

CORNELIA CONNELLY: WOMAN OF MERCY AND EDUCATOR

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The identity and calling of Cornelia Peacock Connelly (1809-1879) as a woman religious were shaped by her experiences as a maturing young woman, wife and mother, and by her educational experiences as both student and teacher. Cornelia came to believe that it was her particular vocation to found, within the Catholic Church, a congregation of women religious whose mission was "to meet the wants of the age"¹ through the spiritual works of mercy. After founding the Society of the Holy Child Jesus on October 13, 1846, she continued to give apostolic expression to her experiences by developing an educational curriculum specifically oriented towards the needs of girls and young women within the social and religious context of nineteenth-century England.

This article focuses upon Cornelia's contributions to education from the perspectives of her experiences as young woman, wife, mother, student, teacher, and foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Cornelia was an educator whose genius is found in her ability to compile, synthesize and adapt a curriculum to new geographical and socio-economic settings. Her awareness of the poor led her to develop a liberal arts curriculum for the poor and middle classes. Her experiences as a mother and teacher on the frontier enabled her to envision a congregation of women religious who would live in human relationship with their students.²

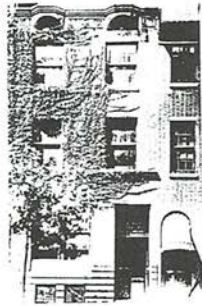
¹ *Society of the Holy Child Jesus: Foundation Texts and Constitutions*, (1983), pp xiii-xiv.

² This essay emphasizes Cornelia's experience, vision, work, and contribution as an educator. While her specific efforts as foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus are of critical importance, they will be dwelt upon only briefly in this essay. For a fuller treatment of material in this essay see my *Something more for the Glory of God: Cornelia Connelly's Development of Education for Girls of All Classes of Society*, (Ed.D diss., Columbia University, 1991.) It is available through University Microfilms International in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Copies may be found in the Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, New Sharon, Rosemont, Pennsylvania and in the Kistler Memorial Library, Rosemont College, Rosemont, Pennsylvania.

For a thorough study of Cornelia Connelly's spirituality and of her work as Foundress, see Caritas McCarthy's *The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly: In God, For God, With God*, (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); and Elizabeth Mary Strub's *Ignatius, "The Spiritual Exercises" and Cornelia*, (1996) which focuses on Cornelia's religious experience as mediated by the *Spiritual*

Young Woman, Wife and Mother

Cornelia Augusta Peacock was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 15, 1809; she was the youngest child of Mary Swope Bowen and Ralph Peacock. During Cornelia's childhood, the family lived at several different addresses in the greater Philadelphia area. Ralph Peacock died in 1818 when Cornelia was nine years old. Cornelia's brother, Dodsworth, died when she was thirteen. A year later, in 1823, when Cornelia was fourteen, her mother died in Philadelphia.



719 Spruce Street, Philadelphia,
home of Mrs. Austin Montgomery,
Cornelia's married half-sister who
adopted her after the death of
their mother.

(Courtesy: ASHCJR)

After her mother's death, Cornelia lived with her half-sister, Isabella Bowen Montgomery and her husband, Austin. The well-to do Montgomerys, who had no children of their own, provided Cornelia with some formal education.³ They were members of Christ Episcopal Church and Cornelia was later baptized as an Episcopalian at St. Stephen Church on February 25, 1831.

On December 1, 1831, Cornelia married Pierce Connelly, an Episcopal priest and the vice-rector of St. James Church in Kingsessing. Soon after their marriage, Cornelia and Pierce moved to Natchez, Mississippi where he served as the rector of Trinity Church. During the couple's four years in Natchez, Cornelia gave birth to their first two children, Mercer, a son, and Adeline, a daughter.

Exercises of Ignatius Loyola. Radegunde Flaxman's A Woman Styled Bold: The Life of Cornelia Connelly, (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1991) is a definitive biography.

³ Just where and how Cornelia was educate has not been documented.

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Nativist activities in the antebellum South aroused the Connellys' interest in Catholicism. Cornelia's initial interest in the Church was of a dutiful wife. She supported her husband in his search. They both thought of Joseph Nicollet who wondered how such anti-Catholic sentiment could be the work of the Spirit of God.⁴ Cornelia and Pierce were close with one another and close in their vision of Catholicism. With the passing of time however, Cornelia's vision of Catholicism took on a breadth of vision wherein she anticipated the possibility of establishing a Catholic community in Natchez which would welcome immigrants and instruct converts to the Catholic faith.⁵ They embarked for Rome in November 1835 with the intention of examining the church at its "source." However, they stopped in New Orleans for a liturgy at which Anthony Blanc was consecrated Bishop of New Orleans. After the liturgy, Cornelia sought out Bishop Rosati, received instructions in the Catholic faith from him, and was received into the church. She received her first Holy Communion from Bishop Blanc on December 8 or 9, before setting sail again on December 10. Rosati described Cornelia as a "femme de beaucoup d'esprit cultivé par une éducation soignée."⁶ After stopovers in Marseilles and Civitavecchia, they arrived in Rome on February 25, 1836.

The Connellys lived in Rome for nearly two years. Cornelia cared for her two children, and familiarized herself with the city, both as an historical and cultural resource and as a setting for social outreach. She also deepened her understanding of Catholicism through conversations with

⁴ M. Ursula Blake and Annette Dawson, eds., *Positio: Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of the Servant of God Cornelia Connelly (née Peacock) 1809-1879*, (Rome: 1983), p. 55. Joseph Rosati, Letter to the Propagation of the Faith, Lyons, March 9, 1836, in *Documentation Presented by the Historical Commission for the Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Cornelia Connelly, Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus*, (date?) Appendix: pp.7-8, Hereafter *Documentation*.

Nicollet was a French Catholic scientist and cartographer who was visiting the area in order to survey the Mississippi River. He became a friend to Pierce and to Cornelia.

⁵Cornelia Connelly to Pierce Connelly, September 22, 1835, *Documentation*, 2: 45-50.

⁶Joseph Rosati, Letter to the Propagation of the Faith, Lyons, March 9, 1836. *Documentation*, Appendix: pp. 6-13.

Catholic laity and clerics and by participation in liturgies. During this period, Pierce, her husband, became a Catholic. Their time in Europe culminated in the spring of 1837 with a family trip through Perugia, Florence, Bologna, Ferrara, Venice and Vienna. While in Vienna, Cornelia gave birth to John Henry, their second son. It was during this period that Pierce mentioned, for the first time, his interest in being ordained as a priest in the Catholic church. Cornelia, pregnant with their third child, was in anguish. She could not understand her husband's desires. She confided to Fr. John McCloskey, "I love my husband and my darling children. Why must I give them up?"⁷

Cornelia's first journey to Europe came to an abrupt end when the Panic of 1837 spread through the United States. Pierce would now need to support himself and his family, and it was necessary for them to return to America in 1838. At the time of their trip to Europe, Pierce's holdings were estimated to be between \$17,000 and \$18,000, which was then a considerable sum. Pierce seems to have received this money through his salary as rector in Natchez and through other unknown sources. There is no indication that he engaged in any consistent employment while in Europe during this time.⁸ The Connellys were invited by Reverend Nicholas M. Point S.J. to move to Grand Coteau, Louisiana in order to assist with the educational efforts of the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Society of Jesus. Cornelia was asked to teach music on a part-time basis at the Academy of the Sacred Heart. Pierce was offered the opportunity to teach English at St. Charles College. Although their remuneration was small, they were provided with a small house and the



*"Gracemere," Grant Coteau, Louisiana.
Home of Cornelia and Pierce Connelly,
1838-1842.*

⁷ Adeline Duval Mack, "Synopsis of Life of Reverend Mother," Notes compiled January-February 1911, *Positio: A Documentary Study*, p.107.

⁸ Cornelia Connelly to Adeline Duval, September 1, 1835, *Documentation*, 2: 41, 54.

(Courtesy: ASHCJR)

assurance of education for their children. The family travelled by boat down the Mississippi River, and arrived in Grand Coteau on June 24, 1838. Cornelia assumed her teaching responsibilities while continuing to raise the children.

In 1839, Mary Magdalene, their second daughter, was born; she was sickly and died within six weeks. In 1840, John Henry suffered a tragic, prolonged and painful death caused by burns. There were additional losses for Cornelia in 1840: Cornelia's close friend, Gwendaline Borghese died in Rome and Pierce announced his definitive desire to become a Catholic priest. While Cornelia had, after four years, reached a point of openness towards Pierce's desires, her generosity was predicated upon the presence of God in the sacrifice being asked of her. Hence, she was cautious, and wanting, in faith, to be certain. She later spoke of Pierce's communication of his decision as the moment of the "beginning of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and that it was founded on a breaking heart."⁹ In 1841, Cornelia gave birth to Pierce Francis, who was called Frank. In May, 1842, Pierce left for Europe to apply in Rome for admission to holy orders and to place Mercer in an English boarding school.

Cornelia continued to live and work at Grand Coteau until she received word that the pope wanted to speak with her in Rome.¹⁰ In July, 1843 she took Adeline and Frank to Philadelphia where they met Pierce. Later in the summer they departed for England where they spent several months. They arrived in Rome on December 7, 1843.

During the next two and one-half years, the necessary formalities were completed in preparation for Pierce's ordination as a Catholic priest. On April 1, 1844, a deed of separation, approved by the pope, was signed by Pierce and Cornelia Connelly. It would become permanent the following year when Cornelia made a vow of perpetual chastity and Pierce was ordained as

⁹ Radegunde Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold*, p. 78.

¹⁰ Radegunde Flaxman, Archivist of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Rome, to author, September 9, 1990. Pope Gregory XVI refused to consider Pierce's petition for ordination unless there could be a face-to-face meeting between himself and Cornelia. There is no known record of the content of the meeting which occurred sometime before December 28, 1843; however, after it was concluded, Pierce's petition for ordination went forward.

See also Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold*, pp. 86, 89, 92-93.

a Catholic priest.¹¹ On April 9, Cornelia moved from the residence they had shared near the Palazzo Borghese to the Trinita Dei Monti, a convent of the Religious of the Sacred Heart whom she had known in Grand Coteau. Pierce was ordained on July 6.

Cornelia left Rome April 18, 1846 for England to found a religious society. She had discerned an invitation from God to found, on English soil, a religious congregation whose members would integrate the work of education with the living of a different, more active, form of religious life. Cornelia was accompanied by two of her children, Adeline, eleven, and Frank, five. En route, they spent three months in Paris as the guests of the Sisters of the Assumption. They arrived in England in August, 1846. In mid-October she founded the Society of the Holy Child Jesus at St. Mary's Parish, Derby.

Cornelia began an unexpected, lifelong, and sorrow-filled period of separation from her husband and children shortly after she founded the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. At the suggestion of Emily Bowles, one of the early members of the Society, Bishop Wiseman, Cornelia's ecclesiastical superior in England, decided that Adeline and Frank should be sent away from their mother to boarding schools. This separation went beyond any requirements set by Catholic Church authorities in Rome.

Pierce became disturbed that Cornelia was no longer under his authority. Without telling Cornelia, Pierce, assuming the role of the founder of the Society, sent his own draft of the Constitutions to Rome in 1848. Cornelia was surprised to learn of Pierce's action. She and the early members of the Society were putting the Constitutional draft which they had in hand to the test of lived experience. It was not yet time to seek any more formal approbation from church authorities. Cornelia separated herself from Pierce's precipitous action. When his efforts to assume control of the newly founded Society proved unsuccessful, Pierce left the Catholic priesthood and apostasized from the Catholic church. Pierce removed the children from their schools and refused to allow them any contact with their mother. He filed suit in the English courts for the restoration of his conjugal rights; he petitioned the House of Commons for the return of his wife. These activities were public and, ultimately, unsuccessful. In addition, Pierce engaged in a series of well-publicized attacks on Catholicism. He took the children with him from England to the Continent. Pierce Connelly eventually moved to Florence where he resumed his Protestant priesthood and became the rector

¹¹Flaxman to author, September 9, 1990.

of the American Episcopal church. He served in this position until his death in 1883.

Mercer, after being removed from Stonyhurst by his father in 1848, returned to the United States. He died of yellow fever in New Orleans in September, 1853. Adeline and Frank remained close to their father and to one another. Although they visited occasionally with their mother in later years, they never regained their earlier intimacy with her. Adeline died in Florence in 1900; Frank, who became a sculptor, died in Rome in 1932.

During the remainder of this article I will develop a brief educational biography in which I will focus upon Cornelia's formative years as an educator, her role as foundress, and her pioneer efforts in bringing a liberal arts education for girls and young women to England.¹²

Student and Teacher

Most of Cornelials exposure to American Protestant education took place in Philadelphia.¹³ In the early nineteenth century, there were two schools of thought concerning the education of girls. One point of view advocated "solid" education, while another supported "accomplishment-oriented" learning and little else. Benjamin Rush (1746-1813), signer of the Declaration of Independence and member of the Continental Congress, was a proponent of "solid" education, which integrated religious knowledge, arts and letters, and living.

Rush's views were similar to those of the mystical theologian and educational writer, Francois Fenelon (1651-1715), whose *Traité de l'Éducation des Filles* was found in the Philadelphia Library as early as 1741. Wealthy parents in Philadelphia supported Fenelon's standards of education for their daughters;¹⁴ and as a result, girls were instructed in

¹²For a description of educational biography see Ellen Lagemann's *A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 4-7, 167-180.

¹³ Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828), a contemporary of the period, referred to Philadelphia, which was America's greatest cultural and commercial city of the time as "the Athens of America." Edgar P. Richardson, "The Athens of America, 1800-1825, in Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, (New York: Norton, 1982), pp. 208-257.

"James Mulhern, *A History of Women's Education in Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: by author, Science Press, Lancaster, PA, 1933), p. 104.

reading, grammar, music, and painting, as well as languages, vocal music, and dance.

Furthermore, Rush stressed that American life was different from that on the continent; therefore girls required a different kind of education than their European counterparts. An American girl needed to be fluent in her use of English and in her ability to work with figures. She also should receive at least some instruction in geography, biography, travel, astronomy, natural philosophy, chemistry, vocal music, dancing, poetry, moral essays, and Christianity.

Rush found that the exigencies of colonial and frontier living demanded the talents of women in a manner as yet unknown in England. As a result, women required an education equal to that of their husbands in order to fulfill their responsibilities in the pioneering role played by the married couple in the development of the new nation.¹⁵ Cornelia experienced frontier living during the years spent with Pierce in the South; and it is evident from Cornelia's later writings that she inculcated a "solid" and practical education which taught girls to think; to integrate their "accomplishments" into a larger contextual framework; and to earn a living. Both in Natchez, Mississippi and in the two Catholic schools of Grand Coteau, Louisiana, education comprised a "solid" curriculum grounded in the liberal arts and implemented in an environment permeated by Christian values, and characterized by qualities of social awareness and practicality. Cornelia's initial philosophy of education was probably characterized by this early American Protestant viewpoint. Thus, whatever Cornelia understood with regard to education before her conversion to Catholicism became the foundation on which she built her later understandings of religion and education.

Cornelia, as noted above, first taught in a school administered by the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau, Louisiana from 1838 to 1842. When Cornelia and Pierce arrived in Grand Coteau, the Young Ladies School had been in existence for eighteen years and the College for Boys was just beginning. The Girls' Boarding School had grown from an enrollment of seventeen in 1822 to eighty by 1834. By 1848, there were 130 boarders. In addition, there was a Sacred Heart Free School conducted in a log cabin associated with the Jesuit parish.

¹⁵ Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, (New York: Science Press, 1929. 2 vols. Reprint, New York: Octagon, second printing 1974), vol. I, pp. 302-304.

The Religious of the Sacred Heart drew their educational inspiration from their own *Plan d'Études* or *Plan of Studies* which was then in its formative stages of development, and from the model provided by the Ursuline Sisters who had begun an Academy in nearby New Orleans in 1726. Both religious congregations offered an education which sought to integrate the various branches of learning with a way of life, a "solid" education. This contrasted with the "accomplishment-oriented" education available for young ladies in the small private schools of Louisiana.

During her years at the Young Ladies School, Cornelia participated in school liturgies, came to understand the work of the Sodality, and was present for the distribution of student prizes. On July 13, 1843 Cornelia left the school for another Academy of the Sacred Heart, the Trinita Dei Monte in Rome. She taught English, music, and chant. The Sacred Heart sisters in Rome admired the quality of Cornelia's English language, and found her to be a valuable asset to the school.¹⁶ She brought with her the American pioneering spirit, formed by Philadelphia Protestantism, and strengthened by the influence of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Louisiana. Cornelia experienced the *Plan D' Études* at work in both of the Sacred Heart settings. Its purpose was to provide a liberal arts education for girls, centered on theology and structured on philosophy, literature, and history. Cornelia was an active participant in developing the *Plan* when it was still in its preliminary stages prior to its first known printing in 1852. The *Règlement des Pensionnantes et Plan d'Études* is important because it specifies in detail a particular structure and style of education for girls during a period when articulated forms of female education were non-existent. The *Plan* also became a means of ensuring uniformity in teaching spirit and methodology during a time when the number of Sacred Heart schools was increasing and spreading geographically.

Cornelia acquired both attitudes and practical skills as an outcome of her experience with the Religious of the Sacred Heart. She grew to understand that a spirit of religious faith in teachers and students alike is an essential aspect of teaching and learning. Integrity and living in accord with a scale of Christian values is at least as important as mastery of course material. This is not to say that subject matter is unimportant, but rather that knowledge of course material should be integrated into the greater concern for

¹⁶ Josephine Coriolis to Sophie Barat, before 3 March 1844. In Archives of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, Villa Lante, Rome; copy in Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Rome.

integrity of life.

Cornelia collaborated with the Sacred Heart sisters as they implemented their *Plan*. Through this experience Cornelia developed a manner of imparting a "solid" education for girls. As Cornelia worked with the Religious of the Sacred Heart, she acquired her own sense of teaching design and student learning abilities. She realized that the education provided for girls was different than that provided for boys. Although the times may have warranted such a separation, Cornelia's later work in education indicates that she questioned the worth of making curricular distinctions on the basis of gender.

Cornelia reacted negatively to "surveillance" utilized by the Religious of the Sacred Heart. The "surveillant" maintained a vigilance over children in order to correct their faults and to enable them to grow in virtue. This was done out of love for the children. Cornelia did not adopt "surveillance;" instead, she talked about "trust" and a "spirit of joy." These were to become the cornerstones of the education she later fashioned.

Cornelia's philosophy of education consisted simply in a "solid" liberal arts education integrated and permeated by Christian values. Both intellectual and moral development were subject to ongoing scrutiny through the evolution of a "plan" of education and reflection upon lived experience. In order to adapt this philosophy to the needs of the girls in nineteenth century England, she added the practical arts of managing a home and making a living. Cornelia learned how to impart such a curriculum and how to create an environment which would foster the development of this curriculum through her experiences at the Sacred Heart schools. She believed it was her calling to place her insight and practical wisdom at the service of the Catholic Church in England.

Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus

Although Cornelia sensed that her calling in life was towards religion and education, it was in a spirit distinctly different from that of the Religious of the Sacred Heart.¹⁷ As an American, she did not think that the "french"

¹⁷ Blake and Dawson, *Positio: Documentary Study*, pp. 228-229, 213, 215; Also, Cornelia Connelly to Adeline Peacock Duval, November 12, 1845, *Documentation*, 5: 104-105.

"Statement of Facts," between 4 May 1852 and 7 September 1853, in *The Writings of the Servant of God Cornelia Connelly*, in Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Rosemont, Pennsylvania, 42:18-22; quoted in

spirit of the Religious of the Sacred Heart could be adapted to children as she knew them. She was drawn to "meekness and sweetness" rather than fear.¹⁸ She envisioned a religious society whose members would practice the spiritual works of mercy in such an active manner that they would not be cloistered.¹⁹ She continued to believe that her manner of life must permit her to fulfill her calling as a mother in relationship to her children.²⁰ As noted earlier, Cornelia became convinced that her calling was to found a religious congregation of women in England, and she founded the Society of the Holy Child Jesus at Derby on October 13, 1846. She envisioned that the work of the Society was to meet the needs of the age through the exercise of the spiritual works of mercy.²¹

Cornelia engaged in a variety of activities in her capacity as the foundress of a new type of Catholic religious order for women in mid-Victorian England. She drew upon the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola and upon her experience of living with the Religious of the Sacred Heart to train those who joined her as members of the Society. Throughout her life she endeavored to offer inspirational leadership to the sisters through visits, conferences, and correspondence. In addition to working with the members of the Society, Cornelia had many administrative responsibilities. These included efforts to secure ecclesiastical approval for the Society's Constitutions and the acquisition of the use and/or ownership of property for the establishment of convents and schools. She was also responsible for

Positio: Documentary Study, 203.

¹⁸ Cornelia Connelly to Adeline Duval, November 12, 1845. *Documentation*, 5: 104-105.

¹⁹ *Documentation*, 5:136; 10:4, 25, 27.

²⁰ Cornelia Connelly, *Writings*, 21:35.

²¹ The actual founding of the Society along with the history of the writing and subsequent approval, after Cornelia's death, of the Society's Constitutions is an intricate and detailed story and will not be told here. Voluminous correspondence and the several Constitutional revisions are to be found in *Documentation Presented by the Historical Commission for the Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Cornelia Connelly, Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus*; *Source: Studies in the Spirituality of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus*, vol. 4, winter 1975; and *Positio: Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of the Servant of God Cornelia Connelly (née Peacock) 1809-1879*, 1983. Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, New Sharon, Rosemont, Pennsylvania. See also McCarthy, *The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly*.

sending the sisters on mission to form new foundations and to teach in various parts of England, the United States, and France.

It was as foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus that Cornelia assumed for the first time her role as headmistress, or principal, in a school setting. She taught children, teachers-in-training, and teachers according to her evolving understanding of a liberal arts curriculum designed for the formation and education of young women. As foundress, Cornelia engaged with the societal and ecclesiastical currents of her day in order to contribute effectively to the education of girls in England.

*Educator and Compiler of the
Book of the Order of Studies*

Cornelia worked at St. Mary's in Derby from October 13, 1846 until December 21, 1848. She administered a Poor Day School, a night school, a Sunday school, and a Boarding School, and she participated in teacher training. Cornelia's desires to serve in religion and education were conditioned by her own experience and education as an American woman; by her exposure to European cultural life; and by the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola.²²

This is reflected in St. Mary's statement of purpose published in *The Catholic Directory* 1848. The initial portion of the entry reads:

The objects which are contemplated in the Convent are to give, upon the sound basis of the practice of all their religious duties, such a solid education to a large and increasing class of Girls as will best enable them to fulfill their office in society, while at the same time they will be thoroughly instructed in the details of domestic life, and in all such arts as are the most practically useful in the service of our Holy Mother the Church.²³

Cornelia's purpose was to develop and to offer forms of education which were appropriate for Catholic girls and which met the requirements of the mid-nineteenth century English educational system. While the context for this education was religious it was also characterized by interaction with society

²² Blake and Dawson, *Positio: Documentary Study*, pp. 7-12, 108-110, 124-126, 137-148, 211-217, 842-848.

²³ *The Catholic Directory* 1848, p. 145; *Documentation*, 10: 74.

at large. Cornelia noted that women in society should make a public contribution, but at the same time they should be versatile in the skills of domestic life and the "arts" of the church.



(Courtesy: Victoria Donohoe, artist.)

Cornelia's effort to educate girls of all classes of society was part of an emerging trend. She was not alone. In Catholic circles women were beginning to engage in the leadership of the congregations which they founded, and they were doing so in an "active" manner by performing direct educational and social services. Ten years later, F.D. Maurice, Mrs. Jesser Reid, Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale led comparable efforts to provide education for girls in Anglican, Nonconformist and nonsectarian circles.

Cornelia's work constituted a distinctive contribution to the literature of nineteenth century women's education in England because of the nature of the work itself and because Cornelia committed her educational efforts to writing. She was actively working in education a decade earlier than some of the other very fine pioneer educators in England.²⁴

Cornelia's brief time at Derby provides a glimpse into her future work. She demonstrated her capability to act as a principal manager of a school. She also trained others in the work of teaching. In addition, Cornelia expanded the Poor School setting to include a night school, a Sunday school, and a secondary boarding school. Through the flexibility and variety of

²⁴ Blake and Dawson, *Positio: Documentary Study*, 257. See also John Marmion, "Cornelia Connelly's Work in Education, 1848-1879," (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 1984) v, 390; also, John Marmion, *Conversation with the author*, July, 1989.

educational offerings, the school became a greater leaven than it had previously been within the working class. Finally, Cornelia's efforts resulted in the formation of a small core of trained teachers and a larger body of students characterized by their readiness and ability to be trained as teachers.



*St. Leonard's-on-Sea
Church*

(Courtesy: Victoria Donohoe, artist.)

Upon leaving St. Mary's, Cornelia moved to St. Leonard's-on-Sea, which became the base of her operations for the remainder of her life. This period was one of expansion for the Society. The seed from St. Mary's, Derby was transplanted south to St. Leonard's where it took root and began to expand. Its branches soon reached northward into London, Liverpool, Preston, and Blackpool. During this time, her most notable educational work was the foundation of the Roman Catholic Teacher Training College (1856-1863.) The school was forced to close when the government funding necessary to begin and to maintain the College was withdrawn due to changes in educational legislation. When the Teacher Training College closed, Cornelia strengthened the courses offered at the Middle School. A Poor Day School, and a Young Ladies' Boarding School were also administered by the sisters at St. Leonard's.

During this period, the distinctiveness of Cornelia's classroom style began to emerge. Cornelia explained her methodology to her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Bowen in 1854:

I shall not be able to enter into the course of our Schools but I can explain our method. We teach our children in each branch vocally before giving them the books and this makes them understand without getting into a puzzle. In grammar we begin by

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explaining everything, letters, parts of speech, and making sentences with writing on a black board, and they are very much amused by this and learn how to parse before learning a single lesson in the Grammar. When they can do this we give them the first Grammar and make them parse daily - In the same way we teach Arithmetic with the black board & slates - all by explaining & very little with books. All our children go through the Arithmetic gradually in this way quite understanding fractions and cube root which is generally thought too difficult for girls. We teach Latin French and Italian in the same way and it succeeds so well that we had one of Racine's Plays "Esther" and one of Metastasio's Sacred Dramas for the Xmas holidays. We had also a pretty little Theatre with 8 side scenes & three back curtains which I painted with water colors and honey.²⁵

Today, this method would be described as an application of inductive thinking to a pedagogy for students. Through her inclusive approach, she demonstrated that, on one level, she knew the pupils whom she taught; and on another level, that she knew her academic subjects. Cornelia used language as a bridge to unite the pupils whom she knew in-depth with the subject matter which she knew in-breadth. This inclusive simplicity, which integrates respectful-relational-knowing- and-being-known with rational-curricular-knowing, as a way into learning, is one of the hallmarks of Cornelia's educational method.

Cornelia's overall goal was to enable women and girls to seek and to find God as revealed in their daily experience, and to use their talents to make an active contribution to society. She sought to provide the forms of education which would make this seeking, finding, and contributing a reality in the lives of those whom she taught.

Cornelia presented her educational contribution within an integrating framework which was built upon the foundation of the academic and lived experience of religion, the visual arts, and the dramatic arts. The liberal arts and the sciences (as they were known in the nineteenth century) constituted the pillars of Cornelia's educational contribution; these included history, literature, and astronomy.

At St. Leonard's, Cornelia offered a variety of educational settings to girls and to young women, but she probably placed the greatest emphasis

²⁵ Cornelia Connelly to Elizabeth Bowen, March 30, 1854, *Documentation*, 41: 14-15.

upon teacher training. Under Cornelia's leadership, trained teachers, both laywomen and religious, went forth to teach in the Poor Schools in other parts of England. Poor School Committee inspector T. W. M. Marshall noted "the rare skill, judgment and patience of the teachers..."²⁶

The expansion of Cornelia's educational work brought the early members of the Society into daily contact with children from all social and economic classes. One of the fruits of this work is a special tradition of love and respect for the poor which has been passed down through oral tradition among the Holy Child sisters.

By the end of this period, Cornelia and her sisters were ready to found the Teacher Training College. She had developed an interpretation of the ways in which the educational methodologies with which she was familiar could be applied to the education of English girls. The most important component of Cornelia's teaching style was the integration of student-teacher relationships with a comprehensive understanding of academic subject matter. Cornelia imprinted the Christian liberal arts tradition with her own values, including the importance of applying religion to lived experience; engaging in the visual and the dramatic arts; and gaining proficiency in skills useful in earning a living. She adapted her methodology to fit the readiness and abilities of her pupils.

The type of education envisioned by Cornelia was consolidated into definitive forms for teacher training, education for the poor, and education for the higher social classes between 1856 and 1862. As a result of the actualization of these three forms of education, Cornelia began to experiment with Middle School Education. Cornelia viewed education as preparation for life. Thus, she viewed religion both as an academic subject and as a practical means of striving for union with God. Excerpts from correspondence, Inspector's Reports, and her own writings allow a glimpse at the very human situation of trial and error through which Cornelia's views on the teaching of religion were clarified.

After the opening of the Training College, Cornelia described her manner of teacher training. She wrote somewhat similar to what she had earlier written to her sister-in-law:

In the lectures generally we have worked upon the primary point rather than in diffuse matter - Method & the means to carry out the

²⁶ T.W.M. Marshall, "Tabulated Reports of 1855," *The Catholic School, Documentation*, 13:16.

end to be attained, cause & effect, the cultivation of the understanding & the judgment rather than the memory, have been the pivot upon which the Instructions have turned during the past two years. I do not mean to say that the memory has not been cultivated, but simply that it has held a subservient position to the understanding & the judgment.²⁷"

In 1859 School Inspector Marshall was struck by the "graduated lessons" presented from the most elementary to the most superior level in the school. First year teachers geared their lessons to the learning capacity of the pupils. They were trained in observation and taught a concern for the arrangement of the subject, uses of language, illustrations employed, manner, and tone of voice. As a group, they critiqued one another in their classroom management. The first year class was "particularly successful" each year in completing the school management examination.

Second year teachers in training built upon the foundation of their first year. At Cornelia's instigation, they discussed logic, Christian ethics, and such topics as discipline, motivation, habit formation, and the importance of self-knowledge. Marshall was struck at the self-awareness which the young teachers were expected to inculcate. He wrote:

Especially are they led to reflect upon the discipline of the will as well of the understanding, the motives of human action, and the formation of habits in young children. But perhaps the most valuable instruction which they receive in these difficult subjects accrues from the careful religious and moral training which they individually undergo. They are taught, apparently not without success, and certainly by teachers who have a deep practical insight into such truths, that nothing can afford so intimate a knowledge of the hearts of others as that which we possess of our own.²⁸

Marshall noted that this led young teachers to a natural understanding of classroom discipline and the character formation of children. The fruits of the moral training received by the young teachers are reaped in the lives of their

²⁷ Cornelia Connelly to T.W.M. Marshall, January 17, 1858, *Documentation*, 37: 9-10.

²⁸ "Inspector T.W.M. Marshall's Report, 1859," in *Reports of Catholic Poor School Committee, 1847-1870*, *Documentation*, 37:102-106.

pupils.



(Courtesy: ASHCJR)

Although Cornelia spent most of her time at St. Leonard's, she made many visits to the schools affiliated with the "Branch Houses" in order to engage in supervision and pupil teacher training. She assigned a number of sisters to teach the poor and the middle classes. Such assignments entailed personal sacrifices for the individual sisters involved. In addition, the remuneration received by the sisters was minimal. As a result, the entire Society experienced the long term effects of committing a significant percentage of its members to the education of the poor and middle classe. The early Society lived poorly for the sake and the privilege of working with the poor.

Cornelia's overriding concern in the education of poor and middle class girls was to enable them to support themselves. Her methodology in formal education was applied to domestic education, industrial education, and the education of governesses. She divided the skills of housekeeping, garmentmaking, mathematics, embroidery, and teacher training for the middle classes into graduated curricular units in order to impart them to middle class and poor students. Cornelia's education for the poor and middle classes was not limited to its "technical" or "useful" aspects. She insisted upon a strong foundation in literacy. A liberal education was added to well-developed skills in reading and writing.

This approach to the education of the poor and the middle classes was distinct from the view of her day. She dealt with girls of the poor and middle classes in the same respectful manner with which she treated those of

the upper classes. Just as she had divided the branches of intellectual knowledge into "manageable bits" so that the pupils could grasp them, so she also divided the branches of vocational training. Cornelia's approach, then, was based upon a respect for the individual student. Children should be able to draw "clear conclusions" and to derive "fixed principles." If they were not able to apply their knowledge, then it was the teaching which needed to be improved.

In 1863 and 1864, Cornelia strengthened Middle School Education for girls and published the *Book of the Order of Studies*. As a result, her notion of "solid education" became more readily available to girls of the middle class, and her educational beliefs were committed to writing.

Cornelia's achievement in the Middle School consisted of bringing together the best of what she had developed previously in education for poor girls, for teachers-in-training, and for the daughters of the upper class. She adapted and combined the best in each of these forms of education to meet the emerging needs of the developing middle class. This demonstrated that her experimental forms of education were capable of meeting evolving needs.

In 1863, Cornelia compiled and published the *Book of the Order of Studies in the Schools of the S. Holy Child Jesus* in concert with members of the Society. This was based on the previous seventeen years of experimentation and experience with her educational method. It was intended to be a guide to the implementation and practice of her system of education. In the *Book of Studies*, Cornelia described the acts of administration and teaching as expressions of an apostolate or ministry of education. Its ultimate purpose was the moral and intellectual development of girls.

Educational philosopher, Lorna Bowman, writes of the *Book of Studies*:

There is...an echo of the seven liberal arts - the foundational trivium of grammar, rhetoric and logic underlying the more advanced quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music... With this strong vernacular foundation, the curriculum of the boarding schools explodes-there are courses in history, geography, mathematics; the senior girls also study philosophy, logic, astronomy, geology, and architecture. Reading, needlework, drawing and music-all with appropriate instruction are part of the daily

schedule.²⁹

Bowman further explains that the students lived at school except during the month of summer vacation. This practice allowed them the time for such a full curriculum.

Cornelia's method of education was utilized in schools in London, Liverpool, Preston, Blackpool, and Mayfield during her lifetime. These were Poor Schools, Middle Schools, and Boarding Schools for Young Ladies, although the boarding schools were at an "early creative stage and not yet at all institutionalized."³⁰ Cornelia used flexibility in order to create an environment which fostered both intellectual and moral growth for students.

Some pupils from the Training College engaged in practice-teaching and received supervision from Cornelia. Her system of education was inaugurated in the United States in 1862, and in France in 1870.³¹

Cornelia retained her educational framework, but continued to adapt it to alternative settings until 1877 when her health began to fail. She became less active, and died in 1879.

Epilogue: A Woman of Mercy

Cornelia Connelly founded the Society of the Holy Child Jesus intending that the Society was "to meet the wants of the age" through performing the Spiritual Works of Mercy. Chief among the "wants of the age" was the need "to instruct the ignorant," so education was given primacy of place in the fulfillment of the Society's mission.

During her lifetime, Cornelia brought a variety of qualities to bear upon her vocation. Through her experience as young woman, wife, and mother she developed an extraordinary humanness tempered with strong self-discipline. It is clear that throughout her life she sought not merely to

²⁹ Lorna M.A. Bowman, "Cornelia Connelly Educator: Her Charisma and Its Institutionalization" (Ed.D. diss., Teachers College Columbia University, 1984), p. 186.

³⁰ Flaxman to author, September 9, 1990.

³¹ In 1863, Cornelia's methods had been already used in an orphanage begun at Ore, England; it was later transferred to Mark Cross. The work of the orphanage included a curriculum which trained the boarders to gain a livelihood after they completed their schooling.

integrate her life experiences, but to view them as a personal invitation from God. She endeavored to create a religious framework within which to live out these experiences. In addition, her efforts to integrate the extraordinary emotional upheaval which took place around her became the means through which she developed sensitivity, compassion, and an understanding of human character. She brought these personal qualities to her work as an educator and to her role as foundress.

Through her experience as student and teacher, Cornelia came to view education as multidisciplinary and multifaceted. She viewed the curriculum as a composite of academic subjects wherein the visual, musical, and theatrical arts, as well as religion, served as integrating foci. She made the process of education enjoyable, challenging, and stimulating. She acquired practical experience in evaluating teaching and learning in a collaborative setting, and so constructed the *Book of Studies*.

While Cornelia viewed education as having intrinsic value, she also knew from her own experience how a woman could become resourceful with a "solid" education. This "solid" education was one of the greatest legacies she and the Society have passed on to young women and to young men as well.

Through her experience as foundress, Cornelia was drawn to a spirit distinctively different from that which she had known through the Religious of the Sacred Heart. As a mother, Cornelia was comfortable with open expressions of simplicity and delight in her dealings with children. She experienced flexibility among the Religious of the Sacred Heart as they adapted to the culture of frontier Louisiana, and hoped to replicate this openness in education for girls in mid-nineteenth century England. She communicated her style with children both to her students and to the early sisters in the Society. An oral tradition of reverence for the uniqueness of each child, trust, and a spirit of joy in relating to children has been passed down over the years within the Society.

As educator and compiler of the *Book of Studies*, Cornelia expressed tried and true educational principles in forms adapted to the needs of girls in nineteenth-century England. The curriculum was characterized by its emphasis upon the liberal arts and by its practicality. Religion and the arts held prominent places in Cornelials curriculum.

As a woman of mercy, Cornelia learned how to integrate affairs of the heart with the life of the mind in such a manner as to create a rich context within which children and young people, girls and young women particularly, might go forth enabled to face the challenges of being human. As we reflect upon her life and work, we can draw inspiration for our own.

