from Daniel "The learned will shine as brightly as the vaults of heaven, and those who have instructed many in virtue, as bright as stars for all eternity" was one which Cornelia had entered into her notebook early in life, and which was a favourite among teachers.<sup>30</sup> But the mediation is not centred upon the reward but the model for education which Cornelia finds in Christ.

As a final insight into Cornelia's philosophy of education, it is possible to consider the recollection of one of the early pupils at St Leonards, Catherine Harper, who afterwards became a Sister of Charity. Looking back later in life she was able to identify some of the elements which made the school so outstanding, and the significant leadership of Cornelia.

She had great sympathy for children and did not try to force upon them wisdom beyond their years. We all loved her and thought her very holy, and would consider ourselves honoured by a smile and a few words from her. Often I came in for rebukes for bad behaviour, and at these times she could be very stern. But the general atmosphere of St Leonards was one of joy and contentment. There was no spying on the part of the nuns, but we were greatly trusted, and trained to a high sense of honour ... a method that completely achieved its end. There was a sense of freedom and broadmindedness about the school that was delightful. Our lives were made happy by numerous little treats and customs on different occasions, to which we looked forward eagerly. On Holy Innocents' Day we dressed up as nuns ... the best part of this was that we were allowed to go all over the convent and mix with the nuns. On another Feast Day, we had to hunt for our breakfast, which was hidden somewhere in the grounds. At other times, we had long walks or picnics, which were pure joy.

With all this gaiety and fun, there was mingled a most attractive spirit of piety. Our dear Lord and His Mother, our Guardian Angels and the Saints were mixed up with our daily life in a happy and loving spirit, which

never made devotion tedious or distasteful. We were supplied with motives which raised our obedience to the school regulations on to a high plane. I have never forgotten how we were taught to keep silence as we went two by two to the chapel, so that we might be asking our Angel Guardians to prepare our hearts to appear before Our Lord. Again, we were taught to rise promptly in the morning by being reminded that our good Angel was waiting for this first act that he might present it as a morning gift to Our Lord.

Reverend Mother loved the liturgy of the Church, and had the gift of spreading this love among us. We were taught to sing Vespers, and every Saturday we all assembled with our Missal and Vesper book to find and mark the place for the next day, the elder girls helping the younger ones.

As I grew older, and began to reflect upon all that I saw, I was struck with the religious spirit among the nuns. They were so unworldly although their duties brought them much into contact with the world, and after more than sixty years they still stand out in my mind as examples of simplicity, generosity, and kindness. Reverend Mother had a very masterful character and a wonderful love of God and great power over others. I thought she showed great good sense in educational matters. She seemed able to imbue all the nuns with her own zeal and large-mindedness. Her voice was rather stern and very determined, though her manner was gentle and winning and her face beautiful. We used to go down to the hall on Feast-days to wish her a happy Feast, and she would speak a few holy, motherly words to us, telling us how we should draw practical help for our own lives from the mystery we were celebrating. She would generally end up playfully, and tell us to run away and enjoy ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

The invisible basis for the structure which Catherine Harper observed and benefited from was the related doctrines of the Incarnation and Redemption; and for Cornelia these two were combined in the Holy Eucharist. This was the reason for her love of the liturgy. The Eucharist was the centre of her life, and she was always very unsatisfied with a new foundation when it proved difficult or impossible to provide daily mass for the community, as at St Ann's Albany. The importance of the mass is revealed in a letter written to the nuns for the Lent of 1857: she proposes that during the season:

we shall particularly unite ourselves to the Passion of our Lord during Holy Mass, placing ourselves on Mount Calvary, remembering that the past, the present and the future are equally present to our Lord, and that the Sacrifice of the Mass is to us the same as that on Mount Calvary - Oh my dear Sisters how is it that we see so few souls truly united to the Passion of our Lord? - So few who are willing to be crucified with Him? - Because of failure in recollection and mortification - Because of forgetfulness of the sufferings of our Model of love - Let us no longer fail but now try our very best saying "I will now begin" yes my Jesus! I will in Spirit follow Thee to Calvary and feel the stripes they laid on Thee; with David in his blest vision of Thee be wounded with Thee and in Thee, that on the Cross I may die with Thee, in all my daily obedience and little sacrifices be one with Thee, and never seek myself in blame or praise, in contempt or honour but in Thee Sweet Victim of Charity.<sup>32</sup>

Cornelia's experience of The Spiritual Exercises had led her into the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, and also to the degree of humility of wishing to suffer and be rejected for the sake of Christ. The same deep experience also provided her the foundation for the whole of her educational thought. Education is aimless without a model. Such a model should represent all that is best in human nature, and so be at once an ideal and a guide. Cornelia found this in Christ. This was all that people should be. The task of education is one both of growth and of change, and the development involved can be painful. This task calls for motivation of the highest order and for assistance and the experience of the value of suffering. The work of Christ, and especially the work of his Redemption was the source of power here. So Christ was found to be both model, motive and giver of grace. This was a Pauline vision very much after the concept of the hymn in Colossians.

He is the image of the unseen God,  
and the first-born of all creation.

...  
He holds all things in unity  
...  
As he is the Beginning,

he was first to be born from the dead,  
so that he should be first in every way;  
because God wanted all perfection  
to be found in him,  
and all things to be reconciled through him and for him,  
everything in heaven and everything on earth,  
when he made peace  
by his death on the cross.<sup>33</sup>