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Women's Religious Education: Liberation or Socialization?

A Case Study

Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education

Chicago

November 3, 1991

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In 1846 Cornelia Peacock Connelly, an American expatriate, journeyed from Rome to England to found the first indigenous congregation of vowed women religious in that country since the Reformation. Its purpose would be "the Education of females of all classes."¹ A native of Philadelphia who had lived and studied in Europe, Connelly's own background, formation and acquaintances could easily have identified her with the needs and perspective of the English upper classes. Her approach to education would reflect her religious beliefs, her lived spirituality and her active response to the exigencies of the societal context in which she worked.² It would also be an expression of an already acquired "educative style," a "characteristic way of engaging in, moving through, and combining of [her] educational experiences."³

The particular concern that I wish to explore in this paper is how Cornelia Connelly developed and implemented an approach to education which she perceived to be a response to the needs of females of all classes of Catholic Victorian society. What were the societal and religious forces behind her work? Whom did she teach? What kind of values, beliefs and knowledge did she convey in her method of education?

¹"Rules of 1844-1846," quoted in Caritas McCarthy, "A Study of the Constitutions of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus," Source 4 (Winter 1975): 26.

²In a recent doctoral dissertation, Roseanne McDougall provides extensive consideration of how Cornelia Connelly interacted with the societal forces of her day, particularly in the area of popular education, in responding to the needs of the poor and the emerging middle class in nineteenth century England. Ed.D. dissertation (New York: Columbia University Teachers College, 1991).

³Hope Jensen Leichter, "The Concept of Educative Style," Teachers College Record 75 (1973): 239-250. For further elaboration of this as it applies to Cornelia Connelly see Lorna M.A. Bowman, Cornelia Connelly Educator: Her Charisma and Its Institutionalization (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, [1984] 1986).

Susan O'Brien points to the paucity of interpretive or general historical research on the contribution of Catholic women's orders in this period.⁴ This paper, presented as a case study, only begins to address this concern. It is an attempt to surface some of the questions around issues of religion, gender, class and culture which emerge with regard to women in religion and education when one looks at the work of an educational institute such as that founded by Connelly.

Genesis of Cornelia Connelly's Educational Institute

Cornelia Augusta Peacock was born in Philadelphia In 1809. Later in life, when asked if she were American or English, she replied "I am a cosmopolitan. The whole world is my country and heaven is my home."⁵ By the time of her first foundation in 1846 Connelly had lived in both the New World and the Old: amidst the sophisticated life of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; on the moving frontier lands of gentile life in Natchez, Mississippi and missionary life in the Louisiana bayous; and at the cosmopolitan heart of Catholicism in Rome. She had travelled in Italy, Austria, England and France. It is not possible to describe here the circumstances which led to this wife, mother, educator and convert to Catholicism to embark upon religious life.⁶ But in August 1846, accompanied by her two youngest

⁴Susan O'Brien, "Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth Century England 121 (November 1988): 109-140.

⁵Documentation Presented by the Historical Commission for the Beatification and Canonization Process of the Servant of God, Cornelia Connelly, Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus 73: 253. In subsequent references the abbreviation D is utilized for Documentation as is customary in all research using these sources. Authenticated or original copies in SHCJ Archives, Rome.

⁶For the most recent biography of CC see Radegunde Flaxman, A Woman Styled Bold: The Life of Cornelia Connelly 1809-1879 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1991). For a briefer overview of her life see Kenneth

children, she arrived in England with the understanding that Pope Gregory XVI wished her to found a religious community for the purpose of teaching "females."

Connelly's coming to England occurred shortly after the conversion of John Henry Newman. From the time of his conversion Newman was followed into the Catholic Church by other members of the Oxford Movement.⁷ This included a Miss Giberne to whom he wrote in July 1846:

If you want to be a nun I have heard (it is a secret) of something which may suit - a new congregation, under the sanction of Rome, with the object of instructing girls, principally of the middle and upper classes; of affording a refuge (for a while) for ladies cast off by their families, and of assisting priests in various things. The works will be all spiritual works of mercy, in opposition to corporeal The person who begins it is in the truest sense an enthusiastic person - of education and great influence in her circle - who has been married - but not elderly I suppose.¹

This is the earliest glimpse we have of the anticipated work Connelly would undertake in England. Three days earlier Newman had also written to Miss Giberne from Alton Towers, home of John Talbot, Lord Shrewsbury. The Shrewsburys were not only leading Catholics of the period, but also friends of the Connelly family and, most likely, the source of Newman's information. A certain expectation around the work to be done by Connelly is evident.

A fuller picture of the work to be undertaken by Connelly emerges in correspondence extant from Bishop Nicholas Wiseman, Vicar Apostolic for the

Woodward, Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't and Why (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), pp.

⁷Roland Bainton, Christendom, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), II: 132-137. See also, Sheridan Gilley, Newman and His Age (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), pp. 223-257.

¹D 50: 1-2, 21 July 1846.

Central District of England and the member of the Church hierarchy to whom Connelly would relate.⁹ In a letter written to the Jesuit Provincial, Randall Lythgoe, in late September (by which time Connelly was making the final arrangements for her new foundation) Wiseman writes "of a Community about to be established in Derby for the purpose of educating the poor and middle-classes & training school-mistresses."¹⁰ There is no mention of the upper class but a connection is established with the English Jesuits.

The following excerpt is from a letter which Wiseman sent Connelly in mid-October, six days after she formally established the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

The field which you have chosen for the exercise of spiritual mercies is indeed vast and boundless, but it presents the richest soil, and the promise of abundant return. The middle classes, until now almost neglected in England, form the mass and staple of our society, are the "higher class" of our great 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 seeds of piety in whole congregations: it is to make friends for the poor of Christ, nurses for the sick and dying, catechists for the little ones, and useful auxiliaries in every good work.¹¹

This letter expresses Wiseman's concern for the emerging middle classes and the poor; his earlier letter to Lythgoe describes how he envisions Connelly's making provision for the needs he identifies.

The situation of the English Catholic Church in 1846 was very complex. From the time of the Reformation many Catholics of the upper classes were educated in Europe. The suppression of the Church in England had meant

⁹See Appendix I for map of Catholic Church at this period.

¹⁰D 10:4, 28 September 1846.

¹¹D 10: 25-26, [19 October 1846]. This is often referred to as the "charter" of the SHCJ.

that the children of the less wealthy middle classes were denied good education as Catholics. Many had become Anglicans. Wiseman had great hope that the Catholic Church in England would not only experience revival as a result of the Oxford Movement, but also that there would be a reunion with the Established Church of England.¹²

The middle classes, with the industrial revolution, were growing in numbers; the industrial midlands saw a burgeoning poor population as many Irish were driven to England to escape the Potato Famine; the converts to Catholicism from the Oxford Movement created a new "class" of persons to be provided with a Catholic education. It appears that these concerns were not only uppermost in Wiseman's mind but were also communicated to Connelly in Rome as she was preparing to come to England.

Connelly brought with her to England the first draft of a Rule for her new congregation. It was the articulation of the vision she had of the shared personal and corporate life of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. It would provide a sense of shared mission for the women who would join her and be the basis of their work receiving official sanction and recognition in the Church. In a letter to her brother written in mid-September 1846 Cornelia indicates that her Rule had first been prepared for the United States "but the immense number of converts in England offered so large a field for Spiritual Mercy that it seems ... in the design of God to begin here."¹³

¹²Wilfred Ward, Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), I: 398-406.

¹³CC I: 70a, 12 September 1846, Spetchley Park, Worcestershire. CC stands for Collection I (Cornelia Connelly's Writings), the first number the volume, the second the page. CC may also stand for Cornelia Connelly. This is customary in all research using these sources. Authenticated or original

This first Rule speaks of the purpose of the new Society "in works of Spiritual Mercy, especially

1. In educating females of all classes;
2. In receiving into houses of retreat pious ladies catechumens, neophytes & young persons preparing for first Communion;
3. In teaching the catechism to children in the Church and in preparing females for the Holy sacraments at the request of the Parish Clergy."¹⁴

It is my belief that in responding to the "wants of the day" and focusing the vocation of the new Society on the education of "females of all classes" Cornelia Connelly was expressing an option for the poor and the emerging middle classes -- the most needy classes of Catholic Victorian England. This included converts from the Oxford Movement.

On October 13, 1846, accompanied by three young women, Cornelia Connelly took up residence in St Mary's Parish, Derby. From a personal notebook we read:

The religious of this Institute of the Holy Child J. having had the verbal sanction of His Holiness Gregory XVI, - 1846, and the Protection of Cardinal Fransoni, Propagande Fide, began the germ of their future life at the Convent in Derby, where they were placed by The Rt Rev Dr Wiseman, Bishop of Melipotamus Oct 14th 1846.¹⁵

Thus Connelly established her work with the understanding that it had the sanction and support of Rome as well as the local Church.

Cornelia and her companions found a Catholic Poor School with two hundred children on the register, a Night School, and a Sunday School

copies in SHCJ Archives, Rome.

¹⁴"Rules of the SHCJ 1856," in Pierce Connelly's handwriting, SHCJ Archives, Rome. Adapted in "Rules of 1844-1846" which are included in 1850 manuscript Constitutions approved by Bishop Wiseman; included in printed form by CC in 1861 with further adaptations. See Source 4 (Winter 1975): 26, 79 for adapted versions.

¹⁵CC Notebook, "Dates of the SHCJ from 1846," CC 28: 2.

awaiting their attention. In a letter to her brother, Sr Maria Cottam wrote the following Christmas, "What a happy thing to be among the Poor" ¹⁶

Educating the Poor

At the time of Connelly's arrival in Derby the Catholic Bishops had spoken out in favor of Catholic schools in every parish for the poor but there was no governmental support available for this endeavor.¹⁷ In 1846 the monies available for educating the poor had been increased by the Privy Council to include religious denominations which fell outside of the National Society and the British and Foreign School Society but it was not until 1847 that the first grant was made to Catholic "elementary" schools through the Catholic Poor School Committee.¹⁸ St Mary's Poor School in Derby, where Connelly's Sisters taught, was one of twelve Catholic Parish Schools that benefitted.¹⁹

The Poor School together with a Night School, and a Sunday School -- both morning and afternoon -- comprised the initial work of Connelly's

¹⁶D 10: 72, Maria Cottam, 30 December 1847.

¹⁷The Catholic Bishops had declared "that it is most desirable for every mission [parish] to be provided with a school." Westminster Diocesan Archives. Res. of the V.A. in 1846. Cited in John P. Marmion, Cornelia Connelly's Work in Education, 1848-1879 (Ann Arbor: United Microfilms International, [1984] 1986), p. 82.

¹⁸Patrick J. McCormick and Francis P. Cassidy, History of Education (Washington: The Catholic Education Press, 1953), p. 167. The "National Society" represented the Anglican or Established Church of England and the "British and Foreign School Society" those Protestant groups such as the Quakers who opposed dogmatic religious instruction.

¹⁹D 10: 22. In 1847 St Mary's Poor School received £62.10.0. Both Mr Sing, the parish priest, and Lord Shrewsbury were members of the Catholic Poor School Committee allocating funds. D 65: 3, S. Nasmyth Stokes to Bishop Ullathorne, 17 October 1848.

Society. Although there were two hundred girls on the register of the poor school average attendance numbered sixty to seventy, the others having been sent to work in factories or having to care for younger siblings at home while their mothers worked.²⁰ This made teaching difficult. Another one hundred or so young teenage women attended the Night School from six to nine; they had already worked all days in the mills. The evening program included catechetical instruction, the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic as well as the cutting and sewing of garments.²¹ In December of 1846 Connelly wrote of the schools to Lord Shrewsbury, perhaps seeking financial assistance:

Sunday is a very busy day with 200 hundred girls to lead to Church for High mass after an hour's labor in teaching them, and from 2 o'clock until 4 in the afternoon teaching them to read, etc. etc. - much as we deplore the state of things which renders this necessary we cannot but acknowledge it is the only way to get hold of the working class - the factory girls - with respect to our poor day schools they are going on very well but we shall never get on without some pecuniary assistance²²

Among the many needs that Cornelia Connelly encountered was the lack of trained teachers. In 1848 the Catholic Poor School Committee noted that "nothing was more frequently deplored than the inadequate supply of properly qualified teachers."²³ It had not been until 1836 that a training college for female teachers was established in England by the Home and Colonial Society in Gray's Inn Road; in 1840 Kay-Shuttleworth had sponsored the Battersea Training College to train men "of lowly origin" to be

²⁰St Mary's Day School Register.

²¹D 10: 109-110, CC to Bishop Ullathorne, 24 August 1848.

²²D 10: 31, CC to Lord Shrewsbury, 28 December 1846.

²³D 36: 6, Catholic Education Council Archives, Reports of the Catholic Poor School Committee, 1847,-1870, 1848.

teachers of pauper children. The latter institute was turned over to the National Society in 1843.²⁴ There was, however, no governmental provision for the training of Catholic teachers.

But, as Della Carrigan notes, in spite of the great need of the Catholic Church in England at this time, its heritage in the field of education was very rich. She observes that

a perusal of the histories of religious teaching Congregations reveals some type of preparation for their young religious for classroom duties but which was limited to the novitiate of the individual communities. There, instruction and practice in the predominating spirit of the religious founders was given. For example, the Ratio Studiorum, the method used by the Jesuits in 1599, is still functional in Jesuit schools Teacher training in religious communities therefore antedates the movement for the Teacher Training colleges in 1840.²⁵ (Emphasis added.)

This heritage was doubtlessly in the minds of the bishops in England in 1840 when they passed the resolution

that it is highly expedient that the Catholic Charity Schools of the country should be placed, as soon as possible, under the superintendence of Brothers or Sisters of Religious Orders or Institutes established for this purpose.²⁶

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus was a new congregation established, in part, for this purpose.

The "training" of the women, who joined the Society, to become teachers was integral to the formation program Cornelia developed for

²⁴R. Sandiford, Training Teachers in England and Wales (New York: Teachers College Press, 1910), pp. 41-42.

²⁵Della Carrigan, The Catholic Teachers Colleges in the United Kingdom 1850-1960 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1961), p. 42.

²⁶Cited by William L. Gillespie, The Christian Brothers in England, 1825-1880 (Bristol: The Burleigh Press, 1975), p. 74. Reference to "Notes and Minutes of Bishops' meeting. West. Dioc. Arch., 72A, Parcel 1846, May 1840."

them.²⁷ Connelly had taught with the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Louisiana and Rome. En route to England from Rome she had spent three months at Assumption Convent in Paris with the founder, Milleret de Brou (Blessed Marie Eugénie). The focus of de Brou's work was the needs of the girls of the upper classes of French society. It is of note that De Brou found Connelly too Jesuit in her ideas and too tied to England and America to encourage her to join her congregation.²⁸ This observation reflects the work Cornelia had done with a Jesuit in Rome while developing her Rule. The Religious of the Sacred Heart with whom she had been associated acknowledged their Jesuit heritage -- both in their spirituality and in their educational endeavors. Thus Connelly brought something of the Jesuit Catholic educational heritage adapted to women with her to England.

Cornelia Connelly also took full advantage of the educational developments of the day. St Mary's Poor School in Derby was included in the pioneering efforts of Kay-Shuttleworth's pupil-teacher system.²⁹ Following five years as an apprentice in a poor school, young women would be admitted to a teacher training college. This opened up the possibility of professional training for the lower classes. At Derby, "five female teachers were placed in training with the Community of the Holy Child Jesus" For the first time governmental assistance was received by a Catholic institution administered by a religious congregation. It was also noted that "the Superior entertains sanguine hopes that, at the expiration

²⁷Marmion expands upon this in his Chapter 10, "Cornelia Connelly's Philosophy of Education," pp. 364-386.

²⁸Extrait de la lettre 1724, vol. 9, de Mère M. Eugénie de Jésus au P. d'Alzon, Paris, 13 Mai 1846, quoted in Positio I: 242-243.

²⁹The legislation was passed December 21, 1846.

of the period named, the nucleus of a Female Training School will by this means be formed"³⁰

The work of St Mary's Poor School made it possible for Connelly to begin teacher training with the women religious who joined her; the pupil-teacher system would make it possible to expand this training to young lay women.³¹ Within two years of her arrival in England Connelly was laying the ground work for a government-sponsored female teacher training college which would serve both former pupil-teachers and young women of the middle classes. With the backing of the Catholic Poor School Committee (who allotted government monies) and the Church, Connelly's young Society was teaching the poor in day, night and evening schools. At the same time she was reaching out to the Catholic middle classes with a boarding school and a day school.

An Accomplishments Education?

Excerpts from the Prospectus which appeared for Connelly's first boarding school indicate the direction her work had taken for the middle classes by 1847:

The objects which are contemplated in this Convent are to give, upon the sound basis of the practice of all of their religious duties, such a solid education to a large and increasing class of Girls as will best enable them to fill 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 most practically useful in the service of our Holy Mother the Church. (Emphasis added.)

³⁰D 10: 128, Catholic Council Archives, Reports of the Catholic Poor School Committee, 1847-1870, 1848.

³¹It appears that the first pupil-teachers for whom grants were received were actually members of the SHCJ who went on to become instructors in the Teacher Training College at St Leonards. Positio: Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of the Servant of God, Cornelia Connelly, 3 vols. (Rome: Society of the Holy Child Jesus, 1983), I: 264 & II: 850.

.... The children are taught English and French, Writing, Geography, History, Grammar, Singing and the principles of Church music; Drawing, Plain Needlework, and every kind of embroidery, tracing, point-lace, stitch, etc., that can be useful in the service of the Church, together with the cutting out and making of vestments, etc.

.... Any parents who wish their children to learn the piano are requested to give notice of it, as it is an extra.³²

An early unpublished biographer records that boarding school students were joined by "day scholars of the better class."³³ Such inclusivity among classes was unusual in Victorian England.

The complexity of the Catholic situation had convinced Connelly of the need to provide "a solid education to a large and increasing class of Girls as will best enable them to fill their office in Society" But what did this mean?

In her research on the "accomplishments curriculum" Marjorie Theobald has found that the typical syllabus of a "*sound English Education with the usual accomplishments*" in the mid-nineteenth century in most ladies' schools, while ascribing to the consensus that the accomplishments were the proper focus of female education, included English language and literature, history and geography, science, arithmetic, religious studies, needlework and physical education as well as the "accomplishments" of modern languages, music and painting. The "masculine" subjects of Latin, Greek, mathematics and commerce were not included.³⁴ When compared with the

³²D 10: 74, The Catholic Directory 1948, p. 145. The first published biographer provides the same prospectus for 1847 (Gompertz, pp. 121-122); this is borne out by a letter from Wiseman to CC cited below, D 10: 69.

³³D 73: 177, Bellasis.

³⁴Marjorie R. Theobald, "*Mere Accomplishments? Melbourne Early Ladies' Schools Reconsidered*" p.12. See also M.R. Theobald. Women and Schools in Colonial Victoria 1840-1910. Ph.D. thesis, Monash University.

initial syllabus suggested by Connelly the contrast is not great -- though one is aware that Connelly's prospectus is geared to Catholic sensibilities and that subjects are intended to be understood as "thoroughly instruct[ing the children] in the details of domestic life and in all such arts as are most practically useful in the service of ... Holy Mother Church."

(Emphasis added.)

Bishop Wiseman's response to her 1847 Prospectus is of note:

I have some doubts in the Prospectus as to the teaching of French, How far, for the middle classes it may be useful, or whether a little "Church-latin" would not be better, though not to be named in a prospectus. The present French literature is so wicked, that the temptation to read it is better removed - though much indeed is translated.³⁵

Cornelia added Latin to her curriculum but retained the French. In fact, she later established her Society in France, and during a time of convalescence in Hyères in 1869 wrote of "pushing [her two American nieces] on in French and painting"³⁶

Thus it is not difficult to identify the "accomplishments" in Cornelia's approach to education. Originally, from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries "the term *accomplishments* in the context of female education combined an exhortation to excellence in music, modern languages and painting with an understanding that female achievement must not be used in the public sphere. The emergence of the term *mere accomplishment* later in the century signalled a ... shift in fashion rather than a valid appraisal of standards."³⁷ (Emphasis added.) This is important to remem-

³⁵D 10: 69, London, December 2, 1847.

³⁶D 9: 151, Hyères, France, CC to Mary Gaenslen, 26 November 1869. In 1877 the SHCJ established a school in France.

³⁷Theobald, "Mere Accomplishments," pp.16-17.

ber when attempting to understand Connelly's approach to education as it developed in England from 1846 onwards.

Earlier feminist research suggested that the education of middle class girls in this period was concerned with their becoming "acquainted with the rituals of visiting, afternoon tea, pretty *accomplishments* and ladylike dabbings in charitable activity."³⁸ Although this understanding in some ways reflects the approach of the emerging middle classes, it does injustice to the role that the accomplishments came to play in girls' and women's lives in both the private and the public spheres. For the young women educated with the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Cornelia Connelly is remembered to have taught her Sisters that in the schools they must teach the pupils to be self-reliant. In Cornelia's words, "We have to learn to make strong women, who, while they lose nothing of their gentleness and sweetness, should yet have a masculine force of character and will."³⁹ One does not necessarily imagine the passive Victorian woman who lived her life only in the private sphere.

In 1848 Cornelia Connelly left Derby and moved her Society to St Leonards-on-Sea. It had not been possible to obtain sufficient financial support for the Derby enterprise. Two girls from the Derby boarding school, seventeen women (including five pupil-teachers) and their chaplain accompanied Connelly.

St Leonards and Further Developments

The direction Connelly's work in England would take had been estab-

³⁸Carol Dyhouse, "Toward a *Feminine Curriculum* for English Schoolgirls: The Demand of Ideology 1870-1963," Women's Studies Int. Quarterly I: 297.

³⁹[M.C. Gompertz], The Life of Cornelia Connelly (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922), p. 308.

lished in Derby. The boarders, who accompanied the Society, were joined by others to form the basis of a middle class boarding school. Work with the poor was continued. A Day School, for the middle class, was not established until 1849 and in the beginning "a large number of highly respectable children joined the poor children as there was no middle school in the place."⁴⁰ In 1851 the Catholic inspector reported on a poor school of eighty-nine girls at St Leonards.

All the conditions of complete success are now united in this admirable school, in which the teaching is of the highest order, and the supply of school requisites ample in quantity and of the best kind. New buildings have been erected during the past year, which are now occupied by the scholars, in which the most effective arrangements have been adopted. The influence of the teachers is of the happiest kind, and the deportment of the children peculiarly pleasing; the condition of the school is one of steady sustained progress, and nothing seems wanting to the gradual attainment of all the highest results which such institutions are capable of accomplishing.⁴¹

It is to be noted that this evaluation of St Leonards Poor School was also a comment on the quality of the teachers, and therefore of the teacher training being provided by Cornelia for the young women of her Society.

By 1854 Connelly had explicated the original purpose of the Society to read:

1. In the education of females of all classes of Society.
 - 1st In the Highest Schools
 - 2nd In Middle Schools.
 - 3rd In Charity Day-Schools & Industrial Orphanages.⁴²

The other two purposes remained substantially the same. (See page 6.)

⁴⁰Gompertz, p. 299.

⁴¹D 11: 212, TWM Marshall to Catholic Poor School Committee, "Tabulated Reports of 1851," The Catholic School.

⁴²1853-4 "Abridgement of the Constitutions of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus," Source 4: 79.

A final "Note" that "It is understood that the second and third of these works are subordinate to the first (education) which is the primary & essential object of our vocation" is added.⁴³ These emphases were not only the outcome of the Society's work throughout the late forties and early fifties but also a reflection of the "needs" to which Connelly was asked to attend by Cardinal Wiseman.

Three areas of need were of ongoing concern to the Society: the lack of an appropriate education for the daughters of "Old" and "New" Catholic families of the upper and middle classes; the dearth of trained teachers for already established schools; and the inadequate provision for the education of the poor. By 1855 there were SHCJ teaching in eight poor schools in London and seven in Preston. In 1856 a Training College for poor school teachers was opened at St Leonards.

Bellasis reports that Wiseman had become concerned about the standard of education for Catholic girls of the upper classes and, in particular about Cornelia's not grasping "the class views of her adopted country." Serjeant Bellasis (the author's father) was "deputed" to go to St Leonards to make it clear to Cornelia Connelly that the boarding school should be for either the upper or the middle classes, "that it must be either one thing or the other."⁴⁴ Record has it that she answered, "Nothing of the sort; it is not to be a case of *one or the other* but it will be a case of *one and the other* I will have two schools and work them on the same premises."⁴⁵ Connelly's commitment to all classes remained. A "Highest

⁴³Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁴D 73: 412, Bellasis.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 413.

School" for "Young Ladies" and a "Middle School" serving the daughters of the less prominent were established in 1864. And this commitment reflected a basic philosophy of education which was inclusive of all. Correspondence extant from Connelly explains to a parent why education for middle and upper classes of girls was so similar, although the fees were different.⁴⁶

Method of Education

When one reads of the ambitious undertakings of Connelly in so short a period one is aware that there must have been a great deal of overlap in her approach to children in the different schools. It is difficult to ascertain how familiar Cornelia Connelly was with the work being done elsewhere in England at the monastic convent boarding schools but her immediate resources were not these.⁴⁷ According to Buckle, her first (unpublished) biographer, until 1856 or so "Mother Connelly pretty much followed the system of the Sacred Heart Convents, with no other aim than to give the education that was most suitable to young ladies & poor children, with the peculiarities of the French system."⁴⁸ (Emphasis added.) This is a somewhat simplistic and biased understanding of what Connelly was about. Already in 1853 Marshall was reporting of the St Leonards Poor School:

Buildings excellent. Desks excellent; furniture excellent, play ground excellent. Books abundant and good; apparatus abundant. Organization excellent. Methods mixed, and applied with rare skill

⁴⁶CC IV: 62, 8 November [1866], St Leonards

⁴⁷For an excellent summary see W.J. Battersby, "Education Work of the Religious Orders of Women." In G.A. Beck, ed., English Catholics (London: Burns & Oates, 1950), pp. 337-341. Also, John P. Marmion, "The Educational Principles of Eight Catholic Teaching Orders from 1500-Vatican II," M. Ed. thesis (Manchester: Manchester University, 1978).

⁴⁸D 65: 141.

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 accomplished all the rarest fruits of Christian instruction. This is probably one of the most perfect institutions of its class in Europe. (Emphasis added.)⁴⁹

This was almost twenty years before the Taunton Commission Report on education in England. It was Connelly, herself, who taught the course in "Principles of Teaching" when the Training School was established in 1856.⁵⁰ From the beginning of her work in Derby she, with the women who joined her, were refining their teaching methodologies.⁵¹ The nature of their shared vocational commitment enabled them to engage in cooperative teaching and learning about teaching.

With regard to the actual curriculum Connelly and her Sisters developed it is known that she relied on the Jesuit Ratio studiorum as well as her teaching experience with the Plan of Studies of the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Initially Cornelia had one of her Sisters translate the Jesuit Ratio studiorum "verbatim & then Mother Connelly altered & added to it to make it suitable to our Schools - Thus we have throughout her own views on education at once solid and practical."⁵² The final product of this endeavor was published in 1863 as The Book of the Order of Studies in

⁴⁹D 12: 115, TWM Marshall's Report, 1853.

⁵⁰D: 36: 54, Training School Journal.

⁵¹CC 35 of Connelly's writings contains records of her meetings with teachers at Derby (1846-1848) to discuss their teaching.

⁵²D 65: 148.

the Schools of the S. of the Holy Child Jesus.⁵³ This publication represented seventeen years of collective experience in female education.

And what is remarkable is that its basic philosophy, and as much of the actual curriculum as possible, is meant to be used in all schools with females of all classes.⁵⁴ Examination of the curriculum and the philosophy of education contained in the Book of Studies indicates that a "solid and practical" form of education had been designed to include the "accomplishments" in a manner that they were not "deemed to have been ephemeral and marginal, inhabiting a nether world of education by default."⁵⁵ McDougall claims that Cornelia Connelly provided a "solid" education "when most girls ... were learning only the accomplishments."⁵⁶ Marmion, in speaking of the very fine art course she developed, writes that "art became quite central to the life of the school, which was very different from the ordinary Victorian ladies' schools where art, music and French were regarded as accomplishments which might assist a young lady in the matrimonial stakes."⁵⁷ In their appreciation for what Connelly did achieve both of these scholars fail to see that one of the contributions that Connelly made was to build on the "language, symbols and forms"⁵⁸ of the accom-

⁵³Probably printed on the Holy Child printing press at St Leonards and is considered within the SHCJ to be the compilation of CC. It is commonly referred to as the Book of Studies.

⁵⁴See Bowman pp. 138-235, Marmion pp. 113-154 & 258-306 and McDougall pp. 193-227 for detailed treatments of the Book of Studies.

⁵⁵Theobald, "Mere Accomplishments," p. 16. Previous research by McDougall (1991) contrasts the "solid" and "accomplishments" approaches.

⁵⁶McDougall, p. 22 and p.41.

⁵⁷Marmion, p. 143.

⁵⁸Theobald, p. 16.

plishments, as they had originally been conceived in education for women, in a manner which was liberating for the young women involved.

Many of the Society's students went on to give leadership in the public sphere as teachers and/or vowed religious. As Theobald has pointed out, it is time to disinter "a tradition of female education which has fallen victim to male/bureaucratic definitions of education and professionalism; to reinterpret its language, symbols and forms; and to reconsider its importance to women as teachers and pupils."⁵⁹ Connelly's Book of Studies and the life choices of the students from the Society's early schools are an invitation to further research from this perspective.⁶⁰

Reflections and Questions

Considerable attention has been given to the genesis and early work of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus in these pages. Cornelia Connelly's interactions with the major societal forces of the day are evident. In cooperation with the Church she responded to the needs of the poor -- both in teaching poor children and preparing others to teach in poor schools. She was dependent upon the Church for authority to engage in the work of Catholic education, and upon government for monies to undertake it. At the same time as she was developing her philosophy of education she was developing a formation program for the young women who joined her Society -- another "educational" work that included females of all classes.

Connelly was not able to engage in the work of education without

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Demographics for some of the early students at St Leonards and later at Mayfield provide material on lifestyle chosen, etc. D 42: 207-223 and D 42: 223a-223b respectively.

making specific provision for the different "classes" of Society. She provided identical curricula wherever possible, "mixed" students as much as was feasible at St Leonards through participation in musical, theatrical and liturgical events, and made the basic curriculum of her Book of Studies available to all pupils in all Holy Child schools in as much as that was viable with different school schedules and facilities.

Connelly was engaging in this work ten years before the pioneering efforts of Miss Buss and Miss Beale in England.⁶¹ The latter individual later provided girls with a curriculum identical to that found in boys' schools, a form of education which received much critique at the time of the Taunton Commission in the mid-1860s. By 1863 Connelly had already adapted and modified the Jesuit Ratio studiorum for young women.

Cornelia Connelly also developed a curriculum which fully integrated the accomplishments. All pupils in her schools were required to study art; it was part of the daily schedule. The fine arts, central to her philosophy of education, were the means by which she, as a Christian educator, sought "to make visible the invisible" things of God. For Cornelia art was "a universal language."⁶²

A case study is intended to set the stage for discussion of questions of both a specific and general nature. The following are among the many that might be raised:

1. Is it possible to understand Connelly's "inability" to comprehend the English class structure for purposes of education in terms of her inclusive vision as a Christian woman?

⁶¹Hannah More's Strictures on Female Education (1799) was in the library Connelly inherited at St Leonards in 1848.

⁶²Book of Studies, p. 53.

2. In Connelly's desire to teach pupils to be self-reliant she stated "We have to learn to make strong women, who, while they lose nothing of their gentleness and sweetness, should yet have a masculine force of character and will." How much of this conviction was a product of her own life experience, a life lived in the public sphere -- where she knew other women would need to be able to give leadership? Is this vision expressed in other philosophies of education of the period?
3. How were the English ecclesiastical and educational authorities challenged by this "strong [American] woman," particularly in her use of the *accomplishments*?
4. How aware was Connelly of issues of religion, gender, class and culture in the work she attempted to do? In what ways did she address them in her method of education?

At the time of Connelly's coming to England the general attitude toward female education for the lower and middle classes reflected the social and economic forces of the day. As has been indicated there was initially no public funding -- and then only meagre funding -- of Catholic Poor Schools; all education of the middle classes was privately funded, often by endowments. I believe that Connelly worked within the strictures of these societal forces -- pushing at the edges to implement a form of education that was liberating for women. This does not mean that her method of education did not include the dynamic of socialization within the cultural context -- this paper has indicated how she related to and worked within the major societal, educational and religious forces of her day. It does mean that Connelly went beyond the vision of much of Victorian England which saw education in religion as a means of not only "rais[ing] the moral level of the masses" but also as a means of social control.⁶³

⁶³See Trygve Tholfsen, ed., Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth on Popular Education, Classics in Education, no. 49 (New York: Teachers College Press, 1974.), p. 11. Morality was a major preoccupation in Victoria England. Tholfsen shows how Kay-Shuttleworth attempted to imbue popular education of the poor, for the purposes of social control, with middle class values through religious training.

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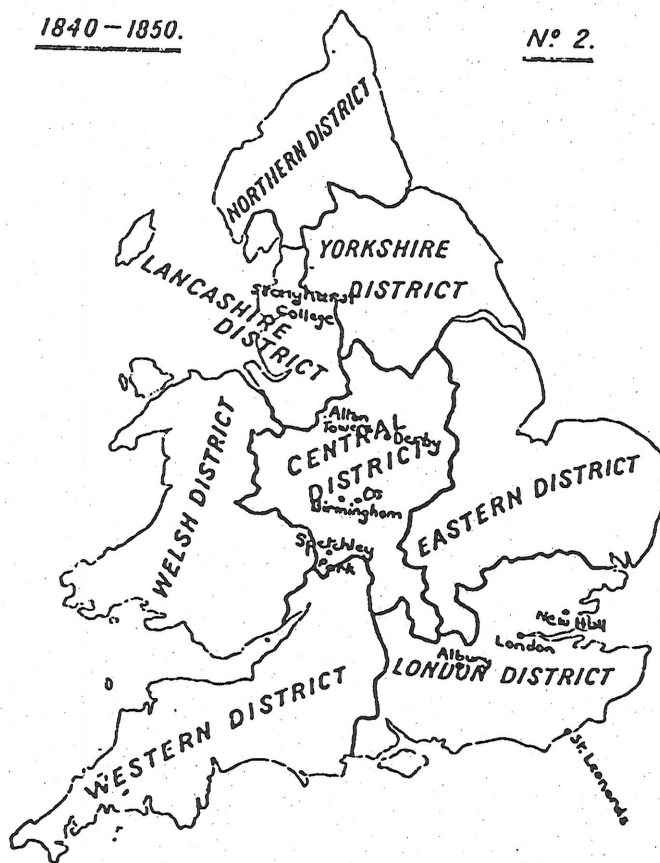
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[The outline of the maps and the diocesan divisions only have been copied from The British Church from the Days of Cardinal Allen. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, Ltd. 1929]

THE BRITISH CHURCH

1840-1850.

No. 2.



MAP No. II. THE EIGHT DISTRICTS