



CORNELIA CONNELLY 1809-1879

**FOUNDRESS
OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS**

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The story of Cornelia Connelly is both extraordinary and dramatic.

A wife and mother, Cornelia sacrificed her married happiness for the sake of the man she loved and his call to the Catholic priesthood.

An American convert, she was sent to open her first convent in England, a country almost unknown to her at that time.

A consecrated nun, she was sued in the English courts for the restitution of conjugal rights by her husband who had abandoned his priesthood.

Foundress of a growing congregation devoted to the Spiritual works of mercy and in particular the work of education, she herself became the subject and object of a prolonged 'No Popery' press campaign instigated by her husband after his attempts to regain her had failed.

Her spiritual insight led her to recognize and follow with great fidelity the will of God made known to her in these extraordinary circumstances of her life. It is small wonder that she regarded the foundation and continuance of her Society as a miracle: "I have only followed the inspiration of God in obedience to *his* not *my* will."

During the century since her death the sisters of her congregation have continued to follow the path she mapped out for them in an apostolate of education and related spiritual and pastoral ministries. Her cause for canonization to sainthood has been introduced in Rome.

WIFE ≈ MOTHER ≈ FOUNDRRESS

RENUNCIATION

On a spring morning of 1844, a number of Roman ladies came together in the Sacred Heart convent at the Trinit  dei Monti to make the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius. Among them was a young American preparing to take a step that would radically change her life and whose presence in Rome was arousing much interest in ecclesiastical circles. Cornelia Connelly had been summoned by Pope Gregory XVI to give her formal consent to the petition for legal separation submitted by her husband earlier in the year. Pierce Connelly was convinced that he had not lost his call to be a minister of God when he resigned his ministry in the American Episcopal Church and entered the Church of Rome. Happily married with a beautiful wife and three children, he had nevertheless asked Cornelia to free him to follow his call to the Catholic priesthood. And Cornelia had consented. "Be it done unto me according to your will" had already become the guiding principal of her life.

WIFE AND MOTHER 1831-44

Born in Philadelphia in 1809, Cornelia Augusta Peacock married the brilliant young Episcopalian minister, Pierce Connelly, in 1831. Their first home was in Natchez, Mississippi, where the young rector and his beautiful wife won all hearts. While investigating certain allegations against the Catholic Church, they both became convinced of its truth and, supported by Cornelia, Pierce resigned his ministry. He decided to go to Rome where he hoped to settle his remaining doubts and to be received into the Church in the very heart of Catholic Christendom. Cornelia and her two little children, Mercer and Adeline, were received in New Orleans before sailing for Europe. Shortly after they reached Rome, Pope Gregory granted them an interview. Pierce's difficulties were solved, at least temporarily, and

he was received into the Church. Husband and wife were confirmed together by the English Cardinal Weld on 31st March, 1836.

The Connellys remained in Europe, mostly in Rome, for the next two years. They were drawn into the group of notable English Catholics who frequented the Holy City. The young converts attracted attention by the novelty of their position — American converts — and by their own attractive personalities. Lord Shrewsbury, premier Earl of England and Ireland, a sincere and zealous Catholic, took them under his wing. He introduced them to the wealthy Borghese family whose heir was married to his daughter, Gwendaline, known as the 'Angel of Rome' for her piety and charity. A friendship grew up between the two young women and Cornelia learned from her friend how a Catholic mother can combine her social and maternal duties with a life of intense piety and devotion to the poor. While Cornelia remained contentedly in Rome with her children, Pierce accepted an invitation to visit Alton Towers, Lord Shrewsbury's palatial neo-Gothic mansion in Staffordshire, and in the summer of 1836 traveled from one stately home to another at the invitation of the Earl's Catholic friends — an experience which seems somewhat to have turned his head.

Returning to America at the end of 1837 with their children and the baby, John Henry, who had been born to them earlier in the year, they took up residence in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, where Pierce had been offered a teaching post in the local Jesuit school. 'Gracemere,' a charming cottage on the college grounds, became their home for the next few years. Here, in July 1839, Cornelia gave birth to her fourth child named Mary Magdalen. To her great sorrow, the baby girl died two months later. Cornelia was able to add to the family income by teaching music in the nearby Sacred Heart Convent school where she came to know and love the nuns. She seized this opportunity to deepen her own love of God and life of faith. Her Jesuit spiritual director introduced her to the Ignatian method of meditation and examen of conscience, both of which she followed with great fidelity, unconsciously preparing herself for her future life. The years at Grand Coteau in the late thirties were, she said later, the happiest of her life.

From a letter written by Pierce at this time, we catch a glimpse of the happy household. At home in the evenings he wrote letters to his friends — or tried to. But in the same room were "three of the sweetest children — and the noisiest — in America." Blind Man's Bluff was in progress and Papa's reading vanished from his sight as his eyes were clasped by hot little hands and he was "caught." The next game was Puss-in-the-Corner during which Papa had to sustain various bumps and collisions as the children raced round the room. Then Cornelia would go to the piano and "send them all dancing and stamping round and round, and Papa would be dragged in, his peace shattered for the moment." When the games were over, the family gathered in the little oratory and said night prayers together before Fra Angelico's picture of the Annunciation. Then Cornelia put the children to bed.

TRAGEDY

In January 1840, seized by a sense of overwhelming happiness and impelled by her growing love of God, Cornelia one day lifted up her heart in spontaneous prayer: "My God, if all this happiness is not to thy greater glory and the good of souls take it from me — I make the sacrifice." Cornelia was intensely happy in her life with her husband and their "darling children," but she must also have been aware that Pierce was once again pondering the question of his own vocation. Her prayer seems to envisage the possible eventual sacrifice of their family life to Pierce's priesthood. It certainly expressed the total and unconditional gift of herself to God following on her first experience of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius in December, 1839. The spiritual exercises also helped Cornelia give expression to her faith in God's presence and action in the whole of her life, and to deepen her understanding of life as a participation in the Paschal mystery.

Very soon a tragedy befell the family, one which could never have been foreseen but which, with all its agony and grief, led Cornelia into a profound sharing in the Paschal mystery of our God-made-flesh in Jesus. John Henry, Cornelia's youngest son, a bright and beautiful two

and a half year old had escaped from Phoebe, his vigilant nurse, and run out to play with the big Newfoundland dog. A sudden spring of the animal flung the baby into a sugar boiler full of scalding liquid which had been left to cool near the garden door. Nothing could be done to save him. Cornelia held the little tortured body in her arms until he died forty-three hours later. She rarely spoke of this child in later life, but from this experience of her dying son she learned the companionship with the Mother of Sorrows which was to be her strength and solace in the future. We know from her notebooks that from this time on she became increasingly aware of the power of suffering to draw a person closer to God, to open one's heart in compassion for others. Ever more conscious of its apostolic effectiveness, even before this tragedy, she had seemed to have a premonition that change and sorrow were coming to her. The prayer of resignation that she was practicing at that time prepared her for the further heartbreaking event which broke upon her only nine months after the death of her little son.

SACRIFICE

Pierce, like Cornelia, had also been developing his spiritual life under Jesuit direction. Although initially after his conversion the urge to continue his ministry as a priest seems to have subsided, there are signs that already by late 1839 it was stirring in him once again. While he was making the spiritual exercises at the college in the autumn of 1840 it re-emerged strongly. He again became convinced that God was calling him to the priesthood. On October 13, while walking back from morning Mass, he interrupted the solitude of his retreat to break the news to Cornelia who was then carrying their fifth child. He asked her to make the sacrifice of their married life and explained that the Church would, in all probability, require her to enter a convent. Stunned and shocked, she nevertheless responded immediately: "Think of it twice and with deliberate intention, but if the good God asks the sacrifice, I am ready to make it to him with all my heart." Her answer reveals her growth in spiritual maturity. Earlier, at the time of their conversion, she had been aware of her husband's leanings

towards the priesthood. When in Rome she had expressed her anxiety on this score to a young American cleric who later became Cardinal McCloskey. He remembered her approaching him, "clasping her hands, her beautiful eyes uplifted to my face. 'Is it necessary,' she said, 'for Pierce to make this sacrifice and sacrifice *me*? I love my husband; I love my darling children. Why must I give them up?'" Her answer five years afterwards was prompt, but she confided to an intimate friend years later that had not God sustained her by a special grace, she would have died of the anguish of that morning. In later life she always affirmed that her Society was built on a broken heart.

The question is sometimes asked: Ought not Cornelia to have refused her consent, for the sake of the children, at least? One needs to look into her heart with imaginative insight. She had herself, earlier in the year, offered the sacrifice of her happiness should it seem to stand in the way of wholehearted cooperation with God's purposes. So how could she now stand in the way of her husband's call, involving, as it appeared, the sacrifice of home and family in order to consecrate himself to a more intimate following of Christ in the priesthood? She may have had her doubts about his ability to persevere, but she could not refuse to let him try.

AT THE TRINITÁ 1844 - 46

Three and a half years were to pass before Cornelia and Pierce signed the deed of perpetual separation in Rome in the presence of the Cardinal Vicar and two witnesses. In the meantime, their fifth child, Frank, was born. Pierce left Cornelia in 1842 to take Mercer to school in England on his way to present the petition in Rome. He was in no hurry and took a post as traveling tutor to the son of the Berkeleys of Spetchley Park, Worcester. 'Gracemere' was sold and Cornelia moved to a small house next to the convent at Grand Coteau where she continued to carry out her duties at home and in school. Knowing that she would, in all probability, be leading a cloistered life in the future, she learned as much about this life as she could and was allowed to

join the nuns in some of their spiritual exercises. She expected to enter the convent there when the petition was granted.

But a summons came from Rome. Her presence was necessary for her formal consent. Once in Rome, things moved quickly. At her own request Cornelia went to the Sacred Heart nuns at the Trinitá after the deed of separation had been signed. As a quasi-postulant, she lived with little Frank and his nurse in a cottage on the grounds while Adeline became a boarder in the school. Pierce entered the Collegio dei Nobili, then run by the Jesuits, as an ecclesiastical student. It soon became clear that he had no vocation to the Jesuits, but he was admitted to the priesthood after only a year's training. Prior to his reception of major orders, Cornelia was required to take a solemn vow of chastity.

Before doing so she gave Pierce the chance to return to their married life, warning him of the difficulties he would encounter in the priestly life. But he persisted in his decision and Cornelia took the vow having first been assured by the Cardinal Vicar that it would neither interfere with her duty of caring for her children nor bind her to enter a religious order. Pierce was ordained on July 6, 1845 and, three days later at the Trinitá said his first Mass at which Adeline made her First Communion. Husband and wife were now irrevocably set on a new course of life in the Church.

The years at the Trinitá were ones of great desolation and darkness for Cornelia. It did not take her long to realize that she was not in the right place. She felt that the cloistered and semi-monastic life would not leave her free to work for the world in the world. Her spiritual advisors and the nuns themselves came to the same conclusion. Mother Barat, their foundress, who came to Rome at that time understood the situation, arranged a lighter regime for her and generously invited her to stay at the convent until her future was more settled. Provision had been made for the care and education of the children. Lord Shrewsbury was educating Mercer, now at Stonyhurst. Frank would remain with Cornelia for as long as he needed her — until he was eight, she hoped — and then Prince Borghese would see to his education. Adeline would remain with her mother and be

educated in the school. While living at the Trinitá, she and the children had been able to see Pierce every week or ten days, thanks to the broad-minded and humane Pope who arranged for this. At these meetings she and Pierce had begun to plan for her future. We know that they got as far as drawing up, with the help of her Jesuit advisor, an outline constitution for an apostolic congregation which she would help to initiate, and that Bishop Fenwick of Boston was prepared to offer a home for it.

APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY

What were Cornelia's ideas at that time for her new congregation? In many ways her outlook was in advance of her times. She was clear-sighted about the needs of the society of her own day. The provision of good educational facilities for both rich and poor was one of them. The stream of converts entering the Church needed instruction and spiritual help. The idea of a congregation devoted to spiritual works of mercy began to take shape in her mind. When asked by her spiritual director to put her ideas on paper, she wrote: "The congregation is wholly for works of spiritual mercy. The sisters are not cloistered and the dress is the least striking possible." It would be called a Society to distinguish it from the monastic orders. Her meditations led her to see the Incarnation as the highest expression of God's mercy and love. His gift of himself, emptied of all his glory, in the form of a little child, poor, humble, obedient for our sakes was to be the model on which her followers would form themselves. They would draw their strength from "contemplating the Eternal Wisdom in the lowliness of his humanity... seeking in the mysteries of the life of this Divine Lord all that can serve to their greater perfection and to the good of their neighbor." The name — Society of the Holy Child Jesus — emerged, and from contemplating the Divine Child "enclosed for nine months in the womb of his mother, born for us in a stable, exposed to suffering and poverty, now fleeing into Egypt and then hidden and laboring for thirty years in a carpenter's shop," they were to receive the spirit of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

These short extracts from her rule show her spirituality to be rooted in the gospel, focused on Jesus as "God with us" in his humanity, and outward-looking in service of others. She had a notable respect for individuality. "Be yourself, but make that self what Our Lord wishes it to be" was one of her favorite sayings. She is careful to point out that the task of the Novice Mistress is not to impose her own spirit on the novices but to assist them to advance in their own way and to study the manner in which grace tends to sanctify each one and act accordingly. Her idea of authority is not rigid. Liberty of spirit and largeness of heart were characteristic of her and she recommended it to those she made superiors. "When she placed a sister in office," wrote one of her early biographers, "she trusted her thoroughly and gave her large freedom. She encouraged the development of initiative and did not hamper her subjects by needless restrictions or tease by small regulations.... She knew that responsibility without freedom was an impossible burden, and that confidence brought the best powers of each one into action."

CALL TO ENGLAND

Cornelia's plans to start her new congregation in her own country were cut short by the intervention of a group of powerful English Catholics, backed by the Pope. Dr. Nicholas Wiseman, coadjutor bishop of the Midlands District since 1840, saw the need for "non-cloistered religious trained in the spirit of which St. Ignatius is the master who, while deeply religious, would know the world and the needs of the world." The new French and Irish apostolic congregations were then only just beginning to make foundations in England, and the need was urgent for Catholic schools with high standards to educate the stream of converts which was transforming the Church in the 1840s. Cornelia was put forward as a person who could help to meet this need, and Pope Gregory, who had shown such fatherly interest in the Connellys, in an interview told her that she was not called to join any existing order but to do a great work in God's Church. Cornelia, who always saw the will of God in the advice of her superiors, yielded and renounced her desire to return to her native land. She said

later: "The Society of the Holy Child Jesus is not my work. I have followed the inspirations of God in obedience to his will, not *my* will." So Cornelia, the American convert, set up her Society in a country where she had only spent a few weeks, and where her ideal of mercy was mostly developed in her ideal of education. She remained in England for most of her life but sent some of her nuns in 1862 to open a convent and school in Pennsylvania from which her Society took root in her native land.

FIRST FOUNDATION

Bishop Wiseman summoned Cornelia to England on August 1846 and laid his plans before her. She was to collect a few companions and go to Derby to take charge of a large poor school with a convent attached. The population of that rapidly growing industrial town was being swollen by Irish immigration and there was much apostolic work to do there. Cornelia was utterly amazed at the proposal. A stranger to the country, without means or influence, she had not a single companion or a circle of acquaintances among whom she might find some. A more modest and secluded beginning would be more suitable for the training in religious life that would be necessary. Wiseman brushed aside all her misgivings and promised to accept financial liability. She yielded to his authority in faith and went for a time to the Sisters of Mercy at Handsworth. There she gathered three young women for her community but, to her great distress, it now became necessary to send her children away to school. Adeline went to the convent of the Holy Sepulchre at New Hall, Chelmsford, and Frank to a school for little boys at Hampstead. Cornelia and her three companions took up residence in the Derby convent on October 13th, 1846. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus was founded.

The new foundation did not go unnoticed in the Catholic press. The *Tablet* of October 31st stated:

The new convent at Derby has for its object the practice of works of spiritual mercy exclusively —

especially the education of children, giving of catechetical and other instruction under the direction of the parish clergy, and the receiving as boarders, under a light rule, ladies desirous of temporary retirement, or converts preparing for the Sacraments etc. We hope to hear more of a congregation that appears peculiarly adapted to the wants of England at the present time.

But during her lifetime, Cornelia never saw her apostolic ideals fully implemented. Ecclesiastics of her day were still rigorously imposing a cloistered regime upon the new apostolic congregations of women. She was rebuked by bishops for allowing her nuns some of the freedoms they enjoy today. In 1865, after Cornelia had taken her nuns out to a local beauty spot, Bishop Grant wrote to her:

Nuns are never allowed to take amusement beyond their own walls, and although they may leave them to travel to other houses, for all other purposes they are always on the footing of enclosed nuns. I am sorry that I cannot hold out any hope that the Church will relax her rules in this particular.

In the matter of dress, however, she got her own way. In order to be as inconspicuous as possible when going out, she chose a contemporary dress, similar to a model of the day reproduced in the *Illustrated London News* and described as a street dress for a young widow. It would have been quite inconspicuous at the time compared with the more traditional tunic, scapular and wimple of the older orders.

TROUBLE AT DERBY

At the end of 1846, Cornelia received the habit and began her own year of training as a novice. Others, mostly converts, came to join her and the sisters taught in the night and Sunday schools as well as in the day school. The apostolate was progressing well, but to the stresses of a new foundation, a personal sorrow and anxiety was

added for Cornelia. Pierce had come to England as assistant chaplain at Alton Towers. It had been thought wiser not to allow him to visit Cornelia as it might be a cause of scandal in Protestant England. He resented the restriction as he began to consider himself the co-founder of the young Society. He had helped Cornelia draw up some rules for just such a congregation when they were in Rome together. Taking matters into his own hands, he began to interfere in its affairs and in March, 1847, called unexpectedly to see her. Cornelia made it clear that he should not have done this without Wiseman's permission and asked him not to repeat the visit. Deeply hurt and resentful of Wiseman's authority, he planned to gain control of Cornelia through the children. Without a word to their mother, he kidnapped them from their schools and took them abroad. Torn as she was by this conduct, Cornelia knew there could be no turning back. She had made her religious vows the previous December. She later wrote to her brother:

My dear children were as much under my eyes as if I had not left the world till their father broke his word and his promises and stole them away from me in a moment of excitement and unjust anger. May God forgive him.

Pierce made his way to Rome and presented a rule "for a small congregation which the good God for a long time inspired me to found with the aid of a holy woman well known to me who was most docile to me." This action became the cause of much confusion when Cornelia forwarded her own rule for approbation later. Rome, in fact, refused to confirm her rule until both she and Pierce were dead.

In May, Pierce returned armed with, according to his own account, papal authority to see his wife and present her with an Apostolic Blessing. Without reference to Wiseman, he called at the convent and demanded an interview with Cornelia. She refused to see him until he had brought her little girl back to her. She wanted to dissuade him "in his hopes of ever having anything more to do with our convent and our rule." According to a witness, when Pierce heard this he threw

himself on the sofa and remained there for six hours "in a passion of rage and disappointment." His attitude now hardened and he determined to "rescue my blessed wife from the hands of devils."

By the middle of 1848, the situation in Derby had become untenable. Wiseman could no longer help the community as he had been transferred to London and they could not meet the debt on the buildings. It became necessary to find a new home. At Wiseman's suggestion they moved to a property at St. Leonard's-on-Sea which was awaiting a religious community to develop it as a center for the Catholics scattered along thirty miles of the Sussex coast. In December 1848, the community moved in, taking with them two little girls who became the nucleus of the boarding school which developed there. The convent at St. Leonard's later opened a school for the education of local Catholics and for a short time a Training School for Teachers.

CONNELLY VS. CONNELLY 1849 - 51

Cornelia and the community had only been at St. Leonard's for six short weeks when the greatest suffering of her life descended on her. On the 25th January, 1849, she was served with a writ to appear in a suit for the restoration of conjugal rights instituted against her by Pierce. Extracts from his letters at the time reveal the state of his mind: "I am a man, a husband, and a father before I am a priest and my first duties cannot be abandoned... I will now never cease until Mrs. Connelly is placed absolutely and unreservedly under my control...." The case came before the Court of Arches in May, 1849. Wiseman took it up on Cornelia's behalf, assuring her that no personal appearance would be necessary. Rumors that Pierce had renounced his Catholic faith reached her and she feared for the faith of her children. She was also concerned that the costs of the case would reduce them to beggary. The court gave judgment in favor of Pierce, but Cornelia's counsel immediately appealed, and in 1851 the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council reversed the judgment and referred the case back for retrial. But Pierce's means had given out

and he was obliged to drop the case. In the end it was Cornelia who paid the costs to save him from being committed to prison for debt.

While the case lasted, public excitement was intense. *The Times* carried full reports of all the proceedings; the country rang with it. The Protestant Alliance rejoiced and the *Tablet* took up the cudgels. Denunciation abounded on both sides and makes painful reading today. Cornelia was urged to flee the country; there was fear that she might be kidnapped. She kept a disguise in her cell for any emergency and never went alone to the parlor or walked on the grounds without a companion. But she kept her head and her dignity and went tranquilly about her daily duties, and most of the community remained in ignorance of her crucifixion. The news of Mercer's death in New Orleans in 1853 came as a new sorrow, for he died unreconciled to the Church.

True to his threats, Pierce carried on the campaign outside the courts. In a public letter to Lord Shrewsbury he stated that his allegiance to the Church of Rome had been a delusion. For twenty years, a series of pamphlets came from his pen attacking the papacy, the hierarchy, priests, the religious life and the vows. These slanderous attacks left Cornelia open to the worst interpretations of her words and actions in other difficult periods of her life, and she often suffered misunderstandings and condemnation from those whom she might have expected to support her.

For the remaining eighteen years of her life Cornelia worked for the approval of her rule by Rome. Here she encountered difficulties, partly of Pierce's making, for his presentation of a rule in 1847 had confused the issue. Moreover, uncertainty about the recognition of the new Society by Rome undermined the confidence in Cornelia of a few of its more powerful members. She was faced with a disloyalty that threatened the very unity of the Society and which eventually led to the humiliation of having her own rule suspended in 1874 and one composed by Bishop Danell of Southwark imposed upon her for three years. Cornelia lived to see the reversal of this situation, for Rome refused to approve Danell's rule; but she died without the satisfaction

of knowing that her own rule — the particular way which the Holy Spirit had inspired her to form her sisters in the pattern of Christ — had been approved. The rule was not approved until 1887.

Pierce eventually settled down in Florence as rector of the American Episcopal Church there and Adeline kept house for him until his death in 1883. She subsequently saw her mother once or twice and was reconciled to the Church. Frank, who became a well-known sculptor, also saw her, but never returned to the Catholic faith. Cornelia died on 18th of April, 1879. She had lived long enough to see the success of her educational work, though to the end she had to face disloyalties and criticisms. Her life and spirit had been summed up in the beautiful words inscribed on her tomb in the chapel at Mayfield, Sussex:

*Love knoweth no measure, feareth no labour,
Maketh sweet all that is bitter,
Findeth rest in God alone.*

CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION

In spite of all that Pierce had done to wreck the young Society, it did not cease to attract new members. As early as 1853 Cornelia was able to send sisters to staff poor schools in 'darkest London' and others to Preston and Blackpool to teach in the Catholic schools. In 1862 she accepted the challenge of building a convent and school out of the ruins of the old episcopal palace at Mayfield donated to her by a wealthy patroness. Her educational methods began to attract attention. She brought to the educational scene in England a breath of fresh life. Brought up in the social freedom and cultural and intellectual life of Philadelphia, a city which provided a serious and substantial education for its women, Cornelia's mind was developed by her contacts with the brilliant Pierce. So she was already a woman of culture and education when she went to Rome in 1835. The two years she spent there moving in the circles of English and Roman intellectuals widened her interests and broadened her outlook. She

developed her natural gifts by taking art and music lessons while there. She had experienced the education given in the Sacred Heart schools in Grand Coteau and Rome where enlightened methods of teaching were employed — the use of visual aids, the careful planning of work, the combination of instruction with amusement. In all these ways, Cornelia's preparation for the profession of teaching was far superior to that of most of her secular contemporaries in England. She developed her educational system in the school and college at St. Leonard's. Her *Book of Studies* which she drew up in 1863 covers in detail the solid learning and the moral and spiritual training the pupils received in her schools, and the place that art, music and drama played in their education. As early as 1853, an inspector from the Catholic Poor School Committee reported on the Girls' Poor School at St. Leonard's:

Buildings excellent. Desks excellent; furniture excellent. Playground excellent. Books abundant and good; apparatus abundant. Organization excellent. Methods mixed, and applied with rare skill and judgment. Discipline excellent; instruction of the highest order.

It is impossible to witness without admiration the results obtained in this very interesting school in which consummate skill in the art of teaching, unwearied patience and the most persuasive personal influence have combined to accomplish all the rarest fruits of Christian instruction. The school is now probably one of the most perfect institutions of its class in Europe.

Exaggerated as this eulogy may sound, life itself had trained Cornelia to be a successful educator. From her own children she had learned the ways of children and she used this knowledge in her dealings with those entrusted to her in the schools. Her love and sympathy and trust drew out the best in them. This spirit of love and trust of children she left as a heritage to her nuns and it has called forth love and loyalty in the pupils who have been through her schools.

THE SOCIETY TODAY

The spiritual renewal inspired by Vatican II has been a liberating force in the life of the Holy Child Sisters. The recommendation to return to sources and re-examine and preserve "the spirit and aims of their founders, together with those sound traditions which form the heritage of each Institute" (*Perfectae Caritatis* 2b) has led them to rediscover and implement Cornelia's original idea of founding a congregation devoted to "all the spiritual works of mercy." They have adopted a broader view of education in consequence and widened their ministries to meet the needs of the times. The Society is now more international in its membership and more widespread in its locations than in Cornelia's day, but still united in its mission "to help others to believe that God lives and acts in them and in our world and to rejoice in the Divine presence." The sisters work in diverse ministries including social, legal and health services, pastoral work, educational offices, schools and colleges, as well as sponsoring Rosemont College, the schools within the Holy Child Network of Schools, and the RESPONSE-ABILITY volunteer program. Through these ministries they continue to fulfill that part of Cornelia's rule which directs them "to meet the wants of the age."

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