

## EXPLORING OUR SPIRITUAL ROOTS

● Sr. Caritas McCarthy, SHCJ

### *The purpose of this working paper*

It is time to take stock of five years of fruitful sharing in the Society. Since 1966 when committees preparing for the Special General Chapter called for each sister's contribution to renewal, we have been so busy that we may not realize how much we have recaptured, revived, adapted. Some have contributed by reflecting especially on our present awareness of our vocation in the light of contemporary needs. Others have combined this reflection with the study of the origin and development of our vocation under Cornelia Connelly. The Institute of SHCJ Studies has particularly shared in the latter task; by now, the labors of several collaborators have resulted in repeated agreement on certain major points regarding the apostolic spirituality of the Society. Now is a good time, before any kind of synthesis is attempted, and while studies are still in progress, to put some of these points before the members of the Society as a whole for comment, supplement, qualification, affirmation, disagreement.

It needs to be stressed that what is presented here is simply a "working paper" on important facets of the Society's response to the Lord—not a finished study, but a presentation designed to bring many members of the Society into the ongoing process of research. It is *not* yet a synthesis of Society spirituality, of that charism of Cornelia in which we all share.

It has become obvious that such a synthesis must be centered in and flow out from the source of her inspiration—the Son of God become Incarnate for us. Our major task in the months ahead will be to penetrate that depth of understanding Cornelia had of the mystery of Christ, and to relate it to the Christological insights of our time. In seeking the Christology that emerges from the writings of Cornelia, we seek not simply the doctrinal content of her understanding of the "Eternal Wisdom in the lowliness of His humanity," but also the response He evoked in her and which she fostered in all to whom she was sent. This response *is* the Society's spirituality; it is that which gives shape and spirit to its apostolate. Only when we have penetrated our sources in terms of the centrality of Christ and our response to Him are we ready for a synthesis of the Society's spirituality.

Meanwhile we ask you, by means of this "working paper," to react to six points which have emerged repeatedly from researches ranging over the whole body of Cornelia's writings. They are hard to crystallize in neat formulae because we found them as they were lived out, with all the

varying nuances that life contributes to spiritual teachings. They might be summarized as follows:

- 1) The need and value of a mutual fostering of the life of the Spirit by the members of a religious community.
- 2) The understanding of the apostolic religious vocation as a call to contemplative, transforming union with Christ in His mysteries in prayer *and* action.
- 3) The understanding of the vows as an oblation which deepens our union with Christ redeeming.
- 4) The efficacy of poverty—understood in the *anawim* tradition—to give religious Christ's own attitude, his "stance" before the Father.
- 5) The understanding of apostolic religious vocation as incorporation into the redemptive mission of Christ.
- 6) The understanding of the apostolic religious vocation as essentially a discerning, a "listening" life, and the profound insight Cornelia had concerning this life.

As you consider the citations given in the following pages to illustrate these points, we ask you to think whether they have emerged in your reading of Cornelia, and what are the varying ways in which you have found them expressed. The sampling of citations given here are from a small portion only of Cornelia's writings—from 1857-58. This is because a sort of "test" was made recently to answer questions like "Are these points characteristic of Cornelia's response to the Lord at any period of her life, or do they emerge only when all of our sources have been covered? To what extent are they characteristic on a week-to-week, month-to-month basis?" We ask you to judge if the answers, in terms of 1857-58, seem to you as decidedly affirmative as they did to us. We hope also that the limited scope of the citations will encourage you to supply your own; and above all, to search for the most apt and definitive expressions of Cornelia's teachings. This latter task requires the collaboration of as many members of the Society as possible, since it is the lived experience of what she teaches that helps us to understand the written expression of it.

#### *A survey of 1857-58*

You will want an overview of the years 1857-58. They were chosen simply because they open the second decade of the Society's existence when it had attained a recognizable form and spirit and yet had not lost the freshness of its beginnings. Deeper investigation showed them to be truly pivotal years. By 1857 Cornelia's record of apostolic expansion and service was impressive, especially for the poor. She was able to say as early

as 1855: "We are devoted to the education of all classes . . .but our poor schools greatly exceed in number the higher schools." (D 27:19)\* She spoke of eight poor schools in London; in 1857 there were eight also in Preston, one at St. Leonard's where there were also orphans; three poor schools had just closed in Liverpool. These latter were succeeded by an upper-class boarding school in Blackpool. St. Leonard's, too, had a boarding school, and London also a fee-paying school.

By 1857 Cornelia's apostolic vision was realized in a teacher training college at St. Leonard's, an apostolic instrument by which she aimed to shape educational policy: ". . .a work most dear to us—embracing a much larger good than any boarding school." (CC 1:118) Her worldwide vision was expressed if not yet realized, in her offering of herself in 1858, for the missions in Japan. (CC 1:75)

The major part of Cornelia's extant writings for 1857-58 is concerned with the practical, often wearying, details of carrying on the apostolate and government of the Society, with only occasional sentences and a few whole letters to reveal the depths of the contemplative spirit in which she lived her extremely active life. She deals with bishops and priests about receiving candidates, about retreats, conferences, and confessions; about new foundations and relinquishing unsuccessful ones, about educational policy, examinations, and school property; about financial and legal problems. She deals with professional and tradespeople concerning her schools and convents. We have few letters to the sisters through the 1850's but those we have show her supreme concern for their life of union with the Son in His mission. Throughout all her writings run the buoyant, energetic, hopeful notes, the underlying joy that characterized her spirit. This is true even though 1857 and 1858 have their full share of the sufferings, misunderstandings, slander, and opposition that were always a part of Cornelia's life in the Society. These years were filled with the litigation and anxieties of the Emily Bowles affair when, after the latter had mismanaged the Liverpool schools and left the Society, she left Cornelia with a huge debt to pay. Dr. Duke continued throughout 1857-58 to wage his war against the Society's rights to St. Leonard's property. The force of these troubles caused Bishop Grant, always timid, to forbid any but annual vows in the Society. Throughout all the Society troubles, Cornelia had always to reckon with the tragedy Pierce kept alive. In 1858 she paid the expenses of the court case he had instigated against her. Twice in that year she asked Bishop Grant for special prayers for her husband

\*Citations from the Cause volumes are indicated throughout SOURCE articles by the abbreviations given on this page: D for Documentation Presented by the Historical Commission, and CC for the writings of Cornelia Connelly; volume and page numbers follow. In quotations the spelling and punctuation follow the original.

and children: "...I think our dear Lord wishes us to pray for them, and I will tell you why when I see you again." (D 9:30-1)

The years 1857-58, interwoven with achievements and setbacks, were as busy and challenging as any of Cornelia's thirty-three years in the Society. It is good then to let her speak for herself. She does not say anything that is not part of her own experience of and response to the Lord.

*Texts from 1857-58 for consideration*

1) "ARE WE NOT ALL . . . BOUND TO HELP EACH OTHER . . .?"

Cornelia's writings for 1857 and 1858 open with Epiphany letters containing a clear statement of what was to be the entry point for her whole spiritual program: her conviction that her greatest privilege was to foster the life of deep union with Our Lord which she believed was the vocation of every Holy Child sister. She is truly Pauline in her warm communication of concern for spiritual growth in others: she saw this concern as basic to the communal love of her sisters. An integral function of community was the fostering of the life of the Spirit in each member, who would in turn manifest to "those in the world" the Lord's loving concern for them.

Jan 5, 1857

My very dear Sisters in J.C.,

The eve of our dear Epiphany feast warns me that you will expect a letter from me if it contains but three lines. You have made your dear retreat, and we are just finishing ours, and preparing for the renewal of our vows tomorrow morning. . . We are willingly to offer ourselves . . . encouraging ourselves and one another, in the habit of prayer, recollection, and constancy in the practice of all Christian virtues . . .

(CC 8:93)

My dear Sister in J.C.

The Eleventh Anniversary of the Epiphany must not pass without a few lines to wish you every blessing with the Manifestation of our dear Lord in your hearts.

One word only, I will write to you, and the definition of this word we shall *talk* over, as I expect to see you very soon, and this is *Attention* . . . I beg of you all my dear Sisters to apply it now in a religious sense each according to her own devotional attrait, and when I am with you we shall *finish our letter*, and you will give me your views about this common little word . . . (CC 8:100)

The invitation to "dialogue" in this last letter sounds surprisingly contemporary. So, too, does the program of "communication" which Cornelia had inaugurated at the opening of 1857, and from which, fortunately, two letters have survived:

Jan 29th 1857

First Week

My very dear Sisters in J.C.

I have promised you a few lines frequently or every week in which you may have a review of our daily Conferences, therefore I shall make it a duty to write to you every Monday Evening. Sometimes it may be a note of three lines only, & if so, you must take it as it comes.

. . . Let us then . . . [have] an ardent desire of perfection . . . a noble courage in overcoming all difficulties . . . a firm resolution to suffer death itself, rather than to give up our enterprize . . .

My dear Sisters are we not all thus assisted, and bound to *help each other*, as well as to look to ourselves?—to flap our wings together on the way to Paradise? (CC 8:95-6)

Cornelia's next letter in her "communications program" has a very human touch—she has to admit she has not been able to achieve the standard she set for weekly letters:

Feb. 25 [1857]

My very dear Sisters in J.C.

It is not quite a month since my last letter to you, and we have reached Ash Wednesday; I . . . must give you the sum of our conferences & proposals . . . Let us as a continuance of the points of our practice encourage ourselves with the remembrance of our high calling, which our Lord has so particularly blessed that He promises *that we shall shine as stars* . . . (CC 8:97-8)

Cornelia did not rest content with encouraging spiritual depth only in her own community but looked outward to her students, other religious communities, and the lay Catholic world. She had a sister translate two works of French spirituality which were published in 1857—*Meditations on the Holy Childhood* (anonymous)—and 1859—*Walking with God* (Rigoleuc). This was a continuation of an apostolate to which she made no small contribution especially in the light of her limited personnel. Within the first five years of the Society's existence she had had sisters translate and publish *Higher Paths in the Spiritual Life* (Nepveu) and *Meditations for Whitsuntide and Other Feasts* (anonymous).

2) "I WILL IN SPIRIT FOLLOW THEE TO CALVARY AND FEEL THE STRIPES THEY LAID ON THEE . . ."

The "high calling" which Cornelia felt herself so privileged to foster in her sisters was one of true contemplative union with the Incarnate Son of God. She spoke to the sisters quite simply in terms of contemplative experience:

. . .to offer ourselves to be possessed by Him . . .

. . .not resisting the love that would fill our poor hearts. Let us not resist my dear sisters for we are *ourselves* the only obstacle to the overflowing of His Divine love . . .

. . .till constancy is sealed by death . . .which is quickly to introduce you to the Beatific Vision, where you are to be filled with the joy of heavenly light and encompassed by the ecstatic delight of loving God without interruption . . . (CC 8:93-4)

Cornelia understood the reality of contemplative union—personal participation in the Paschal mystery through contemplation of Jesus in the mysteries of His earthly life. What she teaches seems to coincide with the teaching of a modern scripture scholar:

It is through these human experiences which befell the Word Incarnate 'in the days of His Flesh,' that I am offered the possibility of relating myself to Him who is my Savior . . .The saving mysteries of the incarnation, birth, childhood, and public life of Jesus Christ, with His temptations, triumphs, frustrations, and disillusionments retain in Him, as He now exists, a perennial, dynamic reality . . .These mysteries do not merely belong to the past as past; they are in fact an integral part of His present glorified existence, and so are contemporary in a very real sense with my own life . . .

(D. Stanley, S.J., *Theological Studies*, 1968, pp. 428-34)

It was from this viewpoint of "entering into" the Gospel mysteries that Cornelia wrote to her sisters:

. . .I need not recall to your mind the hidden treasure we are secretly to carry to our lovely Savior in His lowly manger . . .nor that like the Magi we are to offer the star of salvation by vigilance, humility, and fidelity . . . (CC 8:93)

We shall *particularly* unite ourselves to the Passion of our Lord during Holy Mass, placing ourselves on Mount Calvary, remembering that the past, the present, & the future are equally present to our Lord, and that the sacrifice of the Mass is to us the same as that on Mount Calvary—Oh my dear Sisters how is it that we see so few souls truly united to the passion of our Lord?—so few who are *willing* to be

crucified with Him?—Because of failure in *recollection* & *mortification*—Because of *forgetfulness* of the sufferings of our Model of love—Let us no longer fail but now try our very best saying "I will now begin" yes my Jesus! I will in Spirit follow Thee to Calvary & feel the stripes they laid on Thee; with David in his blest vision of Thee be wounded *with* Thee & *in* Thee, that on the Cross I may die with Thee, in all my daily obediences and *little* sacrifices be *one* with Thee, and never seek myself in blame or praise, in contempt or honour but in *Thee* Sweet Victim of Charity— . . . (CC 8:97-8)

This last remarkable passage shows how clearly Cornelia understood the life of union as one in which prayer and action were but one unbroken circle. The life of the "contemplative in action" was one of growth in the likeness of Christ:

The edifice we are to build must be according to our model in the life of J.C. & in the practice of His counsels . . .

. . .Have we represented *Him* in *our* conduct to them [our children]?  
. . .Have we endeavoured to form them according to our Divine Model?  
(CC 8:95,98)

The reality of her own experience of contemplation in action had taught her how integral is Mary's part in the work of her Son's redemptive mission:

If our *thoughts, words, & actions* resemble those of our dear Mother none of them will be useless—we shall *think* for the love of God & *speak for Him* and *act for Him*— (CC 8:98)

3) "TO OFFER OURSELVES TO BE POSSESSED BY HIM IN THE SWEET BONDS OF POVERTY, CHASTITY AND OBEDIENCE . . ."

Cornelia saw the vows as an oblation, a powerful means by which she and her sisters could, in a radical way, live like Jesus in the Gospels—"according to our Model in the life of J.C. & in the practice of His counsels." (CC 8:95) This meant, then, that they were a means to a very deep union, a means "to be possessed by Him." (CC 8:93) Nowhere in her writings of 1857-58 does she give extended treatments of each of the vows separately, nor does this occur much throughout her writings. She seems to have had a unified concept of the vows as *one* oblation, one in which she would grow through the daily living of it.

It is not hard to see, from the oft-repeated expressions in her letters, what the daily living of obedience was for her: the seeking with her sisters to find and to do the will of God. This involved the exercise of discernment—loving attention to the Spirit:

We shall pray a great deal & leave all in the hands of His Divine Will and Providence . . .

We have no other view or will in this or in any other matter than God's greater honour & glory & the fulfillment of His most sweet will . . .

May His Holy Will be done in you & by you as it is in heaven . . . (CC 4:39; 11:103; 8:99)

The years 1857-58 are particularly valuable in showing the balance, maturity, responsibility, and supernatural quality of Cornelia's obedience. She learned to discern when the Lord was speaking both within and without her, no matter what the human confusions might be; she made her own contributions to the discovery of His will by her knowledge and convictions gained from interior illumination and exterior observation; above all, she made the sacrifices asked of all those who, with the Son, follow those ways of the Father which "are not our ways." All this is demonstrated in her dealings with Bishop Grant to whom she was subject during the St. Leonard's property dispute and the Emily Bowles affair:

Be assured, my Lord, that whatever you decide in this settlement, we very willingly *believe to be the very best "in Domino"* . . .

. . . You my Lord are our Superior and I am ready to *second* the responsibility you proposed taking to the very utmost of my power. Will you remember this my Lord, but at the same time I again repeat *that it is impossible for us to meet your last proposal.* (CC 11:93,75)

Cornelia shows the same maturity and openness in dealing with the bishop regarding the training college:

. . . You are mistaken in saying I named the 29th. I have your Lordship's letter before me . . . to fix Decr 29th & 30th as the days for the Queen's Scholars Ex . . . Your Lordship is also misinformed or mistaken in saying that I left three letters unanswered. I left *one* unanswered, because I *could not* answer it. I did not know that I had the least right to detain the students after the end of their year, nor do I now think that I *could* have exercised any such authority . . . (CC 11:87)

Many more citations can be found for Cornelia's constant loving search for the will of God, the object not only of her obedience but of the whole of her consecrated life. We find that much that she has to say about chastity is delineated in that life of delicate love which is for her the "vigilant," the "attentive," the "listening" life. This will be treated later in the paper. Immediately below are notes on her understanding of poverty which seem significant enough to warrant a separate heading.

#### 4) "...TO IMITATE HIM IN HIS LITTLENESS BY OUR HUMILITY..."

Perhaps those who have been studying the recent expositions of the biblical concept of the Poor of God which culminated in the Person of Christ have noticed how much this concept underlies Cornelia's way of understanding and following Him. Since, as the author of the *Poor of Jahweh* has said, "The subject . . . is, from a biblical point of view, highly complex," (A. Gelin, p.111) it cannot be treated in full here. Cornelia's exemplification of it, occurring in numerous scattered phrases and incidents, is also complex to trace. This is because the concept embraces a whole way of life, a total disposition of mind and heart which is best seen in the actual living of it. The years 1857-58, full of troubles and petty persecution of the Society, provided apt circumstances for the SHCJ to live as the "Poor of God." Below are indications from Cornelia that she and her sisters saw themselves as those who had nothing but what they received from God, sought for nothing but His will, accepted suffering for His sake with meekness and humility, depended confidently on Him for all things, and lived in the joy and liberty of His children:

We have no other view or will in this or in any other matter than God's greater honour and glory & the fulfillment of His most sweet will, being grateful for wrongs and persecutions for justice sake, but not for any human glory . . . (CC 11:103)

I am very sure that throughout our many troubles we have ever maintained & aimed at that rectitude of intention which ensures us peace & rest while quietly labouring for the souls of Christ's little ones, awaiting the declaration of *His* most Holy Will regarding our Rule . . . (CC 11:53)

I beg your prayers that our Community may forget and bear the wrongs brought upon them for Jesus' sake . . . (CC 11:111)

I am annoyed by the miserable tattling of Miss Bowles' affairs, but I suppose we must expect this and ought not to be annoyed, but rather rejoice, as far as the suffering may go . . . (CC 11:67)

Do not let money be the cause of any differences. God himself will take up your cause *if you suffer injustice for His sake.* (CC 8:52)

. . . be wounded *with* Thee and *in* Thee, that on the Cross I may die with Thee . . . (CC 8:97)

The more we love God the more perfectly we shall be in the joy and liberty of *His* children—forgetting ourselves and rejoicing in Him—  
(CC 8:98)

Ah! how many faults to regret, even when we have left the world! and yet our dear Lord gives that jubilee of Soul and that certainty of immortality...which our dear Jesus has merited for us in the Redemption... (CC 1:74)

5) "...ACCOMPLISH WHAT IS WANTING IN THE PASSION OF J.C.—YOUR COOPERATION"

If Cornelia's poverty of spirit pervades all her thinking, she has a conviction which positively rings through it—that of the incorporation of her Society into the mission of Christ. Quite simply she understands and acts upon that consequence of the Incarnation by which the Son has chosen to need others to share His mission to bring salvation to men. No matter how much human ignorance or perversity might obscure or obstruct the Society's work, Cornelia remained unshaken in her conviction.

This meant sharing in the Lord's way of thinking and acting, and always in and through the Church led by His Vicar:

...We do pray *constantly* for H. Holiness—Would it be possible to love Jesus & not to pray for His Vicar upon earth? (CC 11:12)

...I *deplore* our Institute not having been approved. Had this been done, proper authority would have been enforced; ourselves secured as a body, acknowledged as responsible, and this scandal prevented... We know that we are not worthy of any favour from His Holiness, but the only question is the work of God, and the good of souls & that we have the means of serving Him, and of maintaining a right spirit in those He has given to us, which can never be ensured with stability, until the Church blesses us by the seal of her approbation. (CC 11:53-54)

...If this is decided upon I feel confident that our Blessed Lord will help us & that the glorious St. Michael will finally get us through all our difficulties. (CC 11:79)

It should not be forgotten that, beyond anything she may have written, Cornelia left an unparalleled testimony to her faith in the Society's mission by her daily offering of the sacrifice of her husband and children. She joined this with Christ's supreme sacrifice for His redemptive work in which she was privileged to share:

Perhaps I'm asking too great a favour from you my Lord but still I ask it—will you say the Mass on Good Friday for Mr. Connelly and my dear children? (CC 11:99)

Because she was so totally given to the Lord in His mission, Cornelia used to the full her own personality with its gifts, and encouraged others to do the same, as well as to use all created goods for the apostolate. It

would take a separate paper to show the impress of her delightful personality on all her activities—her straightforwardness, her humor, her firmness, her warmth, her tenderness. She is particularly attractive when she is fighting the cause of true humanism against the narrowness of certain segments of nineteenth-century Catholicism, e.g., her efforts to maintain male teachers. (CC 11:76-7) Her humanism witnesses eloquently to the meaning of the Incarnation. In this issue of SOURCE, Sr. Radegunde and Sr. M. Andrew initiate a series of articles designed to increase our understanding of the effectiveness of the SHCJ apostolate under Cornelia.

Hopefully, SHCJ readers have seen in this article simply Cornelia's presentation of the Gospel: her fostering of a life of union with the Lord in His earthly mysteries; her encouragement to her sisters to offer fully the sacrifice of their vows in order to be one with the virginal, poor, obedient Christ; above all, her teaching of incorporation into His redemptive mission. The spirituality of religious founders can be nothing else but the way of Jesus in the Gospels. Yet they do give their followers an identifiable spirit—how they do it needs further study. Perhaps one clue to this lies in the particular combination of emphases which each puts upon various elements of the evangelical life. For Cornelia there was one that seemed to integrate all that she did and taught. She said it clearly in her Epiphany letter for 1858.

6) "...BE AT ALL TIMES READY...TO HEAR HIS VOICE & FAITHFUL IN CORRESPONDING TO IT"

There are many ways and occasions in which Cornelia says this: "Listen and respond," "hear and correspond," "be attentive and be faithful," "practice vigilance and fidelity." It was her way of loving totally and with the utmost delicacy. Was this the way, not merely of the bride, but of the *wife* and mother, of the full, enduring, effective love that has been learned and *lived*? Was this skill in loving the great gift she brought to her daughters in 1846? It would seem so, to judge from the poignant yet joyful account she gave in 1858 of the death of one of her first companions, one who had begun the work of the Poor Schools in London in 1851.

Our dear Sister Frances left us just after midnight. She received Holy Communion at 3 o'clock and ended her agony singing "Jesus & Mary I love you" to one of the Poor School tunes. She is to bring us many blessings and her lovely end is already giving strength to the weak hearted.

One of our Sisters asked her what she would most wish to practice if He gave her back her life. She answered "Fidelity." (CC 11:113)

Since Cornelia's writings are much occupied with "fidelity" in the late 1850's, it is not unlikely that some portions of the Customal, which was circulated in the Society in the 1860's, were formulated by her in the years we have been considering. Such is the passage below. It may be in the language of a spiritual author from whom she borrowed, but the substance was very much alive in her daily experience:

On Three Dispositions Which Are Necessary in Order to Profit by the Grace of Almighty God.

The first is a *docile heart*, a heart not pre-occupied by self-love, or by attachments to inclinations which prevent it from corresponding with *fidelity* to the Voice of God. They only who *listen* hear the Voice of God. In a soul which listens interiorly to the Voice of God the light of heaven is shed abroad—is mine a listening soul? or is it alas pre-occupied?

The second necessary disposition is—a sincere *will* to profit by the grace of God. Our Lord designates this determined and upright will as "a good, and a very good heart", and it is in this land of benediction that the seed of divine grace brings forth a thousand fold. Then—speak Oh good Jesus! and teach thy Spouse to 'listen' to thy Voice.

The third disposition is perservance in practising the good to which Almighty God leads us by His grace. Our fidelity in corresponding to one grace disposes us to receive others, and God delights in bestowing his talents upon those who make them produce fruit. (CC 54:36-7)

The theme of the above is that which comes most readily to Cornelia's mind when she is pressed to say what is most meaningful to her and her Society:

[Epiphany, 1858]

One word only I will write to you, and the definition of this word we shall *talk* over, as I expect to see you very soon, and this is *Attention* . . . I beg of you all . . . to apply it now in a religious sense each according to her own devotional attrait, and when I am with you we shall *finish our letter*, and you will give me your views about this common little word . . . (CC 8:100)

This theme and this citation concludes these research notes on the spirituality of the early Society which, it is hoped, will evoke response on the part of the SHCJ. Many today are growing, through shared study and prayer, in understanding of that "discerning life" which is integral to our vocation, and can add to the brief notes here of Cornelia's writings on the

subject. Some have already done so in workshops with Sr. Claire Sullivan, and will find their studies incorporated into her article in this issue of SOURCE.

Many, too, have probably noted that the last citation contains not only Cornelia's recognition of individual discernment, but also of elements of communal discernment which she fostered according to the understanding of her time. As a part of this she affirmed the value of every sister's reflection on and expression of the fundamentals of our spiritual life. We affirm that value no less today. Therefore, we want to print in the next issues of SOURCE your research and your views about Cornelia's spiritual teachings, hoping that the materials presented here have provided stimulation.

## Prefatory Note

When ninety women, each sharing in the charism with which the Holy Spirit gifted the foundress of their Society, study at first hand authenticated copies of the primary source materials pertaining to the origins of that Society in search of a specified 'root' of their spirituality, dynamic insights can be hoped for. On September 19, 1970, about sixty sisters from five Eastern states in the USA gathered at Rosemont College: on October 31, approximately 30 sisters from the Midwest communities came to St. Ignatius' Convent, Chicago, for the same purpose: to discover the manner and extent to which the Ignatian Rules for the Discernment of Spirits were applied in the daily living of the first generation SHCJ.

After an opening session, the participants were divided into groups of seven or eight for research and discussion. It was suggested that they look for statements in letters and early biographies which indicated that prayerful discernment of good and evil influences had preceded a judgment, a decision, a course of action . . .

- a) by an individual
- b) by a person who had been asked for help in spiritual discerning by another (i.e., spiritual direction)
- c) by a group of sisters (communal discernment)

When such an example of discernment was discovered, it was recorded on 5 x 8 sheets with the letters (a), (b) or (c) corresponding to the above classification and the exact source of the citation according to a model given.

After each hour of individual research, the small groups shared their findings with each other and a secretary took notes of insights of seeming significance.

Another hour of research and small-group sharing followed lunch. The secretaries then summed up for the entire assembly of participants the findings of their research. These reports stimulated discussion and questions from the floor on both occasions.

The hundreds of individual citations and the summaries resulting from small and large group discussions have provided the resource material upon which the following article is based. Thus, although this paper indicates significant understandings, it does not pretend to be a comprehensive treatment of the topic of discernment nor even of discernment as practiced in the early Society. It reflects (and is limited to) the understandings which emerged from the sisters' research in the workshops described.

## ALL OF CREATION NEW

● Sr. Claire Sullivan, SHCJ

### Introduction

At the opening session of each research day, the participants prayed over a quotation from the *Book of Revelation* where God, sitting on His throne, is recorded by John as saying: "Now, I am making the whole of creation new."<sup>1</sup>

We hear much stress today upon the *now* and this is very right. This is the only age in which we have been given time to live and to love, to extend the Incarnation. This is *our now*.

We hear almost equal stress upon the last word of the quotation: *new*. The age in which we have been given to live is an age—not of decadence—but a ferment leading toward renewal: renewal of society, of the church, of religious societies like our own within the church.

"The whole of creation" is to be affected by this renewal. There are, theoretically, no limits to those who must be reached. *All*. But by whom? Who is to make "the whole of creation new"? For Christians, all apostolate seems to hinge on the ability to recognize the "I" as being God Himself at work in His creation: to listen to what the Spirit is saying and to let Him work through us in "making"—"now"—"the whole of creation new."

The question to be raised is this: how does one dispose himself to recognize the movements of the Spirit of God? How does one learn not to be deflected from this listening by self-love, disguised often by specious reasoning or forces of evil?

### Historical Setting

There is help to be found in going back through history to observe the action of the Spirit in the world: to see, for instance, how Christ came to discover the details of the will of the Father in His own life and death and resurrection; to read Paul's and Luke's accounts of how, in the early Christian communities, men and women tried to discern the will of God in the decisions that they made.

For this reason, religious institutes have been well advised to study the action of the Spirit on their own beginnings, in order to discover "their special aims and sound traditions."<sup>2</sup> Yet if our Society has its own identifiable character and tradition, it also shares much with other apostolic religious communities established under the powerful impetus of the Holy Spirit during recent centuries.