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SOURCE



STUDIES AND REFLECTIONS
ON THE HERITAGE OF THE
SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS

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EDITORIAL

WITH this issue SOURCE enters a new phase in its history under a new editorial board. From now on it is our intention to produce two issues of SOURCE each year. Each issue will explore a single topic by means of three substantial articles and a series of much shorter personal and experiential reflections. There will also be space for book reviews and for responses to previous articles.

This issue is devoted to the theme WOMAN. The Constitutions call on us to develop our understanding of the gift of our womanhood and to work for the wider recognition of the dignity of women (Norms 23-1; 9-4); and many of us need no urging, as the quality of the following articles testifies.

The articles in this issue fall into three sections. Firstly Anne Murphy reflects on Cornelia as a woman for the church today in a paper which was originally presented at the European Province Meeting, Easter 1988. The second section is concerned with our role and lived experience as women in the church; Karen Gosser's and Barbara Linen's articles raise some of the issues and are followed by a number of personal reflections. Finally Melinda Keane reflects on poverty and women, and is followed by personal accounts from West Africa and South America.

The next issue of SOURCE will appear at Christmas and will be concerned with SHCJ Government, a topic mandated by the 1986 General Chapter (see Enactments). Then in the summer there will be an issue on SHCJ in Africa. After that issues are planned on Ministry and Images of God. The editorial board welcomes and will consider for publication personal, reflective pieces of not more than 1,000 words on any of these topics. We are also looking for reviews of relevant books and any responses people wish to make to what they have read. In this way SOURCE could become a forum for the exchange of ideas and opinion across the provinces. Copy for the Winter 1988 issue should reach the editor by October 1st, and for the Summer 1989 issue by February 1st.

JUDITH LANCASTER SHCJ

CORNELIA AS A WOMAN FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

Anne Murphy SHCJ

* Revised text of a paper first given at SHCJ European Province Meeting, 5 April 1988.

Introduction

THIS is a personal reflection¹ on the story of Cornelia Connelly in the light of contemporary theological understanding which gives priority to human experience as the locus of God's revelation to us. An interest in Women/Feminist studies has led me to a further awareness that women's experiences are a new and hitherto neglected source for theology. We speak of our fore-fathers in the faith (Desert Father, Fathers of the Church) but where are our fore-mothers who have also gone before us in the faith and who experienced God's grace and mediated it to others? 'Official' Theology (God-talk has been a conversation between men down the ages, but women too have talked about God and more usually been the first teachers of their children. The story of Cornelia Connelly can become part of the current 'retrieval' of women's experiences hidden and obscured in past Christian tradition. The 'retrieval' of the experiences of the other half of the Church will not merely be of archaeological or historical interest but will **RADICALLY CHANGE ALL OUR PERSPECTIVES IN THE PRESENT AND FUTURE**. It will affect the way we look at ministry, spirituality, and theology. It will provide new models of human growth to maturity in faith, based on an examination of *womanhood* as mediating God's gift of life and love to humankind, models which are qualitatively distinct from but in a reciprocal relationship to the current normative masculine models.

Recently a group of (non SHCJ) women made a spontaneous choice to include Cornelia in a litany remembering *'the women named and unnamed who through history have used the power and gifts God gave them . . . to advance the kingdom of*

1 This article would not have been possible without the research and insights gained from reading

- a) The Positio 3 Vols (Rome 1983) Sr Mary Ursula Blake
- b) The Informatio (Rome 1987) by Sr Elizabeth Mary Strub
- c) The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly. Edwin Mellen Press: New York 1986 by Sr Caritas McCarthy.

These will be cited as *Positio*, *Informatio* and *McCarthy*.

'justice and peace'². The litany included the names of Sarah, Esther, Deborah, (O.T.); Mary of Magdala, Martha and Mary, Joanna, Phoebe, Lydia, Prisca (N.T.); Hilda, Mechtilde, Hildegard, Julian of Norwich, Joan of Arc (Medieval women); Mary Ward and 'Cornelia Connelly who through her sacrifice to masculine fantasy lived to see the triumph of her work for education'. This ecumenical group of women has included the story of Cornelia as part of the underestimated tradition of women. Her story spoke to them and they interpreted it from their feminist perspectives. Clearly 'feminism was not the focal, integrating factor in Cornelia's life nor did she use feminist rhetoric'³ — but her story highlights the centrality of women's issues/women's experience in her life. Cornelia has to be seen in the context of Women Studies; but as 20C women we can articulate some of the feminist perceptions and concerns raised for us (if not for her) by her story.

Cornelia's Story: Three cycles of experience

Recent studies on Cornelia have identified three phases in Cornelia's life:

- As child, girl and young woman (1809-1831)
- As wife and mother until the separation from Pierce (1831-1845)
- As separated wife, foundress and spiritual mother of a new religious family (1846-1879). Cornelia was never a widow but bore the titles wife, mother and religious foundress until her death. Such a linear presentation is very helpful but it is also important to see these phases as *three cycles of experience* which spiral back on each other. Cornelia carried her experience of American upbringing, wife and physical motherhood into her experience as a celibate woman and spiritual mother; there was organic continuity, yet a new beginning at each stage of the widening spiral of her life.

Child, Girl and Young Woman 1809-1831

Comparatively little is known about Cornelia's early life and heritage. She was born in Philadelphia in 1809, just twenty six years after the conclusion of the American War of Independence. Her father, Ralph Peacock, was a recent immigrant from Yorkshire who died when Cornelia was nine. Her mother, Mary Swope, was a member of a German Protestant family who had emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1732. They were resourceful, enterprising colonists whose business prospered and who came to have a strong stake in the 'American Enterprise' of building up a new nation. Mary Swope first married John Bowen by whom she had two children. By her second marriage to Ralph Peacock she had seven children of whom Cornelia was the youngest — affectionately known as 'Nellie' or 'Little Ne'.

Cornelia 'grew up with women who exercised responsibility and skill in the management of household and business affairs and who gave her effective feminine role models'⁴. Though Cornelia seems to have been educated at home she grew up in a city with a strong Quaker tradition for the education of girls. This was to influence her positive and creative attitude to the education of women in later life. When her mother died in 1823, Cornelia went to live with her half sister, Isabella Montgomery. Supported

2 Litany used at a Study/Prayer Day on *Women and Advent* organised by the Catholic Women's Network, November 21st 1987. Text in CWN Newsletter March 1988, p 3-4.

3 McCarthy, Introduction, XIV.

Feminism could be defined as an explicit awareness by women of the ways in which a male centred society or church marginalises/subordinates them. Such awareness leads to a commitment to change the structures and attitudes which impede the acceptance of full equality between the sexes.

4 McCarthy, 25-26.

by the warmth and affection of a loving family Cornelia survived the trauma of the deaths of both her parents and her eldest brother, all within the space of five years (1818-1823). To the end of her life she was to correspond frequently with members of the family, declaring in one of her last letters: 'The older I grow the more I love you all'⁵.

Cornelia grew up to be a beautiful and gifted woman, with a lovely speaking and singing voice. A child who boarded with the Connellys in Gracemere wrote in later life: 'I can never forget her lovely face and still lovelier manner'. In Rome an artist spoke of her profile as 'more beautiful than the Grecian models'. This vivacious and talented woman loved deeply and was to be loved deeply in return. Her decision to marry Pierce Connelly against the wishes of her half-sister, who hoped for a more socially advantageous match, showed that Cornelia was not going to conform passively to pre-determined expectations. She intended to make her own decision. She and Pierce were married in December 1831 and went to live in Natchez, Mississippi, where Pierce was to be rector of the Episcopalian Church.

Marriage and Separation: 1831-45

At Natchez Pierce and Cornelia had four years of great personal happiness during which their two eldest children were born — Mercer (1832) and Adeline (1835). Cornelia most certainly set herself to 'live for' her husband and children and to fulfil the conventional role of a wife whose personal wishes were subordinated to those of her husband. In 1843 Bishop Blanc of New Orleans wrote to a distressed Cornelia that 'Nothing of what has happened around you has, so far, been under your control. Your conscience must be at peace'⁶. Certainly at each stage it was to be Pierce who initiated the changes in their married life, and Cornelia had to appropriate and come to terms in her own way with her husband's plans. Yet time was to show that it was Pierce who depended on his wife's love and affirmation to sustain his self image, rather than the reverse. Within the constraints of a conventional 19C view of marriage, it was Cornelia who grew in the freedom and maturity of the self-initiating person.

The story of how Pierce began their joint search into the claims of Catholicism (1835) but how Cornelia preceded him into the Church in New Orleans, is well known. Their first married home, White Cottage, had to be dismantled, and they set off on a long sea voyage to Europe with two small children aged three years, and nine months respectively. Their third child John Henry was to be born in Vienna (1837). The richness and excitement as well as the spiritual joy of that first European journey is also well documented. But how, one wonders, did Cornelia cope with the day to day problems of two small children and a pregnancy, living away from home and moving about from place to place? Furthermore, from the moment Pierce resigned his ministry, there was the question of what form his future ministry might take as a Catholic, for Pierce regarded his commitment to Holy Orders as irrevocable. As the wife of an Episcopalian priest Cornelia could be his helper and support; as wife of a Catholic layman, she was an obstacle to possible ordination. Yet he neither had, nor wanted, any other role in life. Within four days of their arrival in Rome Pierce discussed the problem with Fr McCloskey, a young American student at the Gregorian University. He remembered Cornelia saying to him during that time: 'Is it necessary for Pierce Connelly to make this sacrifice and sacrifice me — I love my husband and my darling children. Why must I give them up — I love my religion and why cannot we remain happy as the Earl of Shrewsbury's (sic) family?'⁷

5 McCarthy, 27.

6 McCarthy, 74.

7 McCarthy, 49.

For five years (1836-41) Cornelia tried to hold their marriage together: *'She bent all her efforts towards helping him to find satisfying ways within their marriage to live out his calling from God'*⁸. Through Cornelia cherished and finally made a choice of the celibate state, she never used language which implied marriage was 'lower' or 'less perfect' in the eyes of God. Given the prevailing theology of marriage in the Roman Catholic tradition, hers was an exceptionally balanced and clear-minded conviction of marriage as a mutual way of holiness to God.

In the spring of 1837, while in Vienna, the Connellys received news of financial losses which necessitated their return to America. By June 1838 they had settled in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, where Pierce taught English in the Jesuit College in return for a home and Mercer's education. Cornelia taught music at the nearby Sacred Heart convent, and was both a working wife and mother and the breadwinner of the family. This reversal of roles must have been a particularly painful one for Pierce.

After the birth of their fourth child Cornelia fell ill and to her great sorrow had to watch the baby, Mary Magdalen, die aged six weeks (September 1839). The following February three year old John Henry died after an appalling accident, falling into a cauldron of boiling sugar. Cornelia held him in her arms for nearly two days before he died. Yet in this same year Pierce was writing about their life together as having *'little to do with the royal road of the Cross'*. He was not a successful teacher and was restless and dissatisfied.

He gradually moved towards the idea of ordination even at the cost of separation from his wife. On October 13th 1840 he interrupted an eight-day retreat to tell his wife that he was now certain that God was calling him to the priesthood. She was three and a half months pregnant with their youngest child, Frank. He asked her to help him to achieve his desire and meanwhile *'to abstain from sexual intercourse with each other, in order to more fully devote themselves mutually to the service of God, and with a special view to his (Pierce's) wish . . . to take Holy Orders . . .'*⁹. Years later Cornelia was to say that the Society of the Holy Child Jesus was founded on 13th October 1840, and that it was founded on a broken heart.

From October 1840 until Pierce's ordination in Rome on 9 July 1845, Cornelia *'lived with the ambiguity which fidelity to God in human circumstances sometimes demands'*¹⁰. She did everything possible to facilitate and support Pierce in his discernment and preparation, but at the same time kept open the possibility of his return to normal married life. Steadily but inexorably their home and day-to-day married life were dismantled. When on 9 April 1844 Pierce took Cornelia to live as a quasi-postulant at the Trinita Dei Monti, she felt *'the loneliness . . . and the seclusion and the enclosure as a great weight upon her spirits'*¹¹. Cornelia was undoubtedly asked to make *'the greatest sacrifice that any woman could be asked to do on the advice of the Church in giving up her husband and children'* (Keller). Today we can see clearly that what was at stake was the *absolute priority of the male celibate priesthood*, and the assumption that married life was essentially incompatible with so sacred an office. The problem is far from being solved in our post Vatican Two Church. A group of former Lutheran ministers in Sweden are currently preparing for ordination as married priests in the Catholic Church. Each has been asked to promise that if his wife dies he will not remarry, and to accept that as a married priest he may never hold an *'official curacy of souls'* even as a parish priest. I was present last summer as the bishop discussed these conditions with the ordinands and their wives. Despite their wide pastoral experience in

ministry and a deep sense of personal vocation, the 'problem' lay not in the degree of preparedness but in the *existence of their wives*. Even to be present at these discussions was to enter a little into what Pierce and Cornelia had to face. In the case of the Swedish couples, however, there was deep regard for the sacredness and obligations of the *continuing marriage*. Catholic ministry could not be undertaken without discernment in this area.

Separation by mutual consent was a poignant but deeply sacrificial action, and Cornelia took comfort in the fact that *'it is not for nothing that I have given him to God'*. Yet within three years in the changed circumstances of Protestant England, Cornelia's new position, and Pierce's unfulfilled ministry, he wanted her to resume their married life. Cornelia refused. Their marriage was now a broken marriage to be marked by painful and public litigation. Pierce abducted the children in order to put pressure on their mother. Such a story — once tucked away as a possible cause of scandal — now speaks directly and poignantly to many who have suffered in similar ways. Cornelia still loved her husband deeply, and fidelity to what she had promised — for his sake — was costly. When Pierce arrived unexpectedly at Derby (1847) during the first months of her novitiate, Cornelia, though longing to see him, said he must not come again. She wrote to him:

*'I have been so longing and hoping for a letter from you this morning; your letter has just come, and makes me cry so that I can scarcely see what I write. Forget your visit to Derby. I never told you, nor meant to tell you, that I assumed that excitement to hide nature, as I must do sometimes. No! You have not the violent temptations that I have in thinking of the little Bethlehem room (their room in Gracemere) nor have you perhaps, gone through the struggles of a woman's heart. No you never have.'*¹²

Cornelia continued to love her husband and children with great intensity. This love was tested in the most searching and unexpected way.

Pierce's decision to become a Catholic priest had traumatic consequences for his children and it is incomprehensible how he could have contemplated such a step while they were so young. But, as Caritas McCarthy points out, *'the Connellys were simply following a centuries old pattern of fitting their children into paternal plans. Nothing is more lacking in the records of the historical setting in which the Connellys moved than recognition of 'rights' of children and women'*¹³. When the home was dismantled in 1842, Mercer was aged eleven, Addy seven and Frank just a year old. The intimacy and warmth of a happy family home was replaced by weekly meetings in the institutional setting of a convent. Cornelia expected to keep the younger children with her, and to see Mercer in the school holidays. In the normal course of events Addy would have accompanied her mother to the school at St Leonards. Just before Pierce's ordination Cornelia wrote: *'The dear Cardinal (Fransoni) in going away said: my duty was to take care of my children, and he said he was molto contento, which made my heart palpitate with joy'*¹⁴.

But Cornelia's plans to keep her children with her were frustrated, first by Wiseman who decided that during her canonical year of novitiate they should be sent away to school. Then Pierce deprived her of all access to them. In English law the mother had no legal rights and so no power to get them back. Paternal wishes were absolute. Mercer never met his mother again before his death (1853). Addy and Frank met her only when they were grown up. In 1872 Frank, now 31, came to St Leonards for a three day visit.

'It is a sad visit ending with Frank shouting at his mother. A house sister who witnesses the scene will later recall that Frank kicks his suitcase down the stairs

8 McCarthy, Ibid.

9 Cornelia Connelly Writings: 21:15.

10 McCarthy, 55.

11 McCarthy, 62.

12 CC. 1:12.

13 McCarthy, 64.

14 McCarthy, 63.

accusing his mother of loving the sisters more than himself. Cornelia calls after him 'Frank, come back, come back'. But he leaves in anger. Mother and son never meet again.¹⁵

Poor Frank. In a moment of anger the grown man cries out with the feelings of a child who has felt abandoned by its mother. The depth and reality of his true feelings was laid bare. Poor Cornelia. She knew that was how it must have seemed to an eight year old whose mother was still alive but never came home. Frank was her youngest, and now her only son. She had been expecting him when Pierce first asked for a separation. Frank never experienced the stability of a happy family life. Cornelia was to say that the thought of her children never left her. The price of her fidelity to what Pierce and the Church asked her to do was very costly indeed. In justice to Cornelia, and to many other women, their stories should be told and their fidelity celebrated, in the church.

Cornelia as Foundress, Religious Leader, Educator

In October 1846 Cornelia responded to a request to found a religious congregation for women in England. Shortly after her arrival Wiseman wrote to her:

*'The middle classes, till now almost neglected in England, form the mass and staple of our society, are the 'higher class' of our congregations out of the capital, have to provide us with our priesthood, our confraternities, and our working religious. To train the future mothers of this class is to sanctify entire families and sow the seeds of piety in whole congregations ...'*¹⁶

Wiseman correctly identified the importance for the Catholic community in England of the education of its future mothers. Cornelia, as wife and mother and religious, imbued with the 'Roman' spirit of Catholicism, seemed an ideal choice. Cornelia, however, soon found herself exercising religious and educational leadership among women, but in a church and society which assumed that women were to be controlled by men. The giftedness, experience and spiritual maturity which had led to her being chosen for the task were to become 'suspect' in the course of carrying it out. Some among her contemporaries appreciated her qualities of heart and mind:

Bishop Rosati wrote of her in 1835 as 'A woman of great intelligence and spirit developed by carefully planned education'.

Newman, who later became more hostile, said Cornelia was 'an enthusiastic person in the truest and best sense'.

Lord Shrewsbury said (1846) that 'There is no one so capable of carrying out an institute of this description as good Mrs Connelly'.

Mr Marshall, the Catholic Schools Inspector who admired her educational ideals and practice said 'she spoke with that clearness and lucidity which belong only to those who possess their knowledge'.

Repeatedly, however, male assessments of, or exasperation with, Cornelia reveal the underlying assumption that women should be ruled, that their duty was to obey masculine authority unquestioningly, and that this woman was 'ungovernable'. Though written fifty years earlier, the following description of the ideal of education for girls in England is still a good guide to male expectations of ideal womanhood in Victorian times:

'The female character should possess the mild and retiring virtues rather than the bold and dazzling ones; great eminence in almost anything is sometimes injurious to a young lady whose temper and disposition should appear to be pliant rather than robust; to be ready to take impressions rather than to be decidedly mark'd; as great apparent

*strength of character, however excellent, is liable to alarm both her own and the opposite sex: and to create admiration rather than affection.'*¹⁷

Such expectations were alien both to Cornelia's character and to her whole American upbringing. Very often when giving her opinion, Cornelia was criticised or attacked as a woman who had the temerity to stand her own ground. Some examples will illustrate this point.

Pierce's unbalanced behaviour is partly explained by the fact that he wishes to regain control over his wife. Both English law and public opinion were on his side. As a woman Cornelia had no legal rights and was regarded as the property of her husband. In 1853 the author of an anti-Catholic pamphlet blamed Rome 'who by priestly art made her forget the children she has borne as well as the husband she has sworn before God to obey'.

Mr Melia, chaplain at St Leonards, said Cornelia 'was an artful and untruthful woman' (1853).

Mr Duke, convert layman at St Leonards, drew Rome's attention to 'the ungovernable character of Mrs Connelly and the well known timidity of Mgn Grant' (1862) — an undesirable reversal of roles.

Mr Sing, parish priest at Derby, took her to task over household repairs and insurance(!) and accused her of 'arrogance, insolence and high-handedness' (1848).

Wiseman, at first friendly and later hostile to Cornelia, wrote to Cardinal Barnabo in Rome (1856): 'We must remedy the dominating and ungovernable character of that American Lady'.

Bishop Ullathorne wrote to Bishop Grant (1850) 'Rose water will not do with her' (i.e. Cornelia could not be manipulated as other women could be).

Bishop Goss wrote to Bishop Danell (1872) that 'she rules like a clever woman of the world ... she tries to avoid as far as possible episcopal supervision'.

Fr Cobb SJ wrote to his Provincial (1872) 'The start was bad and uncanonical ... a married woman who can find no other order in the church but must found her own'.

In fairness it must be said that Cornelia also suffered from the adverse criticism of women who had worked closely with her — Emily Bowles, Sr Mary Alphonsa Kay, and the Preston Cabal. What most hurt Cornelia in these cases was the duplicity practised by sisters whom she trusted, but who in one way or another worked to undermine her authority. She suffered the wound of human loneliness which is betrayal by friends. But the prejudice and unfair treatment by ecclesiastics because of her particular stance as a woman touched on deeper questions of power and authority and so of obedience in the church. Obedience to the known will of God, as mediated to her by her religious superiors, was the touchstone of her life. But even from within the constraints of accepted 19C ecclesiology, Cornelia never confused obedience with subservience, nor did obedience preclude the freedom to speak one's mind before and up to the point where a decision had to be made. In matters concerning justice, it was also important for the truth to be made known. She, like the bishops, bore a heavy weight of responsibility for others, and had to speak for them. Few women with positions of leadership in the Tridentine Church acted as Cornelia did towards Bishop Grant — whom she knew well — when he wrote forbidding any further clothings or professions at St Leonards:

'I took your letter recd by the 3 o'clock post and read it to Our Lady of Sorrows asking her in her own sweet meanness to listen to it — and the interior answer I got was 'burn the letter and tell Bp to forget what he wrote and to come and tell you what more you

15 *Informatio*, 75.

16 Marmion 350.

17 Cited in John P. Marmion *Cornelia Connelly's Work in Education 1848-1879*, (Manchester University 1984) 199. From Erasmus Darwin 'A Plan for the conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools' 1797.

can do than you have done. I have burnt it my Lord and now will you come and tell me what more I can do than I have done.'¹⁹

Cornelia 'loved the Church with a deep devotion despite considerable difficulties experienced at the hands of ecclesiastics' (Whatmore). Intervention by her ecclesiastical superiors extended not merely to matters of canon law and church property but even to domestic and educational policy. Male clerical judgement was made to prevail over Cornelia's creative and usually wiser insight. For example Mr Jones left a considerable library at St Leonards. Wiseman ordered that all the systematic theology and philosophy books should be taken out because they were 'unsuitable for the fragile daughters of Eve'. (The remainder included a set of volumes from Patristic writers. Cornelia and her nuns were to be nourished on the Fathers and prevented from reading the manuals of 19C systematic theology — a happy omission.) It was Wiseman, supported by Emily Bowles, who required Cornelia's separation from Frank (aged five) and Addy (eleven) during the canonical year of novitiate, against Cornelia's wish. The whole question of enclosure and the division of the congregation into two ranks of sisters was forced on Cornelia by Bishop Danell — with painful and lasting consequences. When Bishop Grant was told that the children at St Leonards 'waltzed, danced the polka and played whist', he ordered the dancing to stop and the cards to be played only in holiday time with the nuns present to limit the stakes. Grants also advised against Cornelia's idea of taking several sick sisters to the south of France for convalescence, on the grounds of religious observance. He told her to cut out time for drawing classes in favour of longer religious lessons. Danell did not like the nuns travelling in a pony trap in the vicinity of Mayfield. In future they had to do so in a 'closed conveyance'. There was scarcely any aspect of communal or school life which was not ultimately subject to episcopal control. Often it was a case of the bishop being fearful of scandal or public opinion in Protestant England. One other strong minded woman considered Cornelia's acquiescence in not purchasing the Old Palace Mayfield (1863) 'unaccountable weakness in submitting to the bishop's interference'.¹⁹ The Duchess of Leeds promptly set about buying the property herself, offering it to the bishop who suggested Cornelia.

In her *Recollections of a Northumbrian Lady (1815-1866)* Barbara Charlton describes her visit to St Leonards:

*'I was much pleased with what I saw of Mrs Conelly (sic) and the nuns who seemed not to have thrown off all common sense with their worldly garment.'*²⁰

It was precisely this common sense, and self-reliance, which made Cornelia and her nuns 'suspect' religious women.

Educational Apostolate

It would be impossible even to try to summarise Cornelia's apostolate to girls and women.²¹ The 1863 *Book of Studies* reveals her vision of education as growth towards the fullness of human life in God — somewhat comparable to Karl Rahner's theology of grace as response to God's offer of becoming in and through all the circumstances of life. In offering educational opportunity to girls Cornelia was meeting a very great need, contributing to the advancement of women in a society which mostly neglected to educate them, or, where they did, only to meet social expectations. By July 5th 1869, the Society ran twelve schools in which the sisters were responsible for 6,349 children (girls), 90% of whom were poor. Cornelia most certainly examined the socially conditioned beliefs about the educational opportunities offered to women. In her

carefully planned educational programme she set out to use what promoted maturity and reject what might inhibit it. She knew from the training of her own children that 'the education of a child should begin at its birth . . . affection grows with the habit of showing it'²²; or again, she said to her nuns 'Stiffness and rigour to not produce the spirit of the Holy Child'.

Cornelia was a pioneer for the education of Catholic girls in Victorian England. She belonged to that small band of women whose creative vision eventually enabled the movements for tertiary education and political equality of women in society.

Conclusion:

'Doing the will of God whom I love'. (CC)

The story of Cornelia Connelly is that of one C19 middle class American woman who responded to God's offer of holiness/wholeness from within a concentration of experiences which caused her to suffer deeply as a woman. All human persons have the potential to pass on the gift of life to the next generation, and to do so with a love which is uncalculating and which seeks the existence and fulfillment of others. Cornelia in the various cycles of her life as lover, mother, friend and teacher mirrored the agapic love and fidelity of her Creator and Redeemer. She did so most of all when her love was not reciprocated and her fidelity severely tested. Her story should be celebrated in the Church and the full truth of the issues it highlights should enable greater equality, justice, mutuality and reciprocity between women and men who have been created in the image and likeness of God.

18 Cited in McCarthy, 179.

19 Marmion, 109.

20 Marmion, 176.

21 Fully researched by John P. Marmion as above.

22 Positio, 867.