

The Educational Work of the Catholic Women's League in England 1906-1923

by Mary V. Newman

Institute of Education London University
Ph.D.

Abstract

This is a study of the Catholic Women's League in England. Between 1906 and 1923 it grew from a narrow metropolitan base into a broadly based national society. The CWL was a semi-autonomous organization under hierarchical authority which provided a structure designed to unite Catholic lay women and empower them to serve the Catholic community and promote the Church's social teachings in the public sphere.

The focus of this study is the CWL's informal education which provided both knowledge of the social sciences and an understanding of Catholic social policy. It drew on theories of leadership, traditions of Christian vocation and a belief in the role of women as agents of social reform, to formulate an educational programme designed to convert individual philanthropy into systematic social care. Evidence is provided to indicate how the CWL adapted this informal education to meet the needs of Catholic women both when they were engaged in war work and in their new role as voters after 1918.

This study reveals how the CWL at a time of militant feminist activity endeavoured to develop an ideological space, "Christian Feminism", where Catholic women could be both Catholic and feminist. Thus Catholic women were able to defend traditional female roles in the family while advocating participation in the public sphere. Seven biographical profiles are included to illustrate the similarities and differences between the founders of the CWL including Margaret Fletcher a leading figure throughout this period. The

personal motivations of these women who served on its committees and formulated its educational theory are identified. Finally, this study indicates how women provided an organization for women in which they could be empowered to act as agents of social reform among the Catholic community of England in the early twentieth century.

Contents

Preface

Abbreviations

- 1 Introduction 1
 - 2 Historical Context 12
 - 3 Historiography, Theoretical Framework and Methodology 45
 - 4 The Founding and Development of the CWL: Opposition and
Acceptance within the Catholic Community 103
 - 5 The Making of a National Society 135
 - 6 Empowering Catholic Women: Educational Theory in the context of the
Women's Movement 182
 - 7 The Educational Programme 239
 - 8 The Personal Touch: Biographical Profiles of the Founders of the
CWL 282
 - 9 Conclusion 335
- Bibliography 346

Preface

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Mary V. Newman

Abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting of the CWL
CSG	Catholic Social Guild
CTS	Catholic Truth Society
CWL	Catholic Women's League of England and Wales
CWLM	Catholic Women's League Magazine
CWSS	Catholic Women's Suffrage Society
ECMB1	The Executive Minutes 1907-1909 Minute Book
ECMB2	The Executive Committee Minutes 1909-1911 Minute Book 2
LOC	The Ladies of Charity
NC	National Committee
NUWW	National Union of Women Workers
OP	Order of Preachers (Dominicans).

OSB	Order of St Benedict.
PSI	Public Service Information committee of the CWL Council.
SHCJ	Society of the Holy Child Jesus.
SJ	Society of Jesus
UCM	Union of Catholic Mothers
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter explains the reasons for focusing the study of the Catholic Women's League (CWL) in England on its first seventeen years (1906-1923), and it identifies the key research questions to be examined in this study. The following chapter considers the broader historical, social and religious context in which the Catholic Women's League was founded, developed into a national organization and adapted to the post-First World War society.

1. The Catholic Women's League

For most of the twentieth century the CWL was a significant feature of the English Catholic community and provided Catholic women with a semi-autonomous organization (under hierarchical authority) which empowered them to participate in the public sphere. Although the first formal meetings of the CWL did not take place until early in 1907 it is generally accepted that the CWL was founded in the autumn of 1906 when the idea of a league for Catholic lay women first appeared in the September 1906¹ issue of The Crucible.² A provisional Executive Committee first met in February 1907 with Margaret Fletcher as its chairman. Margaret Fletcher served as its president from 1906 to 1910 and again between 1917 and 1920 and throughout this period she exercised a strong influence on the CWL. During the period 1906 to 1923 the CWL became a national society with branches throughout England and Wales and forged links with similar leagues in Europe and the Empire. During these years it was involved in the founding of several Catholic

societies, for example the Union of Catholic Mothers. The CWL was able to maintain a large membership throughout the inter-war years and it reached a peak of nearly twenty four thousand in the late 1950s. Its membership, however, steadily declined during the 1960s and 1970s so that by the late twentieth century it was little more than six thousand. The twenty-first century society remains committed to the original aims and objectives formulated by the founding generation.

The focus for this study has been confined to the period 1906-1923 in order to include the earliest steps taken in the latter half of 1906 to create the CWL. In this period it developed from a narrow metropolitan base into a broadly based national society. By 1923 the CWL had designed and adapted its constitution, formulated an educational theory, implemented an educational programme and established its position within the Catholic community as a voice for Catholic lay women and as an advocate of social reform. The CWL met the challenge of the First World War and demonstrated its patriotism and won acceptance among non-Catholic societies with similar aims and ideals. Contemporaries recognized Margaret Fletcher's definition of this period (1906-1923) as "those hectic pioneer days of the League's life, days when definite leadership was called for and a willingness on the part of the membership to be led". She saw that by the 1920s the society "had matured into a democratic self-governing association".³ In the post-war period 1919-1923 the CWL responded to the enfranchisement of women with a new educational programme. Lady Sykes, the third person to occupy the post of CWL president, retired in 1923, by which time most of the founding generation

had left office and were no longer involved in the national decision-making process. A new generation of women with different experiences and aspirations were engaged in leading the CWL to meet fresh challenges in the 1920s and 1930s. The CWL was founded amidst the turmoil of the suffrage campaigns and had sought to provide its members with an alternative version of feminism to the more radical forms which included criticism of the Christian religion and challenged the role of men and women within the family.

“Christian Feminism” was a conservative version of feminism that enabled Catholic women to combine active public roles with loyalty to the Church⁴ and its teachings on marriage and the family. By the end of 1923 this particular context had radically altered. Many women were now able to participate in the political process at every level, local and national. In this post-war environment the CWL became committed to a new set of issues, such as divorce law and birth control. Those campaigns were fought out in very different circumstances and by a different leadership from those of pre-1918 and consequently they should be considered in a different context to this study.

Another characteristic of this period was the erosion of the division between paid employment and voluntary work for women. At the beginning of the twentieth century the vast majority of middle-class women before marriage were not expected to earn their own living. At this time ‘work’ did not exclusively mean paid employment, it could mean voluntary, charitable activity done without salary. In some cases there were posts within the voluntary sector which included a small salary but this was still not seen as enough to

undermine the status of the recipient if it was undertaken as a vocation. The CWL usually described voluntary charitable activities carried out for the betterment of the poor as social work. This phrase did not refer to the modern system of state financed support given to the vulnerable and deprived; nor did the title social worker refer to the modern profession. The term 'social worker' is used in this study to refer to women engaged in voluntary activities carried out in a systematic way to differentiate it from spontaneous, casual almsgiving. During the First World War the need for middle-class women to engage in war-work blurred the boundary between paid and voluntary work. By the end of the war the CWL were conscious that most middle-class girls, on leaving school, expected to engage in paid employment.

The CWL accepted the English Catholic Hierarchy's position that education at elementary and secondary level for Catholics must be a combination of secular learning with an understanding of the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. This commitment took several forms including an interest in the schooling given to working-class girls and the encouragement of convent secondary schools for middle-class girls to include public examinations. However, its main concern was the informal education of its own members. The CWL was conscious that the majority of its members could not access formal education so it endeavoured to provide an array of informal educational opportunities. This informal education was designed to empower women to be active citizens, efficient agents of social care and defenders of Catholic social teaching. In the post-war period, following the opening of many

professions to women, the CWL encouraged English Catholic women to take every educational opportunity to increase their employment prospects.

2. The Research Questions

During the nineteenth century Catholic social care was generally provided by female religious orders which attracted large numbers of women to a life of prayer and service to the Catholic community. Religious orders were encouraged by the hierarchy which sanctioned the female vocation within strict boundaries. The only other vocation for Catholic women was as wife and mother. Many Catholic women were conscious that not all social care could be supplied by members of religious orders but felt restrained by the Church's teaching on the role of women and their place within the family. The founders of the CWL were aware that other denominations attracted large numbers of women to engage in philanthropy and proselytising in the deprived centres of England's industrial cities. The CWL was able to persuade large numbers of lay women that engagement in the public sphere was an extension of their religious vocation to love their neighbour. This raises the first key question that the current study seeks to discuss: what were the characteristics of the organization of the CWL which enabled it to deliver its aims to unite Catholic women, to empower them to serve the Catholic community and promote the Church's social teachings?

The CWL was founded at a time of heightened interest in the women's movement.⁵ Suffrage campaigns, some militant, were a common feature of this period as was the widespread use of the terms feminism and feminist. The founders of the CWL were aware of the range of demands within the women's movement where secular philosophies were cited by those seeking to re-define the role of women in society. Catholic women who wanted to participate in the women's movement were challenged by the increasingly anti-Christian nature of much feminist analysis of the origins of patriarchal society and women's subordination. Thus the second research question framing this study asks: how did the CWL construct the ideological space, "Christian Feminism" so that Catholic women could become educators, agents of change in the care of the poor, and activists in the public sphere without abandoning their faith?

The founders of the CWL placed education at the centre of their work for Catholic women. Education was seen as the best means of empowering women to implement lasting social reform based on sound economic and religious principles. Since the educational reforms of the late nineteenth century many groups both religious and secular had placed their hopes in education as the means by which changes in society would be generated and sustained. The Catholic hierarchy was convinced that education was the best method of preventing individuals leaving the Church, of protecting its population from the unwarranted incursions of the state, for example in the application of the Poor Law, and ensuring that Catholic women understood

and could defend Catholic principles in the public sphere. Widening educational opportunities continued to be a major part of the demands of the women's movement in the early twentieth century. Many of the founding generation of the CWL had benefited from improvements in female education made during the latter half of the nineteenth century but they recognized that it had not prepared them for social service among the poor of Britain's industrial cities. The CWL was part of a general move away from individual amateur charitable acts towards a more sustained and business-like approach to deprivation and poverty. Education of individuals was essential if systematic social care was to be provided. This set of issues therefore generates a third research question for the present work to answer: what was the CWL's theory of education and how did it inform the educational programme as it responded to meet changes in society?

While women as participants in the educational developments during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have attracted the attention of many historians relatively few have included Catholic women in their research. More recently historians have begun to examine the contributions of individual women who as members of religious orders fulfilled the many roles involved in the founding, administration and management of hospitals, orphanages, schools and colleges. As yet the lives of Catholic lay women and their support for the development of these social services have not been the subject of much research. Finally, then it is necessary while acknowledging the scarcity of primary sources to ask a fourth key research question: what was the character and motivation of the founders of the CWL?

Addressing these questions critically will permit an overall understanding of the CWL in its foundation years as a significant educational institution for women in the context of its times and a notable participant in changes in the English Catholic community and society in general. This will facilitate a critical academic study of the CWL as a provider both of education and an ideology that authenticated the public roles of its members.

3. The Shape of the Study

The study has been presented in this order to enable the reader to move from the broader contexts considered in Chapter Two and Chapter Three to the detail of Chapters Four and Five. The study then focuses on the education provided by the CWL. While reference is made throughout the study to the founders of the CWL it was considered impractical to provide a detailed analysis of their characters and motivations before Chapter Eight. In addition the reader is advised that Chapter Eight can be consulted as a point of reference.

Chapter Two places the CWL in its historical context. The chapter examines the social legislation which shaped social care, the effects of the First World War on women and the campaign for female suffrage. The Catholic Community, out of which the CWL grew, is analysed.

Chapter Three provides a critical survey of the historical research relevant to the conduct of this study. Attention is drawn to the lack of secondary sources on Catholic women activists in the early twentieth century. Secondary sources were selected from the historical research carried out into Catholic education, the nature of the English Catholic community and women activists in social reform, the latter having an international dimension. The chapter also considers the problems encountered in accommodating the CWL within feminism. Various definitions of feminism are examined in order to place this study in its theoretical framework. Finally the method and methodology employed to select and analyse the primary sources which provided unique insights into the development of the CWL as a national society are examined.

Chapter Four chronicles the steps which led to the founding of the CWL and highlights the importance of education among the motives of Margaret Fletcher and her fellow founders. A detailed examination of the CWL's constitution and structure reveals how the society developed from its narrow metropolitan base into a multi-branched organization. Some of the difficulties encountered by the CWL in building its democratic system of decision-making are illustrated by the study of the changing position of the London membership within the organization. Finally the chapter identifies how the CWL was accepted by the Catholic community despite early opposition.

Chapter Five looks at the issues of membership including recruitment and discipline in the context of social class and the women's movement of the first decades of the twentieth century. An examination of the CWL finances serves as an example of how it moved from an amateur group relying on donations to a society with a regular income and salaried staff. Thirdly, the chapter provides a case study of the CWL Leeds Diocesan Branch to illustrate how national policy was translated by the branches into activities tailored to local circumstances. This case study also provides examples of local initiatives being adopted as whole league activities.

Chapter Six analyses the theoretical basis which informed the CWL commitment to education as the means of transforming amateur philanthropy into systematic social work. This also includes an appraisal of the usefulness of the CWL's version of feminism in empowering CWL members to participate in the women's movement without compromising their religious principles. Detailed attention is given to the aims and objectives of the CWL's educational theory and how this was impacted upon by the First World War and the partial enfranchisement of women in 1918.

Chapter Seven explores the strategies the CWL employed to educate its members. Among those considered are in-house publications, lectures, debates, role modelling, participation in decision-making bodies and national conferences. Three whole league campaigns for the study of social sciences,

the improvement of infant welfare and the promotion of citizenship are laid out to demonstrate how the CWL raised awareness among its members and promoted practical activities.

Chapter Eight contains the biographical profiles of seven women who were key members of the founding generation. Despite the scarcity of personal details this chapter provides insights into the lives of these women. Close documentary analysis of texts authored by them has facilitated an understanding of their characters and their roles as formulators of educational and social theories and innovators of CWL policy. At various points in the study the reader is directed to Chapter Eight in order to access the biographies

Chapter Nine considers the key research questions set out in Chapter One in the light of the research and proposes a number of substantive findings. Indication is given of areas of further research.

References for Chapter One

¹ The CWL celebrated its centenary in the autumn of 2006.

² *The Crucible* was first published in June 1905 with Margaret Fletcher as its editor.

³ Fletcher, M. (1939) *O, Call Back Yesterday*, p. 176.

⁴ Throughout this study "the Church" (with a capital letter) refers to the Roman Catholic Church.

⁵ This phrase is used throughout the study to cover the range of campaigns concerning women in the early twentieth century.

Chapter Two: The Historical Context

1. Introduction

This chapter surveys the social and political context in which the CWL functioned. The environment in which the CWL worked was shaped by social legislation, the First World War and the women's movement. (See Table 1.) The CWL empowered Catholic women to be agents of change in social care. The CWL did engage with the State in pursuit of social reform and the defence of Catholic social teaching but it considered itself non-political.⁶ Although the CWL did not challenge the class structure of society many CWL strategies were directed at improving the educational opportunities for girls and women of all classes.

The division of early twentieth century society by class and gender was particularly overt in the educational provision of elementary, secondary schools and the universities. The Balfour Education Act of 1902 did not remove divisions of class and gender. This act abolished the School Boards, one of the few public bodies where women could be both electors and be elected, and placed elementary schooling under the control of county and borough councils. These councils provided free education up to the age of 14 and were responsible for a large part of the financing of the voluntary schools owned by the Church of England and the Roman Catholics. This system remained in place until the 1944 Education Act. The Catholic hierarchy was committed to denominational elementary schools and defended the right of

Catholic parents to have their children receive a Catholic education on the same terms as other parents. Elementary education was for the working class, few of whom went on to receive secondary schooling. The gendered curriculum made domestic science compulsory for girls.⁷ Opportunities for further training were extremely limited and often depended on parental contributions such as for apprenticeships. Secondary education was largely reserved for the upper and middle classes who spent a larger proportion of the family capital on boys, than on girls' education. While many boys and girls left secondary schools with no formal qualifications, and only a minority went on to study at university level there were even fewer places for girls to pursue their education. Increasing numbers of middle-class girls sought paid employment before marriage but this only became accepted as normal during the First World War. While the middle class saw male education as the best means of insuring the family's financial future, upper-class male education centred on the public schools and the universities was designed to equip men for social and political leadership.⁸ Politics, the Church of England, the armed services and the highest levels of the Civil Service and diplomacy were dominated by men from the upper class. Upper-class girls' education was designed to fit them for marriage and the role of successful society hostess. For such women involvement in the public sphere was strictly limited to a few charitable activities. Several members of the founding generation of the CWL including Mabel Hope and Edith Sykes (see Chapter Eight) belonged to this class. Mabel Hope and Edith Sykes both performed the leadership role of CWL president.

A sense of the inadequacies of the education given to upper and middle-class women was a strong motivation for the CWL's educational programme.

Upper and middle-class girls lacked the necessary knowledge, according to the CWL, to effect social reform and defend Catholic principles in the public sphere. During the First World War the CWL began to recognise failures in working-class girls' schooling.⁹ Attention was drawn to the spread of socialism among the working class. The CWL did address these issues and looked at methods of countering the appeal of socialism with Catholic social teaching.

At the beginning of the twentieth century social care was provided by the Poor Law and a multitude of philanthropic societies many of whose members were motivated by religious conviction. Detailed surveys such as those conducted by Booth and Rowntree had revealed the extent of social deprivation among the working class. The Liberal government under Herbert Asquith responded to the shocking details of Booth's and Rowntree's reports with social legislation. The most significant of these were the old age pension and the national insurance system. The old age pension marked a significant break with the Poor Law inasmuch as it made the payment a right not a charitable dole. The national insurance scheme used contributions from employers and employees to finance a limited number of benefits such as unemployment pay and maternity benefit. This scheme replaced the individual 'friendly societies' which had grown up in the nineteenth century and financed almost entirely by the workers themselves. The period also saw significant developments in

education which are of particular interest to the understanding of this study. The provision of meals and medical examinations for school children heralded an extension of the role of the schools into welfare services. These provisions are generally seen as the foundations of the welfare state and while they did not end poverty they went some way to establishing welfare as a function of government. Charity continued to be an essential tool in the alleviation of poverty and deprivation and a major concern for the women who formed the CWL. The First World War highlighted many of the issues involved in the high infant mortality rate common among the working class.¹⁰ It was in response to these concerns that the Maternity and Child Welfare Act was passed in 1918. It gave local authorities the task of providing maternity services with the aim of reducing the infant mortality rate. Some historians have seen this focus on the infant mortality rate as middle-class criticism of working-class child care practices which focused on the ignorant mother.¹¹ It was assumed by many social reformers that mothers who worked outside the home neglected their children. This assumption lay behind the call for the male bread winner to receive a family wage, that is, a wage that would meet the needs of his whole family. Others saw the problem in terms of working-class women mismanaging their family budget.

The founding and development of the CWL coincided with the intensifying of the suffrage campaign which had begun in the late nineteenth century. The founding of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903 signalled a new phase with an emphasis on public demonstrations and acts of violence with

the objective of bringing female suffrage to the notice of the public and the government. Between 1910 and 1912 campaigners for the suffrage had reason to believe that enfranchisement was possible. A Conciliation Committee was set up which framed a Conciliation Bill. It proposed to give a limited number of women the vote according to property qualifications. The bill was finally defeated because it drew opposition from both the Liberal and Labour parties. The bill would have enfranchised women householders, a group most likely to support the Conservative Party. In 1912, with the successful reform of the House of Lords completed, the Liberal government under Asquith decided to extend the male suffrage to such an extent as to be almost universal. Asquith had given the impression to the suffragists that he would be prepared to see an amendment to this Reform Bill which would enfranchise women. All hope of a successful outcome came to an end when in January 1913 Asquith withdrew the whole Reform Bill. Militant tactics employed by the WSPU culminating in the death in 1913 of Emily Davison raised the profile of the suffrage campaign but divided its sympathisers into those who supported the militants and those who looked to the moderate National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies founded in 1897 under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett. Catholic opinion was equally divided, for example, the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society founded in 1912 refused to condemn the WSPU but did not participate in militant activities. The Tablet, the leading Catholic weekly newspaper declared itself in favour of women's enfranchisement.¹² Between August 1912 and November 1912 The Tablet carried a series of letters and reports which demonstrated the range of opinion on female enfranchisement among its readers.¹³

While the CWL remained resolutely silent on the subject of female suffrage it did encourage its members to participate in local government. The 1907 Act gave some women the right to participate in county and borough councils. Women could also be elected as Poor Law Guardians. The CWL was committed to empowering Catholic women to be active citizens for the benefit of the poor and as advocates of Catholic social teaching. Although in 1900 some 270 women were members of school boards this particular public service was not attractive to Catholic women because of the Church's commitment to denominational schools and its horror of any attempt to divide secular education from religious instruction.¹⁴ Hollis's study of women active in local government has demonstrated the importance of women poor law guardians in the amelioration of the harshest aspects of the workhouse regime. The majority of the 1,147 poor law women guardians in 1900 had, according to Hollis, had been drawn to this work through involvement in other philanthropic activities. The CWL was conscious that few Catholic women took an active role in the poor law. It was frequently lamented by the founders of the CWL that Catholic teaching on social issues was not represented on such public bodies because Catholic women were reluctant to put themselves forward for election. There was a strong sense that Catholic women were late arrivals in the public sphere where Anglican and Nonconformist women had long been a significant presence.

The CWL responded to the enfranchisement of women over thirty in 1918 by encouraging its members to take up their civic responsibilities and participate in the democratic processes of government. The following year barriers to women holding public office or civil and judicial posts were removed. Many professions were officially opened to women though unofficial discrimination continued until after the Second World War. The CWL continued to encourage women to seek professional careers though it did not envisage any radical reshaping of family life or the sexual division of labour within the household.

The First World War presented the CWL with the challenge of directing Catholic women's voluntary war-work. The welfare needs of various groups during the war were addressed by the CWL. The war brought about change for women of all classes but perhaps the most visible were the changes in the lives and work of young working-class women. It was women who lived and worked away from home as munitions workers that became the focus for middle-class concern. These women were seen as in need of protection which resulted in the provision of hostels for them. Middle-class women also volunteered to form patrols which worked alongside the police to protect young women from the temptations presented by large camps of soldiers especially in the ports.

Marwick has pointed out that at the beginning of the war women volunteers were not taken seriously and that the real change came with the introduction of male conscription in 1916.¹⁵ He adds that the only industry which suffered during the war was domestic service. Working-class girls who had previously sought employment as servants could during the war get better paid jobs in industry.¹⁶ Summerfield has criticised the view that women benefited from the opening of men's work to women.¹⁷ She pointed out that despite the provisions of the Munitions Act of 1915 which guaranteed that women doing men's work should receive the same pay, many employers argued that women could not undertake the whole task and required more supervision. Summerfield calculated that few of the one million women munitions workers received men's wages for their work.¹⁸ The real growth industry with the more long-lasting results for women was in the clerical sector. The war created a new bureaucratic apparatus which resulted in the creation of the business woman.

This study will examine some of the ways the CWL adapted its educational programme to meet the challenges of the war years. The study considers the social care the CWL gave to such groups as women munitions workers, Belgian refugees and servicemen away from the front line not the political and military events of the war. The war brought the CWL into contact with other non-Catholic societies such as the Red Cross.

2. The English Catholic Community

An understanding of the English Catholic Church and the community it created during the nineteenth and early twentieth century is essential in order to appreciate the complex influences which combined to shape the CWL and which contributed to its rapid growth between 1906 and 1923. What was the nature of the English Catholic community which formed the socio-religious base from which the CWL drew its membership?

At the beginning of the twentieth century England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland were governed by the Westminster Parliament as one political entity whereas the Roman Catholic Church recognised three national divisions. Scotland and Ireland each had their own Catholic hierarchy entirely separate from the hierarchy of England and Wales under the leadership of the Archbishop of Westminster. Despite its shared hierarchy the Welsh Catholic community must be considered to have significant differences to that of the English community and therefore warrant further research which could reflect them. The focus of this study has been on the English Catholic community and therefore references to Wales and Welsh Catholics have been omitted to reflect this focus.

Between the establishment of the Church of England during Elizabeth I's reign (1558-1603) and the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 Catholics in England experienced varying degrees of persecution. This period is often categorized as the penal years. Laws were passed designed to reduce the Catholics of

England to a persecuted minority. By the 1670s it is estimated that only one per cent of the English population was Catholic.¹⁹ Laws, propaganda, wild accusations and some genuine Catholic plots had, by the late seventeenth century, combined to convince large numbers of people that Catholics were dangerous conspirators. It was believed that they were constantly seeking a way to overthrow the Protestant religion and return England to the Catholic religion and the authority of the Pope. Anti-Catholicism remained a feature of English society for the next 150 years. During this period the Test and Corporation Acts forced Catholics into a private world fearful of persecution. Catholic men had few opportunities for education, professional qualifications or public service. The French Revolution assisted the cause of English Catholics in two ways: the sight of nuns fleeing persecution in France and seeking safety in England evoked much sympathy in England, and the conflict that followed helped to convince many that the time had come for Catholic emancipation. In 1828 the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed thus ended the requirement to be a member of the Church of England in order to hold an office of power or authority. The following year in 1829 the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act ended statutory discrimination. Anti-Catholic feeling was not laid to rest by emancipation.

From the late seventeenth century until 1850 England was officially, according to the Vatican, a missionary province with no true hierarchy of its own and where the Catholic Church existed in an uncertain state mainly under the protection of a small number of Catholic landowners. There was no formal

Church government, no diocesan structure, no parishes, and matters were decided in Rome by the Sacred Congregation for the Spreading of the Faith, by the department of the Papal Curia known as "Propaganda". (This ancient department had been re-established by Gregory XV in 1622. It was renamed in the late twentieth century following the Second Vatican Council.) Before 1850 England was divided into several large districts each with a Vicar Apostolic appointed by the Pope to exercise jurisdiction as a bishop but with no cathedral, chapter of canons to help him or territorial diocese. In 1850 by a letter 'Universalis Ecclesiae' Pius IX re-established in England and Wales a hierarchy of one metropolitan bishop to be known as the Archbishop of Westminster and twelve suffragan bishops. Dioceses were established across England and Wales. To some extent they reflected the distribution of the industrial working class and consequently the centres of Irish immigration, for example, in Liverpool and Birmingham. An extensive programme of church building was begun of which Westminster Cathedral was the most prominent; it was completed in 1903. As the Catholic population grew, largely as a result of continued Irish immigration, changes were made to this structure. For example, in 1879 the large northern diocese based at Beverley was sub-divided. Two new dioceses, one centred on the industrial area around Middlesbrough and the other based in Leeds were a response to the expansion of the Yorkshire coalfields and the subsequent growth in population. Leeds was also judged most suitable because, by the 1870s, it was the centre of an extensive railway network. The modern system of parishes was not formally established until the revision of Canon Law in 1915.

Many English Catholics looked across the Channel to 'Catholic' countries with pangs of regret and envy, but in many ways early twentieth century Britain was an easier place to practise the Catholic faith. Prejudice and discrimination were common features of both France and Germany and the relationship between the newly unified Italian State and the Vatican was fraught with suspicion and hostility. As Church temporal power had waned and the newly formed nation states of Europe treated the Catholic Church with suspicion as a trans-national organization, the papacy sought to increase its disciplinary hold on laity and clergy. This policy was manifested in the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope, the tightening of controls over national hierarchies and over the laity in 1908 with the encyclical Ne Temere which required non-Catholic partners in a Catholic marriage to promise that the children would be brought up as Catholics. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also saw the triumph of the Ultramontane version of Catholicism with its emphasis on weekly mass attendance, frequent confession, strict observance of rules and regulations during the liturgical year and a spirit of exclusiveness and separation from non-Catholic institutions and society. Heimann has suggested that in the latter half of the nineteenth century English Catholics underwent a religious revival similar to the evangelical movement among Protestants at the beginning of the century.²⁰ This religious revival focused on the Irish working class whose religious practice was considered, by the Ultramontanes, as too casual and in danger of lapsing altogether.

During the early twentieth century the English Catholic community was conscious of its historical heritage and many Catholic commentators referred to the legacy of the penal years. For those Catholics whose origins were in the 'Old Catholic Families' this historical legacy was still relevant. For many CWL women writers it was the social memory of the years of persecution which accounted for the reluctance of Catholic men and women to engage in public life. This legacy of persecution lay behind much of the suspicion displayed by the Catholic hierarchy of government attempts to change the educational system.

Between 1850 and 1900 the Catholic Church underwent remarkable growth and development which manifested itself both physically, in the building of churches, schools and convents,²¹ and spiritually, in a growing confidence and evangelization. It was within this structure that the CWL operated as a mainstream Catholic society within the framework of the institutional church. It was endorsed and encouraged by the Catholic hierarchy.

Accurately describing the Catholic population of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is fraught with difficulties. This is firstly because of the lack of historical research in the area. Until recently few historians who write about the social importance of religion during this period have spent very long on the Roman Catholic population. Either they write as if there were no special

features linked to the Roman Catholics, or they treat them as an interesting novelty. Most historians concern themselves with the religious practices of the Anglicans and the Nonconformists, by which they mean the Protestant Nonconformist churches usually described as chapels. Many historians have thus ignored the experience of Roman Catholics during this period.

Secondly, there is a lack of accurate figures which is also linked to the problem of definition. There was no census for religious affiliations in the nineteenth century other than church attendance. Some historians like McLeod have challenged the acceptance of church attendance as a working definition of religious affiliation. McLeod, in his analysis of the role of religion in society,²² drew on oral history surveys to demonstrate ways in which people may consider themselves religious without attending a particular church or a particular church service. MacRaild examined the nature of Catholicism as practised by the Irish immigrants to England and suggested that religious observance was only part of a culture of Catholicism.²³

The narrow definition of church attendance signifying religious affiliation was not favoured by the Catholic Church because it saw itself as increasingly committed to recovering lapsed Catholics. In this context 'lapsed' usually meant the Irish, or their descendants, whose participation in parish life might be limited to the services of baptism, marriage and burial. In view of the Catholic Church's refusal only to count its membership in terms of those in

church on a particular Sunday, it seems strange that the Church was not more diligent in finding out how many Catholics there were in England. Spencer has addressed the whole problem of establishing the size of the Catholic population during this period.²⁴ He used the census of 1851 as a starting point and calculated from the census that about 253,000 Catholics were counted at Mass on 30 March 1851. Spencer examined figures given in The Catholic Directory²⁵ during the nineteenth century and suggested that these figures have very little statistical basis. In 1894 the Catholic Directory claimed there were 1.5 million Catholics in England and Wales, this figure was then repeated until 1903 and no figures for the next eight years appeared in the Directory. The 1912 edition claimed 1,710,000. Spencer looked at statistics of marriage ceremonies and infant baptisms, from which the Catholic ones were extracted, with gaps for some years. This analysis produced a figure that by 1912 there were between 2.2 and 2.5 million Catholics.

The loss of church membership was a problem frequently discussed by the Catholic Church throughout this period. The hierarchy appear to have treated membership of the Catholic Church as an inherited inalienable right especially in relation to the Irish immigrant population. Much of Catholic philanthropy and the imperative behind the commitment to Catholic elementary schools was the prevention of 'leakage' from the Church. Leakage was seen to take place when a Catholic married a non-Catholic according to a non-Catholic rite which resulted in children of the marriage not receiving a Catholic baptism, and subsequently not attending a Catholic school. These problems became more apparent with the increased Irish immigration of the nineteenth century.

Whatever the difficulties of establishing the size of the Catholic population in the first decades of the twentieth century most historians have found it useful to divide the Catholic population into three: the Old Catholics, the Irish immigrants and the Converts. This division was widely accepted by Catholic commentators during the early twentieth century. It was among these three disparate groups that the CWL was promoted as a society to bind all Catholic women together.

The Old Catholics, mostly gentry and their servants/tenants, had remained loyal to the Roman Catholic Church despite persecution during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the years of low level prejudice in the eighteenth century. Where money allowed, these families had sent their sons (and more rarely their daughters) abroad in order to receive the Catholic education forbidden them in England. They had accepted a life excluded from the universities, the professions and politics. With Catholic emancipation (1829) and the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850, they had begun to assume a position of authority. The newly-constructed hierarchy was to be dominated by these families for many years. Three of the first four Archbishops of Westminster, Wiseman, Vaughan and Bourne came from this background.²⁶

The largest of these divisions was certainly the Irish and their descendants. The 1851 census recorded some 519,959 as Irish-born persons in England

and Wales. This refers only to those who had been born in Ireland. In 1871 there were 566,540 of this category which represented 2.49% of the population of England and Wales. The Irish-born proportion of the population was to drop so that in 1921 there were some 364,747 people who had been born in Ireland. They now only appeared as 0.96% of the native population. These figures do not show how many were not born in Ireland but descended from those so born and considered themselves Irish or were considered by others, especially the Church, as Irish.²⁷ (From these figures there is of course no way of knowing how many were Protestant in their religious affiliation.) Hickman has tried to identify this group in her study of data extracted from censuses. To a large extent her analysis acknowledged that it was extremely hard to define Irishness in relation to second and third generations of Irish migrants.²⁸ According to contemporary documents the hierarchy viewed descendants of the Irish immigrants as Catholics and the most likely to lapse and the most in need of missionary and charitable assistance.

There is some evidence that the Church was rather slow to recognise the needs of this group. At the restoration of the hierarchy most Catholic priests were attached to old landowning families with their own chapels, with a few itinerant priests moving among the Irish with their migrant work patterns. Gradually changes did take place and religious orders such as the Jesuits and the Passionists adapted their rules to allow for the appointment of missionary priests. Gwyn commented that

It was an immense and providential advantage that they were inclined to settle and multiply in the same restricted areas where they [the Irish] first arrived... And so long as the Irish Catholics, who formed so large a proportion of the whole body, continued to live in the same districts there was always a probability that those who had lapsed would come back again.²⁹

Gwyn drew on the survey of church attendance in London which was undertaken in 1903 by the Daily News and which was subsequently edited and published, to show how church attendance was in decline across all the denominations. From this survey the problem appears to have remained the same as fifty years earlier.

The Roman Catholics occupy a somewhat unique position in East London ... it is not for them to convert or proselytise – they could fill all their churches to overflowing if professing Catholics alone attended. Their priests experience in very poor districts the same difficulties in getting a regular attendance that other denominations find; a further proof if proof were required, that poverty is a bar to attendance at church.³⁰

According to MacRaild calculations based on the census returns showed that in 1871 London contained 11.8% of the Irish-born living in Britain which was in fact greater than the 9.9% living in Liverpool.³¹ In Liverpool, however, the concentration of the Irish and their descendants gave the city a strong Irish-Catholic culture. MacRaild described Liverpool as having an Irish middle class and a strong commitment to Irish nationalism. In such areas he identified a social Catholicism which centred on the parish, membership of confraternities and sodalities and the importance of the parish priest as community leader.³²

The third group, the converts, are in some ways the hardest to describe. This period saw hundreds of men and women become Roman Catholics. Apart from the high profile university men like John Henry Newman and Henry Manning (the second Archbishop of Westminster) there were hundreds who quietly changed their allegiance to Rome.³³ McLeod claimed that the majority of converts were from the working class but he gave no bibliographical reference for this statement.³⁴ McLeod suggested that these working-class converts were the result of marrying a Catholic. The Church discouraged Catholics from marrying non-Catholics and in 1908 this was formalised in the encyclical Ne Temere.³⁵ For many non-Catholics the easiest way through these difficulties was for them to convert prior to the marriage ceremony. It is difficult to produce accurate figures because the hierarchy used no uniform definition of a convert until the 1950s. Conversion continued to be a feature of the Catholic population during the 1920s and 1930s. The CWL was conscious of the issues surrounding the role of converts within the Catholic community.

3. A Catholic Culture

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the English Catholic community began to manifest a strong sense of its own identity in the form of a subculture. This subculture included a strong defensive element sometimes described as “the fortress church”³⁶ part of which was the determination to recover lapsed Catholics, fight for the rights of poor parents to have their children educated in Catholic schools and construct an alternative welfare system which would

protect Catholics from the dangerous influence of the Protestant Poor Law. The CWL was able to draw on this Catholic culture and encourage women to develop a sense of their own role in defending it from outside dangers. This defence of Catholic culture was particularly noticeable during the First World War when normal social controls were weakened.

The personnel of the Church also changed. Before the restoration of the hierarchy the leading clergy were from aristocratic families, educated abroad and more familiar with the houses of the gentry than the inner-city. In the 1870s Cardinal Manning urged his bishops to provide diocesan seminaries where secular clergy (priests not members of a religious order but under the authority of a bishop) could receive an exclusive education fitting them for service in the industrial cities of England. For example, St Joseph's Seminary opened in Leeds in October 1878³⁷ and the hierarchy began to include men such as Bishop Joseph Cowgill of Leeds (Bishop 1911-1936) who as a young priest had been involved in the administration of St Mary's Orphanage and St Vincent's Boys Homes which served the needs of the Leeds Diocese.³⁸ There had also been a very significant growth in religious orders of priests such as the Jesuits.

In May 1890, The Tablet published three lengthy articles celebrating "half a century"³⁹ of its existence by surveying the changes that had taken place in the Catholic community in England, Scotland and Ireland. It is interesting to

note the statistics the author quoted in order to show how successful the Catholics of England had been. He related the dramatic increase in the number of churches that had been built: from 1840 there were only 457 in England and Wales but by 1890 there were 1,312. This was the great age of church building for all the denominations. Along with these churches, the author commented on the number of priests which had also increased from 551 to 2,444. Similar increases are recorded for the numbers of religious orders and for schools. It is not clear where the author took these statistics from, but the tone of the article reveals a strong sense of enthusiasm and confidence in the future. The author described the scene of Wiseman's funeral, a public event in 1865, when the size of the procession could be favourably compared to that of the Duke of Wellington.⁴⁰

This confidence and strong bond of the Catholic community, portrayed so clearly in the articles referred to above in The Tablet, could be partly explained by an intense devotional life centred on the parish, where regular attendance not just at Sunday Mass but also at week-day Benediction, saying of the rosary and frequent confessions all helped to create a strong sense of identity which marks the distinctive nature of Catholicism in this period.

Heimann⁴¹ suggested that during the latter half of the nineteenth century Catholics underwent a religious revival, one result of which was the proliferation of separate Catholic societies. The Catholic Church during the second half of the nineteenth century encouraged a sense of exclusiveness and fostered a strong commitment to devotions that emphasized

denominational differences. Heimann described a number of societies that combined a particular devotion with a social and charity function, for example, the Association of the Cross, which was a Catholic temperance society which required frequent attendance at mass with the carrying of a two foot wooden cross and regular family prayers in front of it. This illustrates the very strong impulse among Catholics to found societies that mirrored "Protestant" groups but insisted on them being distinctively Catholic. In the early twentieth century this motivation can be seen as playing a part in the formation of the CWL, the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society and the Catholic Girl Guides.

This confidence placed the Catholic community in the early twentieth century with a choice between two policies as Catholics in a non-Catholic country,

they may stand entirely aloof from the national activities, banding themselves together as separate body which forms for the most part a minority of protest; this policy is advocated by the hierarchies of some Protestant or Anticlerical countries, and is accordingly adopted by the faithful in those areas.⁴²

On the other hand in a country such as Britain, more open to religious toleration Catholics could adopt the policy to

enter into the national activities of their country – seek admission whether men or women, to the various controlling departments of its public and civic life, and come forward to prove themselves efficient and useful citizens.⁴³

This latter option was not envisaged as a easy one for it was assumed that Catholics so engaged in the public sphere would

endeavour to bring Catholic principles to bear upon the discharge of their public duties, to spread a Catholic influence around them, and to make the Catholic spirit which individually animates them felt and appreciated by others as a leaven permeating their work.⁴⁴

This conviction that English Catholics should be engaged in “public duties” had been endorsed by Leo XIII’s encyclical Rerum Novarum, which examined the position of industrial working classes and the effects of industrialization on the poor. It commended to Catholics this section of modern society as the rightful sphere for the Catholic seeking to apply biblical injunctions to care for the poor. Vicinus in Independent Women identified the need for single women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to transform the passive role assigned to them within the cult of domesticity, into “one of active spirituality and passionate social service”.⁴⁵ Vicinus did not include in her study Roman Catholic women. Although the CWL was open to both married and single women it is worth noting that the League clearly provided an organisation in which single Catholic women could be transformed into activists. The CWL were able to utilise the encyclical to justify their view that “efficient and useful citizenship”⁴⁶ was the only acceptable option for Catholic women with the education and leisure to take an active role in social care.

According to Bennett, a major impulse behind the drive by the hierarchy to promote the growth in Catholic charities, was the need to remove Catholic children from the hands of the Protestant Poor Law. During this period the state funded and administered welfare system was not neutral in terms of religion. Charity, during this period, was seen both by the providers and the recipients as a tool of the proselytiser. Each denomination held the other’s

charitable works in deep suspicion.⁴⁷ An example of this suspicion is demonstrated in the quarrel between the children's society Dr Barnardo's and the Catholic Church. To the hierarchy Dr Barnardo's proud declaration that the society took in any child regardless of its religion was not a matter for rejoicing at such even-handedness but deeply troubling. Bennett described Barnardo himself as "an extreme Protestant with a missionary zeal" who "regarded it as his bounden duty to bring up all children in the religion which he followed".⁴⁸ The fate of the children of poor Catholic parents became the focus of both Catholic charity and Catholic education. The hierarchy responded to state welfare by seeking to change the law and its practice and, at the same time, to build its own welfare system. By 1877 the spokesman for the hierarchy, Father Seddon, reported that the situation had greatly improved with most guardians being prepared to hand over the Catholic children who qualified for the workhouse. The quarrel with Dr Barnardo continued. Negotiations and arguments continued from 1887 until 1899 when Cardinal Vaughan was able to reach an agreement that Catholic children would be handed over to Catholic rescue societies.

Much of this welfare was provided by religious orders mostly of women. This was to prove very successful and by the beginning of the twentieth century there were throughout the country orphanages, residential homes, hospitals and schools of every description. The hierarchy encouraged the founding of English orders whose members like the Sisters of St Paul the Apostle engaged in all aspects of social care. European orders came to England and

attracted large numbers of English and Irish men and women to swell their numbers. By 1937 there were 176 religious orders of women in England and Wales. Many of these Orders had more than one 'house' which meant that few areas lay outside this network of care. The bulk of the charitable work was done through these women. These religious orders of women are beginning to attract research and hence redress the imbalance exemplified by Vicinus's investigation of the communities single women constructed for themselves. She examined several religious communities composed of Anglican women but made almost no reference to the Catholic version.⁴⁹ Yeo had considered the power of religious images that Protestant feminists like Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904) borrowed from the Catholic iconography of the Blessed Virgin Mary to challenge the assumption that single women were redundant because they had failed to become wives and mothers.⁵⁰ Yeo demonstrated how Protestant women utilised the virgin mother image and transformed it into an empowering one in which the biological mother was replaced by the "moral or social mother doing self-sacrificial work with the poor and needy in the public world".⁵¹ Clearly Roman Catholic women seeking a meaningful single life, within a religious order or as members of a lay society like the CWL, had no need to borrow these images.

There were never as many orders for men and these usually consisted of priests who combined teaching with parish work. Few male orders were specifically founded to give social care to the poor. In the early twentieth century the CWL was part of a movement to bring lay men and women into the field of social care.

4. Catholic Education

Education for the Catholic community of the early twentieth century was seen as the key to maintaining its distinctive character and preventing the loss of church membership. The emphasis for the Catholic hierarchy was on formal education but this thesis demonstrates that the CWL provided an informal educational programme for its members. Unlike formal education CWL education was not so strictly divided by class and gender.

Like most nineteenth century men the bishops of England and Wales had assumed that elementary education was for the working class, that secondary schooling and higher education was for middle-class boys and that middle-class girls and women required a very different provision. Beales claimed that while divisions existed among Catholics on matters such as liturgy, on the schools' question they spoke as one and what they demanded was recognition by the State "that the parent has a natural right to have his child educated according to his conscience, and a civic right that this shall not cost him relatively more than his neighbour".⁵² The various campaigns to achieve this parity of provision were overseen by the Catholic Poor School Committee which had been set up in 1847 and its successor, the Catholic Education Council formed in 1905. Both organisations were committed to protecting the

denominational nature of Catholic schools and securing a fair share of the funds provided by the government. Twice in this period the hierarchy engaged in strenuous efforts to secure elementary education for its community. When the Elementary Education Act of 1870 was first introduced into the Commons the bishops were aware that 44% of poor Catholic children could not be given a Catholic school place. Manning launched the "Crisis Fund" in June 1870 to raise the money to meet the deadline for founding schools before the board schools were set up.⁵³ An astonishing £390,000 was raised and over 71,500 places were created. The system that then prevailed until the Act of 1902 was seen increasingly by the hierarchy as unfair and they recorded many incidences of inequitable funding and attempts at discrimination. By the late 1890s the hierarchy was once again struggling to defend the denominational character of its schools and feeling more and more isolated as Anglicans and Nonconformists accepted the Agreed Syllabus option.

By 1900 the elementary school system needed radical reform. The denominational elementary schools financed by a combination of government grants and private fund raising was considered by both religious authorities and the government to be failing. The Catholic Church believed the system was used to discriminate against its schools. There was a general feeling that the English system was not providing the education needed to maintain her position as an industrialized economy. Contradictory aspirations of the various interest groups became clear in the early 1900s when the government set out to end the School Boards, reform the voluntary sector and place

education under local authority control. Opposition to financing denominational schools from the rates was both vocal and visible, for example, a Nonconformist demonstration through the streets of Leeds protested against "Rome on the rates". Cruickshank⁵⁴ made the point that it was the Anglicans with far more schools than the Roman Catholics who had the most to gain. Cardinal Vaughan although he had misgivings over some of the clauses concerning school management, supported the new arrangement because most Catholic elementary schools were in urban areas catering for the Irish poor. Much of the antagonism between the Nonconformists, the Anglicans and the Government was over the denominational status of rural schools where no alternative to an Anglican school was possible. With few changes to the overall system the 1902 Education Act remained in place for the inter-war period. Various attempts to reduce the role of religious denominations in public funded elementary schools such as the Birrell Bill of 1906 were strenuously resisted by Catholics. The CWL was involved in several such campaigns when they assisted the hierarchy in rallying Catholic support. Throughout the period of this study, fund raising to start new schools was a feature of branch level CWL activities, for example, Newcastle Diocese Branch was involved in a bazaar in Gateshead to raise funds for local schools.⁵⁵ Elliott has shown that the hierarchy's commitment to Catholic schools remained constant throughout the inter-war period. He cites several examples including that of the Catholic clergy of Liverpool who in 1938 had informed the city's education committee that they were prepared to go to prison in defence of their Catholic schools. Another example was the extreme position of the Bishop of Salford who, in 1943, told his clergy that parents who

sent their children to non-Catholic schools were committing a mortal sin which could only be forgiven when the children were transferred to a Catholic school.⁵⁶

The three disparate groups, the Old Catholics, the Irish immigrants and the middle-class converts that formed the English Catholic community were drawn together by the institutional church which had flourished during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Encouraged by the hierarchy this community sought to create a Catholic culture which drew on the social memory of the penal years and which was prepared to defend its civil rights. The CWL was formed to serve this faith community by responding to the social and political movements of the first decades of the twentieth century. The CWL provided English Catholic women with a base from which they could meet the needs of its members and those they endeavoured to help among the working class.

Having identified some of the characteristics of the historical context in which the CWL functioned, the following chapter places the present work within the historiographical context. The chapter also explains how theories of feminism provided the framework for the analysis of the primary sources that form the basis of subsequent chapters.

Table 1: A Chronology of significant social and political events 1828-1918.

1828 Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts removed the need to be a member of the Church of England in order to qualify for positions in government and the services.

1829 Catholic Emancipation Act enfranchised Catholic men on the same terms as those belonging to the Church of England.

1850 The Vatican re-established a hierarchy for England and Wales under the leadership of the Archbishop of Westminster with twelve suffragan bishops with their own dioceses covering the whole of England and Wales.

1870 The Education Act allowed for the creation of school boards which would provide schools in areas where the denominational schools were unable to meet the needs of the area. The denominational schools were given a year to extend their school places before a school board was set up in a given area.

1870 Dr Thomas Barnardo opened his first home for deprived children in Stepney, London.

1874 The Girls' Friendly Society was launched by the Church of England to give religious and secular support to young women, mainly domestic servants, who earned their own living away from their families. The society insisted on the girls adhering to a strict moral code. Both helpers and the young women were expected to be members of the Church of England.

1876 A society dedicated to the moral and social well-being of young women adopted the title, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The focus was on providing suitable accommodation for single Christian women living away from the parental home. Its helpers were drawn from Nonconformist churches.

1879 The large Catholic diocese of Beverley was divided to create two new dioceses based at Leeds and Middlesbrough

1888 The Cross Commission recommended domestic science and child care to be taught in elementary schools to girls.

1889 Charles Booth published the first volume of *London Life and Labour*

1894 The Women's Industrial Council was founded to investigate factory conditions in relation to women workers and to report breaches in factory regulations. On several occasions the Council recommended legislation designed to protect women by limiting their hours of work. It was a non-sectarian and non-party political organisation.

1895 A formal constitution was adopted along with the title, the National Union of Women Workers, formed from a loose association of women's groups concerned with philanthropic work. The NUWW organised annual conferences where the reform of welfare, employment and criminal legislation was discussed in relation to the lives of women and children. The NUWW was an umbrella organisation to which charitable societies affiliated. In 1918 it changed its name to the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland.

1897 The Union of Women's Suffrage Societies founded under the leadership of Milicent Fawcett to co-ordinate non-militant campaigns for the enfranchisement of women

1901 Seebohm Rowntree published *Poverty, A Study of Town Life*

1902 The Education Act Abolished the School Boards. It placed elementary schools under the control of county and borough councils and financed from the rates. Denominational schools were partly financed through the rates with a complex system designed to accommodate denominational religious teaching during the school day.

1903 The Women's Social and Political Union formed to engage in public acts of disobedience in order to further the cause of women's suffrage

1906 Provision of School Meals.

1906 CWL founded.

1907 Local Government Act gave some women the right to vote in county and borough council elections.

1908 The Old Age Pension established

1911 National Insurance established as a means of providing a limited range of welfare benefits.

1912 The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society founded.

1913 Withdrawal of the Conciliation Bill which suffragists had hoped would enfranchise some women who fulfilled the same property qualifications as men.

1913 Emily Davison, the suffragette, died on Derby Day while campaigning for the suffrage.

1914-1918 The First World War

1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act gave local authorities the task of providing maternity services.

1918 The enfranchisement of women over thirty

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- ³¹ MacRaild, D. (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 147 and p. 86-91.
- ³³ Margaret Fletcher, founder of the CWL and her sister Philippa converted in 1897. They were daughters of an Anglican clergyman.
- ³⁴ McLeod, H. (1996), *op. cit.*
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Chapter Three: Historiography, Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The first section of this chapter provides a critical survey of historical research relevant to an understanding of the context in which this study of the CWL was conducted. This survey points to the scarcity of secondary sources on Catholic women activists in the early twentieth century. Also included is historical research which has influenced the direction and final shape of this thesis. The second section sets out some of the issues and problems encountered in using feminism as a theoretical framework for historical research. Various definitions of feminism and feminists are examined to suggest how the CWL can be accommodated within this area. The final section explains the methodology and methods employed in conducting the research. Particular attention is given to the primary sources which were critically analysed to provide the basis for this study.

1. Historiography

Secondary sources were consulted to place the CWL in its historical context and to inform the analysis of how the CWL faced the social and political challenges affecting women in the early decades of the twentieth century. Secondary sources were also considered in order to give the thesis its place in the existing historiography.

A. Catholic History

Until recently writers who set out to chronicle the history of the Roman Catholics in Britain were usually concerned with the Reformation and the years of persecution that followed the Elizabethan religious settlement of the sixteenth century. In the early twentieth century some historians included developments in the Catholic Church after the re-establishment of the hierarchy in 1850. These historical surveys generated by the English Catholic community rarely included women. An exception was David Mathew's Catholicism in England 1535-1935⁵⁷ where women appeared as an add-on to the main text. Women and Margaret Fletcher (founding president of the CWL, see Chapter Eight for biographical details) in particular were mentioned in an appendix written by Mother Mary Paul SHCJ and not by the main author. Even as late as 1973 McClelland was happy to produce English Roman Catholics and Higher Education 1830-1903⁵⁸ with no reference to Catholic women, religious or lay, even though many Catholic women were engaged in higher education during the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ The motivation of such historians was mainly to celebrate the emergence of the English Catholic Church from the years of active persecution and discrimination.

A valuable source for the study of Catholic history is the detailed survey produced in 1950 for the centenary of the restoration of the hierarchy in England and Wales in 1850, under the editorship of Beck.⁶⁰ This volume contained detailed factual accounts of most aspects of the Catholic Church in England and Wales including the development of diocesan administration, the lives of leading members of the hierarchy and the growth of the Catholic population. None of the chapters were written by a woman but there was a chapter on the educational work of the religious orders of women.⁶¹ There were references to the contribution women had made in the chapters on the poor, on elementary schools and welfare provision. It was only in the context of charitable work that the CWL was considered but no credit was given to them for empowering Catholic women to engage with the ecclesiastical and civic decision-making processes. This volume gave credit to women while they remained within their traditional roles but did not recognize women's efforts to move outside these fields of service and forge new opportunities for themselves. For example, in Chapter X, "Catholics and the Universities" by H. O. Evennett, which recorded the struggle to open Oxford and Cambridge to Catholic men, the problems that Catholic women encountered were ignored.⁶² Long after the universities had removed their religious barriers, the Vatican imposed a ban which was lifted, for men, in 1896. Catholic women remained under the ban until 1907 when the Vatican was persuaded that their faith and morals would not be endangered by exposure to the traditional curricula of Oxford and Cambridge. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus opened the first hostel specifically for Catholic girls wishing to study as Home Students at Oxford University. The hostel became known as Cherwell Edge (1908).

Margaret Fletcher and other members of the CWL were involved with the students at Cherwell Edge.⁶³ The only general history of the English Catholics which devotes considerable space to Catholic women is Catholicism in England 1535-1935: Portrait of a Minority where it appeared as an appendix written by Mother Mary Paul SHCJ.

In 1999, nearly fifty years after the publication of Beck's survey, McClelland and Hodgetts edited a collection of essays which also started with the new hierarchy established in 1850 but extended the period to cover the latter half of the twentieth century.⁶⁴ The tone and motivation of this volume is less congratulatory than Beck's and is a further indication that the English Catholic community has become a subject for academic historical research. The role of the Catholic hierarchy in both the shaping of the Catholic community and its relationship to wider political events was the subject of Aspden's critical research. Aspden provides insights into the extent to which the bishops were prepared to engage in party politics to defend the 1902 educational settlement that gave voluntary schools a share of the rates. He also discussed the relationship between the bishops and the new Catholic lay organizations which developed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. He identified the ambivalence of the hierarchy to these organizations that wanted the engagement of the laity in defending Catholic interests but sought to maintain episcopal authority over them.⁶⁵ Two more works which provide useful background on this theme were, Catholics in England 1950-2000 edited by Hornsby-Smith⁶⁶ and Option for the Poor by Dorr,⁶⁷ though writing

history was not the primary aim of either of these authors. Hornsby-Smith was more concerned with such issues as the lack of attendance at Sunday Mass, the financial burden of Catholic schools and the Church's relationship with other denominations and other faiths. There is some useful information on the social context of the Catholic Women's League during the 1930s but this is in the way of a lament for the demise of parish-based socialising and does not assess the CWL's achievements in education, social work and civic life. Dorr's purpose⁶⁸ was to provide a justification for the Church's involvement in issues of social justice especially in Third World countries. In order to examine the origins of the Catholic Church's involvement in social justice he re-examined the first of the Church's social policy encyclicals, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum issued in 1891. Rerum Novarum's call for social justice in industrialized countries was the catalyst for much Catholic social action in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rerum Novarum provided the justification for the founders of the CWL to engage with the social deprivation associated with industrialization and urbanization. Dorr's analysis is useful because it points to the limitations of Rerum Novarum as a manifesto for change. He demonstrated that its emphasis was on the behaviour of the rich towards the poor, not on empowering the poor to demand justice. Thus Rerum Novarum was a call for charitable concern for the working class and as recipients of the just reward for their labour but it did not endorse an employee versus employer struggle. A number of the contributors to the CWLM cited Rerum Novarum as justification for their educational programme. A response to this encyclical was the establishment of the Catholic Social Guild to which the

CWL was closely linked both officially and individually; many members of the CWL were also active in the CSG. Both organizations saw Rerum Novarum as a counter to socialism.⁶⁹

The work of Atkin and Tallett which examined the relationship between the Vatican and the major European states in Priests, Prelates and People: A History of European Catholicism since 1750⁷⁰ has been a valuable source in placing this study in the context of the relationship between the Vatican and the English Catholic community. Their work examined social and religious trends among Catholic communities across Europe. Camp has traced the development of the Vatican's concept of a woman's place through papal letters and encyclicals from 1878 to the late twentieth century. His aim was to demonstrate fundamental changes in papal teaching concerning the role of women in society but, in fact, showed how it remained conservative.⁷¹

B. Catholic Education

The history of Catholic education has been the subject of much research. As Grace pointed out in the recently published International Handbook of Catholic Education the schools and colleges providing a Catholic education number some 200,000 across the world and form the single largest faith-based educational system.⁷² Catholic education has been shaped by the

particular historical context in which it developed. Thus the history of English Catholic education is different from that found in Scotland. The Irish system set up following independence provides a useful contrast. To a large extent historians have focused on the development of state funded Catholic schools in England and Wales which in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were elementary schools. Catholic secondary schools usually sex segregated and until 1944, privately funded have received less attention and most higher education has not been delivered by faith-based institutions. The Catholic community's attitude to the history of the relationship between the State and its schools is illustrated by the title "The Struggle for the Schools" which Beales chose for his contribution to the Beck volume.⁷³ Beales's account of the period between 1847, the first public money granted to Catholic elementary schools, and the 1902 Education Act which ensured rate aid to denominational schools, celebrates the united effort the Catholic community made to secure equality in terms of public funding. More recent research in this area suggests a different version is possible. Aspden's investigation demonstrated divisions between Bourne (Archbishop of Westminster) and the laity. Bourne, for example, in 1906 advocated that Catholic voters should support the Conservatives to prevent Liberal attacks on the 1902 Education Act while large numbers of the Catholic laity voted Liberal because of that party's commitment to Irish Home Rule. The Catholic hierarchy, according to Aspden, was quite prepared to influence Catholic voters' choice of candidates whenever Catholic elementary schools seemed threatened.

Cruickshank's detailed investigation of the subject was a less partisan version by considering the position of all the denominations together. Her history of the protracted struggle between successive governments and the religious communities for a publicly funded educational system between 1870 and 1960 demonstrated the complexities of accommodating the aspirations of the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Nonconformists. In the long history of state involvement in providing public funds to religious bodies providing schooling, Cruickshank portrayed the state as reformist and the religious bodies as conservative and obstructive. Her study culminated in the 1944 education settlement (the book has a foreword by R. A. Butler who was responsible for the 1944 Education Act) which she celebrated as a successful conclusion to the century of conflict.⁷⁴

Another examination of the relationship between state funded education and the Catholic community was the subject of Elliott's "Between Two Worlds: the Catholic educational dilemma in 1944".⁷⁵ Elliott reflected on the cost to the Catholic community in Britain of providing elementary schools which were seen as the best way of passing on the doctrines of the Church and preserving the Catholic identity of the Catholic working class. The cost was two-fold, the financial burden of fund-raising which had characterized the second half of the nineteenth century and the cost in low standards and poor facilities found in Catholic elementary schools. Elliott's work also provided examples of the degree to which the English Catholic hierarchy was prepared to go to protect Catholic education from State interference.

According to Tenbus the hierarchy's pursuit of state funding for Catholic schools served two purposes: first, securing schooling for the large Catholic working-class and the means of delivering religious instruction. Secondly, it "served to bring together Catholics, rich and poor, cradle and convert, liberal and ultramontane, English and Irish" to form one community.⁷⁶ Thus the English Catholic community developed from "a timid, reticent, and often suspicious outsider into a confident, tenacious, and sometimes aggressive participant in public policy"⁷⁷ able to meet further challenges to its denominational schools. These experiences helped to create an atmosphere in which the laity assumed leadership roles in education and social care. As one such institution the CWL worked closely with the Catholic hierarchy encouraging its members to help defend the principle of parental choice in education, and shared its conviction that such schools were essential to prevent the loss of future generations from Catholicism. However its own work was aimed at adult education provided through informal strategies which were adaptable to the needs and time constraints of its members. Such informal methods of Catholic education in England have to date not attracted historical research.

O'Donoghue's examination of the control of Irish secondary schools during the first forty years of Ireland's independence is an interesting contrast to the experiences of the English Catholic community.⁷⁸ The close relationship between Church and state in Ireland from independence (1922) to the 1960s produced a secondary educational system almost entirely the work of the

Church with little attempt by the state to influence the curriculum or provide funding. While the socio-economic and political context in which Irish Catholic education was conducted was entirely different it has been important in the writing of the present study to bear in mind that a large proportion of the English Catholic community had familial connections with Ireland.

O'Donoghue demonstrated the importance the Church placed on conformity among its teachers and in the content of the school curriculum which hardly changed during the first forty years from independence. His research invites a comparison with the English Catholic school curriculum which largely conformed to the needs of society and the requirements of state endorsed examinations. While in Ireland the Church was left to manage schooling for most of the population (there were a few non-Catholic schools) without interference from the Irish government, in England Catholic schools remained a minority and within them the Church focused on the religious curriculum.

C. Catholic Women

Histories concerned with religion as a social phenomenon in Britain while not ignoring the Roman Catholics rarely provide more than a brief survey of their community. McCleod in Religion and Society in England 1850-1914⁷⁹ acknowledged the uniqueness of the Catholic experience but the bulk of McCleod's work concentrated on the Church of England and the Nonconformist churches.

Both Malmgreen in 1986 and Morgan in 2002 pointed out very little research has been conducted on the role of religion as a motivating force in the lives of women activists. Malmgreen placed the blame for this neglect with feminist historians who “should not forget that women took to the public platform on behalf of religion long before they were stirred by politics, that women left home in droves to conduct Sunday schools and prayer-meetings long before they campaigned for professional training”.⁸⁰ Even so, the collection she edited only included Catholic women in a chapter concerned with the portrayal of nuns in art. Nearly twenty years later Morgan lamented “the absence of any sustained historical analysis on women’s religious and feminist convictions ” and made a similar point to Malmgreen in that religion gave women in the nineteenth century “an unprecedented array of opportunities, such that it has been suggested that evangelical religion was more important than feminism in enlarging women’s sphere of action”.⁸¹ Morgan’s collection of essays did not include any Catholic women despite Malmgreen’s observation in 1986 that “the historiography of Roman Catholic laywomen... is all but non-existent”. Yeo, in 1998, considered how Protestant feminists adapted Catholic icons such as the self-sacrificing virgin mother, to empower their commitment to single women. Yeo’s investigation of how such feminists as Frances Power Cobbe and Josephine Butler were able to soften the maleness of Protestant Christianity with the female saints of the Catholic Church such as Catherine of Siena.⁸² Yeo’s work did not examine how Catholic women related to these images.

There are no histories of the CWL and no biographies of any of the women founders of the League. The Dictionary of National Biography did not include any of the founders of the CWL. The Dictionary of British Women's Organizations⁸³ had an entry for the CWL which although it provided basic facts it did not record its continued existence nor any membership figures. There was also a separate entry for the Union of Catholic Mothers' which recorded its origins in the CWL. There was a small pamphlet-like publication produced as a commemoration of seventy-five years of the CWL in 1981.⁸⁴ It was a survey of the CWL's work with no analysis of the work nor any evaluation of its achievements. The CWL has been part of some historical research notably Beaumont's unpublished PhD and several articles.⁸⁵ Beaumont considered the CWL as one of six women's organizations active during the 1920s and 1930s. Her appraisal of the CWL's role concentrated on the period when the League was well-established as a mainstream women's organization after the equal enfranchisement of women. Hence her study was concerned with a very different social and political environment from that which faced the CWL's founding generation. Kane studied the CWL in order to demonstrate to what extent it could be considered a feminist organization.⁸⁶ Neither Beaumont nor Kane appear to have had access to the unpublished material held in the CWL's own archive, nor do they draw on the printed material located in The Crucible or the CWLM before 1919. Eaton's investigation into the demise of parish-based organizations drew on a historical perspective which includes the role of the CWL in the twentieth

century but her work was mostly concerned with the nature of the parish community in the twenty-first century.⁸⁷

The response to social issues by various faith communities received attention in McCleod's Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York.⁸⁸ Prochaska's study of philanthropy in nineteenth century England examined some of the processes involved in the move away from individual acts to a more structured approach to social deprivation.⁸⁹ A detailed examination was provided by Lees of the ideas and work of social reformers faced with the growth of industry and urbanization in his work Cities, Sin and Social Reform in Imperial Germany.⁹⁰ Though not specifically about the work of the Catholic community in Germany he gave a useful background both for the understanding of the origins of the Frauenbund (inspiration for the Catholic Women's League in England) and the European dimension to social reform in an advanced industrial context. In "Part 3: Urban Reformers and Their Visions of Virtue" Lees looked at the contribution of individual reformers, for example Alice Salomon was the only woman to receive detailed treatment. Salomon was not a Catholic (she converted from Judaism to Christianity late in life), but it is clear that she shared with many Catholic women a similar vision of social work as an extension of their home and advocated education and training for volunteers. Many articles published by the CWL shared Salomon's vision of educating women so that they could participate in the move from amateur, voluntary philanthropy to quasi-professional social work. Salomon has attracted more recent scholarship from Schröder and Schüler⁹¹ who discussed the dilemma for middle-class women of their enforced idleness

and working-class women's double shift of domestic toil and paid work in the industrial economy. This work provided a European dimension to these social issues. They have demonstrated how religious motives for women's involvement in philanthropy was developing into a demand for education and training for social work among the poor. They provide an opportunity to compare German women's response to social deprivation with members of the CWL. Such a comparison highlights the importance of the religious motive in many women's activism in the field of voluntary social work. The German experience is also relevant here because Margaret Fletcher and other founders of the CWL were familiar with German social issues. They saw the Frauenbund as a prototype for the English league. The ambiguity over paid and unpaid work for middle-class women was an important concern for the CWL, which from its earliest days provided employment information. The trend to move from amateurish charitable work to professionalized social work was a significant feature of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century female philanthropy.

Comparison can also be made with the experiences of Catholic women in the USA. Kenneally's survey of Catholic women in the USA demonstrated that Catholic women had a long tradition of activism particularly in social reform and education from the early colonial period to the late twentieth century. American Catholic women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries faced similar social and religious obstacles to those in Britain.⁹² For example his study of Catholic women engaged in Settlement work among the poor of

the major cities of the USA showed that many saw their activism as an extension of their work in terms of traditional female roles of caring and nurturing but were frequently criticised for abandoning the role of wife and mother. He also examined the divisions within the Catholic community between those who believed Catholic women active in the public sphere could improve society and those who objected to women moving outside the confines of the home. American Catholic women activists also embarked on educational programmes, with the same aim as those provided by the CWL, to improve their competence to bring about social reform.

The issue of work was a major concern for women in Britain, Germany and the USA. A strong motivation for many women engaged in the nineteenth century women's movement was the need of many middle-class women to find paid work. Middle-class women who did not seek paid employment often saw voluntary work as essential for their self-esteem and to assert their right to an identity outside marriage. At the same time many social commentators lamented the economic necessity for working-class married women to seek paid work. One of the first organizations the CWL associated itself with was the National Union of Women Workers. This was not a trade union for working-class women. As an association for women engaged in philanthropy it stated its aim as one of representing:

women who are engaged in some real work whether it be paid or voluntary and who do that work, not for the sake of their own satisfaction, not for the sake of pay, though some may need some pay, but because they look upon their work as a vocation.⁹³

This highlights a feminist issue of defining women's work. These ambiguities were never openly discussed by the CWL. Only during the First World War does the evidence (in the unpublished and published sources) suggest that the balance had shifted from assuming all middle-class women had the leisure to engage in voluntary work to acknowledging that many middle-class women had a paid occupation before marriage.

Increasing numbers of historians have in the last ten years begun to research the role of women within the Catholic community during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Among them are McAdam⁹⁴ and Mangion,⁹⁵ who have begun to fill the now obvious gap in Vicinus's work in which she neglected the Roman Catholic experience of female community life while she did consider Anglican orders which sprang up in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁹⁶ McAdam and Mangion examined the female experience of religious life reflecting on the social phenomenon of the expansion of women's religious orders during the nineteenth century. Across Britain Catholic women volunteered to enter religious orders and pledge themselves to a life of prayer and hard work. Mangion had two explanations for the previous lack of historical research on women in religious orders. The first is a general point:

Industrialisation, science and technology are logical and rational explanations used to explain history and change. Religion, judged as irrational and not part of modernity, has been marginalised as an explanation for social change in the modern world.⁹⁷

Her second point applies more particularly to the study of women who made religious beliefs the central motivation for their activism. Mangion noted that: "In its institutional form, religion has come to represent an unwelcome symbol of patriarchy",⁹⁸ and this is particularly relevant to this study of the CWL. This study has considered the ways women, within the institutional patriarchal Church, built a semi-autonomous space within which they could contribute to social reform. Mangion's study of the work of religious women as teachers also provided insight into the difficulties women had in the nineteenth century (and still applied in the early twentieth century) in gaining professional status for occupations many saw solely as extensions of the female virtues of caring and nurturing. Walsh's Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales 1800-1937⁹⁹ and Heimann's Catholic Devotion in Victorian England¹⁰⁰ gave some useful insights. Heimann analysed those typical Catholic activities such as Benediction and the Rosary, which were features of the lives of all the members of the CWL. Her work also pointed out that there was a trend within the Catholic community to replicate existing societies of Anglican or Nonconformist origin, with a Catholic version, for example there were Catholic temperance societies and Catholic orphanages. This desire of replicating existing societies in a Catholic form, can be seen as part of the motivation behind the founding of the CWL and other societies such as the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society.¹⁰¹ Walsh examined the extensive work of women's religious orders. Her work demonstrated how nuns became active in almost every aspect of social provision. The CWL were conscious of the debt the Catholic community owed to these women but they also saw

drawbacks to leaving social work to religious orders and encouraged its members to take on duties they deemed best-suited to married women.

Research carried out on other organizations engaged in philanthropic work has helped highlight some aspects of the CWL's involvement in similar activities. For example, Woollacott¹⁰² has shown how the social work provided by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in the early twentieth century gradually moved away from its religious origins towards a professional authority derived from education and training. Woollacott identified the years 1914-1918 as the period when women began to realise that social work for the YWCA could provide paid work and a career. Woollacott's work covered the same time period and the same field of endeavour as the early years of the CWL. The transition from social work based on assumptions of female moral authority to the acceptance of the need for education and training is demonstrated by Woollacott's study of the YWCA. The CWL was also a conduit for a similar transition. The CWL's educational programme was designed to inform its members of the economic causes of social deprivation and to train volunteers as social workers; by the early 1920s the CWL employed full-time paid matrons of hostels and rescue homes.

Ruth Watts in her review "Gendering the Story: Change in the History of Education"¹⁰³ has shown that the study of women's contribution to education is no longer incidental but part of the mainstream history of education. She

discussed the motivation of many historians working in this area to be the desire to reveal women not only as victims but as active participants in the processes which formed society. Martin and Goodman's¹⁰⁴ study of women educationalists is a further move away from viewing women simply as victims of injustice and examines how women have negotiated a path through gendered political and educational systems. Using this scholarship as a foundation for examining the educational work of the CWL it is possible to move away from the negative analysis of Kane's "Willing Captive of the Home"¹⁰⁵ and see the founders of the CWL as contributors to the education of Catholic women. Martin and Goodman have demonstrated that the investigation of the contribution of women to the development of education moves them from the objects of reform to the participants in the process.

Many historians have embraced the idea of borrowing the social science concept of network analysis in order "to draw a micro-perspective picture that envisages from a cultural angle the specific circumstances, variations, actors and mechanics"¹⁰⁶ to understand social developments. Fuchs has pointed out that despite the network analysis originating within the social sciences, when employed by historians it does not imply the application of "a quantitative, statistical approach". For many historians the nature of the data they work with rules out this quantitative approach but they have attempted to describe networks. Jane Read's study of Froebelian women employed this concept of networks to facilitate an understanding of women as contributors to educational development.¹⁰⁷ In her work she explained how women across

national boundaries employed networks to develop the kindergarten movement and create a profession for women teachers of the very young. Harford has also appraised the role of social networks in the development of women's colleges in Ireland during the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸ She traced the importance of formal networks which enabled the pioneering women principals of the women's colleges such as Alexandra College Belfast (Protestant), the Dominican College Eccles Street, St Mary's University College and Loreto College St Stephen's Green, Dublin (the last three all founded by Catholic religious orders) to engage in the debate over university education and ensured that women were included in the new National University of Ireland (1908). Her research also revealed how women students at these colleges engaged in college societies which covered a wide range of interests from art and sport to the more spiritual. Membership of those societies which combined religious fervour with philanthropy was "often the path by which women embraced wider feminist questions".¹⁰⁹ These societies also provided opportunities for women students to participate in administration and public speaking; they enabled networks to operate after leaving college.

Scholarship such as Burley's has shown how Catholic women in the very different social/political contexts to those in which the CWL operated also took active roles rather than passively submitting to male supervision. Burley's study of Catholic schooling in South Australia demonstrated how these schools provided opportunities for women to exercise considerable power and management skills. Religious orders, Burley claimed, provided a career path

for women with the professional skills of management to found, finance and administer schools. She attempted to penetrate the secluded world of women's religious orders to uncover the lives of some of the successful educationalists active in South Australia between 1880 and 1920.¹¹⁰

While this thesis does not include any extensive network analysis the analytical tools used by these historians suggest ways of examining the role of women within the CWL. One method of fulfilling the commitment to revealing the contribution made by laywomen to the development of Catholic social care in the first decades of the twentieth century has been suggested by the work of Cunningham and Sikes. Cunningham's analysis of the networks and structures through which progressive teaching was expounded, argued for the importance of focusing on "the everyday work of teachers".¹¹¹ His search for the "anonymous, practitioners" through a prosopography of progressivism suggested that assembling biographies of members of Catholic laywomen could lead to a better understanding of their motivations. Taking from Sikes' advocacy of the use of narrative and auto/biographical methodologies in educational research to "give privileged insights into how people make sense of the world",¹¹² this thesis has provided seven narratives of seven key members of the CWL.

Historians engaged in women's history and the history of education have suggested lines of enquiry which have been useful in answering the research questions posed in Chapter One.

2. The Theoretical Framework

This study takes as its theoretical framework definitions of feminism within which the CWL is analysed both in its contemporary setting and its overall place within the women's movement of the last 150 years.

Defining feminism has always been problematic. There had already been several reformist campaigns run by women before the term feminism and feminist had been coined. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the term was first used in Britain, but even then many women shunned it. By the early twentieth century the term, for supporters and opponents, became almost synonymous with militant campaigns for the suffrage. There was a retreat from the notion of feminism as a social movement in the 1920s and 1930s. The women's movement of the 1960s revived interest in defining feminism. The early twenty-first century accepted use of the word, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is that feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes. It was the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s that began to study the origins of feminism who realised that one definition of feminism based on equal rights and equality of the sexes would leave out many women active in the women's movement of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries because they did not subscribe to radical

demands for re-shaping the role of women according to an ideology of equality of the sexes.

For many of the pioneers of women's history the demand for political enfranchisement was the test to determine which individuals and organizations could be included in the feminist pantheon and warranted their attention. Banks in her book, Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement set out to link the feminism of the nineteenth/early-twentieth century with the 'second wave' of the 1960s. To do this Banks declared that she had used feminism in the "broadest possible way" to include "any groups that have tried to *change* the position of women, or the ideas about women"¹¹³ (original emphasis). Even so her study conservatively dated the women's movement from the 1840s with its origins in the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, natural law and equality of rights. Banks identified two other traditions which drew on Protestant sects such as Unitarians and the Quakers and those which sprang from various theories of communal living such as Owen and later from Socialism. In her later work Becoming a Feminist Banks selected the men and women on which she based her analysis by their commitment to "a critique of the traditional subordination of women, enshrined... in law, custom and religion".¹¹⁴ All her feminists in this survey claimed for women "a new relationship between men and women which would give women greater control over their lives".¹¹⁵

In order to examine the ideology of feminism Banks moved away from an emphasis on the various campaigns included in the nineteenth/early-twentieth century women's movement and instead identified nine concerns which were cited by activists at various stages of the women's movement of the nineteenth/early twentieth century. These she abbreviated to: unmarried women, autonomy, double standard, equal marriage, economic independence, co-operative housekeeping, mothers and children, complementary roles and protection.¹¹⁶ Thus Banks's analysis drew together almost contradictory positions such as "Autonomy" and "Protection" and demonstrated how feminists could subscribe to a range of ideas within feminism. Banks also showed how feminism changed over time so that aspects important in the early nineteenth century such as the position of unmarried women and economic independence faded while the emphasis moved to the welfare of mothers and children and assumptions that women required protection from certain occupations. Harrison's study of British feminists in the 1920s and 1930s also challenged the link between revolutionary methods and feminism. His work demonstrated how, after the enfranchisement of women, "inter-war feminists were much preoccupied with parliament... [because] women had much to gain from handling politicians skillfully".¹¹⁷ He argues that the inter-war feminism had received less attention than those of the Edwardian period because historians tend to pursue the dramatic and give less attention to those who perform on "a smaller stage". The women that Harrison described as "prudent" were "feminists [who] tried to be unobtrusive, to cover up their tracks, if only to prevent their triumphs from seeming too obviously complete."¹¹⁸ Implicit in such a study as Harrison's is a redefinition of

feminism away from the militant and towards one that recognizes political prudence as a valid method.

By the late 1980s research into women's history had begun to raise more problems. One centred on the use of the words feminism and feminist and whether events that significantly pre-dated the coining of these terms could be so described.¹¹⁹ Many historians, like Offen have been prepared to describe a variety of women activists before the late nineteenth century as feminist. Another problem was how to assess the role of many women who had actively sought reforms for the betterment of women but did not fit certain accepted definitions of feminism. Many historians began to see feminism as a system of thought which historically "incorporates a broad spectrum of ideas".¹²⁰ Viewed in this way a much wider field for research is available from which to uncover women's lives and to reconstruct how they contributed to their society even if they were culturally unable to envisage a radical rethinking of women's roles within the family and the public sphere. For example Strauss Sotiropoulos set her definition wide enough to include a diverse group of women who between 1760 and 1810 actively promoted improvements in women's education.¹²¹

Liberal feminism is generally seen as a product of the eighteenth century Enlightenment when many aspects of society once thought natural, unchangeable, God given, were questioned. The Enlightenment emphasized the importance of the individual, equality and the importance of education.

Mary Wollstonecraft applied these theories to the position of women in late eighteenth century Britain and concluded that many of the characteristics ascribed to woman were products of her education which kept her subordinate to men. Mary Wollstonecraft built her feminism on the Enlightenment's denial of all innate qualities for men and women and argued that the environment and education were the most significant forces at work in shaping men and women. This remained the basis for equal rights feminists throughout the nineteenth century.¹²² Liberalism's commitment to the rights of the individual to freedom and equality and a voice in the process of government informed nineteenth century party politics but it was not applied to women. Women's lives in the first half of the nineteenth century were dominated by the separate spheres ideology which placed the home, family and the position of women outside the scope of liberal reforms. Philosophers like John Stuart Mill argued that the principles that liberals applied to male suffrage equally applied to women's suffrage.¹²³ They said that much of what was generally described by society as natural to women was in fact the product of their education and their subordination to men. By the mid-nineteenth century feminists such as those grouped around Barbara Bodichon which formed the Langham Place group focused on reforming legislation which restricted women especially in education, employment and property rights. Their commitment to the equality of the sexes led, for example, educationalists like Emily Davies to campaign for women to receive the same university education as men.¹²⁴ Liberal feminism's concentration on removing the legal barriers to women's equality with men found its strongest expression in the demand for female enfranchisement. In the period between the two

world wars liberal feminists continued to argue for legal reforms especially in such areas as divorce, employment and education. For many feminists it was the discrepancy in wages and the operation of a marriage bar, especially in the professions which became the focus of their campaigns once the 1928 legislation had granted women the franchise on the same basis as men.

For many women equal rights for women translated into opportunities for women to compete with men by adopting the dominant male defined goals. Many women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century found an emphasis on equal rights unappealing and chose to campaign on the basis that men and women had complementary roles in society which should be given equal consideration and status. This position found echoes in Radical Feminism of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Socialist Feminism drew on theories which envisaged a radical remodelling of society to enable a fairer share of resources. Charvet argued that Marx made little reference to women in his theoretical writings but implied that under socialism there would be nothing to hinder their realization of their full social nature alongside men.¹²⁵ Marxism replaced the earliest exponents of these theories such as Robert Owen, with his comprehensive analysis based on class. Followers of Marx believed the injustices experienced by women were part of the greater inequalities which arose from the capitalist system. Marxism, with its apparently scientific analysis of history, gave a

comprehensive explanation for social injustice and its inevitable demise with the overthrow of bourgeois capitalism. Women's subordination was seen as one of the injustices arising out of capitalism and would therefore disappear through the replacement of capitalism with socialism.¹²⁶ The Marx-Engels attack on the institution of monogamous marriage and the family which they saw as a product of the concentration of private wealth in the hands of individual men who wanted to bequeath it to their heirs appealed to feminists who rejected the restrictions of nineteenth century society on women's autonomy. For those women who embraced Marxism the priority became the socialist revolution not the amelioration of women's situation by changes in legislation.¹²⁷ Many English Socialist feminists became convinced that the best way of removing the injustices women suffered was to work for socialist goals which targeted the working class. While liberal feminism in its nineteenth century form had largely engaged in campaigns that affected middle-class women more than working-class women, university degrees, property rights for married women and professional careers, socialist feminists turned to trade union rights, welfare provision for working-class families and better working conditions. This identification of feminists with socialism accounts to some extent for the falling away of the women's movement during the 1920s. Social legislation passed in the early years of Soviet Russia did seek to weaken the bourgeois family by making divorce very easy, removing any legal disabilities on illegitimate children and providing abortion on demand.¹²⁸

English women did take active roles both in the trade union movement and in the Labour party. The early reforms in Soviet Russia had been gradually removed during the 1930s and 1940s as part of the control of society under a totalitarian regime. Analysis of the Soviet Union in the 1970s indicated that women rarely reached high positions in state government.¹²⁹ In the family Soviet women were no better off than their Western capitalist counter-parts; women's pay was generally lower than men's and women did the bulk of the domestic chores despite their involvement in paid employment.¹³⁰

Radical Feminism grew out of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s which began in the USA and owed a debt to the Civil Rights campaigns. Radical Feminism sought to explain why despite legal reforms, women continued to experience subordination and suffer oppression. This led to formulations of theories of patriarchy.¹³¹ Theories of patriarchy suggested that women's subordination was perpetuated by male domination that contrived to counter any legislative reforms. Patriarchy was seen as a deeply entrenched social constant that could be identified in all social structures, all political regimes and formal religions and was reflected in the relationships between men and women. The family became a subject for much analysis and debate. For some feminists the traditional activities of women associated with their biology, childrearing, childcare and domestic activities held women back as individuals. This led to a general acceptance that traditional masculine pursuits were intrinsically superior. Once again the criticism was raised that feminists wanted women to be more like men.

By the 1980s feminists had begun to argue that women and society would lose out if women repudiated all aspects of women's culture. They began to assert that women had developed "strengths within their subordinate culture... a responsiveness to emotion, and an intuitive understanding which should not be abandoned for a masculine ideal of objective rationality".¹³² Germaine Greer and other feminists of the Women's Liberation movement later argued that women have discovered their isolation from other women by pursuing male lauded goals, which has been even more bewildering and crippling than the isolation and exclusion from public life experienced by so many women in the 1950s.¹³³ An emphasis on womanly values led some feminists to see men as the enemy and they advocated a lesbian separatism but this only attracted a minority. Most feminists distinguished between male power which they opposed and individual men who should be treated as individuals.¹³⁴ This valuing of women's lived experience has influenced academic research in several fields of which history is only one.

Besides the traditional Liberal Feminism and Socialist Feminism several more definitions have been developed. The deceptively simple definition of Summerfield's "Feminism referring to political expressions of the desire for a better deal for women"¹³⁵ raises the issue of the nature of "political expression" and the question, whose judgement would be applied to "better deal". Other definitions of feminism as Social, Maternalistic, and Conservative take account of individuals and organizations which engaged in some aspect

of the women's movement of the early twentieth century without commitment to all its aspirations. It is these broader definitions of feminism which inform this thesis and have been employed to analyse the CWL's own version of "Christian Feminism".

With a growing volume of research in the field of Women's History, an even wider understanding of feminism has been employed to facilitate the study of women not as victims or powerless pawns but as participants and contributors to their own societies. Uncovering the work of hundreds of women who from the 1870s served as elected members of school boards, poor law boards and county and borough councils. These women employed the less controversial of feminist claims, that women were needed in public life to complement the business-like nature of men with female instincts of nurturing and compassion. Hollis described how women poor law guardians actively challenged male guardians by personally investigating conditions in the workhouses. The women guardians claimed that much of local government was concerned with housekeeping as women they understood these needs better than men.¹³⁶ Historians such as Martin and Goodman have identified women educationists who contributed to the development of women's education in the early nineteenth century without subscribing to the radical ideology as set out by Banks.

McDermid's study of women such as Hannah More (1745-1833) and Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) who wrote advocating improvements in female

education, extended the definition of feminism even further. She noted that in their demands for education lay a desire for a reassessment of their place in society. Yet the logic underpinning their arguments was deeply conservative because they made no challenge to the traditional roles of wife and mother.

According to McDermid it was their “challenge [to] the contemporary prejudice that learning was unsuitable for ladies” and their “stress on the necessity for the cultivation of rational judgement... against the idea that women were children” which gave them a claim to be designated by historians as feminists. MacDermid acknowledged that their position was not radical as they did not advocate female education to remove women from their rightful sphere but they did seek to liberate women “from the dominion of emotion”.¹³⁷

Strauss Sotiropoulos studied advocates of improving women's education in order to identify feminists at work during the latter half of the eighteenth century in England, France and Germany.¹³⁸ Her analysis used a very wide range of sources including fiction, conduct books and educational treatises to demonstrate how women employed the image of maternal educator to advocate improvements in female education. The maternal educator did not openly challenge the Rousseauian position that women by their nature were so different from men that their education should be entirely focused on their reproductive function but covertly sought to gain female education a complementary status to that provided for men. Writers not usually described as feminists were revealed by Strauss Sotiropoulos as feminist because they

portrayed, in fiction and non-fiction, examples of 'miseducation'.¹³⁹ Her analysis led her to see Jane Austen's Mary Bennet as a woman whose education has not been properly directed leaving her as a sterile intellectual devoid of sensibilities in part because of Mrs Bennet's failure as the maternal educator.¹⁴⁰ Thus Strauss Sotiropoulos extended the definition of feminism both backwards in time and wider to include women who may not have consciously sought to challenge the traditions which subordinated women because of their potential for motherhood.

Social feminism as defined by Naomi Black enabled her to include a wide range of activists who campaigned for reform of education, welfare provision and the law for the betterment of women's lives. Black included the French Catholic, L'Union Féminine Civique et Sociale in her book Social Feminism.¹⁴¹ In this context she examined the relationship between Social Catholicism and Social Feminism. The link between feminism and Protestant nonconformist groups such as the Unitarians and the Quakers has been the subject of much research. Banks traced the connection between the early years of the women's movement and the Quakers and Unitarians.¹⁴² Hirsch described the Unitarian influence on Barbara Bodichon from the network of friends and family which she drew on for support and advice.¹⁴³ Offen made the link between dissenting churches and the women's movement of the 1820s and 1830s.¹⁴⁴ Black and Kenneally are among a small group who have shown how Catholic social teaching (formulated in the encyclical Rerum Novarum) provided Catholic women with a theoretical basis for their activism.

Kane used Black's definition of feminism to examine the English CWL. She claimed that the CWL's understanding of womanhood was best described as "social feminism... because it offers a mode distinct from Marxian or radical feminisms rejected by the Church".¹⁴⁵ Kane examined the role played by the CWL in reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable, that is, the deeply conservative male-dominated Catholic church with women eager to move outside their domestic sphere and forge new roles for themselves in the wider community. Kane pointed out that the Catholic hierarchy had embraced the separate spheres ideology and often saw the home as a sort of convent in which the wife and mother were cloistered. Kane said that Margaret Fletcher and the other founders of the League claimed that the Church provided the correct image of womanhood. This image was one of women who were spiritually aware, and had an immortal soul and honourable service to perform in moral guidance and education.

Although Kane accepted that the League directed its members to the goals of secular educational opportunities she pointed out they did not seek political parity. Kane acknowledged that the League contributed to the women's movement of the early twentieth century "by generating an atmosphere of feminine, group and self-awareness" but she criticised it because it "bound women closely to the institutional church" and "it upheld the church's paternalistic principles about the role of women".¹⁴⁶ In her evaluation of the

CWL she saw them as ultimately responsible for making Catholic women “the willing captive of the home”.¹⁴⁷

Cremer, like Black, has widened the definition of feminism to include the activities of the South German Workingwomen’s Associations. Cremer defined their dominant ideology as: “maternalist feminism... desiring equality in difference, it asserts both biological and gendered distinctions, a sharply defined division of labour”.¹⁴⁸ He went on to point out that the essence of this form of feminism are the twin ideas:

that women are valuable because they are different and that their public roles derive from their private roles... it contains both the demand for women’s rights - justice and equity – and the demand for emancipation- self-determination and autonomy. It also rejects female dependency and the impermeability of separate spheres.”¹⁴⁹

Cremer asserted that this feminism did not just refer to women as individuals but it also insisted that values and competencies associated with women should be allowed to influence society.

The link between religious beliefs and feminist activity was the subject of Trethewey’s study of the life of Kate Cocks.¹⁵⁰ Trethewey described Kate Cocks’s commitment to pioneering the roles of Juvenile Court Probation Officer and Principal of Women Police in early twentieth century South Australia, as a manifestation of her Christian beliefs. Trethewey described

Kate Cocks as a Christian Feminist.¹⁵¹ While her work contained no lengthy analysis of “Christian Feminism” Trethewey provided the evidence to show that Kate Cocks believed her work for deprived, destitute and vulnerable girls and young women to be God-led with Providence directing her step by step.¹⁵²

Beaumont’s examination of several mainstream women’s organizations during the 1920s and 1930s included the CWL. She employed a more traditional definition than Black and Cremer in describing the CWL as a non-feminist society.¹⁵³ Beaumont discussed six women’s organizations including the CWL and the Mothers’ Union, occupying similar roles within the Catholic and Anglican churches respectively. Beaumont looked at the leadership roles of various women’s organizations during the inter-war period. Beaumont did not examine the League in terms of its place within the Catholic community of England, nor in relation to education. Nevertheless, Beaumont’s work provided valuable insights into the CWL useful to this study. Beaumont traced their reaction to various issues such as divorce and birth control during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁵⁴ She showed how they negotiated the boundary between citizenship and feminism. The CWL encouraged its members to be good citizens but in the inter-war period rejected any labelling of their work as feminist. This reluctance to use the term feminist about themselves was a response to the changed circumstances. Before 1918 the CWL encouraged its members to adopt “Christian Feminism” as their framework but as Beaumont has demonstrated by the 1930s the term feminism was treated with great caution and strongly rejected as an useful ideology.

The definition of the CWL as a non-feminist organisation used by Beaumont highlights an area of controversy for historians in this field. Kane and Black argued that in their commitment to women, the Catholic Women's League was feminist even though they did not explicitly articulate a feminist ideology and did not support the suffrage. Yet once the suffrage had been partially won (1918) the League set up a programme to educate Catholic women to use their vote wisely.

Offen set her definition of feminism widely enough to apply the term to a history that predates the invention of the term and declares it was "the name given to a comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men as a group within a given cultural setting".¹⁵⁵ She went on to make a distinction between "subordination" and "oppression" and pointed out that "subordination can be identified historically by examining laws, institutions, customs and practices, whereas oppression connotes a highly subjective psychological response".¹⁵⁶ Separating subordination and oppression provides a useful tool to examine the CWL. Many of the founders of the CWL commented on employment laws, institutions of higher education and customs which limited women's involvement in public life, but they did not see Catholic women as oppressed.

Offen claimed that her study of the history of European feminism had led her to identify two broad lines of argument which she called “relational and individualistic”:

Relational feminists emphasize women’s rights *as women* (defined principally by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities) in relation to men. They insist on women’s distinctive contributions in these roles to the broader society and make claims...on the basis of these contributions.¹⁵⁷

This feminist model can encompass the “Christian Feminism” of the CWL which sought to raise the status of women’s traditional role of motherhood and remove unjust laws and customs that disabled women because of their childbearing role. Offen suggested that an important aspect of relational feminism was its insistence on the value of the feminine and womanliness. Founders of the CWL, such as Agnes Gibbs, did value womanliness and warned members against activities that would damage their femininity while at the same time encouraging them to embark on active public service.

Offen’s individualist feminist tradition concentrated on “abstract concepts of individual human rights and... [acknowledged] the quest for personal independence... while downplaying, deprecating or dismissing as insignificant all socially defined roles”.¹⁵⁸ It is possible to identify in the articles, pamphlets and books produced by some of the most prominent CWL writers, opposition to this line of argument. For writers such as Margaret Fletcher the childbearing and nurturing roles of women were not just biologically and socially defined but God-given and sacred. Christian Feminism did not challenge sex-linked roles nor the attendant responsibilities but it did seek to encourage women to recognize their personal independence.

3. Method and Methodology

In order to answer the key research questions posed in the Introduction to this thesis it was necessary to identify and critique the primary sources available; these were mainly located in the CWL's own archive held privately and un-catalogued. Primary sources produced by other institutions such as the Catholic Social Guild and books, periodicals and newspapers produced for the Catholic community were also examined to assist the investigation. These sources were subjected to close documentary analysis taking into account the context in which they were produced and the nature of the discourse employed by the authors. Apart from a limited examination of CWL membership lists for 1909 and 1912, quantitative methods were not suitable for the available source material. The CWL archive contained no audio material and as the period covered by this thesis is over eighty years ago it was impossible to employ methods associated with oral history.

The largest and most significant source of material for this thesis was the archive held by the Catholic Women's League. The un-catalogued sources presented certain problems, for example inserted into the Minute Book for the National Committee 1911-1913 are several loose sheets of paper. One dated February 1917 refers to the minutes of a subcommittee responsible during the

First World War for CWL recreation huts. Another set of loose sheets referred to the Council meeting of 25 November 1919. The archive has been moved several times while this study has been in progress. Some material has been mislaid. The archive contained a variety of primary sources including both unpublished and published material and some artefacts such as photographs, not identified, and enamel badges provided by the CWL to its members.¹⁵⁹

The extensive nature of these sources has facilitated a detailed documentary analysis with frequent cross referencing between published and unpublished sources.

The most significant unpublished sources contained in the CWL archive are the minute books of the CWL decision-making bodies. The minute books covering the period of this thesis are : The Executive Minutes 1907-1909 (ECMB), The Executive Committee Minutes 1909-1911 (ECMB), National Committee of Council 1911-1913 (NC), Council 1912-1916 and Council 1919-1925.

The value of such sources has been shown by McCulloch, for example, in the analysis of the personal collection of Sidney Raybould in understanding the processes which culminated in the Crowther Report of 1959.¹⁶⁰ McCulloch demonstrated how these revealed some of the assumptions which directed investigations and how the results were made to fit pre-existing concepts of secondary education.

The CWL minute books are the only source material which have provided a similar insight into the CWL to the Raybould papers mentioned above.

Although these minutes were not personal papers they were produced for a limited audience. In the early years the minutes of the Executive Committee and its subcommittees were handwritten into a book. From the internal evidence committee members were not given personal copies of the minutes but presumably had access to the book before or during the next meeting.

The technological difficulties of producing multiple copies were not overcome for several years until typed carbon copies were circulated. Clearly the knowledge that the minutes could only be accessed in a limited manner by a very select group allowed the secretary to record disparate opinions without the natural censorship a wider, less restricted audience would have entailed. Appreciating the audience and recognizing how it changed as the CWL developed into a national society has helped shape the analysis of the minute books.

These minutes record the work of the relatively small number of women who were responsible for fashioning the CWL into a successful organization, setting its policy and providing the leadership in its activities. Many of these women had several roles within the CWL, as writers for the in-house publications, lecturers (not just to CWL audiences), delegates (private and official) to non-Catholic societies and professional careers. In the absence of personal papers the minute books provided the only opportunity to 'hear' their

voices, albeit filtered through the secretary's pen and the constrictions of committee conventions.

The minute books provided a way into the CWL's decision-making processes. Through the Minute Books it is possible to gain an understanding of the process by which key decisions were arrived at, for example on membership, by the Executive Committee. The records enable the historian to examine the role of individuals in these processes and evaluate the importance of the status of the key players such as Margaret Fletcher. The minutes revealed the degree of agreement among the members of the committees and the issues which disrupted the unanimity presented to CWL membership in published reports and the general public. It is these minutes which have provided much of the evidence for the conflicting views among the founders.

It is also possible to trace the issues confronting the CWL as it moved from a select London-based society to a national society. The books enable the historian to go behind the scenes of the published reports and Council decisions and trace the process which led from the initial consideration of an issue, through its various stages of discussion to the final formulation of a CWL policy and the published report/decision and subsequent activities. It is possible to reconstruct the processes involved in carrying out the objectives of the CWL Constitution through these minutes. For example, the minutes demonstrated that the Executive Committee did not want a branch in Rome

but found it politically expedient to acquiesce to decisions made by members of the hierarchy. Elsewhere the minutes revealed the Executive Committee's determination to maintain the integrity of the CWL administration when faced with a group of women in Shaftesbury styling themselves as a CWL branch without central authorization. Neither of these items were reported to the general membership in published form, nor do the clauses of the Constitution provide much in the way of guidelines.

The books were kept in manuscript except for Council 1919-1925 which contains typed copies pasted into the leaves of the book. The early minute books do not include separate agendas for the meetings which can make tracking certain items difficult. In places the manuscript minutes have been altered by rubbing out or crossing out words and phrases. In some places names are illegible. The minute books covering the Executive Committee meetings 1907-1911 are mainly the work of the first Honorary Organizing Secretary, Ada Streeter, who was highly skilled at recording discussions and conveying the sense of disparate opinions shared in the course of a meeting. The later books, with their printed agendas and abbreviated style of record keeping do not convey the same sense of atmosphere. In the minutes of Council 1919-1925 the discussions are recorded referring to delegates by the Branch they represent rather than by their own names. This gives the minutes a cold, rather sterile character and makes it impossible to trace the development of an individual's opinion.

The Minute books are not fully complete as there are no records covering the period from the end of 1916 to the beginning of 1919. This absence in the record has meant that it has not been possible to 'get behind' the published version of policy nor reconstruct its development for the years 1917 and 1918.

The first two minute books which covered the period from 2 February 1907 to 1 May 1911 were records of executive committee meetings (in manuscript), which were held in London. The minutes appear to have been written during the meetings or soon afterwards and show signs of correction, that is, words are scratched out or written over so are presumably amendments resulting from later consideration. The two books also contain the minutes of Executive permanent subcommittees dealing with such areas as finance and lecture programmes as well as temporary ones set up for a specific purpose such as in October 1907 to examine the draft Constitution. It is also possible to trace the development in the Executive Committee's understanding of the needs of the CWL, thus in April 1909 the Public Service subcommittee was set up to advise on the social issues that should concern the CWL. From an examination of the lists of participants at these meetings it has been possible to evaluate the level of commitment of individual women and to discover their personal interests. The timing of the meetings also provided material for assessing the social class of these women. Nearly all of the Executive Committee meetings and many of its subcommittees were held during the day.

The minute books also make it clear that the CWL moved quickly away from holding Executive Committee meetings in private houses to a separate office which acted as CWL headquarters. These early books also have loose sheets, for example within the 1907-9 minute book is a list of names with a mixture of dates including 1912. It has proved difficult to ascertain the significance of this list and in the second book covering 1909-11 there is a separate sheet of minutes for the "Arts and Craft Section". It is not clear why no other entries are recorded for this subcommittee.

The third book contained the minutes for the National Committee of the Council from December 1911 to November 1913. This book does not contain the minutes of any subcommittees. There is a break in record between the 48th Executive Committee held on 1 May 1911 and the 1st National Committee meeting held on 15 December 1911. No explanation was given to account for this gap in the minutes. The new name, National Committee, marked a stage in the CWL's development as a national society when it gave the Council a more prominent position in its government. Although the minutes referred to an agenda and resolutions this list was not preserved in the book. It has proved difficult at times to follow the subject of recorded discussions.

The fourth minute book covered the period 1912-1916 was the first separate record of the Council of the CWL which had been inaugurated in 1907. The

Council appears to have had a very limited role up to 1912. While the records of the National Committee predate the minutes of the Council by one month (December 1911), the Council minutes extend past the last record of its National Committee. This means that for the period coinciding with the first two and half years of the First World War, a period of rapid expansion for the CWL, it is not possible to cross reference between the records of the two most important decision-making bodies. Indeed the minute records are not extant for either body for the years 1917 and 1918, except for the loose sheets tucked into the fifth minute book which contained the agenda for the National Committee meeting for September 1918 and a summary of that meeting. The recording of the Council minutes is another indicator of the CWL's development into a national society for members were encouraged to see the Council as a parliament. In March 1913 they began the practice of holding one meeting a year outside London and giving the responsibility for making the arrangements to the chosen branch.

This fourth minute book included a list of the names and addresses of the delegates to the Council. There were 55 delegates listed for 1912, in 1913 there were 70 delegates recorded and 63 for 1914. The minutes do not contain agendas for the meetings nor a separate list of resolutions though the internal evidence is that both these items were available to members. The minutes were also circulated to members of the Council in some reproduced format, this marks a change from the earlier arrangements. The style of the minutes reflect this change in audience. The audience for the Council minutes was a much larger body than those for the Executive Committee and

the National Committee and so had a more formal style with the sense of being more carefully edited. Delegates were expected to report back to their branches and thus the minutes may have played an important role in branch executive meetings. By 1914 the initial audience was over sixty and the potential readership was (in the branches) much larger. There are a few loose sheets attached to this book. One is an original letter addressed to Margaret Fletcher from the Secretary of the Catholic Education Council; the other two sheets are reproductions of a questionnaire the CWL planned to send out to headmistresses of Catholic secondary schools for girls. The latter provided proof that at this stage the CWL was making use of reprographic technology. The minutes frequently refer to reports given by officers of the Council such as the Honorary Treasurer but these reports were not included in the minute books nor are they located in the CWL archive. Subcommittees such as the Public Service Committee were given responsibility by the Council for particular field of endeavour. In contrast to the two books covering the early period 1907-1911 which did include the record of subcommittees, neither the third, fourth or fifth minute books contain minutes of these meetings.

The fifth minute book covered the period from November 1919 to the Council meeting held on 18 June 1925. This book was consulted in order to furnish information about the post-war CWL and how it met the challenges of the social changes of the early 1920s. The minutes also provided an insight into how the CWL had evolved by 1923 into an organization with over thirty-six

Branches spread across England and Wales with a Council of 138 delegates and twelve officers. These minutes therefore provided the opportunity to examine the decision-making process of a substantial women's organization as its members came to terms with their new political powers and the CWL's position in the Church and society in general. This book also contained loose sheets some of which are dated 1920 and take the form of a manuscript letter by the Honorary Secretary Ada Streeter and dated February 1920. It is a reproduction of the original letter which has been preserved and over the original text there are pencil corrections. The other sheets appear to be dated 1915. All these sheets refer to Standing Committees to Council and concern, in part, the relationship between the Council and the London membership. That relationship underwent several changes during the period of this study. (See Chapter 4) The loose sheets provided useful evidence of the nature of the official communication between officers of the Council and its delegates. The fifth minute book does not include a full list of the delegates to Council as can be found in the fourth minute book. The minutes do follow the standard procedure and list the delegates present at each meeting. Thus the first meeting recorded in the fifth minute book was attended by fifty-six delegates representing sixteen branches. From November 1921 the process of recording Council meeting changes and from that date onwards the minutes are typed onto sheets and pasted into the leaves of the book. Unfortunately these sheets are often very flimsy and have deteriorated with parts of pages missing. In most cases, however, the record does contain the typed agendas which were circulated to delegates before the meetings. It was the intention of the CWL leadership to portray to the general membership the Council as the

League's parliament. One way this policy was developed was in the use of a very formal style in the minutes with far greater use of numbers to refer to agendas, resolutions and amendments. The individual 'voices' of these women are much harder for the researcher to uncover. The muting of the individual voices may have been a deliberate decision on the part of the Council in its aim as portraying itself as a national society formed to engage in serious negotiations with the State over such issues as contraception, divorce and denominational schools.

Other unpublished primary sources were located in the Francis Bourne Archbishop of Westminster's papers which include a few letters from Margaret Fletcher and Ada Streeter. These letters and Bourne's replies provided insights into the conflicts within the CWL over the social class of the intended membership. There are letters between Bourne and members of the LOC which revealed the opposition among Catholic women to the newly formed CWL and its adoption of a formal, committee-based style of government. Restricted access to the Westminster Diocesan Archives made it impossible to compare these letters with the rest of Bourne's correspondence. The CWL archive contained a very small number of letters between members of the CWL.

Articles, pamphlets and books written by several prominent women involved in the founding of the CWL were located in other archives and libraries. Most

notable among these was the autobiography of Margaret Fletcher, the only published autobiography of any of the founders of the CWL. Margaret Fletcher published several books in which she discussed Catholic social teaching in relation to the family and the role of women in society.

The absence of personal documents, such as diaries and letters of not just Margaret Fletcher, but of the other founding members of the CWL made the autobiography of Margaret Fletcher, O Call Back Yesterday a major source for this study. Margaret Fletcher also published a book describing her travels in Hungary (1892) sketching and painting. After her conversion to Rome all her published work was religious in motivation and content. Her one attempt at novel writing, The Fugitives (1912) had in its purple prose a strongly religious theme. The following books were consulted to provide insight into the character and motives of Margaret Fletcher as the founder of the League: The School of the Heart (1904), Christian Feminism (1915), Catholic Women: the Ideals They Stand For (1918), The Christian Family (1920). Margaret Fletcher also produced a large number of articles for The Crucible, CWLM, The Catholic Women's Outlook and for The Catholic Social Guild which had a policy of publishing pamphlets as well as producing a Year Book containing articles.

O, Call Back Yesterday, Margaret Fletcher's autobiography was first published in 1939 in Oxford. She narrated in chronological order, her story

beginning with early memories of a Victorian nursery in Oxford, through the events of her youth, her conversion to Rome and some of the public roles and events that occupied the latter half of her life. Despite her declaration towards the end of her autobiography that “I have tried to avoid bringing myself into this chronicle unless it was necessary to account for some new activity or some fresh interest in work for the Faith”,¹⁶¹ this work provided those opportunities described by Gary McCulloch¹⁶² to examine the personal experiences and her view and reaction to public events and issues confronting her generation. McCulloch pointed out that autobiography was once the preserve of the rich; feminist historians and critics such as Jane Martin¹⁶³ and Linda Anderson¹⁶⁴ remind us that it was very unusual for women to write autobiography. A feminist critique of autobiography helps the historian to understand the paradox of Margaret Fletcher trying “to avoid bringing myself” into her narrative while engaged in the very literary form in which “myself” is essential. Linda Anderson reminds us of the difficulty women have in saying “I”. Margaret Fletcher confidently described scenes, discussed social trends and raised issues that played a part in her narrative but is reluctant to dwell on “I”.

An historian studying an autobiography as documentary evidence to illuminate the wider narrative of public events must raise the question: Why and when did the author write the autobiography? A clue to Margaret Fletcher’s motivation lies in the above quote when she refers to “the Faith” (the capital letter is hers). From the moment she became a Roman Catholic she freely

talked about “the Faith” and refers to matters of her chosen church in a very direct and personal way. Margaret Fletcher saw herself firmly rooted in a relationship with not just the Church as an human organisation but also the supernatural, as she put it, “a world of its own with the saints for companions.... with priests who could open windows giving on to heaven”.¹⁶⁵ In such company few devout Christian women brought up in the nineteenth century would have put themselves forward with the same confidence one might find in a man’s narrative.

What then did Margaret Fletcher leave out? She gave few names of family and friends, few dates or times and few details of the young Margaret as a student in London and Paris. Margaret Fletcher never discussed any emotional attachment to men and/or women other than members of her immediate family; nor did she explain the absence of such information. Did Margaret Fletcher experience that caution which Paula Polkey¹⁶⁶ suggested many women in the nineteenth century experienced, when about to go into print that to reveal too much might expose their private lives to censure? With no diaries, private letters or intimate memoirs this last question cannot be answered.

Other published sources included articles in the Jesuit periodical The Month which accepted work from women writers. These articles were designed for a Catholic audience, The Month had a wide circulation and among middle-class

Catholics its content was mostly theological and usually written by members of the clergy. Several pamphlets published by the Catholic Truth Society and by the CSG were written by founders of the CWL such as Margaret Fletcher, Flora Kirwan and Agnes Gibbs. These publications provided opportunities for such writers to expand on subjects they had already addressed in The Crucible and the CWLM. These lengthier items were written for a wider non-gendered audience. An analysis of these items showed how the CWL formulated its theoretical basis for its educational programme. The sources also demonstrated how the CWL's values and ideals matched or differed from other Catholic organizations. The Catholic weekly newspaper The Tablet provided examples of the activities of other Catholic societies such as the LOC for which there is no archive. The Tablet also contained reports of the CWL. These reports were designed for a wide audience as it was the leading intellectual Catholic newspaper in Britain. The Tablet also provided editorials, articles and letters which taken together enabled a reconstruction of the range of opinion within the Catholic community (expressed in public) on the women's movement. Several of the founders of the CWL contributed in print to the development of a conservative form of feminism which culminated in the publication of Christian Feminism in 1915. It was designed to reach more than CWL members, with a rationale that enabled Catholic women to support many aspects of the women's movement without compromising their commitment to Catholic principles. The process which led to the publication of Christian Feminism was traced through articles written by Margaret Fletcher in both The Crucible and the CWLM.

An examination of primary sources contained in the archive of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society (CWSS) was used to show how some Catholic women were able to follow a more radical form of feminism. The CWSS supported the suffrage campaigns between 1912 and 1918 and refused to condemn the militant behaviour of the WSPU even though its periodical The Catholic Suffragist (renamed The Catholic Citizen in 1918) never advocated similar action for its members. Contributors to CWSS publications criticised Margaret Fletcher's Christian Feminism for failing to identify the suffrage as the single most important issue for which women should campaign. The archive of the CWSS was also useful in providing the evidence that some women belonged to both the CWSS and the CWL. For example Mary Fitzsimon, Honorary Treasurer to the CWL Council was also a member of the CWSS. Both the CWLM and The Catholic Suffragist (the CWSS magazine) published obituaries for Mary Fitzsimon, the latter described her as one of "the many devoted and courageous women who have dared to come forward and urge...the woman's need for citizenship".¹⁶⁷ The evidence however is limited. The CWL published in 1912 a complete membership list as part of its annual report but no membership list has been preserved in the CWSS archive, thus preventing a statistical analysis to suggest how many women combined membership of both the CWL and the CWSS.

Three distinct areas of historical research, Catholic history, Catholic education and Catholic women have been surveyed to provide the historiographical context in which the present study was conducted. Various theories of

feminism were appraised in order to form a framework for the analysis of the CWL as a semi-autonomous women's organization. The final section set out the methodology which informed the close documentary analysis of the key primary sources. The research findings arising out of this documentary analysis and informed by theories of feminism are set out in the following chapters. In considering the circumstances in which the CWL was founded, Chapter Four identifies some of the difficulties the nascent organization had to overcome.

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Chapter Four: Founding and Developing the CWL: Opposition and Acceptance within the Catholic Community

1. Introduction

This chapter will consider the founding of the CWL from the first proposals of a league for Catholic women through its subsequent development into a formally constituted society. From the outset the CWL was envisaged as a main stream Catholic society. It accepted a position which was never wholly autonomous. The approval and authority of the hierarchy was secured from the beginning and this was enshrined in the Constitution where it proudly announced that the CWL was “under the Special Patronage of His Grace the Archbishop of Westminster”.¹⁶⁸ The public manifestation of this endorsement was Archbishop Bourne’s presence at CWL AGMs where he assumed the role of chairman. The chapter will also show how the education of Catholic women was at the heart of the initiative; the conviction was that better social work could be delivered to the Catholic poor through a society formulated on a business-like structure. The importance of The Crucible in this process will be demonstrated. The context in which Margaret Fletcher and her fellow founders worked to ensure the CWL was accepted by the Catholic community will be examined. The chapter will show how the CWL constitution was designed to provide a structured decision-making process which would transform individual philanthropy into systematic social work. An examination

of the changing position of the Central/London Branch will also illustrate some of the difficulties the CWL experienced as it developed from a small select metropolitan society into a national organization with branches throughout England and Wales.

2. The Founding of the CWL

Although it can be argued that the CWL began in 1907 when the provisional executive held its first formally recorded meeting, the tradition among its members is to date the foundation from 1906 when Margaret Fletcher held several informal meetings to advertise her idea.¹⁶⁹ This study follows that tradition partly to facilitate a close examination of the events and circumstances leading to the first executive meeting in February 1907. Therefore this section must begin with a close examination of the role of Margaret Fletcher in the founding process.

Margaret Fletcher recalled in her autobiography that on becoming a Catholic she had been struck that her new faith community was

infinitely scattered and isolated. It was a world of its own with the saints for companions, the penal times for history and priests that could open windows giving on to heaven.¹⁷⁰

She started The Crucible to counter this isolation and was convinced that the better educated Catholic woman would be of more use to the Catholic community. Her conviction that furthering the education of Catholic women

was the best way of assisting the Catholic community grew out of her own experiences. Margaret Fletcher was the daughter of an Oxford vicar who had sent his daughters to the newly opened High School and had encouraged them to seek careers. She had pursued her studies in London and Paris and was familiar with Oxford University and was part of a society in which education was valued. She taught art at the Oxford High School for Girls for nearly twenty years. It was during this period that she converted to Catholicism.

Margaret Fletcher published the first edition of The Crucible in June 1905 from her Oxford home. The magazine carried the subtitle "A Catholic Magazine of Higher Education for Women" and it was priced at 1s 3d.¹⁷¹ The magazine was aimed at a small portion of the Catholic community, that was educated, middle-class, female and prepared to pay for a quarterly journal of a distinctly learned and serious character.

Margaret Fletcher was able to establish The Crucible relatively quickly partly because of the nature of the Catholic community which she hinted at in her autobiography, where she talks about the smallness of the Catholic community and the even smaller portion of it that was middle class. Because she edited it from her Oxford home where she had lived nearly all her life, she could draw on extensive personal connections. Her father, the Reverend Carteret Fletcher, was a prominent Oxford clergyman. Her brothers had studied at the university. Her sister Agnes Constance had married into the

Rogers family, one of the leading Liberal families of Oxford and involved in the struggle to open the University to women. Another sister, Philippa, had studied as a member of the Home Students Union. Apart from articles written by personal friends she quickly attracted the attention of religious orders engaged in secondary education and some more radical women writers such as Alice Abadam. Between the pages of the early editions of The Crucible subscribers could read articles produced by Jesuits such as Joseph Rickaby and C. C. Martindale, and university men such as F. F. Urquhart, a fellow of Balliol. Among the women were Virginia Crawford, author of several articles in the Jesuit periodical The Month on social issues, Lucy Wyatt Papworth a prominent member of the Women's Industrial Council, and Annie Rogers, a leading activist in the campaign for women to study at Oxford University. Many articles were very detailed instructions for teachers, for example, on the teaching of spelling and reading, on how to give religious instruction, on setting up and stocking a convent school library. These instruction articles ran alongside more academic and lengthy examinations of topics relating to the women's movement, for example, Alice Abadam's "Medieval Women and Others" which ran to over 4,000 words.¹⁷² Mary Miller's article in over 2,000 words on the German magazine "Madchenbildung" (in English) discussed the role of the magazine in promoting higher education for girls in Germany.¹⁷³ In a 5,000 word article, "The Evolution of Christian Woman" Margaret Fletcher made her first attempt to reconcile aspects of the women's movement with the position of women within the Catholic tradition.¹⁷⁴ Each issue concluded with a "Review" section in which many books both religious and secular were

recommended. This section was followed by “Notes” which served as a notice board for the editorial staff and a survey of related events in Europe.

Whatever the initial success of The Crucible it became clear to Margaret Fletcher that the magazine could not on its own alleviate the isolation and insularity of the Catholic community. In her autobiography she recalled her awareness of the gap she found on conversion to Rome, between the satisfaction of her new spiritual life and the disappointment in the lack of engagement in the needs of the wider community shown by

this little world in the midst of England on which I was now looking, the air of which I was now breathing, so alive in the spirit, ... in its social contacts like a fragment from the past embalmed in the midst of a secular life.¹⁷⁵

Her conviction grew that Catholic women in Britain would benefit from an organization designed to draw them together and provide opportunities for education and training in social work.

Margaret Fletcher drew on her knowledge of initiatives on the Continent supplied by her friend Mary Miller and through the pages of The Crucible. Catholic women in France in 1902 had formed the “Ligue Patriotique des Françaises” and in 1904 the “Frauenbund” was established in Germany. In the June 1906 issue of The Crucible under the section “Notes” a whole page was devoted to an organisation in Boston, Massachusetts of a newly formed league of girls who “are now anxious to organize something more decidedly

philanthropic and not merely social". The extract goes on to describe the four committees the girls had formed in order to teach, visit and entertain in the settlements in the poorer districts. There was also a "Literature Committee" whose members read and recommended books on social and philanthropic work.¹⁷⁶ While this Boston group was not Catholic it is possible that this item was the final prompt for Margaret Fletcher to put her ideas into action. In the following issue she placed her article "Proposals for a League of Catholic Women Workers"¹⁷⁷ and hoped for a reasonable response. She knew that The Crucible with fewer than 400 subscribers was not a large enough market place to sell her idea so she mounted a multiple assault: she attended a small gathering of Catholic women in Cavendish Square where fourteen listened to her proposals, a copy of the lecture was sent to Archbishop Bourne and a leaflet containing these proposals was placed on every seat at the Catholic Conference held in Brighton that year. Margaret Fletcher was sufficiently encouraged to run another article about the league in the December 1906 issue of The Crucible, this time written by Lucy Wyatt Papworth¹⁷⁸ who was a leading member of the Women's Industrial Council.¹⁷⁹ This article, sounding at times like a manifesto, put forward in very strong terms the principles and objectives of the proposed league. The article concluded with the same point Margaret Fletcher had already made several times, that such a league countered

the special conditions of the Catholic body in England... the isolation of individuals, the difficulty of getting into touch with or even of finding out what is being done, of securing work in many cases and workers in others.¹⁸⁰

The strident note taken by Lucy Wyatt Papworth did not appeal to everyone especially members of the Ladies of Charity (see below) but it did attract enough women so that by the beginning of 1907 the Provisional Executive Committee which Margaret Fletcher had formed with the full support of Archbishop Bourne began to hold regular meetings and keep minute books.

Margaret Fletcher had moved with caution and had early on secured the support of Archbishop Bourne. With his encouragement she had set out to recruit

those already taking leading parts in settlement work, rescue work, social clubs, poor law work, district visiting, etc. and of a certain number ... [of] leading women from the various professions.¹⁸¹

This policy was successful. The Provisional Executive Committee contained Miss Ada Streeter, a member of the Ladies of Charity (LOC) and already experienced in setting up girls' clubs, Miss Lucy Wyatt Papworth whose experience in the secular world as treasurer of the Women's Industrial Council, fitted her to be the CWL's first treasurer, Dr Alice Johnson with extensive knowledge of the medical profession to her credit and Flora Kirwan, another member of the LOC and well-respected for her work among poor Catholic girls in the East End of London.

Among the Provisional Executive Committee's first actions was to set up an information office which had several purposes including "a social meeting

place for workers". It was also planned that "it would be in constant communication with its correspondent in every mission throughout the country, its local branches and the federated societies". They also visualized a wider purpose in that "the office would... be in touch with the organizations on similar lines in France, Germany, the United States and elsewhere".¹⁸²

The founders believed effective dissemination of information could only take place within an organization. It was first necessary to concentrate on organisation if the CWL was to realize its educational aim. Margaret Fletcher's speeches implied a total lack of any order in the Catholic community's response to poverty and deprivation. Education was believed to be an essential element in bringing to social work a better understanding of the causes of poverty and the methods best suited to alleviate it. The league was needed, as far as Margaret Fletcher was concerned, because "women united in aim and associated in work will accomplish more for the glory of God than they imagine possible while acting in isolation".¹⁸³

On 11 September 1907 several of the founders of the CWL accompanied Margaret Fletcher to the Women's Meeting at the Catholic Truth Society Conference held in Preston where Margaret Fletcher spoke at length on the merits of the league and asked for more volunteers. This conference provided Margaret Fletcher with a wider audience, further increased by the account which appeared in The Tablet on 21 September 1907. The message was reinforced when her speech was reproduced in full in the December issue of

The Crucible. Margaret Fletcher told her Preston audience that in her opinion the situation facing Catholic social work was one of well-meaning chaos. To illustrate this point she described the situation to be like travelling from “island after island without a chart of the whole course”.¹⁸⁴ There was plenty of individual effort being applied to social work but what was needed was an umbrella organization like the ‘Frauenbund’ which had existed in Germany for a couple of years. She described the committees and sub-committees of the Frauenbund but acknowledged that an English version would have to take account of the differences between the two countries. She reminded her audience that as Catholics they were “a small missionary body, widely scattered and with the scars of a special persecution upon us”.¹⁸⁵ She set out what the advantages of organization would be:

the discovery of our weaknesses and our strengths... the possibility of directing workers ... the stirring up of interest in social work ... gaining recruits ... dispelling apathy ... enlisting the service ... of brain-workers ... the energy of simple, practical people of leisure.¹⁸⁶

She concluded her speech with a call for volunteers. When the speech appeared as an article in The Crucible it ended with a contact address.

The organisation of the CWL had gradually taken shape during 1907. Even though Margaret Fletcher had recommended the ‘Frauenbund’ to her listeners/readers in the autumn of 1907 she was aware that the English CWL could not reproduce the German version exactly. One obvious reason was that unlike the German Catholic community, the English one was much

smaller and far more fragmented. It was also necessary to keep reiterating that the aim of the embryonic league was not to take over and dominate but

to federate all existing Catholic organizations, seeking to prevent overlapping and to further the utility of existing works by making them better known to each other and to those for whose benefit they exist.
187

In March 1907 the three women Margaret Fletcher, Ada Streeter and Lucy Wyatt Papworth addressed a large audience of women in London. They explained their ideas for the CWL. The main purpose of Margaret Fletcher's speech was to encourage more women to join the embryo organisation. Ada Streeter spoke about the proposed educational programme and Lucy Wyatt Papworth explained the finances of the CWL. In order to recruit more women the speeches were reproduced in The Crucible in its June issue.¹⁸⁸ The meeting was a success as the CWL had risen to 240 members. After all the hard work of 1907 the founders were able to have a copy of "The Constitution of the Catholic Women's League" published in the December 1907 issue of The Crucible.

3. The Constitution and Structure of the CWL

The initial draft constitution was largely the work of Margaret Fletcher and seems to have been available at the first meeting of the Provisional Executive in February 1907. The document was revised by a subcommittee where it underwent some changes. After it was accepted by Archbishop Bourne, it was published in the December issue of The Crucible.¹⁸⁹ During the next few

years the Constitution saw few changes although some areas were further developed as the CWL grew in membership. A revised Constitution was published in the December 1913 edition of the CWLM.¹⁹⁰ The changes mainly related to the position of President and the functions of the Council.

The 1907 Constitution contained very little concerning the role of the President. In paragraph 5 the President was briefly mentioned along with a summary of the components of the CWL. Paragraph 9 stated in a few sentences that the President was to be elected annually by ballot at the general meeting. The rest of paragraph 9 explained the duties of the Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary. No specific duties were assigned to the President; this omission was deliberate as the Executive Committee wanted to leave Margaret Fletcher free to develop the role herself. It may be that in those early days, no one, including Margaret Fletcher, had a clear idea of what such a position would entail. In 1910 it was decided to limit the number of terms of occupation of the position to three consecutive years while retaining the annual election. This clause was altered again in December 1913, at the suggestion of Archbishop Bourne, in a letter¹⁹¹ to the Hon. Secretary. He pointed out that as the CWL was now so large it must take nearly three years for a new president to visit all the branches and understand the work. When Mabel Hope (Mrs James Hope), the second president, stepped down from the presidency in November 1917, she had served nearly seven years during which time the position had become more arduous than anyone could have predicted.¹⁹² The 1907 Constitution made no provision for

a vice-president or a role for past presidents. In 1910 when Mabel Hope was elected President, replacing Margaret Fletcher, the title of Vice-President for life was conferred on Margaret Fletcher as founder of the CWL. Provision was made for all subsequent retiring presidents to be honoured with the title Vice-President for as long as “the term of office of her first successor”.¹⁹³ This ensured Margaret Fletcher a permanent place in the decision-making structure while retaining the services of the immediate previous president.

The 1907 Constitution laid down that “the affairs of the League shall be administered by a Council and General¹⁹⁴ Executive Committee... the Central Executive Committee shall consist of twenty-four Members”.¹⁹⁵ The CWL had in fact emerged from the top down, with the encouragement of Archbishop Bourne. It was some years before the Council emerged as a dynamic decision-making body.

The first annual general meeting (AGM) was held on 19 December 1907 in Cathedral Hall, Westminster to which over 300 members came. The audience was addressed by Father Bernard Vaughan, Margaret Fletcher and Father Maturin. These ‘sermons’ were concerned with encouraging women to join the CWL as a way of realising their Christian vocation. Also at the meeting Archbishop Bourne formally gave the Constitution¹⁹⁶ to the CWL. To reach the wider membership unable to attend the AGM, The Crucible reproduced the ‘sermons’ in full but no information is given of the business side of the meeting. No mention was made of the Council.¹⁹⁷

By February 1909 the founders of the CWL were able to organize three days of national administration beginning with a Council meeting held on 15 and 16 February and culminating with the second AGM on 17 February 1909. The Council had decided that the offices of Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary should be filled by the Executive Committee electing two candidates.¹⁹⁸ At the AGM members were given reports by Margaret Fletcher (President), Ada Streeter (Hon. Secretary), Miss Saunders (Information Bureau Secretary), and Agnes Gibbs¹⁹⁹ (Lecture Committee). The Hon. Mary Thesiger read a report compiled by Mrs Wilfrid Ward (Debates Society). These were then followed by reports from the four branches then in existence: Boscombe, Bournemouth, Brighton and Manchester.²⁰⁰ The way these events were reported in The Crucible reveals something of the attitude of the leading members of the CWL. Margaret Fletcher (editor of The Crucible) gave very little space to the decisions of the Council but reproduced, at length, the reports concerning events in London with the assumption they would interest the general membership of the CWL. Little attention was given to the Branch reports. This reinforces the overall impression that the CWL at this stage had a metropolitan outlook based on a predominance of a London based membership.²⁰¹

The daily work of administering the CWL during the first years was carried out by the Executive Committee. According to the Constitution the Council was summoned once a year by the Central Executive Committee. The Council

was the final appeal in all matters connected with the discipline and policy of the League.²⁰² In fact all its decisions were submitted to Bourne for ratification. During the first four years the Council seems to have had a very limited role in the CWL. By 1910 its role had changed and the revised Constitution reflected this. It described the structure and role of the Council and its Committee of Council in more detail. From 1910 onwards the Council had to meet twice a year and consisted of, besides the officers of the CWL, all Local Presidents, two members from each branch executive committee and “one Delegate elected by the full membership of each branch for every 250 members on its list”.²⁰³ Between Council sessions the Executive Committee, re-named the National Committee, met monthly and consisted of the officers of the CWL and one delegate elected by branch executive committees from those delegates already on the Council.

Changes in the nature of the CWL AGMs took place as they gradually took on the role of educating the membership on a particular area of social concern. For example, in 1916 the AGM was devoted to launching a campaign to reduce the infant mortality rate in a nationwide initiative. It was hoped that from this AGM “a concerted effort to co-operate on our own Catholic lines, with the splendid work, municipal and voluntary, being done all over the country”.²⁰⁴ The AGM of 1916 was also the first time the CWLM devoted space to describing the event and providing brief summaries of the main speakers. The inclusion of the report reflects the importance by 1916 given to both the AGM and the issue of infant mortality. The AGM underwent another change

in May 1917 when the National Committee decided to replace the AGM with a Conference on Adult Rescue. Thus they moved a step closer to it becoming an educational programme and less a social gathering of the members.

Towards the end of 1917 with the prospect of female suffrage soon to be granted, the National Committee decided that the 1918 AGM should be replaced with a conference to examine the whole area of citizenship as a preliminary to the CWL Citizenship Campaign, not just across the whole League, but aimed at all Catholic women voters.

The Constitution laid down that an annual report should be produced and made available to all members. The first annual report was given out at the second AGM, giving a summary of the work of the year.²⁰⁵ It was seen as an important way “that the centre should supply a unifying and centralising influence to the branches”.²⁰⁶ Most subsequent reports were produced as separate pamphlets and up to 1912 each one included a list of the membership. The production of these annual reports became a financial burden and were frequently the subject of discussion at Executive Committee meetings. It was financial considerations that prompted the removal of comprehensive membership lists from the annual report after 1912. During the war, paper shortages and the rising cost of printing forced the CWL to economise. In 1919 there was no annual report but a summary appeared as the February 1920 issue of the CWLM. No annual reports were produced for 1920 and 1921. With a much enlarged CWL the 1922 Annual Report was

published as a separate booklet of about 134 pages containing the General Report and 31 Branch Reports.

In January 1911 the Executive Committee suggested and Council agreed to start a League Magazine as another way of uniting the League members, providing a space for developing its theories and discussing future projects. Up to the first issue of the CWLM in June 1911 the CWL had used The Crucible to inform the membership of forthcoming events and to report on developments. This magazine had only appealed to a small clientele and was not designed, nor did it have space, to encourage a corporate identity among CWL members. Despite the CWLM's financial struggles it was considered so important that every effort was made to continue publication even during the privations of the First World War. Its monthly reports on "What the League is Doing" were viewed as essential means of communicating with its members. As the CWL developed into a national society the CWLM's "Branch News" acted as a notice board to advertise events.

The CWL wanted to be seen as a national organisation and aspired to recruit members from all parts of England and Wales.²⁰⁷ The CWL grew steadily, for example in June 1908 The Crucible led with a lengthy article largely composed of a new leaflet available for distribution, giving details of the CWL and carrying news of three branches recently set up: Manchester, Bournemouth and Boscombe. Despite this commitment to national

representation the early years were dominated by the London based membership. (See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of CWL membership.) This London bias is best illustrated by an analysis of the decision-making structure of the CWL at this stage. The 1909 Council consisted of the President, Margaret Fletcher, 12 representatives of Central (based in London), the two officers of Central, six members representing the branches Manchester, Bournemouth, Boscombe and Brighton and the two Central Officers, (the Honorary Secretary and the Honorary Treasurer) and the Spiritual Adviser. Thus the governing body of the League numbered 24 of which 18 were members of Central. The Executive Committee for 1909 consisted of 26 members of whom 11 were from Central. The two officers were also from Central, which meant that out of 28 people meeting in committee at least 13 came from Central.

The CWL, at this time, reflected the broad social attitudes of society. Thus for some members belonging to Central carried more status than belonging to a branch. Membership of the CWL, in its first few years, was part of the London season and fitted in with a metropolitan view while belonging to a branch was less desirable with its provincial location and activities. Branch activities may also have involved a lower social class than some of the London locations imply. It seems that women who spent some time in London could join the CWL as town members²⁰⁸ regardless of where they lived for the rest of the year especially if no branch had been formed there. As the CWL grew and new branches were formed the Executive Committee was anxious to remove

this bias towards Central so refused to allow the “member of Central formerly residing in Salisbury but now living in Boscombe ...to remain in the Central lists as she did not wish to join the Boscombe Branch”.²⁰⁹

4. London

An investigation of the relationship between the London membership and the rest of the CWL reveals some of the difficulties it faced in its attempt to become a national organization. The London membership in the first years of the CWL was known as Central. During the first years of the CWL no attempt was made to distinguish between activities engaged in by the members of Central and those rightly belonging to the League as a whole. For example, much of the Second Annual Report was in fact the report of Central given by the Central Hon. Secretary who was also the Hon. Secretary for the League. In July 1915, reviewing the early years of the CWL, Margaret Fletcher saw them as:

the probationary years [when] the London Executive was the centre of administration and the source of propaganda, for it was in London that the League was begun. It was the Executive which authorised new branches and decided what work should be undertaken by the League as a whole, and it was the London membership who found the bulk of the money for maintaining the offices, paying the Secretary’s salary, and the cost of printing reports, leaflets etc.²¹⁰

By the end of 1913 the CWL had taken on a more national character, with 16 branches, besides London, which required a national administration. It was impracticable to continue the old relationship between the London membership and the Council. Nowhere was this relationship more obviously

entangled and muddled than in the arrangement of the offices at 116 Victoria Street, London, where the administration of both the CWL and Central intertwined in the same rooms using the same personnel. Also sharing the accommodation were the headquarters of the CWL Emigration Society and the Nurses' Guild club room. Also at 116 Victoria Street was the Information Bureau (IB) based in London and staffed and financed by Central. It was in fact a national agency putting women in touch with charitable organisations seeking volunteers and advising on paid employment.

The first sign that attempts had been made to sort out this muddle and place the London membership on the same footing as the other branches came with the announcement in the CWLM that on 27 November 1913 the Annual General Meeting of members of the London Branch which nearly 300 women had attended was told that the Central Executive Committee had elected Flora Kirwan as Local President of the newly named London Branch. Up to this date the national President had also been the local president of Central.²¹¹ The Central Executive Committee relinquished any control over the League as a whole and became, as with the other branches, merely a local executive committee.²¹² In trying to untangle this relationship more confusion was evident when members were heard congratulating Flora Kirwan on her election as President of the whole League. An explanation of this change formed part of the "Editorial" in the December 1913 issue of the CWLM.²¹³ It contained an explanation of the differences between the newly formed London Branch and the national administration. In particular it was pointed out that the London Branch now had a Local President in common

with all the other branches. London also now had a separate executive from the CWL. The CWL was administered by a National Committee and a National Council with a national President.

The separation of the London membership from the national administration had financial implications:

the League as it now exists, composed of its branches, is in a sense an abstraction, but once it materialises in the meetings of its governing Council it also owns property, ... at 116, Victoria Street.²¹⁴

Two of the three rooms used by Council at 116 Victoria Street were sublet from London, one for the Information Bureau (now under the control of the Council), a large room was used for Council meetings and a third room for the Honorary Organizing Secretary was rented separately. All branches paid a capitation fee to Council but this did not make Council financially secure and without the unofficial subsidies provided by the London membership, Council found itself in serious difficulties. The finances of the CWL are dealt with in more detail in the following chapter. Disentangling the finances of Council and London Branch was nearing completion when war was declared.

Despite Margaret Fletcher's article in the CWLM of July 1915 in which she extolled the virtues of this separation of the CWL and London, with development of the Council as the 'parliament' of the League, only four months later in November 1915 the structure of the CWL was changed again. This time the London Branch Executive Committee was placed directly under the "jurisdiction of the National Committee of the League" and was renamed

“Headquarters”. Readers of the CWLM were told in the November issue that the change was necessary because many of the activities of the London Branch were in fact national in character. Doubtless the events of the previous four months of war had influenced this decision. Throughout the period August to December 1914 the CWL had run a rescue centre in London for Belgian refugees arriving in London. Most of this work had been done by the London membership with no time to consult the National Committee. Since that time many opportunities had occurred for co-operation with other societies especially non-Catholic national organizations engaged in war work and this was often carried out by London members. The change may also have been influenced by financial problems. Council was constantly short of money having few resources to draw on other than the capitation fees raised from the branches.

In November 1917 once again the situation changed; the initiative seems to have come from the London membership who had submitted a resolution to Council “dissolving the present government of Headquarters in Sections and re-establishing the London Branch”.²¹⁵ What had occurred to effect this change in the relationship between Council and London is not clear and as this decision was taken in the period not covered by any of the extant minute books it is not possible to get behind the rather bland report in the CWLM.

Once again, however, this separation of London and the national administration did not last long. In November 1919 the status of London was discussed and it was proposed that the London branch should cease to be a

branch and form part of the national administration of the CWL which together would be known as Headquarters. Branch matters would be dealt with by a committee entitled "Central Standing Committee to Council". It was Margaret Fletcher (President) who initiated this change based on:

two years experience that there should be a more centralised government and that Council and other activities in the London area should be unified to prevent overlapping and misunderstanding.²¹⁶

She added that "this would probably lead to very little actual change in the machinery".²¹⁷ The London Executive Committee in the interests of the whole League agreed to the change and a temporary committee was formed to oversee the interim to the end of the year. The new arrangement took effect from the start of 1920 when the 1920 Council held its first session on 12 and 13 February 1920, when the Central Standing Committee was formed.²¹⁸

These changes demonstrate the willingness of the CWL to respond to changes in society. The CWL was able to adapt and develop its Constitution to meet the needs of the League as it aspired to becoming a national society.

5. Opposition to The CWL

The Westminster branch of the Ladies of Charity (LOC) had been formed in 1900 with the encouragement of the then Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vaughan. This organisation had a long heritage reaching back to the early seventeenth century and its inspiration in the work of St Vincent de Paul

who had co-ordinated the generosity and Christian devotion of aristocratic French lay women. The London Association of Ladies of Charity recruited women from the foremost Catholic families of England. Each year, the LOC published a report on its work in a numerical style which seems to emphasize the work of the individual. An example of one such report reveals something of the LOC's priorities:

Number of visits to the poor	20,125
Children taken to be baptised	151
Children brought back to Catholic schools	90
Children attending council schools receiving religious instruction	266
Conversions	23
Lapsed Catholics brought back to practise of religious duties	40
Number attending religious instruction	504
Number of meals given to children	37,450 ²¹⁹

The LOC concentrated on the spiritual life of the poor and encouraged its members to develop their own prayer life. The LOC's biennial meetings appear to have been for the spiritual renewal of its members rather than as opportunities to review initiatives and make policy for the forthcoming year.

Soon after the "Proposals for a League of Catholic Women Workers" article appeared in The Crucible in 1906, Archbishop Bourne tried to persuade the LOC to co-found the CWL along with Margaret Fletcher. From the outset, however, there was reluctance and suspicion on both sides. Margaret Fletcher expressed her opinion to Archbishop Bourne that the attitude of the LOC would "not be one of opposition to the scheme so much as distrust of

initiative which comes from the professional classes".²²⁰ In an effort to smooth the way for his scheme, Archbishop Bourne asked Margaret Fletcher to supply the LOC with more details of the proposed league. The extra information did not bring about the Archbishop's wish and a letter from Lady Edmund Talbot, dated 19 November 1906, informed him that the LOC had voted against the Ladies of Charity, as an organisation, being involved in the formation of the CWL. Lady Edmund Talbot explained that it was believed an affiliation between the LOC and the CWL was not possible under the LOC constitution. She then complained

I am afraid the Promoters of the Proposed League have been tactless talking and saying that the LOC are too spiritual, not up to date etc etc. What I thought ... was that Miss Wyatt Papworth who is a Lady of Charity and who attended the meeting as Miss Margaret Fletcher's representative rather took the line of saying that the LOC Association could be forced to join the Proposed League ... if it gets about that you (Archbishop Bourne) prefer the Proposed League to the LOC Association and mean to turn the Association into the Frauenbund it would create a great deal of ill feeling.²²¹

What Lucy Wyatt Papworth said to the LOC in the late Autumn of 1906 has not been recorded. If Lucy Wyatt Papworth's written style is a reflection of her general manner she was probably not the best choice as an ambassador for the CWL to the LOC. Lady Edmund Talbot was annoyed and suspicious of the new organisation. She complained to Bourne:

my personal feeling is that while I think the organisation scheme of the Proposed League is excellent I do think that the danger of its becoming political, woman's rights etc would be fatal in England ... I also think that it is a mistake of the Promoters of the League to underrate and criticise spirituality as old fashioned and not up to date.²²² (original emphasis)

Perhaps Lucy Wyatt Papworth, a successful and energetic participant in the public sphere, was too challenging to the “Ladies”. An article written at this time reveals Lucy Wyatt Papworth to have had a strong forceful style and the article contained statements about the nature of the proposed league that might (if included in her talk) have struck the wrong note with her audience.²²³

Archbishop Bourne did not give up his hope of combining the CWL and the LOC. He persuaded Ada Streeter to join the CWL while she remained in the LOC. Ada Streeter, while consenting to the wishes of her Archbishop, found her situation difficult. She asked Archbishop Bourne to clarify her position as a vice-president of the LOC and the Honorary Secretary of the CWL. Archbishop Bourne tried to allay her fears and encouraged her to continue as the Honorary Secretary of the CWL. With the date of this correspondence unclear it is difficult to place her hesitation in the sequence of events. Was this exchange between Archbishop Bourne and Ada Streeter before or after Lady Edmund Talbot’s letter to Bourne in November 1906? What was Ada Streeter’s relationship with Lady Edmund Talbot and the other members of the LOC? Certainly Ada Streeter is named as a member of the Provisional Executive Committee of the CWL in the March 1907 issue of The Crucible. If the Bourne-Streeter correspondence was later, between March and September 1907 it would point to a very tense relationship between the representatives of the CWL and the LOC when they met in Preston in September 1907 and shared a platform as part of the Catholic Truth Society Conference.

Margaret Fletcher had been invited to address the “woman’s meeting” of the Catholic Truth Society Conference, to advertise the newly formed CWL. She began by re-telling the story of how the CWL came to be formed but soon she had moved on to talk about the role of the CWL in communicating with other Catholic societies. Under the title “Links” she spoke about the need for “some means of putting those already in the field [of social work] into touch with one another, ... to fill the gaps ... to bring as much trained ability to the task”.²²⁴ She went on to emphasize her point with a long example suggesting that person A should share ideas and experience with person B. She must have been acutely aware that she was sharing the platform with Lady Lovat whose organization, the LOC, had refused to participate in sharing experiences and which had resisted all attempts to work with the CWL. Was Margaret Fletcher’s motivation solely to promote the CWL or was she making another attempt to get the LOC to join in the new enterprise? There is no reason to believe that her speech intended to antagonise the LOC. Indeed as things stood in September 1907 the LOC was the far more prestigious organization with an impressive aristocratic membership and with a close relationship with the Catholic hierarchy while the nascent CWL was still an untried and untested idea of a relatively small group of lay women.

It has not been possible to ascertain which speaker led the evening. While Margaret Fletcher gave a recruiting speech, Lady Lovat chose to give a long

talk outlining the origins of the LOC and re-telling the life of St Vincent de Paul. Her speech was reproduced in The Tablet on Saturday 21 September 1907 and occupied six columns of print. Lady Lovat emphasised the saint's involvement in the founding of the LOC, and the spiritual dimension to the LOC. She concluded her talk with a reminder that the LOC was tried and tested by the Church and

the Lady of Charity therefore may feel that in belonging to this Association, which has stood the test of nearly three hundred years' existence, she is enrolling herself in a band of workers blessed by the Church, inaugurated by a Saint, and perfectly fitted for the needs and requirements of the present time.²²⁵

The style of this speech may give some clues as to why the two organisations were unable to combine. Perhaps the proposed league with its emphasis on committees, lectures and debates appeared too worldly to the older organisation. Lady Lovat's emphasis on the spiritual dimension to the LOC and its origins in France is a deliberate contrast to the more worldly sounding CWL. The LOC belonged to the tradition in the Church that focused on personal piety and individual acts of charity as the best counter to the evils of poverty and deprivation. The CWL seemed to reject this tradition and advocate an institutional approach with a correct procedure to govern charitable activity and demand education and training for its members.

An example of this institutional, formal approach to philanthropy is the CWL's affiliation with the non-denominational National Union of Women Workers (NUWW). The founders of the CWL wanted Catholic women to enter the

public sphere as advocates of Catholic social policy. The converts on the First Executive Committee (at least three) were perhaps more aware than life long Catholics that there was no formal Catholic representation on many secular organisations. There was also the concern that Catholic women's reluctance to engage in the new secular organisations was in fact leaving these new fields of endeavour to "non-Christian" influences. This view was expressed by Lucy Wyatt Papworth in June 1907 that

At present there existed no Catholic Woman's Society which could have a representative on outside societies.. Too often the Catholic view was simply passed over because there was no one to voice it.. trusted the League would secure this representation and ... a beginning might be made with the Education Committee of the National Union of Women Workers ²²⁶

Almost before the ink was dry on the above report members of the CWL set about bridging this gap so that

At Manchester, during the Conference of the National Union of Women Workers in October [1907] a meeting for Catholic members was held, at the instance of Miss Zanetti, under the presidency of the Rev. H. Naish, S.J. Miss Streeter, Miss Wyatt-Papworth, Miss Zanetti and Miss Kirwan spoke upon the League. Thirty members were enrolled on the spot. ²²⁷

With this prompt action the CWL had recruited Catholic women already in a non-denominational organisation. The NUWW was a national umbrella organization for a large number of voluntary charitable societies. CWL members on the NUWW would be able to bridge the gap and set a precedent for other such affiliations.

By the time the first General Meeting of the CWL had been held in Cathedral Hall at Westminster, its credentials were impeccable with it now officially “under the special patronage of His Grace The Archbishop of Westminster”²²⁸ and its loyalty to Rome assured when the meeting was chaired by Archbishop Bourne who announced:

the first duty of the League ... was to express its loyalty and homage to the Holy See... [with] the following message ... 'We, members of the Catholic Women's League, ... prostrate at the feet of your Holiness, offer the most earnest assurances of our loyalty ... and humbly ask the Apostolic Blessing on ourselves and on our work.'²²⁹

Thus with such a declaration and assurances of “absolute obedience”²³⁰ to the Pope, the CWL reassured its critics that its members would work within the Church as loyal Catholics. The CWL remained in contact with the English Catholic hierarchy with the archbishop of Westminster required to ratify all Council resolutions before they were considered enacted. Senior members of the hierarchy chaired CWL AGMs and the clergy participated in many branch activities. This semi-autonomous position had the advantage for the CWL of giving the society a high status within the Catholic community. There seems to have been little resentment of this restricted position.

There is another issue that may explain the antipathy between the LOC and the CWL. From the outset Margaret Fletcher spoke of the CWL being open to all Catholic women without class barriers. Were the aristocratic “Ladies” unwilling to combine with the increasing numbers of middle-class women now part of the Catholic community? The issue of social class in the development of the CWL is considered in the following chapter. While none of the

Provisional Executive Committee of the CWL could be described as anything other than middle class, Margaret Fletcher and Alice Johnson earned their own living and Agnes Gibbs was married to a working journalist. This may have given a challenging impression to the aristocratic LOC. Whatever the truth of the tension, the CWL emerged as the dominant organisation while the LOC faded from view. Up to 1914 The Tablet regularly covered in considerable detail the two formal meetings held by the LOC each year to which the archbishop of Westminster was always invited. In the Saturday 21 November 1914 issue of The Tablet this report had been reduced to a brief statement that Cardinal Bourne had addressed them. A search of the post war issues of The Tablet has shown that the LOC no longer warranted, at least in the eyes of its editors, even the briefest reports. There is no doubt that the LOC did a lot of charitable work but it seems they were unable to meet the changing needs of the Catholic community during and after the First World War. The CWL was able to tap into the changing role of women in society and direct Catholic women into an organization that met their needs and the needs of the wider community especially during the First World War.

It was not only the LOC who were suspicious of the embryonic league. The frequent use of such phrases as social work, women being organised and the need for representation in the wider community led to accusations that the CWL was socialist, suffragist and political. As early as the summer of 1906 Margaret Fletcher had to reassure the delegates at the National Catholic Conference, held in Brighton, that her first leaflet proposing a league was not

suffrage material. This suspicion was long lasting with some justification as The Crucible ran several articles that discussed issues raised by the women's movement and carried several articles written by active supporters of the suffrage campaign. Chapter Six examines the relationship between the CWL and the women's movement in more detail.

The CWL's development during the period 1906-1923 is examined in more detail in the following chapter with special attention given to issues concerning its membership. The unavoidable bias in Chapter Three to events in London will be balanced in Chapter Five with an examination of the Leeds Diocesan Branch as a case study to illustrate how the national society functioned at a local level.

References for Chapter Four

¹⁶⁸ "The Constitution" in The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 11, p. 188.

¹⁶⁹ See the 21st Anniversary Speech by Margaret Fletcher reported in CWLM, Vol. 1927-1928, No. 195, Jan. 1927, p. 10.

¹⁷⁰ Fletcher, M. (1939) O, Call Back Yesterday, p. 131.

¹⁷¹ The Crucible, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jun. 1905.

¹⁷² Abadam, A. (1907) "Medieval Women and Others", in The Crucible, Vol. 2, No. 8, pp. 216-225.

¹⁷³ Miller, M. S. (1905) "Madchenbildung", in The Crucible, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 157-162.

¹⁷⁴ Fletcher, M. (1905) "The Evolution of Christian Woman", in The Crucible, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 47-58

¹⁷⁵ Fletcher, M. (1939), op. cit., p. 132.

¹⁷⁶ "Notes" in The Crucible, Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 63.

¹⁷⁷ Fletcher, M. (1906) "Proposals for a League of Catholic Women Workers", in The Crucible, Vol. 2, No. 6 pp. 67-73.

¹⁷⁸ Wyatt Papworth, L. (1906) "More About the Proposed League of Catholic Women Workers", in The Crucible, Vol. 2, No. 7, pp. 146-115.

¹⁷⁹ The Women's Industrial Council was established in 1894 'to watch over the interests of women engaged in trade'; it was non-sectarian and independent of political parties. By the 1900s it was campaigning for women to have the right to technical and trade training. See Gordon, P. and Doughan, D. (2001) Dictionary of British Women's Organisations 1825-1960.

¹⁸⁰ Wyatt Papworth, L. (1906), op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁸¹ "Notes", in The Crucible, Vol. 2, No. 8, p. 71.

¹⁸² The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 12, p. 151.

¹⁸³ The Crucible, Vol. 4, No. 14, p. 191.

- ¹⁸⁴ The Crucible, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 67.
- ¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 70.
- ¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 72.
- ¹⁸⁷ Wyatt Papworth, L. (1906), op. cit., p. 149.
- ¹⁸⁸ The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 9, pp. 3-11.
- ¹⁸⁹ The Crucible, Vol. 2, No. 8, pp. 188-190.
- ¹⁹⁰ "The Constitution", in CWLM, Vol. 1913-1914, Dec. 1913, pp. 1263-1266.
- ¹⁹¹ Council 1912-1916, 8 Dec. 1913, a letter attached to p. 52.
- ¹⁹² CWLM, Vol. 1917-1918, Nov. 1917, p. 1.
- ¹⁹³ CWLM, op. cit., Dec. 1913, p. 1265.
- ¹⁹⁴ This appears to be a typing error as all other references in the archive are to the Central Executive committee.
- ¹⁹⁵ "The Constitution", op. cit., p. 188.
- ¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 188.
- ¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 191-201.
- ¹⁹⁸ The archive of the CWL does not contain minutes of Council meetings until 1912 in the minute book Council 1912-1916. Minutes of AGMs do not appear in the archive.
- ¹⁹⁹ Agnes Gibbs is usually referred to in the primary sources as Mrs Philip Gibbs, for example see The Crucible, Vol. 4, No. 16, p. 106.
- ²⁰⁰ The Crucible, Vol. 4, No. 16, p. 200.
- ²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 193-202.
- ²⁰² CWLM, op. cit., Dec. 1913, pp. 1263-1266.
- ²⁰³ CWLM, op. cit., Dec. 1913, p. 1264.
- ²⁰⁴ "General News", in CWLM, Vol. 1915-1916, Feb. 1916, p. 21.
- ²⁰⁵ The Crucible, Vol. 4, No. 16, pp. 193-202.
- ²⁰⁶ ECMB, op. cit., p. 67.
- ²⁰⁷ The Archbishop of Westminster is the head of the Catholic hierarchy for England and Wales. Separate hierarchies exist for Scotland and Ireland.
- ²⁰⁸ ECMB, op. cit., p. 8.
- ²⁰⁹ ECMB, op. cit., p. 108.
- ²¹⁰ "Editorial", in CWLM, op. cit., Jul. 1915, p. 2.
- ²¹¹ CWLM, op. cit., Dec. 1913, op. ct., p. 1228.
- ²¹² Ibid., p. 1277.
- ²¹³ "Editorial", in CWLM, op. cit., Dec. 1913, p. 1.
- ²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 2.
- ²¹⁵ CWLM, op. cit., Dec. 1917, p. 13.
- ²¹⁶ Council 1919-1925, 25-26 Nov. 1919, 2nd Council meeting, item 11, p. 20.
- ²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 20.
- ²¹⁸ Ibid., item 11, p. 20.
- ²¹⁹ the Tablet, Sat. 31 Oct. 1908, p. 691.
- ²²⁰ Letter from Margaret Fletcher to Archbishop Bourne , 30 October 1906, in the Westminster Diocesan Archive
- ²²¹ Letter from Lady Edmund Talbot to Archbishop Bourne, 19 November 1906, in the Westminster Diocesan Archive
- ²²² Ibid.
- ²²³ Wyatt Papworth, L. (1906) op. cit., pp. 146-115.
- ²²⁴ The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 11, p. 127.
- ²²⁵ the Tablet, Sat. 21 Sept. 1907, p. 462.
- ²²⁶ The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 9.
- ²²⁷ The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 11, p. 130.
- ²²⁸ "The Constitution", op. cit., p. 188.
- ²²⁹ The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 12, p. 191
- ²³⁰ Ibid., p. 191.

Chapter Five: The Making of a National Society

1. Introduction

This chapter traces the CWL's development from its first executive committee meetings in 1907, through the early years before 1915 which saw its growth into a national organisation, its achievements during the First World War and its response to the new challenges of the early 1920s. Building on the examination of the structure of the CWL in the previous chapter, this chapter first looks at how the CWL tackled issues concerning the membership such as recruitment and discipline which are considered in the context of social class and the women's movement. Secondly, a brief investigation of the CWL's finances shows how it moved from being an amateurish group relying on loans and donations to a national society with a regular income. Thirdly, the spread of the CWL through its branches across the country is described. A case study of Leeds Diocese Branch provides examples of branch activities which give some idea of how the CWL was played out in the provinces. Fourthly, examples are shown of the ability of the CWL to create new societies when the need arose. Finally, an appraisal of the CWL's relationship with other groups both within and outside the Catholic community demonstrates how the CWL learnt from its first tentative relationships in the early period, its robust interaction with non-denominational organisations during the war and its achievements between 1919 and 1923.

2. Membership

Between December 1907 and the end of 1912 the CWL grew rapidly from about 500 members to over 1,280 by 1909 and to an impressive 6,800 in 1912.²³¹ Both the Second Report for 1909 and the Fifth Report for 1912 contained a list of members by branch. In subsequent reports this listing was dropped because the membership was so large as to make it impractical.

From the outset Margaret Fletcher had always maintained that the CWL should be open to all Catholic women and this was stated in the constitution, but membership was not an automatic right. A woman seeking membership had "to be either proposed and seconded by Members of the League, or recommended by a Priest, and duly elected by the Executive Committee".²³² In this early period nearly every Executive Committee meeting included the election of quite large numbers²³³ without any discussion recorded as to the suitability of the women.

The CWL's vision of uniting "all Catholic Women in a bond of common fellowship for the Promotion of Religious and Intellectual Interests and Social Work"²³⁴ was hard to realise, especially when faced with issues of class

common to Edwardian society. It was while discussing the membership of the CWL that the subject of social class was raised at two consecutive Executive Committee meetings: 30 November 1907 and 7 December 1907.

Margaret Fletcher's expressed opinion on the vexed question of whether the CWL should restrict its membership to the upper and middle classes or welcome working-class women was expressed in a way that revealed her prejudices and assumptions. She explained to Archbishop Bourne:

I have always hoped the League would gradually penetrate to the working classes without any regulation implying class distinction being embodied in the rules. I believe that we should begin by enrolling only such women of the Industrial and working classes as are either by ability or force of character and experience, natural leaders. That we should give these full membership, and the opportunity to acquire the spirit of the League and understand its aims – that only gradually and in proportion as we have leaders, capable of organising, speaking etc should we enrol the rank and file. If under cover of 'associateship' masses were enrolled – (clubs etc) at our present stage, we should have nothing to give them and little control over them and they might easily become an embarrassment. If the League grows gradually I do not believe social difficulties will arise, as working women grouped around their leaders will prefer their own hours and meeting places etc.²³⁵

Margaret Fletcher also made the point that deciding who should be a working-class associate and who should be a full member because they were categorized as middle-class would prove very difficult. For her it was better not to raise the issue for fear of the consequences. She explained:

I can see that there will have to be distinctions but I believe these will come about simply enough and without any of the class hostility that I fear could be aroused by a rule that embodies the distinction.²³⁶

Archbishop Bourne was even less willing to discuss the class issue and declared:

My only wish is that the League should be open to all Catholic women who are genuine Catholics and genuine workers and I understand from

Miss Streeter that the question would be discussed at the next Executive meeting. It is precisely on the 'how it is to be done' that I desire information.²³⁷

Margaret Fletcher may have had a vision of a CWL embracing all classes but she could not imagine what it would be like and assumed that working-class women would want to remain in separate meetings. Later, in her own life, her contact with working-class women through her involvement with the Catholic Social Guild and Plater College, may have given her a greater understanding, but in these early years of the CWL her Victorian middle-class origins still coloured that vision. While Margaret Fletcher wrestled with some of the issues of social class, Cardinal Bourne was anxious to remain aloof. His silence on the matter may well have been to protect the hierarchy from an entanglement in a potentially difficult issue. The Catholic community at this time was conscious of at least three divisions: the Old Catholics, aristocratic and conservative, the Converts who in large numbers were swelling the middle classes, and the Irish (first, second or even third generation) both the largest number and the main component of the Catholic working class. To meddle in social class might have been very injurious to the attempts to unite these three components into one Catholic community which was struggling to assert its rights to state funded education and welfare provision.

The debate in these Executive Meetings was among those who wanted to admit working-class women as associate members, those who were against it on practical grounds, and those who were against any formal division being made. The discussion on 30 November 1907 appears to have been provoked by Flora Kirwan declaring that

she was strongly of the opinion that women of the working class should be admitted to the League. In the present qualifications for membership no class qualification was implied and many working girls, she knew, had told her they would like to join”²³⁸

Flora Kirwan, despite her aristocratic origins (see Chapter Eight), was well placed to speak on behalf of Catholic working-class women through her “dining rooms for business girls... the St Edward’s Club for Girls”²³⁹ which formed part of her work with the poor of London. Flora Kirwan believed that lonely Catholic girls who might be placed “in circumstances of temptation” would benefit from belonging to the League and that wearing the badge would be “a sign of fellowship”.²⁴⁰

Opposition to Flora Kirwan’s proposal came from those who argued that the admission of working-class girls was impractical. Mabel Hope²⁴¹ believed the League was not ready for such an influx of numbers. Ada Streeter,²⁴² the Honorary Secretary, spoke in favour of the admission of working women but only into a special category of associate membership. Her argument was:

membership brought with it certain rights and privileges, such as, first the right of admission ... to all lectures and debates, second, the right to vote. Now, if working girls and servants were admitted to the League ... and if there was only one grade of membership, the parlour maids or other servants of any lady, who had lent her drawing room for a debate, would be entitled ... to take their seats in the drawing room and join the debate. Such a situation was ... awkward and would only bring the League into universal ridicule.²⁴³

It is interesting to note that this discussion took place in the house Ada Streeter and Flora Kirwan shared. (See chapter Eight for personal details of these two women.) Although no one replied directly to this point, Margaret

Fletcher (President and in the Chair) declared herself “strongly against” having two grades of membership. Her opposition was also, in part, a practical one because:

the line of demarcation would be almost impossible to define... and in working ...the scheme of two grades it might be found that one member of a family ...was eligible for one, and another for the other [grade] which would give rise to very serious complications.²⁴⁴

She also pointed out that the idea of two grades of membership was “entirely foreign to the spirit and ideal of the League”.²⁴⁵ The meeting voted to postpone a decision to the next meeting.

The subject of admitting working girls/women was returned to at the following Executive Committee meeting.²⁴⁶ Margaret Fletcher opened the discussion by referring to her correspondence with the Archbishop of Westminster.²⁴⁷ She said that the Archbishop only wanted a decision if the committee was unanimous and that he expressed no opinion on the issue of two grades of membership. The meeting heard that both Lady Denbigh and Mrs Arkwright, prominent members, had informed her that they wanted the decision postponed. The Honorary Secretary then told them of the attitude of Bernard Vaughan, the CWL’s spiritual adviser, who had been very angry and had told them the CWL was moving too quickly and “he strongly deprecated the institution of a grade of associate to include the working classes”.²⁴⁸ Once again, Margaret Fletcher spoke of her ideal and her wish that the CWL would “become part of one large whole through the bond of ... their Catholic

womanhood only".²⁴⁹ Discussion ranged widely among members of the committee and went on for some considerable time judging by the length of the minutes which took up another three pages. The discussion became concerned with the administrative difficulties of enrolling large numbers in London and in the Branches. Eventually the discussion was halted by suggestions that the decision be deferred. Dr Alice Johnson suggested that the matter be brought to the first meeting of Council but this was rejected. A resolution for a further, undefined period of postponement was proposed. The committee passed this by ten votes to two with "a rider from Miss Papworth, that no one otherwise qualified should be refused membership pending the decision".²⁵⁰

The subject of different grades of membership for different classes was never overtly referred to again. There is a brief reference to associate members in 1920; at that time the Council was discussing how best to set up the CWL Girl Guide Standing Committee and the minutes record that the meeting:

resolved to present the Guides' Standing Committee with some hundreds of the League Associate badges which had been made many years ago and never used. The sale of those at a moderate price would provide a secretarial fund for the Standing Committee.²⁵¹

If these badges had been intended for associate members, the planning for a scheme to admit working-class women may have gone further than the minutes of 1907 implied. It seems possible that the fear of large numbers of working-class women enrolling in the League was washed away in the deluge

that was the First World War. Alternatively it may be that discussing social class had proved so painful that the Executive Committee avoided it in all future meetings. Such caution is in keeping with their approach to both political issues and religious matters. A twenty-first century member of the CWL has suggested that working-class women were directed into the Union of Catholic Mothers, set up by the CWL and later given its independence.²⁵² Certainly the Union of Catholic Mothers (UCM) grew rapidly from its inception. While the better placed working-class women might have been able to afford the annual subscription of one shilling, the majority would have been excluded, and most would have found the extra costs of attending lectures, buying pamphlets and travelling to meetings prohibitive.

Another group singled out for discussion by the Executive Committee was converts to Catholicism. Since the 1850s the Catholic community had been greatly enlarged by large numbers of middle-class men and women converting to Rome. Indeed several members of the Executive Committee were converts. Despite Margaret Fletcher being one herself, the draft constitution included a bar on converts serving on the Executive Committee within five years of their conversion. When this clause was considered at the 7th Executive Committee meeting on 14 October 1907, Margaret Fletcher defended it by suggesting that:

many converts were unshaped for at least five years and if a recent convert who possessed a natural power of influence but whose Catholic instincts were still imperfectly developed were admitted on the

Executive she might lead the other members into regrettable decisions.²⁵³

Several of the committee members objected to any distinction and Maude Petre seemed to have summed up this position when she insisted that “either one was a Catholic or one was not”.²⁵⁴ After much discussion as to how new members should be selected for election to the Executive Committee the general feeling seemed to have been that the danger of a ‘convert take over’ was groundless. The matter was dealt with when the Executive Committee passed Miss Kirwan’s resolution that the clause regarding the ineligibility of converts be omitted.²⁵⁵ The minutes do not record by how many votes this resolution was carried so it is not possible to judge the size of the opposition to the original exclusion clause. The incident does establish that not all of Margaret Fletcher’s ideas and views were accepted without question.

By December 1909 women could join the CWL through its eight Branches but many chose to enrol as members of Central. Central, based in London with its syllabus of lectures and debates attracted women as part of the Edwardian London season. Chairing meetings, serving on committees, participating in debates and doing voluntary work for charitable organisations had long been part of the late Victorian and Edwardian leisured woman’s life style. For Catholic women the opportunities to participate in such voluntary activities were limited as most charities were denominational in character. One opportunity for Catholic women, already discussed in the previous chapter,

was the Ladies of Charity (LOC). The more business-like approach of the CWL suited the times better than the individualistic LOC.

Using the figures and membership lists provided in the Second Report for 1909,²⁵⁶ it is clear that the majority of the women who belonged to Central were registered as 'Miss', over 800; the next largest group was about 400 married women. Three smaller categories can also be identified: 51 women had aristocratic titles, while 11 women registered using non-English versions of 'Miss' and 'Mrs,' such as 'Madame' and 'Signorina.' Finally, three (Alice Vowe Johnson, Agnes McLaren and Eleanor Warner) chose to be registered as 'Dr.' It is impossible from this list to know the ages of the women; there is no way of identifying which of the 'Misses' were mature women, like Margaret Fletcher aged 47 in 1909 with a career as a teacher behind her, and those young women newly released from school. The married women also present the problem (all too familiar to historians) of being registered using their husbands' first names. It is equally impossible to judge the socio-economic class to which these women belonged. The 51 titled women reinforce the image of Central, at this early stage, as being a 'club' for upper and middle-class Catholic women.

There are some clues as to the socio-economic position of some members of the CWL in the minutes of its various committees. For example when the timing of lectures was discussed one member pointed out that the evenings would be convenient for school teachers and other professionals.²⁵⁷ The Honorary Secretary said "of the 195 town members about 43 were

professionals against 67 voluntary workers, the remainder she had no information about and that [for] the voluntary workers the evening was often impossible".²⁵⁸ The decision was finally made by vote at the meeting on 7 September 1907, that 3.15pm was best. This meeting did acknowledge that Dr Alice Johnson's First Aid course would have to be at 5.30pm, in order to accommodate her working hours. Between January 1909 and December 1910, most of the subcommittees met between 12 noon and 3.30 pm while all Executive meetings were at 4.30 pm or later, and this may reflect a difference in the professional status of committee members. For example, Dr Alice Johnson served on the Executive Committee for most of this period.

In March 1911 the Executive Committee discussed two items which reveal some contradictions at the heart of the CWL. The committee considered several rumours circulating that the CWL was only for professionals and working women and that the leisured classes were not welcome. Yet at the same meeting in answer to a query about paying the travel expenses of delegates to Council, the meeting instructed the Honorary Secretary to make the following reply:

the subject was one that each branch must decide for themselves with the recommendation that, only those members should stand for election to Council, who were prepared to meet the expenses of travelling up to London.²⁵⁹

This policy suggests a deep-rooted assumption that the Executive was, despite sanguine statements about no class distinctions, at heart deeply middle class.

The constitution allowed for the “Executive Committee [to] have the power of requesting the resignation of any Member of the League whose retirement shall be considered desirable by three-fourths of their number”.²⁶⁰ The Executive Committee do not appear to have wielded this power. The Minutes of the Executive Committee do record several resignations. When Maude Petre resigned on 16 December 1907 she stated her reason as “being not in sympathy with the League”.²⁶¹ Actually, Maude Petre had become a controversial figure through her defence of the Modernist theologian George Tyrrell SJ.²⁶² Catholic Modernist theology was condemned by the Vatican authorities and George Tyrrell and his supporters suffered condemnation and ostracism. Maude Petre had written several articles for The Month and had been part of the CWL’s Provisional Executive Committee; she had served on the subcommittee in February 1907 formed to write a leaflet advertising the CWL.²⁶³ Maude Petre’s resignation was important enough for it to be the subject of a letter by Margaret Fletcher to the Archbishop of Westminster. There can be little doubt that the resignation was encouraged and there was no suggestion that the newly formed CWL might fight to retain their member.

The CWL’s determination to avoid criticism concerning its religious orthodoxy was also revealed by Mrs Neville’s resignation. Mrs Neville had served on the CWL’s Provisional Executive Committee. It was when she tried to organise debates as part of the educational work of the CWL in London during the first year of the League, that she transgressed. Mrs Neville persuaded a woman²⁶⁴ who was not a Catholic, to give them some training in the

techniques of public debates. When it became clear that the trainer was in fact a Christian Scientist, Mrs Neville was heavily criticised. In her defence it was pointed out that the Christian Scientist had not taken part in any CWL debate and had not been part of any event where the subject had been religious. Nevertheless, Mrs Neville resigned from both the Executive Committee and the League. The Archbishop was informed of the resignation which appeared to end the matter satisfactorily for him if not for Mrs Neville.²⁶⁵

An early victim of the CWL's often repeated non-political position was a Mrs Temple. Mrs Temple had allowed her home to be used on separate occasions both by the CWL and a meeting to promote the suffrage. The founders of the CWL were determined to avoid any suggestion that the CWL was a suffrage society consequently the Executive Committee decided not to use Mrs Temple's house for any further meetings. Mrs Temple resigned from the Executive Committee. It is not clear if she resigned from the CWL.²⁶⁶ Some members of the CWL supported the suffrage movement but this was never referred to in CWL literature. The possibility of female enfranchisement was only discussed in the CWLM after it had ceased to be a controversial issue.²⁶⁷

3. Finance

The founders of the CWL deliberately set the annual membership fee at one shilling, in order to make it easy for women to belong. It was accepted that one shilling would not provide the revenue for the work they planned; the

deficit it was hoped would be made up from donations. The 1907 constitution laid down that each branch had to pay a capitation fee of 2d from the one shilling subscription to finance national administration based in London. The records of the CWL are full of complaints, appeals and schemes to encourage and persuade the branches to pay their capitation fees. It was, however, recognized that if the CWL was to have the credibility of a successful society with a business-like approach to charitable work, it would have to have financial stability.

Having set the membership subscription relatively low, it was necessary to charge entrance fees for most CWL activities such as lectures, debates and study circles. In London a small number of open lectures was arranged with tickets on sale to the public rather than exclusively to the membership. These lectures provided a small income as did the Information Bureau and the Clothing Depot, both of which were London based but national in scope. With the separation of Central from the CWL's national administration in 1913 the financial difficulties of Council became apparent.

During the meeting of National Committee of Council on 11 January 1912 it was agreed that as part of the duties of Miss Fitzsimon, as Honorary Treasurer, she was responsible for the expenses of the Honorary Secretary, the rent of offices in London, holding the AGM, paying subscription fees to the various societies to which the CWL was affiliated and printing the Annual

Report.²⁶⁸ By June 1912 Miss Fitzsimon was reporting that expenditure was well in excess of capitation fees actually paid by the branches; she pointed out that the amount the branches paid did not match the number of members they claimed to have.²⁶⁹ This situation improved a little with some branches making donations on top of capitation fees but it was only with a change of treasurer that Council's finances improved. Miss Fitzsimon died in May 1914 and was succeeded in office by Margaret Fletcher (Vice-President) who persuaded Council to let her set up a finance sub-committee to assist her. She also called a conference of branch honorary treasurers early in 1915.²⁷⁰ At the first meeting of Council for 1915 Margaret Fletcher proposed and it was agreed that where a branch's membership list was longer than the list of those paying capitation fees, the number of delegates to the Council should be calculated on the capitation fee list. At that time a branch was entitled to one delegate per 250 members. Subsequent minutes do not record any further discussion of the discrepancy between membership numbers and capitation fees. Methods used by the branches to raise money for CWL activities will be discussed in the following section on branch development. On 25 November 1915 Margaret Fletcher reported to Council²⁷¹ that the financial situation was satisfactory with enough money to meet Council's responsibilities and three months later that the Council was free from debt.

Although finance did not appear as a major concern of Council meetings after the war, the balance sheets in both the Annual Reports for 1922 and 1923 suggest that the CWL was still struggling to meet its obligations. The CWL's

main sources of income in these two years were capitation fees, donations from the branches, profit from the Clothing Depot and contributions by the London Branch to the upkeep of the offices in London. In 1922 the balance sheet included "Donation from Miss Fletcher [of] £100."²⁷² This gift appears to have been essential for the CWL to meet that year's expenditure. The balance for December 1922 on the current account was just over £43 and the deposit account was £100. This shown that the current account was £7 less and the deposit account was £157 less than at the start of the year. Without the donation from Margaret Fletcher the CWL would have had to empty its deposit account to meet the year's expenses. The following year, with no donation from an individual recorded, the CWL's current account in December 1923 stood at £20 and the deposit account at £52.²⁷³ Evidently the CWL's commitments were in danger of outstripping its income, a situation that appears not to have worried the decision-makers unduly.

4. Branch Development

From the outset it was envisaged that the CWL would have branches across the country. Enthusiasm for the CWL exceeded the expectations of the Executive Committee. Even before they had formulated the constitution a branch had emerged in Manchester largely as the result of women already active in social work. Even when the constitution was written (and ratified) it simply stated, "when sufficient members are enrolled in any given locality a Branch may be formed".²⁷⁴ Without giving any definition to "sufficient" or "locality" it left room for considerable ambiguity in the process.

The constitution adopted in December 1907 provided for each branch to have an executive committee, a chairman, a treasurer and a secretary. The branch was required to submit an annual report and capitation fees to the national organisation once a year. The first branch to be formally accepted into the CWL was Manchester in January 1908. Even before the constitution was ready the enthusiastic Frances Zannetti had started to form the Manchester branch. Three more branches joined the CWL during 1908, Boscombe, Bournemouth and Brighton. Between 1908 and 1914 the CWL consisted of 18 branches, not including Central (see above for the uniqueness of Central), eight of which were in the Midlands and the North. Each branch was encouraged to send in accounts of its public activities, first to The Crucible and after June 1911 to the CWLM. These reports provide a limited amount of information and it must be borne in mind that they have been edited at least twice, once in the branch and then at the magazine office. Branch reports also appeared in the Annual Reports.

In the December 1911 issue of the CWLM there was news of seven branches out of a possible twelve. Each entry was signed by the honorary secretary of the branch. Bath reported on contact with a non-Catholic "Bath Babies Visiting Society" which would give the CWL the care of Catholic babies in need of the Society's help. Birmingham provided information about elections to its executive committee and lectures given, while Leamington also reported on lectures. Boscombe took the opportunity to advertise its "December Fixtures" mainly lectures including one to be given by Ada Streeter.

Bournemouth also ran a list of forthcoming lectures and advertised the visit of the president Mabel Hope. Brighton also recorded a visit by Mabel Hope and reported on lectures, debates and the meetings of sub-groups such as the one in Littlehampton. Leeds Diocese had a crisper style than others and reported on the activities of the executive committee, news of their AGM, lectures given and details of the Protection Home to be opened in the district. Liverpool', a nine-month old branch supplied a summary of their first lecture on the theme of the women's movement.²⁷⁵ Newcastle, an eight-month old branch, described its first large meeting with over 500 present, reported that they had agreed to work with their bishop to set up a children's rescue service and that local meetings were to be started in South Shields, and Wallsend.²⁷⁶ Thus, from the evidence, it is clear that allowing for local differences and the maturity of the branch, much the same activities were carried out. The CWLM continued to carry "Branch News" which by July 1914, the last issue unaffected by war restrictions, occupied twelve of the 42 pages of the edition. The branches covered in July 1914 were Birmingham, Boscombe, Brighton, Leeds Diocese, Liverpool, London, Newcastle, Northampton, Norwich, Preston and Salford (the Manchester branch had been subsumed into its diocesan branch).

One of the features of the CWL during the First World War was the rapid growth in membership and branches. In January 1914 the CWLM listed seventeen single branches with no sub-divisions. In the first issue of the CWLM published in 1919 there were 28 branches listed and four of them were

in fact diocesan branches with subdivisions: Birmingham with five Sections, Leeds with six Sections, Liverpool with four Sections and Salford with five Sections. Each branch and section listed its own local vice-president and honorary secretary. Doubtless there would have continued to be growth and development without the First World War but the unique circumstances of the war years must explain the rapid growth these facts show.

The CWL executive resisted any attempts to extend the CWL beyond the borders of England and Wales. The accepted response to any such inquiries had always been that each country should form its own league and then affiliate with the international movement to which the English league had belonged since its inception. In February 1912 it appears that some English residents in Rome wanted to belong to a branch of the CWL and assumed that Cardinal Bourne could give his consent. In fact the ladies, led by Miss Stourton, had been referred to the Cardinal Vicar in Rome who had consented. It was only at this stage that the CWL was contacted. Faced with the weight of the Catholic hierarchy, the Council did not attempt to withhold consent. During much discussion a resolution was proposed, "that this consent should constitute no precedent for the founding of branches in foreign countries".²⁷⁷ Even this was not thought strong enough by Margaret Fletcher who wanted it amended to apply to branches in Britain. In the end this attempt at asserting the Council's authority was not followed through and the resolution was withdrawn. The Rome branch was founded but its position and role seemed a

strange adjunct to the rest of the CWL. No other overseas branches were formed.

Enthusiasm had outstripped the slow procedures of the CWL. The Honorary Secretary told the Council meeting in November 1915 that:

a group of women in Shaftesbury had written to her using the title 'Catholic Women's League, Shaftesbury Branch.' She had replied accepting co-operation but saying that there were certain formalities to be gone through before anybody or ladies' guild could call themselves by the name of the League. She had had no reply to this letter.²⁷⁸

Unwilling, perhaps, to discourage a potential new branch of women eager to engage in war work, the Council agreed to leave the matter as it stood and the representative from Bath Branch offered to make local enquiries.

The Shaftesbury women were not referred to again and no branch bearing that name appeared in the lists published at the beginning of each issue of the CWLM. It is possible that they were brought into an existing branch.

There were a number of examples of initiatives beginning in a branch and then being taken up by the CWL as a whole. For example, during the war the CWL scheme to open a Recreation Hut in February 1915 at Boulogne for convalescent soldiers was extended by the Leeds Branch to include military camps in Britain. Having raised a large sum of money towards the CWL huts in France the Leeds Diocese executive committee agreed to raise money and

staff a hut at the Ripon Camp. The committee had been approached by the Catholic Chaplain, Father Levick. He had explained to the committee that:

Though able to attend Mass on Sunday, it is not possible for them to come *fasting* for Holy Communion, as the Camp breakfast is cleared before their return. If a Hut is in the Camp, Mass can be said in it early on week days and early on Sundays, and the soldiers can easily come to Holy Communion and be thus prepared for the dangers they must so shortly face at the Front.²⁷⁹

His appeal commended itself to the committee as it brought together the temporal, providing food and recreation for the soldiers, and the spiritual, enabling Catholic soldiers to practise their faith. Lady Radcliffe, President of the Leeds Branch, obtained a loan of £300 to start the hut as soon as possible. The loan was to be paid back out of the hut fund, made up of profits and donations. This hut was henceforth known as the CWL Ripon Hut. (This loan system was used by the CWL to begin other huts before waiting to raise the money through charitable activities.) The branch report also included a call for funds and workers to serve in the hut. The rightness of this initiative so appealed to the editor of the CWLM that she congratulated them:

on having taken the lead ...in inaugurating a Canteen for our Catholic soldiers in English camps... We warmly commend this venture to the notice of our readers... and earnestly hope that other CWL branches situated in camp areas will follow the example of Leeds.²⁸⁰

The editor's words did not go unnoticed. Soon the CWLM was running a regular section "Hut News" and by February 1917 it reported on four English huts apart from Ripon, namely, Codford, Lydd, Richmond and the prestigious

Westminster Hut, erected close to the Catholic cathedral and providing sleeping accommodation besides a 24-hour refreshment service.

Almost every edition of the CWLM carried appeals for women to work in these huts. It may be that raising the money was more popular than volunteering to spend hours cleaning, cooking and serving meals. Accommodation for the workers was difficult and the following description, in the "Branch News" was designed to encourage would-be volunteers:

a delightful little cottage in a Studley Village, where three or four helpers can be accommodated... it is only five minutes' walk from the Hut and has a little garden in the front and has been furnished by the kindness of Mrs Warrington, who has worked hard to make it attractive and comfortable.²⁸¹

Hut workers had to pay for their accommodation and by May 1916 Leeds executive committee had been able to add to the 'little cottage' by obtaining additional lodgings,

several bedrooms in Studley village, five minutes from our Hut at Ripon Camp, and the sitting room in what is known now as The Catholic Cottage, will take the place of a rest room for the helpers...[who] may now obtain a room ... for 12/6 or 15/- a week. This includes bed and plain breakfast at a cottage, with dinner and tea at the CWL Cottage... More expensive rooms, and naturally more comfortable, can be found in Ripon [one and a half miles from the Hut] at £1 per room of board. The Spa Hotel, Ripon offers luxurious quarters at 10/6 a day.²⁸²

It is hard to judge what sort of women would be able and attracted to this sort of work. The work was unpaid and physically demanding. Would women who could have afforded the Spa Hotel have volunteered to do work involving skills that must have been unfamiliar to them? Working-class women, used to long

hours of housework (as well as work outside the home) would have been unable to volunteer for unpaid work. Nevertheless Ripon Hut and the other CWL huts stayed open for as long as they were needed.

When the Council, in January 1913 agreed to move the AGM away from London and give each branch the opportunity to host it along with the Council meeting that preceded the General meeting the reasons were made clear as the Secretary explained:

that the League was composed of centres each equally important and it was only fair that each centre should have the opportunity to play its full part in the general life of the League. The migration of the Council meeting from centre to centre would give opportunity to show the national character of the League and to emphasize at the same time the local strength and colour of [the branches throughout the country].²⁸³

This acknowledgement of the importance of its branches signalled a significant stage in the development of the CWL. Henceforth the CWL could justifiably consider itself a national society.

5. Leeds Diocesan Branch

The following is an examination of the Leeds Diocese Branch from its foundation in 1910 to 1923. This case study will demonstrate how the branch developed and changed over time and how it responded to decisions made at national level by the CWL, at diocesan and parochial level and to requests

made by the hierarchy. Underlying all this was its commitment, like the CWL as a whole, to the education of its members.

The formation of a CWL branch in the Leeds diocese can be seen as part of the Church's response to changes in the population of the area. The old diocese was in 1878 divided into two, one centred on Leeds and the other on Middlesbrough. The enormous task of providing for the pastoral care of the working-class Catholic population was recognized by all the subsequent bishops of Leeds but it was Bishop Cowgill who focused on this aspect of his duties. During the late nineteenth century the population increased as coalfields were opened between Pontefract in the north and Doncaster and Rotherham in the south. In its initial stages diocesan effort concentrated on founding churches and schools. By the early twentieth century the focus had moved to social issues.

According to Hagerty,²⁸⁴ Bishop Cowgill (1911-1936) while still Coadjutor to Bishop Gordon (1890-1911) invited the CWL to form a branch in the Leeds Diocese with the express intention of using the women to further his work for the protection and rescue of women and girls. It is certainly true that from its earliest days Branch members served on the newly formed diocesan Protection and Rescue Society but there is an alternative explanation. In 1910, Bishop Cowgill in the role of Coadjutor the frail Bishop Gordon hosted the first National Catholic Congress. As part of the arrangements he called together a group of women to assist him in the planning of the Congress; this group of women decided to form a branch of the CWL in the area.²⁸⁵

The Leeds Branch of the CWL was formally instituted in June 1910 when a meeting was held on 4 June during which an executive committee was elected with the Lady Mowbray and Stourton as Local President, Lady Radcliffe as Vice-President, Mrs Coghlan as Honorary Secretary (soon replaced by Miss N. Mahony) and Mrs Warrington as Honorary Treasurer. The initial membership was 275 women. Earlier branches such as Manchester and Bristol had been formed in a particular city and it was only later that they were incorporated into a diocesan structure. Leeds, on the other hand, was conceived from the beginning as a diocesan branch and provision was soon made for local sub-committees to be formed in the various key towns and cities of the diocese. Each sub-committee had its own officers including a chairman who served on the Branch Executive Committee. Among the earliest local sub-committees were Bradford and Wakefield. In September 1911 a local sub-committee was established for the city of Leeds; this made it clear there was to be no structural bias in favour of the members who lived in the city of Leeds.²⁸⁶ The Branch Executive Committee met monthly and at the beginning of each year held elections. From its number it elected delegates to the CWL Council of which its Local President was automatically a member. The Executive Committee also arranged the election by the general membership of delegates to Council, the number based on the size of the branch membership. In January 1912 the branch qualified to send four delegates. By January 1912 Bradford, Sheffield, Harrogate and Leeds city all appear to have had local sub-committees which also held elections in January. This system of local sub-committees was

necessary to overcome the large distances between these cities and the diocesan centre in Leeds. There are passing references to the problems some sub-committee officers serving on the Executive Committee faced in attending its meetings held in Leeds city centre.

The branch held AGMs which like the whole league AGMs had an educational element, for example, the members attending the 1912 AGM were given a lecture by Father Vincent McNabb OP on "Rescue Work".²⁸⁷

After only three years the branch was financially secure enough to open an office at 46 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds. It consisted of two rooms, of which one was used by the honorary secretary and the other was a clubroom for both the CWL and the Nurses' Guild. The burden of running the office was shared between the branch officers and members of the Leeds district sub-committee.²⁸⁸ Later the office moved to a room in the CWL Hostel in another part of Leeds.

Branch administration appears to have reflected the whole League structure with an AGM each year at which the officers of the branch gave their reports and to which outside speakers, usually clergy, were invited. The responsibility of organizing this moved between various towns and cities. During the pre-war period AGMs were usually held in school halls provided by the various women's religious orders but during the war larger accommodation was needed, such as in 1915 when the Harrogate committee used "the large hall of the Hotel Majestic". Over 250 women attended this particular event

including the Grand Duchess of Russia and Princess Margaret of Denmark.²⁸⁹ By the end of 1917 the "People's Hall" was needed to hold the branch AGM in Leeds at which both the Bishop of Northampton and Margaret Fletcher gave speeches. This move from private diocesan accommodation to public, secular venues reflected not just a growth in numbers but a change in status for the CWL. The CWL in the West Riding was no longer a solely sectarian society but was accepted as a philanthropic organization committed to war work. The point is also made by Hagerty who sees the Catholic community as a whole becoming "more established socially and politically" during the early years of the twentieth century.²⁹⁰

In the years following the war the branch moved into another phase of its development with many new initiatives in the field of social work and education. The growth of the membership was reflected in a number of changes. In April 1920²⁹¹ the executive committee decided to widen the scope of their meetings and to include not just the officers of the district committees but also "branch workers" such as the CWL magazine agents. In June 1919 throughout the CWL 'Districts' were renamed 'Sections' and were recorded in the lists of branches at the front of each issue of the CWLM.²⁹² In December 1923 the whole branch changed its name from Leeds Diocese to the West Riding Branch in order to reflect the extension of its membership right across the West Riding.²⁹³

Throughout these years the authors of the Leeds Branch reports made frequent appeals for its members to pay their annual subscriptions. Two examples reveal the frustration of the honorary secretary: in December 1921 she reminded the readers of the CWLM that 300 people had not paid for that year, some three months later her appeal was bolder, "membership of the Branch now numbers 1,187 who paid their subscriptions in 1921. Not all subscriptions have been paid".²⁹⁴ If all paid, she added, it would entitle the Branch to another delegate to the National Council of the CWL. A similar appeal went out in December 1923. Thus the office of honorary secretary of a very successful branch still carried with it, some frustrations.

The branch entries in the CWLM frequently included reports on the Leeds Protection and Rescue Society. From its earliest days the branch worked hard to provide the Society with funds. In 1912 the Society opened a Rescue Home funded to a large extent by the CWL and furnished by appeals in the CWLM. Later the Society decided to separate out its protection work from girls in need of rescue and opened a second home to emphasize the difference.²⁹⁵ After the war, as part of its on-going commitment, Sheffield provided a home for unmarried mothers and their babies.²⁹⁶ This work continued in the post-war years but as the Protection and Rescue Society had its own administrative structure and involved non-CWL members all its endeavours have not been included in this analysis.

In June 1914 the executive committee of the Branch agreed to comply with the wishes of the CWL Council and set up a Catholic Mothers' Union in the diocese. The prototype had been established in Birmingham and its merits had been shown to the CWL during the CWL AGM held in Birmingham that year. The idea was supported by both Cardinal Bourne and the Bishop of Leeds. The Branch leadership saw the advantages in both social and religious terms: "it will bring [the Branch] in contact with our very poorest mothers, and be a great work for souls".²⁹⁷ The Branch reports contain only brief references to the progress of this scheme as war work swamped the entries for the next four years.

The first report submitted by the Honorary Secretary N. Mahony after the outbreak of war is a summary of the branch's first contribution to 'war work'. The executive committee had issued instructions to its district committees and individual members to undertake what work they could without waiting for official instructions. The policy was a success, for example, Sheffield District Committee had found homes willing to take Belgian refugees and had produced over 50 garments for the refugees. In Bradford the CWL was represented on every civic war work committee.²⁹⁸ The report contained similar entries for the other branch districts.

During the war the branch entries contained numerous reports of social evenings, whist drives, bazaars and sales of work produced by many sewing groups as fund raising activities for projects either directly related to the war, for example providing trench comforts, or for well-established concerns such

as rescue work. The branch also funded and staffed the CWL Hut at Ripon Camp. (Ripon Hut was part of the national CWL scheme which has been considered earlier in this chapter.) The branch's continued commitment to the Ripon Hut was symbolised by the erection of a wayside crucifix to which an annual pilgrimage was organized.²⁹⁹ A major source of funding was the branch garden party/summer fete. The pre-war garden parties were held in the Bishop's garden in Leeds and appear to have been rather sedate occasions but with the war the event was transformed into a summer fete (at least once given the title "Highland Gathering") and were designed to attract a larger clientele. In the summer of 1917 the fete was held in the grounds of Grove House Hospital, near Harrogate. The entry in the CWLM appealed to members to show their solidarity with wounded soldiers:

Those who cannot come in person may provide a deputy in a wounded soldier, to whom a ticket will be given by the Honorary Sec. at the request of any member unable to attend thus helping the fund and giving enjoyment to those on whose behalf we are all working.³⁰⁰

The response to this appeal may partly account for the fete's success in making a profit of over £195 and the change of location from Leeds to the more leisured environs of Harrogate may also have played a part.

In the early 1920s the CWL embarked on the new initiative of providing hostel/social centres for Catholic working women. The audience at the branch AGM of 1921 were told that some of the funds for this work would come from the Huts and Hostels Committee to National Council. The Committee appear to have had funds left over from war time efforts. In some

ways this was not a 'new' work for the Leeds branch. In 1917 the executive committee had accepted the invitation of the Bishop of Leeds to help in a scheme which he had hoped would provide suitable accommodation to Catholic girls seeking employment in the area. He suggested a hostel be opened for the girls with a Catholic matron to supervise it.³⁰¹ Within a couple of months a suitable house had been found and after several appeals for funds and furnishings it was opened in September 1917 by the Mayoress of Leeds.³⁰² With a grant from the Huts and Hostels Committee this hostel was extended and became the nucleus of a CWL social centre in Leeds. In Harrogate the existing Girls' Club was adapted to provide accommodation for girls needing temporary lodging while travelling. Early in 1922 Wakefield opened a social centre for girls but other areas found the project more difficult. Halifax complained that they could not find suitable rooms for a social centre because:

The present lack of employment in Northern towns makes the starting of the venture such as a social centre where the running expenses are an unknown quantity an undertaking to be very seriously considered before a start is made.³⁰³

It may have been similar problems that dogged Sheffield's effort throughout the summer of 1922 to find suitable rooms for a social centre. Sheffield was busy raising funds for a home for unmarried mothers and their babies, and this may have been of a higher priority for the women of Sheffield than a social centre for Catholic women who could afford participation in such an enterprise.³⁰⁴

In its commitment to the education of its members, Leeds branch mirrored many of the activities of the CWL as a whole. At branch AGMs members were usually addressed by senior members of the clergy such as Canon Shine (later Bishop of Middlesbrough), Bishop Keating of Northampton and Father McNabb all of whom usually spoke on an aspect of the social work they thought the CWL should engage in.³⁰⁵ Lectures were also organized by district committees, in particular Bradford seems to have been the most consistent in its efforts to 'educate' its Catholic population. In December 1921 their lectures were described as "becoming quite a feature in our Catholic life", and "certainly the best we ever had".³⁰⁶ In 1922 the Bradford Section again won praise when it arranged for the distinguished Jesuit Father Martindale to lecture in the Mechanics Institute on psychoanalysis: "These annual lectures under the auspices of the local section of the CWL are anticipated by the general public of the city and commented on by the press."³⁰⁷ Fortunately Father Leo McGuire's lecture "The Catholic Woman in Civic Life" which was also given in Bradford in October 1922 was quoted from in the branch entry. His audience was not solely composed of CWL members when he declared: "you can be an ideal citizen not good citizens despite being Catholics but good citizens because you are Catholic citizens". He went on to make the point clearer; "we want Catholics more and more in public life we want them for their catholicity to preach Catholic principles in and out of season".³⁰⁸ Leo McGuire was certainly in tune with CWL policies which from its foundation had advocated Catholic women's engagement in the public sphere and since the enfranchisement of women had taken the position that Catholic women should be informed voters.

Other forms of education were also a feature of the branch. Within a few months of its foundation the Leeds Branch, with the expressed encouragement of Bishop Cowgill, started a debating society.³⁰⁹ In October 1913 the branch agreed to join a debating competition held among the Northern branches. With this competition in mind the executive committee set up a debating class held in the branch office. Although the participants were never a large number and even at the first class only 22 women took part,³¹⁰ the branch did take part in the competition debates. Debating was seen by many as an excellent form of preparation for public service. At the end of 1917 Margaret Fletcher launched the new campaign of self-education for CWL members by exhorting the audience at the branch AGM to consider their:

chief duty would be to study the questions affecting women and women's welfare, and above all to study them from a Catholic standpoint. Then when the time came for them to play their part as citizens they might further Catholic principles and Catholic social ideals.³¹¹

She recommended the setting up of study circles and discussion groups.

(This educational programme is dealt with in more detail in a later chapter .)

In March 1918 the message was reinforced in the branch entry under the new heading "Social Study". Readers were told:

it is the duty of members to acquire the Catholic teaching on social questions... [they] are *fulfilling the wish of Ecclesiastical Superiors* who desire that Catholic women should have correct knowledge which will guide them in the great work of re-construction that will come after the war is over.³¹² (original emphasis.)

For the rest of 1918 the branch entries contain many reports of districts setting up social study clubs/discussion circles. Branch members were

encouraged to take the CWL Citizenship examination but they were reassured that the examination was not obligatory. The November 1918 branch entry did contain a helpful section entitled, "Hints to Candidates for Examination!" which told them to:

Call together the other candidates; take a table (solid for choice!), *stand on it*, speak on your own selected subject for five minutes, invite and answer interruptions...Send... for list of test questions, put them to one another. Contradict speaker in loud clear voice from end of room... Do all this *twice a week*: only admit fellow candidates.³¹³ (Original emphasis.)

This was sound advice but also revealing in several ways. The author of the entry, N. Mahony, had no worries about the impropriety of women standing on tables nor did she concern herself with the idea of women shouting, defending their opinions and dealing with interruptions. Skills learnt by following this advice were transferable into public life and even overtly political activities.

Throughout the years 1910-1923 the branch entries in the CWLM were treated as an opportunity to educate the branch members with frequent references to social issues, to decisions taken at the CWL Council and even reproducing letters from Bishop Cowgill.³¹⁴ Miss N. Mahony devoted the whole of the branch entry for October 1917 to a summary of all the social work undertaken by the branch to assist members in their own philanthropic activities. Entries also contained frequent references to retreats, religious ceremonies, such as the services held at the wayside crucifix near Ripon and novenas for peace said during the war. No wonder Miss N. Mahony

repeatedly urged branch members to take out subscriptions to the CWLM and encouraged them to pass it on when recruiting new members.

6. The Creation of New Organisations

The Founders of the CWL had envisaged an organisation that would unite Catholic women in a bond of religion and intellectual interest for the better understanding of social issues requiring their charity and work. They had not foreseen how the CWL would become a conduit through which would flow a constant stream of new ideas which when channelled and directed proved strong enough to form semi-autonomous organisations.

In 1911 the National Committee to Council decided to investigate the subject of Catholic women emigrating to Canada. They had been alerted to the situation that these Catholic women were without the support of other Catholics during their journey and on arrival in Canada. The investigation revealed that the only charitable societies caring for women emigrants were not Catholic and therefore took no account of the women's desire to work for, or be near other Catholics. Members of the National Committee to Council felt that the situation warranted CWL attention.³¹⁵ Liverpool branch recorded their interest and saw the issue as work peculiar to their branch.

Subsequently it was decided to place emigration to Canada on the agenda for the CWL AGM of 1912. The National Committee moved quickly and by April 1912 they had formed an Emigration Society. The Emigration Society based in the CWL offices in London generated its own funds and regulated its own

affairs but had a seat on the CWL Council. The Emigration Society undertook to select women on the grounds of "moral respectability, physical and mental fitness, religious guarantees and capability of work".³¹⁶ A hostel was opened in Liverpool to provide safe accommodation for the emigrants, and chaperones cared for them during the journey and on arrival in Canada. The Society also worked closely with similar groups in Canada to assist the women to find suitable situations and complete the Canadian side of their journey. This work was only interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914.

The Nurses' Guild, like the Emigration Society, grew directly out of the CWL. In October 1912 the CWL Council agreed to investigate the setting up of a Catholic nurses' guild as a response to a number of enquiries from members. It was noted that there were many guilds and clubs for nurses but none specifically Catholic. A special sub-committee³¹⁷ was set up to look at the nurses' guild idea. It began work in November 1912 and recommended that there should be a branch of the guild in every CWL branch but separate from the CWL organisation³¹⁸ with its own network of committees. The National Committee decided in September 1913 that the Nurses' Guild was ready to form its own central committee³¹⁹ and again in October the minutes record that the Cardinal had attended the inaugural meeting of the Nurses' Guild. The Nurses' Guild opened a club room at 116 Victoria Street, Westminster alongside the offices of the CWL. This arrangement of shared premises was replicated in the branches. During the war there is some indication that the Nurses' Guild fell into abeyance and after the war it assumed a life of its own.

The CWL's creative spirit also reacted to the development of the Girl Guide movement. A Girl Guide sub-committee to Council was set up to encourage the formation of Catholic Girl Guide companies. As with so many other initiatives the impetus for this expansion was a desire to see a Catholic version of a popular movement. In June 1918 the CWL appealed for "educated girls ... to volunteer as Guide Officers ... these officers are most urgently needed [as] the Catholic representation is so small that even Convents with organised Corps are asking for Protestants".³²⁰

From this small beginning the CWL Girl Guides grew rapidly so that in the Annual Report for 1922, Mary Hollist was able to claim 44 affiliated companies with over 1,000 members. The following year there were 71 companies of Guides and they were branching out into Rangers, Sea Guides and Brownies.³²¹ Mary Hollist chaired a Standing Committee of Council formed from Guide Officers and with its own representation on the Imperial Council of Girl Guides.

The CWL's creative spirit was channelled, during the war, into a large number of activities designed to help Catholic soldiers and sailors and to support Catholic women in their war work. One of the most successful CWL war activities was the building and staffing of Recreation Huts for soldiers both in Britain and in France. This subject has been discussed earlier in the chapter. The CWL's commitment to its huts work was recognised by creating a Huts

Committee to Council chaired by Miss Orwin. In their report for 1923 the committee summed up its achievement:

The CWL had twenty Huts in England and France and of these nine came immediately under the Huts Committee. It was also responsible for the staffing of five Canadian Huts and Clubs and for the building of five chapel Huts in France from money given by the various Huts in England and France.. After the war a Club was opened for the Army of Occupation in Germany.³²²

This success brought a new sense of confidence. The Huts Committee at the end of the war changed its name to the Hostels Committee to signify a new programme of encouraging branches to open Social Centres to provide Catholic women with:

recognized addresses where all Catholic girls, who from various causes are living away from their own homes, can go for advice, hear of suitable lodgings, and where they will find a quiet reading or waiting room, a recreation room with small canteen attached.³²³

By the end of 1923 the Committee felt that the CWL Social Centres scheme had been successfully launched. Each branch had been responsible for the founding and running of their own Social Centres. The Huts/Hostel Committee closed and directed its members to take up the new CWL field of endeavour, Adult Rescue.

Perhaps the most successful and the most enduring of the CWL's foundations was the Union of Catholic Mothers. Once again this innovation appeared first at branch level, in Birmingham. The Local President of Birmingham, Mrs Radcliff, presented the idea of a nationally organized union of Catholic mothers at the 1914 CWL AGM. The editor of CWLM commended the work to her readers commenting that it had "already received the serious

consideration of the governing body of the League, and this ventilation [at the AGM] will, we believe, result in immediate definite action".³²⁴ The work was taken up by the branches and seems to have merged with the well-established CWL welfare work for mothers and babies through variously named enterprises such as Schools for Mothers and Babies' Welcomes. The exact progress of the Union of Catholic Mothers is rather hard to track through the pages of the CWLM as the magazine became dedicated to war work. In the late 1930s the UCM became an independent organization with a membership comparable in numbers to the CWL.

Not every suggestion resulted in the founding of a new society. For example, at the same CWL AGM at which the UCM was launched, Dom Lambert Nolle spoke of the need for an association to help "Catholic Domestic Servants"³²⁵ and despite the editor's endorsement this work never became Council policy and no such association was formed. The social upheavals of the war years moved the welfare of servants down the CWL agenda.

7. Relations with other organisations

The founders of the CWL were conscious of having to move carefully among other organisations, some within the Catholic community and those in the wider public sphere. The CWL had been established with hierarchical approval and this continued with Archbishop Bourne continued interest and involvement in the CWL's decision making process.

The support of the Archbishop of Westminster did not ensure a smooth path for the CWL among fellow Catholics and the clergy. There is no direct evidence of antagonism between the CWL and the clergy but members were urged to move carefully. Even after six years of working with the clergy there were tensions strong enough to provoke some considerable discussion at national level. The Honorary Secretary may perhaps have been referring to an actual incident when she told the meeting on 8 December 1913:

that the difficulty arose when Parish Priests had parish workers who [were] supplied by the League but being controlled by the League Executive. While the League itself was never parochial but national and diocesan³²⁶

If this was a response to actual incidents (not referred to in any records), not just unshaped fears, then the danger was that:

Priests had become alienated from the league owing to this extra parochial control of parish work. If the priests were alienated the bishops would soon withdraw their support and she thought the situation a very serious one.³²⁷

In general she seemed in sympathy with priests who might object to this situation and suggested that:

some provision should be made that CWL parish workers should be exclusively under the direction of the parish priest they were working for.³²⁸

The Secretary's mild approach was not shared by all:

Miss Fitzsimon disagreed with the secretary as also did Leeds, Bournemouth and Brighton. The feeling being that if the League supplied parish workers and parish works it should keep some control of them. Mrs Wake (Leeds) said any parochial sections would break

up the united feeling which was just beginning to manifest itself in branches.³²⁹

Oil was poured on troubled waters, at least in the Council meeting, if not in the parishes when:

The President said the question was one that could be settled by tact ... on the part of executives. Any tactless appearance of interference by executives would very naturally be resented by priests. Without putting any resolution to the meeting she impressed on all present the necessity of working with their priests in the way the priest wished. If they rubbed up their priests they would soon find themselves on the rocks and quite a small incident in one branch might end by bringing discredit on the league as a whole.³³⁰

This recommendation ended the discussion. Indeed no reference was subsequently made to conflict over the boundary dividing CWL control and priestly authority in directing parish/branch activities.

The CWL's relationship with Bourne was an important asset when opposition and criticism came from the laity. At the executive committee meeting on 16 November 1907 the CWL's involvement with the Church Army (a non-Catholic charitable organisation working among the poor) was challenged in a letter by a Miss Passmore who asked "by what authority the CWL had entered into an arrangement with the Church Army ...to supply Catholic visitors to Catholic cases?"³³¹ The committee agreed that they derived their authority from the Archbishop but they hesitated to invoke it without his permission. It was agreed that the Archbishop should be consulted as to the reply the Honorary Secretary should make to Mrs Passmore.³³²

Frequent contact between the executive committee and Bourne meant that such matters could be swiftly dealt with and at the following executive meeting they were told that "the League had no formal authorisation to enter into

relations with the Church Army". Far from this being a criticism, Bourne had suggested "if the Executive wished it he would consult with his council and if found desirable [he] would grant it".³³³ CWL literature always publicised the approval of the Catholic hierarchy.

The Executive continued to exercise caution concerning its involvement in the public sphere. In July 1908 it refused to send an official delegate to sit on the committee of the Kensington Workhouse to replace a Catholic woman who had resigned. It was not clear to the Executive who was responsible for filling this post and so they refused to act until the matter was settled.

Where there was no doubt of its authority the CWL was not slow to make links with non-denominational societies. One of the first links the CWL made was with the National Union of Women Workers. It was agreed at the 4th Executive meeting in April 1907 to endorse Lucy Wyatt Papworth as its official delegate. Lucy Wyatt Papworth, a member of the Executive was also, in a private capacity, a member of the NUWW which explains the CWL's quick action here. The CWL was, however, very protective of its name and in January 1910 was dismayed to hear that Baroness von Hugel was styling herself as the CWL delegate on the education section of the NUWW. The Executive agreed to send their own official delegate and advise Baroness von Hugel of her mistake.³³⁴ The CWL connection with the NUWW remained strong and in May 1912 the National Committee for Council

Unanimously agreed that the CWL should support the resolution of the industrial committee of the NUWW “that in view of the low wages and falling prices in many women’s trades the Nat. Council of the Women of Great Britain and Ireland urges on his majesty’s government the desirability of extending the Trades’ Board Act to such trades”. As a resolution to be submitted for discussion by the Council at the NUWW meeting at Oxford in October.³³⁵

The CWL co-operated in several non-Catholic activities during this period including working with the Girls’ Protection Society in caring for the large number of French female exhibition workers that arrived in London in the summer of 1908. The CWL’s involvement was justified on the grounds that most of the girls were Catholics and therefore their welfare was best placed in the hands of fellow Catholics.

Among other links forged by the CWL was that with the Women’s Industrial Council and the Home Education Congress. In December 1908 the CWL set up The Public Service Committee which advised on how women could take a larger part in public and administrative work. It was also given the task of actively seeking representation on non-Catholic societies. Unfortunately the minute books do not include the proceedings of this sub-committee apart from its first session in April 1909. The Executive was approached by several organisations which sought closer ties with the CWL, for example, the Society to Promote the Welfare of Children, campaigning against half-time education, the Westminster Social Welfare Society and the Mothers’ Union (Anglican) which wanted co-operation in its campaign against proposed changes to the divorce laws. In all these three cases the Executive displayed its usual caution. It was pointed out in the case of ‘half-time education’ that it was an area in which members might privately want to get involved but the CWL did not, as

an organization, officially join this society. Considerable time was spent at several National Committee meetings in 1912 on the CWL's possible involvement in providing insurance for Catholic women, such as domestic servants, through existing friendly societies or by helping to set up a new one.³³⁶

The caution displayed by the CWL in these early years seemed to have been dispelled by the crisis of the war years. During the war the CWL both at a national level and at branch level fostered links with a large number of non-Catholic, non-denominational organisations. In February 1920, the first annual report published after the war the following list was provided.

The League is represented on the Committee of the following societies
 Lady Rhonda's Health Committee (Ministry of Health)
 Catholic Watching Council (re Ministry of Health Bill)
 National Committee (Catholic Public Opinion)
 Catholic Federation
 National Catholic Adult Rescue Board
 National Committee (League of Nations)
 Catholic Emigration
 NCCV Diseases
 Immigration of Foreign Girls
 on 8 sub-committee of NUWW including Education, Emigration,
 Rescue
 on the Women Citizen Associations of most of the Borough Councils³³⁷

The Report also listed each branch's links with other societies. In many cases these were the local equivalents of the national societies listed above. The war had consolidated the years of hard work by the CWL and established it as a significant organization engaged in social work at the local level. At national level it was acknowledged as an important provider of voluntary social care which participated in campaigns to influence government welfare policies.

This chapter has plotted the progress of the CWL from its earliest amateurish organisation largely based in London to its position as a national society accepted within the Catholic community and respected by non-Catholic organizations. By the 1920s the founders had realised to some extent the CWL's objective of replacing individual charitable efforts with a systematic, business-like approach to social care within the Catholic community. This chapter has traced some aspects of that process which in the achievements of the war years demonstrated its ability to inspire Catholic women to engage in systematic social work. The Chapter has indicated the origins of the confidence displayed by the CWL in the first years of peace. The following chapter will analyse the theories which provided the CWL with an ideological space where it could empower its members, through education, to become activists in the public sphere without endangering their religious beliefs.

The following Chapter examines the CWL's educational theories in the context of the women's movement.

References for Chapter Five

²³¹ The Second Report: 1909 and The Fifth Report: 1912, were published as separate booklets.

²³² "The Constitution", in The Crucible, Vol. 3, No. 11, p. 188.

²³³ ECMB 1907-1909, 7 Dec. 1907 item 2, p. 81.

²³⁴ "The Constitution", op. cit. p. 188.

²³⁵ Letter from Margaret Fletcher to Archbishop Bourne, 26 Nov. (no year), Westminster Diocesan Archive.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ On the back of the Letter from Margaret Fletcher to Archbishop Bourne, his reply dated 26 Nov. (no year), Westminster Diocesan Archive.

²³⁸ ECMB, op. cit., 1907, item 6, p. 75.

²³⁹ the Catholic Who's Who and Year Book 1908, p. 230.

²⁴⁰ ECMB, op. cit., 1907, item 6, p. 76.

²⁴¹ Mabel Hope is usually referred to in the minutes as Mrs James Hope.

²⁴² This meeting was actually taking place in Ada Streeter's home.

²⁴³ ECMB, op. cit., 1907, item 6, p. 77.

- 244 Ibid.
- 245 Ibid.
- 246 ECMB, op. cit., 1907, item 6, p. 81.
- 247 The Westminster Archive does not contain these letters.
- 248 ECMB, op. cit., 1907, item 6 p. 81.
- 249 Ibid.
- 250 Ibid.
- 251 Council 1919-1925, 12-13 Feb. 1920, item ii, p. 32. (Entries in the minute books do not use a consistent numbering system.)
- 252 From a conversation with a member of the CWL at a meeting in Portsmouth in 2006 as part of the CWL centenary celebrations.
- 253 ECMB, op. cit., 1907, note e, p. 59.
- 254 Ibid.
- 255 Ibid.
- 256 The list consists of surname, initials and titles.
- 257 ECMB, op. cit., 1907, p. 49.
- 258 Ibid.
- 259 ECMB, op. cit., 1907, item 2, p. 157.
- 260 "The Constitution", op. cit. p. 189.
- 261 ECMB, op. cit., 1907, item 4, p. 91.
- 262 Tyrrell was eventually expelled from the Society of Jesus and forbidden to teach theology or carry out the duties of a priest.
- 263 ECMB, op. cit., 1907, p. 6
- 264 The name is not legible in the ECMB 1907-1909.
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Chapter Six: Empowering Catholic Women: Educational Theory in the Context of the Women's Movement

1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the theory and philosophy the CWL developed to inform the education they provided for their members. The relationship between the CWL and the wider women's movement of the early twentieth century will be considered in order to show how the CWL sought to empower Catholic women by providing a form of feminism which could co-exist with their faith. The CWL hoped that education combined with a Christian feminism would enable its members to act in the public sphere for the benefit of the poor and the Church and adapt existing traditions of education to meet its needs. This chapter will examine the aims, objectives and outcomes of their educational theory. Chapter Seven will consider the CWL's educational programme and examine the strategies it employed to achieve the hoped for outcomes.

The founders of the CWL considered education the means by which Catholic women could be recruited and trained as social workers for the Catholic poor

and for the good of the whole country. Their confidence in the power of education was partly born of the revolution in education during the nineteenth century. For women, in particular, the changes in education were the most dramatic. Members of the CWL would not only be trained to deal with the complexities of industrialized society, they would be able to steer a pathway through the women's movement without falling prey to unChristian influences and they would provide leadership for vulnerable girls of the working class. Education would benefit both the social worker and the recipient of her actions.

The founders of the CWL drew on the educational traditions located in the public schools, the high schools for girls and the Catholic convent schools, to inform their educational theory. They were prepared to adapt traditions to meet the changes in society that became apparent during the early twentieth century and in particular during and immediately after the First World War.

In this chapter the work of a number of writers who shared a set of ideas and ideals which over time coalesced to form an ideology is analysed to demonstrate how this ideology helped create an empowering position within the women's movement. None of these women had received formal education in the theory and philosophy of education and yet by sharing a particular outlook and similar approaches to the social problems of their day they were able to produce a coherent theory. Few writers tackled feminism overtly; CWL educational theory was developed in articles concerned with

social work, citizenship and social study. Margaret Fletcher was an exception among the CWL for openly referring to feminism. These writers did not always agree on such issues as the suffrage, but they did formulate a set of ideals which drew on their shared faith and its traditional morality. Margaret Fletcher produced a substantial body of work by which she made a significant contribution to the development of CWL educational theory and feminist ideology. Her unique position as founder, three times president and permanent vice-president of the CWL gave her the status as the League's leading theorist.

Iconic female figures were employed to reinforce the CWL view of the correct path for Catholic women to take while negotiating with the contemporary women's movement. These role models ranged from the sacred to the comic. Supreme among the women set before the CWL members was the Blessed Virgin (Our Lady). Both Margaret Fletcher and Agnes Gibbs called on their readers to identify with Our Lady's care of her family and her neighbours and to translate this into modern social work.³³⁸ Margaret Fletcher made a comparison between Our Lady and the Old Testament women Deborah and Jael. In her view neither Deborah, who had encouraged Israelite resistance to Canaanite domination and Jael who had deceived and then murdered the Canaanite commander Sisera³³⁹ were acceptable. For her a Protestant emphasis on such Old Testament women as "Deborah , a charismatic leader" who spurred the Israelites into action and victory at Megiddo³⁴⁰ had given women the wrong role models, at the same time as denying women the true

pattern in the form of Our Lady. The traditional image of Our Lady as the meek and humble girl held sway for these writers. Even Leonora de Alberti, the radical Catholic suffragist and critic of Margaret Fletcher, did not challenge this tradition when she rejected the anti-suffrage argument that Our Lady did not have the vote so women should not seek it.

Other iconic figures were more problematic for the CWL; the beatification of Joan of Arc in 1909 and her canonisation in 1920 brought her to the notice of Catholic women and the CWL spent much time and effort to raise funds for a memorial in Westminster Cathedral. For some Joan of Arc became almost a patron saint for Catholic women seeking a dynamic role model to emulate. The Dickensian comic character Mrs Jellyby was the anti-role model for some writers. Both Agnes Gibbs and Charles Plater tried to dispel the image of Mrs Jellyby, the failed mother and neglectful housewife of Bleak House and made the case that no such fate was inevitable for Catholic women active in the public sphere.³⁴¹

2. Traditions of Education

The educational system familiar to the CWL founding generation was class based, that is secondary schools provided for upper and middle classes in the form of public schools, private schools for boys and girls (grammar and high school) and higher education for a minority of men and women. Elementary schools gave a narrow education to the working class. The personal experiences of the founders of the CWL of this system were limited;

public schools were solely for boys, their contact would therefore be as observers of brothers, husbands and sons. Some like Margaret Fletcher, had been pupils at girls' high schools, some were convent girls. All were aware of the developments during the latter half of the nineteenth century in female education. This class based system provided them with three traditions of education to draw on and adapt to their particular circumstances and needs. The male tradition based in the public schools by the early twentieth century provided the model for all boys' secondary schools to emulate. Gary McCulloch's examination of this tradition identified its philosophy as "education for leadership" drawing on Platonic theories of selecting and training an elite for serving the community as rulers and guardians of its culture.³⁴² With their long history the public schools provided the upper classes with an English liberal education based on the classical curriculum which helped engender a sense of common purpose and the rightness of patrician rule. The nineteenth century reform of the public schools to provide this education for the upper classes meant that "in the English context the notion of education for leadership was .. closely associated with the cultivation of an existing social elite".³⁴³ While the purpose of this tradition was not to promote social mobility Gary McCulloch's work showed how the tradition was adopted and adapted by all sections of the middle class as part of their social status. By the beginning of the twentieth century the ex-public schoolboys dominated the professions, the civil service and of course government. This tradition of "education for leadership" could not be accessed in its entirety by the CWL because of its gendered nature. Only boys went to public schools, only men had access to the highest positions in government and women did

not have the same experiences of schoolboy *esprit de corps* developed through discipline, sport and a shared assumption of leadership. Yet women were already beginning to adapt male education in the high schools and at university level to serve their needs. The CWL was able to transfer part of this education to inform its own educational programme for leadership.

The girls' high-school tradition of education had by the end of the nineteenth century been established and a network of secondary schools for middle-class girls had spread across England. The first generation of pioneers in women's education such as Maria Grey, Frances Buss, Dorothea Beale and Emily Davies had campaigned for women to receive the same liberal education as men and thus demonstrated female intellectual capacity; they did not argue for a 'public school' education for girls. Such a claim would have alienated too many. These pioneers moved away from the small ladies' academy model and instead provided an education which would produce the new woman from the new schoolgirl.

As girls' secondary education expanded most headmistresses of these high schools adopted a curriculum which combined 'male' subjects and the female accomplishments associated with the Victorian drawing room, to provide a wider curriculum than was accessible to boys. Girls studied history, literature, geography, modern languages (and Latin but rarely Greek), mathematics and natural science. The aesthetic subjects, that is, music, singing and drawing were taught in the afternoons when lessons were voluntary.³⁴⁴

Headmistresses pioneering girls' education persuaded parents that their daughters should study Latin and mathematics because they had also provided a training in the feminine virtues and accomplishments. Ladylike behaviour and the maintenance of respectability were essential elements in girls' high school education. School life for girls was not an exact copy of boys' schools, while organisation, discipline, rewards and punishments always bore in mind parental expectations that their daughters would be taught the feminine virtues. Clearly they could not receive the masculine education for leadership but Hunt has also shown how early on pioneers like Frances Buss encouraged her pupils to take part in charitable work such as sewing garments for the poor. Hunt has shown how Frances Buss did believe that participation in school life would result in the acquisition of "the wider public-spiritedness of the citizen and the English gentleman".³⁴⁵ Hunt suggested that by 1900 combining an academic curriculum, designed for success in public examinations with "their nurturing of the qualities of duty, service and charity",³⁴⁶ headmistresses were attempting to reconcile two conflicting ideologies: one to fit women for employment and independence and the other to defend social constructs of femininity and the domestic ideology.³⁴⁷ This combination of intellectual endeavour, feminine accomplishments and a social sense for individual philanthropy was familiar to some members of the CWL such as Margaret Fletcher, ex-pupil of the Oxford High School for Girls.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the expansion of secondary schools for middle-class Catholic girls provided by religious orders of women. Indeed by 1900 almost every major town in England contained a convent

school with traditions often based on European models of discipline and curriculum where the emphasis was on religious observance and character formation. Many religious orders like the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus specialised in girls' education and catered for the leading families in the Catholic community. For the majority of CWL members this tradition would have been the most accessible.³⁴⁸ Convent education concentrated on developing the moral character of the girls with an emphasis on a strict observance of their religion and leading lives of quiet self-sacrifice and humility. This was both a hindrance, in producing girls unfitted for organized systematic social work, and useful with its sense of duty and religious fervour. Girls were given a sense of superiority as Catholics and a commitment to individual works of charity but there was no suggestion that women should assume a leadership role in providing such charity.

For the majority of upper and middle-class women before the First World War the education they received did not lead to professional careers, nor even employment of any kind. Many of the prejudices described by Joan Burstyn in her study of Victorian education lingered into the early twentieth century and continued to limit society's expectations of female education.³⁴⁹ As Roach has pointed out most returned to homes dominated by male bread winners where they were expected to fulfil the traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother. At best their education was valued as better fitting them as intelligent companions for their husbands and sons. If home duties allowed they could use their talents and engage in voluntary social work suitable for respectable women.³⁵⁰

The CWL were not alone in realizing that for many girls, successful at school, the years at home before marriage and with no need of seeking paid employment, could be empty and depressing or, even more debilitating to the character, filled only with pleasure and amusements. On hearing of an ex-pupil with no “energy, no perseverance” one headmistress recorded her reaction:

What a pity... the poor, the ignorant, the industrial classes, the friendless, the foreign missions... they would be to her as if they had never existed. Here was another disappointment; one more Catholic with money, brains and good health about to settle down to be a useless member of society.³⁵¹

It was from the ranks of such girls/women that the CWL sought to recruit its members. In its efforts to build on the convent tradition the CWL employed the help of Mother Mary Loyola and warmly recommended her 1907 book Home For Good to its members. Loyola’s book attempted to adapt the traditional image of the convent girl to the needs of early twentieth century society and declared:

priests may do much, laymen may do much, but unless our Catholic women, not here and there, but as a body, are what they ought to be, physically, intellectually, and spiritually, the cause of the Church in this country will be lost.³⁵²

Loyola’s rallying call to Catholic girls on leaving school fitted exactly into the ideology of the CWL. That ideology included the firm belief that large numbers of non-Catholics would be converted if the principles of the Catholic faith were seen to apply to the needs of industrialised society of the early twentieth century.

3. The Relationship of the CWL to the Women's Movement

In this chapter and throughout the thesis the various campaigns for the reform of the social/legal/political position of women are referred to as the women's movement. Among the CWL writers various phrases were used such as the Woman Question and the Women's Movement. 'Feminism' is used but rarely by the majority of these writers except in Margaret Fletcher's book Christian Feminism. This reticence can partly be explained by the CWL's ban on any references to the suffrage issue. Some women like Virginia Crawford who was a member of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society and was active in the suffrage movement did write for the CWLM. Writers such as Mabel Willison, B. Anstice Baker and Brigid Stafford may have kept the term 'feminism' out of their work to avoid alienating women for whom it was impossible to accept that someone could be both a feminist and a Catholic. 'Citizenship' was a more useful and less divisive term enabling writers like 'Audrey' in 1911 to discuss women's responsibilities in the public sphere and for Susan Cunnington in 1918 to explain "How to Use the Vote".³⁵³ In 1921 Susan Cunnington published the study manual The Christian Citizen³⁵⁴ in which she explained the basic mechanisms of local and central government. Four of the nine chapters refer to social issues: the poor, health, education and social services in relation to the community. The emphasis was on responsibilities of women as voters. Cunnington did not acknowledge any feminist heritage or contemporary feminist agenda, she wanted women to be active in the political system for the benefit of the community. Beaumont's

recent examination of mainstream women's organisations has demonstrated how this reluctance to be identified with feminism continued even up to the outbreak of the Second World War.³⁵⁵

There was no one Catholic policy, or approach to the women's movement of the early twentieth century. The Catholic hierarchy, as the official authority, did not pronounce on this movement. Ordinary members of the clergy published articles supporting nearly all shades of opinion. The leading Catholic newspaper the Tablet declared its support for women's suffrage but still ran articles by priests critical of even modest campaigns. There were Catholic women members of the militant WSPU. Members of the clergy could be found both for and against any reform of the position of women, socially and legally. Between these two extremes Catholics held a wide variety of opinions. The founders of the CWL were conscious of the danger of being too closely associated with the Women's Movement to their aspiration of uniting all Catholic women in one society.

When Margaret Fletcher in 1918 reflected on the CWL's silence on the suffrage campaigns during the years before the partial enfranchisement of women, she acknowledged that "the CWL has maintained a neutral attitude in the face of active controversy on Women's Suffrage...no other line would have been possible". Nevertheless she recognised that the price had been high: "neutrality on our part... has been a serious hindrance to the development ... [of] the building up of a definite Catholic position on social

questions.. the practical result has been that we have either avoided vital questions or touched them with nervous timidity".³⁵⁶ Whatever the truth of the "nervous timidity" nowhere in the writings of Margaret Fletcher or in the in-house publications of the CWL did women openly declare their position on suffrage.

Among those writers developing CWL educational theory, Margaret Fletcher's examination of the women's movement was carried out in articles she contributed to The Crucible and the CWLM and in her book Christian Feminism. At the heart of her attempt to formulate a feminism compatible with Catholicism was the belief that women had benefited from the spread of Christianity and that Christianity remained the only secure base for any future development. Margaret Fletcher's analysis of the impact of Christianity on society and the role of women may appear naive to twenty-first century commentators. Her view fitted in with a belief in the progressive development of history and enabled her to defend Christianity from attacks by those who saw Christianity as a repressive reactionary force in society. Margaret Fletcher's historical perspective led her to conclude that before Christianity women's only purpose was to provide for the physical needs of men. It was Christianity's insistence on monogamy and raising marriage to the status of a sacrament that had given women their equality. In acknowledging their spiritual equality with men, Christianity had given women the choice of an independent intellectual/spiritual life.³⁵⁷ Any contemporary criticism of the role of Christianity in restricting women's emancipation was explained by Margaret

Fletcher as either the result of the Reformation which had reduced woman to wife-only status, or the inability of humans to formulate law that truly reflected Christian principles, that is Catholic, as distinct from Protestant, principles. A recurring theme in her articles is the assumption that some of the difficulties facing Catholic women in relation to the women's movement would be relieved if they were more conscious of their Catholic heritage and the wisdom of the Church's teaching on the family, marriage and moral principles. For Margaret Fletcher the answer to those men and women who criticized Christianity for the injustices they perceived women to suffer from in the early twentieth century, was:

When Catholicism ceased to control and to mould woman, we see her starting upon a fresh journey, guided by a religion which embodied more of the spirit of the Old Testament than the New, which ignored the Blessed Virgin, and glorified such types as Jael and Deborah - a religion moreover which since it had no provision for her, and no need for her except as a member of a family, placed her under men's authority.³⁵⁸

This loss of status she described as a disinheritance that left women with little choice but to accept the valuation that they must succeed in marriage to acquire any status and for men to see them as "merely domestically useful or purely decorative".³⁵⁹

Margaret Fletcher commended the achievements of the pioneers in the reform of female education and saw it as an awakening from three hundred years when the woman was "untaught and inarticulate; she had endured a narrow and often monotonous lot with fortitude; she had practised an asceticism in the face of life, and a humility in the face of man, all her own".³⁶⁰

Unfortunately this period of educational reform had been succeeded by a confused state in which women sought to understand the injustices of the moral standard by rejecting Christianity and the restraints it demanded. For Margaret Fletcher confusion over the 'moral standard' was explained: Protestantism had led society to see the moral standard for men and women differently, Catholicism taught that they shared exactly the same moral responsibilities.

Margaret Fletcher's concern was for the future. Her analysis of the evolution of Christian women led her to believe that without the moral teachings of the Catholic Church, women would descend into a worse state than they had experienced hitherto. She wanted Catholic women to be taught the dignity of their inheritance and for society to benefit from the application of Catholic principles to all forms of social reform. By 1907 her concern for the direction in which the women's movement was going had increased as writers like Annette Meakin³⁶¹ gave the impression that all women were rushing headlong into a very uncertain future. Margaret Fletcher believed that the good intentions of the early educational pioneers had been taken over by what she labelled Free-Thinkers and Socialists who wanted "the restraints of the marriage tie and... any moral law whatsoever" removed and to bring about a non-Christian future for women. To highlight the dangers involved in the women's movement to society and for Catholic women attracted by the movement, she warned :

the movement in this country has arrived at a stage when the nature of some of the alliances which it has contracted by the way are becoming

apparent, and it rests with Catholics to examine the central idea and lend all possible help and support to the Christian and truly progressive elements which it contains, and to endeavour to bring the whole within the influence of the Church, where alone it can attain its full fruition.³⁶²

For Margaret Fletcher the CWL was the best means of uniting Catholic women for this task. One of the CWL's educational objectives was to increase its members' awareness of their unique heritage and to enlarge their powers to act. The outcome would be that they would make their "stand for religious liberty, for the integrity of the home, and for love of country".³⁶³

An example of an extreme position in the Catholic Church occurred in The Crucible between March 1906 and March 1909 in four lengthy extracts from Father Rösler's book The Woman Question from the Standpoint of Nature, History and Revelation. Father Augustin Rösler published his examination of the women's movement in Germany in 1893. The book was subsequently translated from the original German into several European languages and Rösler was recruited to write an article in The Catholic Encyclopaedia published in 1912.³⁶⁴ In European Feminisms 1700-1950 Karen Offen³⁶⁵ described how Rösler's work was widely circulated and carried much weight in Catholic circles. These extracts in The Crucible put forward a strongly conservative view of the rights of women based on Rösler's interpretation of Christian teaching. The first extract which appeared in March 1908 was accompanied by a couple of pages of commentary by Margaret Fletcher. In recommending the work to readers she commented:

Father Rösler is an inspiring guide, and if we cannot pledge ourselves to agree with quite all his conclusions, he at any rate lays down the lines upon which investigation should be made.³⁶⁶

It is tantalizing but Margaret Fletcher did not make clear what she did not agree with, and perhaps it was wiser not to be explicit in criticising a writer so widely accepted. Rösler's opinions were expressed in a way that allowed for no acknowledgement that Christian teaching might indicate a different interpretation. It was even more difficult to challenge the ideas of Rösler when they were presented to The Crucible by the leading churchman Dom Lambert Nolle. The three further extracts from Rösler's book were printed without any further commentary. It is hard to reconcile some of Rösler's statements with the broader aspirations of The Crucible which was founded to promote the higher education of women and aims and objectives of the CWL's educational work.

Did many of The Crucible's readers accept Rösler's claim that: "in man the muscles of the arm are specially strong, in woman those of the tongue, and this explains her facility in pronouncing foreign languages"?³⁶⁷ In the final article Rösler pronounced on the suitability of certain professions for women. Predictably for a deeply conservative analyst he only really recommends teaching and nursing. His dismissal of art and literature as suitable professions must have rankled with many of the members of the CWL. Margaret Fletcher who had trained as an artist and earned her living as an art teacher could not have read the following paragraph with agreement:

Strong and sensible piety may inspire women painters with sufficient energy to produce works of religious art which bear comparison with some works by men; but so far we have no proof that women could equal the clear and sublime concentration and the powerful execution of Fra Angelico... Raphael...Michelangelo.³⁶⁸

Nor could many of the subscribers to The Crucible have submitted to the stinging:

as far as we can judge from natural gifts and from experience we can hardly expect women to become writers or poets of the first rank; because they will not have the power and grasp to deal with great and sublime subjects.³⁶⁹

The Crucible did not have a comments page nor a correspondence section, so there were no opportunities for readers to record their reactions. No article was published directly dealing with the issues raised in these extracts, nor were there any directly challenging Rösler's opinions. However, Margaret Fletcher as editor of The Crucible did include in the September 1909 issue (the same year) a paragraph congratulating three successful Catholic women students at Oxford and Cambridge with the clear intention of encouraging others to follow these women into higher education. In March 1910 The Crucible published an article by Brigid Stafford who had received a scholarship from the CWL to enable her to further her study of economics at the London School of Economics. In her article Stafford examined many of the arguments put forward by conservatives like Rösler for the restriction of women's paid work. Stafford refuted many of these even tackling the widely held Catholic view that married women with children should not engage in paid work. She questioned the assumption that children were always better looked after by unoccupied women. Unlike many of those helping to formulate CWL attitudes to education and the women's movement she also

discussed working-class women's labour and pointed out that low wages for women were usually the result of an arbitrary decision which was not based on ideas of the family wage or lack of training.³⁷⁰

The September 1909 issue of The Crucible (the second issue following the last extract from Rösler's book) published a long article on Joan of Arc. The article makes no overt attack on the extreme conservatism of Rösler's position but the choice of Joan of Arc as the subject of an article seems deliberate. Joan of Arc had become almost a patron saint for many in the women's movement; the CWSS was renamed the St Joan's Alliance after enfranchisement. In the article the writer, B. Anstice Baker gave an account of Joan of Arc's life and drew several conclusions for her contemporaries. Baker declared: "she [Joan of Arc] teaches this age that no career unsexes a woman if undertaken and carried out at the call of duty and in a spirit of self-sacrifice",³⁷¹ which would not have found favour with Rösler who believed even the recommended career of teaching brought out and emphasized manly qualities in women. Baker posed the challenge to modern women to:

Think what it meant to do as Joan did, to undertake a career that no woman had ever undertaken before. To do what those dear to her would condemn, to fly in the face of all precedent, to outrage the conventionalities and to risk moral dangers. Yet without a word she went - no "new woman" could do more than she did. No "old woman" should do less; she did the will of God.³⁷²

By 1909 Margaret Fletcher's discomfort with many aspects of the women's movement had crystallised into specific concerns: some women's religious beliefs had been undermined by anti-Christian forces within the Women's Movement and the situation had been made worse by "the absence of an organized Christian body united on first principles, with a strong intellectual

position and definite teaching upon the evolution of woman".³⁷³ An alliance between suffrage campaigners and socialism had resulted in working-class women being targeted for propaganda which attacked the accepted moral code.

It is these concerns she tried to address in her 1909 article "The CWL and Contemporary Feminism". Margaret Fletcher provided a summary of the women's movement in Britain and some comments on events in Germany and France. She approved of the educational reforms, the demand for "more equitable laws and better economic conditions for wage-earners".³⁷⁴ Her criticism of the Women's Movement in all three countries was centred on the extent to which reforms had been linked with anti-Christian forces and the undermining of her view of Christian morality. In France the women's movement had been confined to "the camps of Freemasonry [and] Freethought and even Anarchy" (her capitals) so that for many years it was assumed that "no Feminist imagined it possible to be Feminist and also Catholic and no Catholic imagined it possible to become Feminist and remain Catholic".³⁷⁵ This situation had been redeemed by the work of Mlle Maugeret³⁷⁶ who had seen "the harmony which exists between many of the new claims and the Church's teaching". She saw the gain to religion if Christian women were, in their turn, "active pioneers of a Christian Feminism".³⁷⁷ Margaret Fletcher hoped that similar service could be done for Catholic women in England. Fletcher wanted members of the CWL to be able to defend the Church's teaching on the family and the role of women and participate in the development of a Christian Feminism similar to the French

position. With proper study and understanding of the issues and armed with the Church's teachings, she wanted CWL members to actively engage with working-class girls and women and supply them with the intellectual equipment to refute the extreme ideas to be found in penny pamphlets advocating a socialist future where responsibility for children would fall to the state and where enthusiasm for religion would be replaced by commitment to socialism.

Nearly six years after the appearance of the article "The CWL and Contemporary Feminism" she published a book in the series Catholic Studies in Social Reform as part of the CSG's educational programme. In this volume Margaret Fletcher set out her understanding of Christian Feminism. The expansion of the CWL into a national organization, the war time experience of CWL members and the contribution of commentators such as Agnes Gibbs and M. B. Willison enabled Margaret Fletcher to write her analysis of Christian Feminism with confidence. The majority of the book is a factual summary of the laws that pertained to women in their private lives and property law, in employment and industry.

Margaret Fletcher was concerned that for many women "the moral law is apt to be obscured, ignored, or denied"³⁷⁸ when the term feminism was used. To make the moral law clear she set out "the clear definition of spiritual things... the Church... has come to possess through the penetrating discernment of her grace-illuminated children, a number of exact definitions".³⁷⁹ Margaret

Fletcher had an explanation for anyone dismayed that so much of a study manual should be given over to definitions:

untrained minds of an energetic cast...[experience] a certain amount of discouragement in finding so many unprovable principles definitely settled... Such people welcome a purely secular movement ... They are often heard to say with evident satisfaction that such and such a question has nothing to do with religion, whereas ultimately everything has to do with religion and every question sends some root down till it touches a moral law.³⁸⁰

She described the Church's teaching on topics ranging from the sex of the soul to self-sacrifice and liberty. Using a didactic tone Fletcher established the equal nature of the human soul and the independence of human development and declared: "Consequently a woman has an inalienable right to all that makes up her personality, including the free exercise of her religion as part of her spiritual existence."³⁸¹ The section "Destiny" consisted of the one line statement, "Woman's destiny like man's is Eternal Life." While her theology was not new, including such statements in this context did convey a sense of empowerment for the woman reader/student.

Margaret Fletcher's feminism was, however, not revolutionary. She posed the question:

If, on the one hand, we see in Courts of Law efforts to harmonize Divine and human justice, why on the other do we often find such unequal justice in *social* life in the matter of the same sin committed by a man or a woman, an inequality which bears hardly on the woman? (original emphasis).³⁸²

She did not use the feminist answer to this injustice that society often employed a double standard of morality, rather her explanation implied that woman's sin was more damaging to society than man's sin.

This conservatism is apparent in the section on marriage. Margaret Fletcher repeated the Church's teaching that as marriage is a sacrament it cannot be removed or dissolved. Returning to her theme of the equal application of the moral law she pointed out that "on reciprocal fidelity to these laws rests the stability and happiness of the whole social fabric".³⁸³ Despite this emphasis on the equal nature of marriage she endorsed traditions of male authority by stating that this authority was "for the good of those subject to it".³⁸⁴ This predictable assent to the Church's teachings on marriage and her abhorrence of divorce were tempered by listing the laws that secured to women their rights to resist tyrannical husbands, to have custody of children and to dispose of their property.

The book provided the reader/student with a comprehensive list of the laws governing the employment of women in industry. These changes from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth were presented as one of progress, and she gave little credit to the working-class struggle. Margaret Fletcher pointed out how some laws designed to temper the conditions of female factory workers had been circumvented by employers. On the whole she saw the solution to the hardships working-class women experienced, not in better employment legislation but in the establishment of the family wage for married men. She did not challenge the conservative view that working-class wives should be in the home. To Margaret Fletcher and many of the

CWL writers on social issues the injustice lay in the lack of a living wage, not in the conditions found in the workplace. The book concluded:

Christian Feminism seeks to build upon Christian principles, and to discover for women a wider scope for the development and exercise of their powers in conformity with these, and thus to procure for them a greater share of justice in social life.³⁸⁵

To what extent individual members of the CWL agreed with her theories of Christian Feminism or how much they diverged from it is not easy to ascertain, but as a society the CWL did not challenge the traditional roles of women in the home. The founders of the CWL did, however, reject the rigid interpretation of the separate spheres ideology and argued that it was a woman's duty to move outside her home and engage in a narrow field of activity deemed particularly suited to womanly concerns of education, care of children and improvement in the homes of the poor. For the founders of the CWL, Christian Feminism empowered them to recruit women who already manifested elite qualities, who would be willing to undergo an educational process to form them into leaders of the Catholic community and act in the public sphere for the benefit of the wider community.

A number of writers contributed to the CWL understanding of Christian Feminism by developing arguments designed to encourage Catholic women to engage in social work and participate in community-based decision making open to women. One of the earliest to attempt to formulate a coherent theory was Charles Plater, a Jesuit priest, a personal friend of Margaret Fletcher and a supporter of the CWL. Charles Plater's main concern was encouraging

Catholic working-class men to study the Catholic faith and become leaders in their community. To this end he founded the Catholic Social Guild (CSG). After the First World War he conceived the idea of the Catholic Workers College, renamed Plater College after his death in 1921. In 1911 Charles Plater went to the heart of the problem that confronted the CWL when he described:

those who fear that social action may hinder the performance of home duties. They contend that woman's sphere is the home, and that excursions beyond that sphere should be sternly discouraged. They are haunted by the ghost of Mrs Jellyby... They plead for the old-fashioned and quiet utilities of the home.³⁸⁶

Agnes Gibbs portrayed the dilemma even more clearly as she tried to remove it. She acknowledged "the great and extraordinary changes in the position of women" and asserted "women, nowadays must go out to work, they can no longer remain in their own homes...they have a mission to fulfil in the social, political, and intellectual world". However, she could not let go of the Pauline advice that a virtuous woman "must always live a more or less hidden life" and rejected the idea that changed times had made this advice "obsolete". She suggested that the woman out in the world must find a way:

of cherishing that divinely bestowed quality which can hardly be analyzed but is understood when we use the word 'womanliness' ... qualities which thrive only in a soil of modesty and retirement.³⁸⁷

Charles Plater never quite got to grips with what a Catholic woman should actually do but Agnes Gibbs was blunter when she declared:

the ideal woman should have her vocation clearly mapped out in her own mind... no woman should live an aimless existence. The best and most important work to which any woman can devote her energies...

whether married or spinster... is what is generally known as 'social work'...in schools, on committees, in workhouses, among the sick, the crippled, the poor.³⁸⁸

However, she was forced to conclude that at the time the number of Catholic women so engaged was very small and most of them were overworked and so with one last attempt to reach the reluctant volunteer she referred to the biblical metaphor of the vineyard and the harvest and asserted " there is no surer sign of our love for God than work for our helpless neighbour".³⁸⁹

After trying to prove that a Catholic woman properly educated to develop her "social sense" far from neglecting her home duties, would in fact perform them more willingly, Charles Plater concluded that the real reason

which keeps most Catholic women back from social action is not any deliberate objection to such action but merely – lack of interest. The message has not come home to them. They do not realize what the Church wants of them.³⁹⁰

Charles Plater did not spell out "what the Church wants", his article implied it. He recommended to his readers that the Catholic Social Guild could supply the message while the CWL could now provide effective and safe methods of social action.

In her article Agnes Gibbs assumed that social work outside the home was accepted as the means by which Catholic women fulfilled their Christian duty. She examined the conflicts in such a situation as caricatured by Dickens in the form of Mrs Jellyby. She recognised that the conflict lay in Mrs Jellyby's engagement in public affairs despite the claims of the home and the neglect of

“the cultivation of those modest womanly virtues which will only grow in the soil of home life and home-affections”.³⁹¹

Agnes Gibbs supplied a number of answers to this dilemma. Firstly, the individual worker had to accept her limits and be prepared to see opportunities neglected in order that she fulfil “higher or more primary duties” and secondly, more women should get involved. The answer of course was to join a committee and the implication, though not explicit in the article, was to join a CWL committee. Agnes Gibbs assumed her readers would agree with her “that women... are the best fitted to help the poor, comfort the sorrowful, nurse the sick, feed the hungry and teach the children”,³⁹² but she put forward another reason for organisation. Only through co-operation and the understanding of the economics of modern society could the traditional acts of charity make a difference.

Aware of the criticism the would-be Mrs Jellybys suffered, Agnes Gibbs provided an analysis of church history in order to prove that ‘association’ is entirely within the traditions of being a Catholic. Having proved the need for association she then made it clear that what was needed was “an army not a mob” and the only way to achieve this was “the committee – the means to produce, perfect, and perpetuate [an] organization”.³⁹³ Having argued in favour of committees she was forced to admit that:

the Catholic woman, in spite of her religious faith and strong piety, dislikes committee work, doesn’t see the use of it, and when she does allow that committees are a necessity, does not know how to serve on them.³⁹⁴

Charles Plater understood this problem in moral terms and identified “the self-centred benefactress” who would only work in isolation and refused to cooperate with others. Both writers saw the CWL as part of the solution. Agnes Gibbs set out to reassure her readers that “a committee is not such a very formidable affair” and spent some time explaining how one should work. She recommended that “training will come with actual experience”.³⁹⁵

In an article ascribed to “Audrey”³⁹⁶ the inertia identified both by Charles Plater and Agnes Gibbs was examined again and she concluded that the “enforced idleness imposed upon Catholics in penal times, still holds in its grip far too many”.³⁹⁷ She was more strident than them in her rejection of “inertia” and stated plainly, “we cannot plead ignorance in order to shirk our duties, for we know we are answerable for each other’s welfare”.³⁹⁸ One reason for this stern tone becomes clear when the writer pointed out that “we must take our part in all social activities, parochial, municipal, charitable, for if we stand idle the work will be done by others” by which she meant the socialists. “Audrey” like many Catholics at this time saw socialism as the enemy of Christianity and dreaded its growing hold over the working class. “Audrey” went on to recommend two ways in which her newly awakened citizens could find the right direction to exercise their sense of responsibility: by studying the Catholic Social Year Book (produced by the Catholic Social Guild) and by contacting the Information Bureau of the Catholic Women’s League.

Taking as her starting point the familiar theme, already discussed by Agnes Gibbs and Charles Plater, of the reluctance of Catholic women to join organisations, Margaret Fletcher used the National Catholic Congress held in Newcastle in August 1911, to reach out to such women. Her paper, reproduced in the CWLM September issue, described these women as still uncommitted and “have hitherto discouraged or distrusted the active work of lay-women”³⁹⁹ and challenged them to change their minds. By referring to the International Federation of Catholic Women’s Leagues, she sought to demonstrate that the work of the English CWL was in tune with traditional Catholicism and she described the work being done as: “the Church ... calling together an army of Christian women to work under her leadership...for Catholic ideals in every place of social life”.⁴⁰⁰ Margaret Fletcher hoped this would provide a strong enough argument to win recruits to the CWL.

The CWSS, a much smaller society, took a far more radical position than the CWL. Leonora de Alberti, one of the founders of the CWSS and editor of The Catholic Suffragist⁴⁰¹ criticised the CWL for its silence on women’s suffrage. In a review of Christian Feminism de Alberti particularly objected to Margaret Fletcher’s definition:

Revolutionary Feminism, founded on a claim to equality of the sexes and freedom for complete self-realization for the individual, is seeking to make a new path and is convinced that whatever seems to obstruct this work stands, for that reason, condemned, whether it be revealed religion or traditional morality.⁴⁰²

Her first challenge is to Margaret Fletcher’s use of “revolutionary”. De Alberti pointed out that only a few years before Margaret Fletcher herself would have earned this tag. Certainly Fletcher had benefited from the opening of the

Oxford High School for Girls, where she had been both a pupil and a teacher. In the 1880s she had participated in a challenge to the authorities at the Slade School of Art in London where she had objected to the restrictions placed on women students. In Christian Feminism Margaret Fletcher made a distinction between the demand for educational reform and later demands for social reform that became part of the women's movement. De Alberti's review also refuted Fletcher's objection to feminist demands for "complete self-realization" by referring to earlier chapters in Christian Feminism where Margaret Fletcher had confirmed the right of a woman to seek her spiritual and intellectual development and the sinfulness of either giving it up or being forced to surrender it to another. Surely, de Alberti argued, that is what feminists mean by self-realization. De Alberti did acknowledge that Christian Feminism contained some useful information but in general she objected to anyone who used religion to refute feminism. Her reply to this standpoint was to lament how "Christians are much too apt to pass off their own narrow views as immutable Christian principles."⁴⁰³

De Alberti also challenged those who used "pious" arguments against women having the vote. She identified at least five arguments, including: Our Lady did not need the vote nor do I, women should be meek and humble, and women should remain aloof from politics. De Alberti objected to these "opponents" who wrongly believed the Church had made any ruling on women's suffrage. Susan Cunnington made a similar point when she reinforced Margaret Fletcher's argument against such a view:

the sanctions of our holy religion are for principles not details... instead of being universal [they] would be temporary, national, even local.⁴⁰⁴

De Alberti's answer to those who complained that the women's movement was in the hands of atheists even in Catholic countries was to cry "shame on the laggard Catholics who had allowed this tremendous force... to be lost to Christianity".⁴⁰⁵

Opposed to the official CWL attitude to social reform, de Alberti believed the best way of securing social reforms was by securing the vote for women. Writers like Gibbs and Fletcher might argue that it was a Catholic woman's duty to assist the poor by venturing out into the public sphere and engaging in social work but de Alberti declared:

Yes, woman's chief sphere is the home, and that alone is an overwhelming argument for the vote; she needs it to protect her home, she needs it to safeguard her children, she needs it to defend herself. There are reforms which will be never more than played with until women are a power, a voting power in the land.⁴⁰⁶

Susan Cunnington's review of Christian Feminism appeared in the CWLM and was, hardly surprisingly, more favourable than de Alberti's. Susan Cunnington commended Margaret Fletcher's efforts to clarify and define areas that many Catholic women found perplexing. Cunnington believed that even:

the most rebellious Feminist may be well content with this [book] it is a dignified rendering of what is summed up in the demand for the woman's point of view.⁴⁰⁷

Christian feminism was followed within a year with new moves towards partial enfranchisement of women. In the Autumn of 1917 both Margaret Fletcher

and Ada Streeter published articles to reassure CWL members that enfranchisement would not alter the League.

We are and we shall always remain a non-political society. Our purpose has been, and is, to organise the Catholic women of the country in practical effort for Catholic social work, and as a consequence to develop and make effective the Catholic position in interdenominational relationships... The CWL has maintained a neutral attitude in the face of active controversy on Woman's Suffrage... no other line would have been possible to any body created with the object of uniting all women ...developing social work for the Catholic Church.⁴⁰⁸

The CWL could not stand still as the new situation in terms of women's responsibilities meant new challenges for the CWL and Margaret Fletcher indicated the next stage for the CWL was to tackle "all those other matters in which legislation touches the practical lives of women".⁴⁰⁹ She saw clearly that

the Catholic woman voter would not be left as an untilled field. She would be canvassed in the usual way in some political interest, she would be visited by the agents of endless zealous societies, all bent on social reconstruction". The role of the CWL was to be that of educator so that Catholic women would "get a grasp of the principles which should unite us".⁴¹⁰

Ada Streeter's article also considered the challenges arising from the new situation which would mean

an enormous responsibility on all Christian *women* to prepare themselves for the exercise of the vote... the full utilisation of the influence they already possess, by studying the application of Christian principles to the problems of social life.⁴¹¹ (original emphasis)

Her article was designed to encourage the membership to see the forthcoming enfranchisement as a great opportunity to do what they had always been trying to do. She wanted Catholic women to see the League as the medium through which to channel their new power because it "possesses

a fully equipped machinery for the expression of collective opinion... for the declaration of a definite policy".⁴¹²

4. The Aims and Objectives of the CWL's Educational Theory

A. Aims

The founders of the CWL believed that as Catholic women they had "a central motive power [directing] the wish to draw together and to organize ourselves, that by educating one another we may work more effectively for the Catholic Church in this country".⁴¹³ This creation of an organisation was an essential aim of its educational programme. Only through organisation could Catholic women begin:

the discovery of our weakness, and our strength, and the possibility of directing workers and help to weak places, the stirring up of interest in social work, gaining recruits among the young, dispelling apathy... by enlisting the service of brain-workers in the study of social science, and utilizing the energy of simple, practical people of leisure who could carry out efficiently what they could not perhaps initiate.⁴¹⁴

Their educational aims were part of a much larger enterprise which Lucy Wyatt Papworth, using words borrowed from both Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster and the 1890 encyclical of Leo XIII showed that the need was not only to engage in social work but also to realise that "all the forces of evil are co-ordinated and the enemies of the Church are co-ordinated".⁴¹⁵ While an individual has a duty to "show forth his faith, either to instruct and encourage others of the faith, or to repel the attacks of unbelievers" it was not only unwise "to enter the field as isolated champions of the faith" but

unnecessary because a league of Catholic women would co-ordinate the defence of Catholicism.

Margaret Fletcher identified the importance of the CWL's aim of creating an organization with her analysis, in 1906, that while Catholic women were rich in the spiritual life and many were very active in individual acts of charity, the situation in the early twentieth century was of "isolation" with individual associations "quite out of touch with one another" so that anyone trying to understand the present situation was like someone without a map having to navigate by "calling at island after island".⁴¹⁶ For Fletcher that individualism was no longer appropriate because the situation had fundamentally changed in two respects: the advent of the women's movement during which women had been the target of non-religious influences and the spread of industrialisation and urbanisation. Margaret Fletcher saw women engaged in a conflict for which the imagery of war was appropriate to convey the urgency that she felt. She declared, in 1906, that the defence of Catholicism required: "to put into the field trained bands of women intellectually the equals, spiritually and morally the superiors [of] the women in the opposite camps".⁴¹⁷

In order to form such bands of trained women the CWL had to overcome two problems which combined to make many Catholic women reluctant to join an organisation. The first was in part the product of the traditional convent schooling. The founders therefore encouraged Catholics and especially heads of convent schools to re-interpret their lessons in self-sacrifice so that they would see that "every one of you [has] a vocation... a grand task in life

waiting. Go out to meet it bravely.” Well-meaning piety was no longer enough because “in the social worker⁴¹⁸ of to-day qualifications are called for which [were] never dreamed of twenty years ago... the modern district visitor must know what ... [the law] is and where to complain and to whom”.⁴¹⁹

The CWL aimed, through its educational programme, to achieve a fusion of traditional feminine qualities with the skills required of the social worker who would bring to the care of the poor a more business-like approach and a knowledge of local and state welfare provision. The CWL was committed to encouraging English Catholic women to “do our *own* thinking”⁴²⁰ and the League “to fill up the many and varied gaps in our social education as quickly as we can”.⁴²¹

B. The Objectives

In order to achieve their aims, the founders of the CWL set out to recruit an elite force of Catholic women. Naturally, they sought this elite among the sections of society they were most familiar with, that is from the upper and middle classes. It was women from these classes whose own education drew on the three traditions already discussed. It was assumed that these women had the potential for leadership. Therefore despite its founders’ protestations that the CWL was open to all classes it drew its membership, certainly up to the First World War, from the upper and middle classes. The majority of the Catholic community were working class of Irish descent, therefore this made it easier to recognise the sought after qualities in the small upper and middle-class pool. The CWL’s decision not to recruit women

from the working class was examined in an earlier chapter. Margaret Fletcher made it clear that the CWL needed women with at least two qualities, experience in social work and intelligence; she recognised that these might be found together in the same person or separately, and that united they could form “an organisation with a brain”.⁴²²

It was an objective of the CWL to recruit an elite which would be willing to undergo an educational process to enable them to represent the Catholic community in the public sphere. It was generally believed that the ills of their society were the result of “the case of the Catholic point of view is entirely unrepresented and that Catholic interests go by default”,⁴²³ and that better solutions could be found if Catholic principles and Catholic teaching could be brought to bear on them. This objective was made clear at one of the earliest meetings of the CWL when on 16 March 1907 Lucy Wyatt Papworth explained that “...too often the Catholic view was simply passed over because there was no one to voice it... nor was there necessarily any hostility to the Catholic position. It was simply ignored.”⁴²⁴

Another CWL objective was to provide the Catholic community with “an organism with a brain composed of the most able and experienced lay workers in every branch of work, allied with the most highly trained and capable thinkers”.⁴²⁵ The founders were aware that many women, regardless of their schooling were inadequately educated to achieve this objective. As editor of The Crucible, Fletcher had realised that many Catholic women were

engaged in social work but they “were almost invariably overworked for want of the helpers who were really just round the corner ... but had no means of meeting and discussing their work and experiences or, as Catholics, debating upon the suitability of methods”.⁴²⁶ The CWL wanted to convert Catholic secular social work from the informal and individualistic to a more formal united effort. The CWL was aware that many convent schools were beginning to encourage their pupils to engage in social care among the poor of the Catholic community. The CWL set out to recruit this new generation and transform it into social workers by providing the training and organization needed.

The ability to be efficient fund raisers was also a skill the CWL sought to encourage and develop through its educational programme. Although the majority of the earliest members of the CWL were free from the constraints of earning their own living, the Catholic community was not wealthy and all CWL projects involved extensive fund raising. Many of the activities generated in the branches were in part seen as opportunities to increase resources to fund social work such as clubs for working class girls. During the war demands for money and comforts for the wounded became incessant in the CWLM.

These appeals were expressed in very direct terms as when on 19 March 1916 the editor declared:

if every member who was going to buy a new blouse or hat, gave up the project and continued with the old one; if every member going to buy one book or one seat at a theatre, denied herself and went without it, sending the small sum (for in war-time no one can spend much, even on a hat!) to help us equip our Hut for our Catholic soldiers – why

it would be furnished in no time, and the money sacrificed would be enduring in its effects, and in the happiness it gives, which is more than can be said for either of the other ways of spending it! Just one act of self-denial for our soldiers, Leaguers it is 'up to you' to make that Hut at Westminster the best equipped in London. Will you fail us? NO: LEAGUERS NEVER FAIL.⁴²⁷

The CWL did raise considerable sums before and during the First World War employing a variety of methods from private subscriptions to the selling of the 'corporate image' in the form of membership badges.

An important objective was to encourage this elite group of women, whatever their social class, to be in touch with the women and girls of the Catholic working class. Some members would even be in "close association with mankind, whose work lies often among the young, the sick, or the destitute".⁴²⁸ The CWL provided many opportunities such as working and living in CWL settlement and rescue houses, helping to run girls' clubs, visiting mothers' groups where this objective could be realised. Once familiar with Catholic working-class women CWL members would

counteract, in however slight a degree, the ever-increasing spirit of materialism, love of pleasure, and indifference to religion of the age in which we live... to use every effort to keep in touch with the younger generation, in order to save them from, or to lessen, the evil influences surrounding them. Social guilds, or clubs for girls have, therefore, two purposes, namely, to keep our Catholic girls together and to learn to know them individually, and to endeavour, by means of instruction and healthy recreation, to promote a sound mind in a sound body.⁴²⁹

None of these objectives were expected to be an excuse for women to abandon the qualities associated with the traditional roles of wife and mother advocated by the Church. The CWL did recognise that there was a new

generation of women who had some of the qualities desirable in its members.

A CWL objective was:

to utilize the education, the aspirations, the social duties and amusements, the 'go' of the modern girl with those qualities which are the characteristics of true womanhood.⁴³⁰

Loyola was convinced this could be done because if "Catholic girls and women of our own time, who as truly and as closely follow in the footsteps of the Maiden Mother"⁴³¹ joined the CWL they would be guided by the company of like minded women.

C. Skills

The founders of the CWL assumed that women from the upper and middle classes would have the skills of leadership they believed were innate characteristics of their social class, but they also recognised that for many women these skills were underdeveloped. These skills were particularly important as from the outset the CWL experienced opposition to its leadership from many directions, from parish clergy, other Catholic organisations such as the Ladies of Charity and anonymous critics referred to in editorials in the CWLM. Criticism that the CWL was not spiritual, too secular, too concerned with procedure were all strongly countered in the pages of the CWLM.

Criticism was also countered by a strict observance of correct procedure in all sections of the CWL's machinery of government. The CWL provided for its members "special opportunities for studying the various social problems and perplexing questions... to form opinions consistent with the teaching of the Catholic Church"⁴³² and participate in "discussions from a Catholic standpoint upon religious, philosophical, historical, literary and artistic subjects and upon

social, industrial and economic questions".⁴³³ However, it did not expect a bland acquiescence. Members were warned that there would be differences of opinion. Women who served on its committees would find they consisted of "intelligent people with views of their own [who] know how to express them and to modify [them] if necessary... know how to give way readily when... [they are] in the wrong."⁴³⁴ Members who had practised the skills of committee work were encouraged to look for opportunities to serve on Boards of Poor Law Guardians, town and county councils and industrial committees. Members were not expected to confine their activities only to the needs of the Catholic poor. The CWL sent official delegates to participate in NUWW campaigns such as the 1913 Anti-Sweating demonstration; during the war they were expected to engage in the voluntary work done by non-denominational societies. Members were expected to know the Catholic principles which guided the Church's social policy and to be able to explain them, when appropriate, to non-Catholics. It was assumed that members would demonstrate how leadership in the public sphere could be combined with a devout observance of their faith.

The old skills associated with good will, self-sacrifice and saintly philanthropy were recognised as no longer sufficient to help the poor and disadvantaged in the urbanised society of the large industrial towns of early twentieth century Britain. New skills were needed to study social science, the laws of economics and the machinery of state and local government welfare provision. A CWL worker was expected to use the decision-making process at local

government level in order to bring about improvements in welfare provision, housing, schools and all forms of poor relief.

The founders of the CWL defended the secular approach of the League and they explained that, “by its Lectures, Debates, Essay Club, Study Club and its insistence on correct Committee procedure, it seeks to equip its members to take their place creditably among non-Catholics in public life.”⁴³⁵ The CWL provided its members with the knowledge and skills that would transform them from well-meaning amateurs to trained workers because as Bourne explained at a CWL AGM, he understood that

the League had come into being because it is felt the League was required to give to Catholic Women workers the opportunity to work...As everybody knows, any and all good works could be better done by those who were trained to them than by those who had received no training.⁴³⁶

The training the CWL provided was designed to give Catholic women the skills resulting from

serious study, [which] becomes every year more necessary among us as our social legislation becomes more complicated and searching. To be a competent Care Committee secretary... an efficient health visitor... requires a real working knowledge of various acts of parliament and of local administration.⁴³⁷

There was a sense that the acquisition of this knowledge was urgent because other denominational groups and non-Christian groups such as the socialists were already active and that Catholics had been left behind.

The long standing commitment to study skills became much more overt policy during the war. The CWLM was employed to encourage this. Some of this may have been aimed at new readers drawn from the increased membership of the League as branches multiplied. Virginia Crawford began the new campaign with "Social Study in War Time" hoping to draw into a programme of study those whose social conscience had been newly aroused by the war and who were no longer satisfied with a life entirely of pleasure. She included in her article the reassurance that the CWL would be able to provide the means for women to study by organising study circles and putting members in touch with one another. She listed sources of information such as the CSG which had published several pamphlets by Virginia Crawford, Margaret Fletcher and Agnes Gibbs. Study would reveal "our general social and civic aims coincide with that of non-Catholics, our line of study must be laid to meet our special needs".⁴³⁸ Once armed with the results of this "serious study", Virginia Crawford exhorted Catholic women to get involved in public life and "push their way on to our Town and Borough Councils... [because] one active, well-informed, persistent Councillor can effect wonders in improving slum conditions".⁴³⁹ Bretherton pointed out a danger for untrained women: "anyone attempting work which involved the spending of public money should have a training other than the dictates of a kindly heart so often led astray by an ill-instructed head".⁴⁴⁰ Serious study and a training in social issues would enable them to see beyond the "sensational" and "one-sided explanations" which appeared in the press. Acknowledging her admiration for Virginia Crawford's

earlier article, Bretherton also advocated the pamphlets of the CSG as a study resource.

The CWL intended its members to develop the habit of studying social issues. The knowledge provided by the CWL for its members was wide ranging. For example between May and December 1916 the CWLM ran a series of articles under the heading of "Social Study Series" covering such topics as the English Poor Law, the Workers' Educational Association and child emigration to Canada. To excite further study articles began to carry a short bibliography such as M. L. D. Sharples' two articles. Writers like Sharples suggested that a higher standard of authorship was sought by the CWL and that it was assumed that readers would develop the skills and the inclination to pursue a topic outside the pages of the CWLM.

The knowledge of social issues was a CWL objective from its inception and the acquisition of the necessary study skills was a subject frequently returned to, for example, in May 1916 in an article written by Margaret Fletcher. She encouraged the formation of study and discussion circles among CWL members. Margaret Fletcher's "Study Circles and Discussion Circles" did not provide the same practical instructions given in earlier articles. She tried to answer the question: "Why is the idea of a study circle so formidable, indeed to some minds, so repellent?" She identified the problem that for many women a study circle was too reminiscent of school days. Her solution was to

recommend study circles to young girls and women who still had the study habit. For older women, there was the "Discussion Circle" which would:

meet at stated intervals and exchange experiences and thoughts on either subjects arising from their own work, [or] some other department of the League... and everyone's mind will have in some way been enlarged as a result of the discussion... It is a comparatively easy matter, when the subject for the next meeting has been chosen, for one or two members to find the time to procure information which will be new to others... In this very simple unpretentious way, I am sure that a great deal can be done to remove ignorance, to stimulate interest and fill the still thin ranks of social workers.⁴⁴¹

By 1916 after two years of war and ten years since the formation of the CWL, the League realised it needed to adapt its educational programme to fit the new situation. Mary Mackellar's article identified the change with her assumption that it was no longer necessary to persuade women to move outside the home. The point was that modern girls wanted an occupation but few had the necessary knowledge to undertake useful work. The education and class system had combined to produce "girls [who] have a better knowledge of the ancient Greeks than of the lives and conditions of the working classes" and who "imagine themselves a different order of being, possessing quite another set of feelings, to those whom they herd in one mass as 'the poor'". She did not disparage the convent girl or the college girl from Girton or Newnham but more was needed :

The social worker to be an asset to the state must be trained... an acquaintance with the 'Poor Law' and the 'Insurance Bill' is necessary... a thorough knowledge of the correct administration of relief is vital, for upon this pivot the whole question of true and false charity revolves... she is animated by a strong spiritualizing force... she should possess 'friendly' feeling, a wide love of humanity, and a deep and real sympathy with its weaknesses... the Catholic girl whose ideal of womanhood is of the highest, should be the foremost in the

ranks of workers, carrying her spiritualizing force to counterbalance those who work from purely humanitarian principles.⁴⁴²

Not all the sought-after skills were intellectual. Members joining this elite were expected to be prepared to engage in practical social work which would mean “working *for* others [which] means working *with* others ... that co-operation is essentially Christian and essentially womanly”.⁴⁴³ This co-operation would be manifested in sympathy, tact and “above all the spiritual insight given her by her religion”.⁴⁴⁴

Writers like Willison recommended that the CWL could learn from the women’s movement and develop the skills of co-operation and experience “learning to stand together shoulder to shoulder ...[to find] the support, moral and physical of numbers, the strength derived from co-ordinated action” . The implication was that Catholic women could find a similar experience to suffrage campaigners. The CWL in developing their theory of education recognised the experience of the power of solidarity and understanding which had widened “the horizon of usefulness and responsibility, and ... opened wells of sympathy which are all the more valuable because they are full not only of understanding but experience”.⁴⁴⁵ Moreover according to Willison, “it is precisely this protecting solidarity that the Catholic Women’s League offers to each individual member... she shares in the volume of Catholic thought and activity which is gathered together into the League”.⁴⁴⁶

Communication was a highly prized skill. Members were expected to be able to communicate with, firstly, fellow members of the CWL. Formal

communication was done through the hierarchy of branch committees and national delegates to Council. The CWLM was valued as a regular, inexpensive means of communication but members were encouraged to participate, at branch level, in a variety of activities. These activities ranged from serious educative lectures,⁴⁴⁷ to ones of entertainment such as lantern shows of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, railroad pioneering in India, Browning's shorter poems,⁴⁴⁸ whist drives, choral evenings and summer garden parties. All of these were used to create a sense of fellowship and unity.

Secondly members were expected to communicate and interact with those they tried to help. Some idea of the approaches recommended can be found in articles such as one that provided instruction on running a girls' club. Members were reminded that girls joined clubs for a good time and did not want good work thrust upon them, rather leaders and girls should work together as friends.⁴⁴⁹ Leaders were further encouraged to form a committee of girls and give the committee members tea on a Sunday afternoon. Such friendships were not expected to cross the class divide and members were instructed "never to make a girl discontented with her own class; it is a great mistake, as wrong to her and to those with whom she lives".⁴⁵⁰ How skilful members were in dealing sympathetically with the poor is not recorded. Nor is any opposition from recipients of their philanthropy recorded in the sources.

The CWL did exercise discipline in order to ensure its elite retained the approval of the hierarchy, an essential relationship if it was to be able to

confer on its members the status of leadership in the Catholic community. At no time did the CWL seek to challenge the power of the hierarchy (male) and indeed deferred to it by submitting its Council decisions to the Archbishop of Westminster for ratification.

5. The Impact of the First World War

By the beginning of 1914 the CWL had achieved many of its educational aims and objectives. It had demonstrated its ability to recruit large numbers of Catholic women into an organisation that had many branches across the country and it had both nationally and at local level engaged in social work. Margaret Fletcher's 1907 reflection that: "Catholics in England are admittedly reluctant to draw together, but this is a symptom that should yield to treatment,"⁴⁵¹ had proved correct. This reluctance she had identified was the result of an outlook that enabled the persecuted minority to survive the penal years as individuals living peaceably under absolute government. The CWL had benefited from the changes brought about in the relationship between the Catholic community and the state. As the CWL had spread-out from its London base it grew in confidence.

Involvement in the international Catholic women's movement enabled it to communicate with similar elites across national boundaries. This international dimension provided opportunities for CWL members to further develop their study skills. Other advantages of belonging to this federation arose out of

the organization of Catholic effort for the advancement of the Church's interests and the spread of her principles – we gain a clearer insight into the work which confronts us, by learning to see with each other's eyes the aspect presented by the state of other nations.⁴⁵²

The international movement studied similar social issues to those that concerned the English CWL such as the White Slave Trade. Although the war disrupted the international movement the CWL maintained its interest in other leagues located in Allied nations. International conferences resumed after the war and eventually German delegates were allowed to attend.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 gave the CWL the opportunity to demonstrate the fulfilment of their objective to have:

in the course of time, branches ... all over the United Kingdom... then, we may fittingly liken one part of the League's work to a system of telephone wires at the service of Catholic enterprises. Anyone desiring to organise or expand some benevolent undertaking will find the League at their service.⁴⁵³

The "benevolent undertaking" of the CWL was the emergency provision of homes and comforts for large numbers of Belgian refugees that arrived in London in the first weeks of the war. As the war continued CWL confidence in the machinery of their organisation increased. The CWL was proud of its ability to place a large number of voluntary workers at the disposal of both the Church and state for war work. The CWL's achievement of building and staffing canteen huts both at home and abroad, of providing children's homes for Belgian refugees and hostels/rescue homes for women munition workers can be seen as a successful outcome of their earlier educational programmes. The war also saw a remarkable growth in the membership and organisation of

the CWL. By March 1917 the editor of the CWLM felt it necessary to both welcome new members and explain the League's role:

the League? It exists, no doubt, more to carry out ideas than to form opinions. It accepts the ruling of authority and sets to work to achieve results formed on lines thus derived, by trying to inspire energy, and then organizing it. It is not required of members of the League to lay down or change any opinions they may hold, but they are asked to enlarge their knowledge of the facts of social life and its conditions. In thus doing it may be that opinions will change; this, however, is a consequence not a condition. As Catholics we must not be afraid of the responsibility of choosing a path through the wilderness of modern Feminism.⁴⁵⁴

In December 1918 Margaret Fletcher reflected on the success of the CWL response to the needs of the Belgian refugees and on the years "spent upon organisation... the linked-up work between the centre and the Branches ...and see in the making of channels through which Christian charity has been enabled to flow".⁴⁵⁵ Throughout the war the CWL had renewed its efforts to educate its members in social science and economics. To what extent the earlier initiative had been successful is hard to judge but the advent of new members and a new sense of urgency as war time society began to present new problems of large numbers of young women living away from parental influence and increased old problems such as prostitution and unwanted illegitimate children prompted the CWL to call for more social study.

The CWL had formulated its educational aims and objectives during a period of great change for women. This process was speeded up by the First World War and the CWL was conscious that its membership had also changed. Mary MacKellar's article in February 1916 had explored these changes as they affected girls still at school. She used the phrase 'new woman' and

pointed out that girls leaving school during the war expected to work. The CWL realised that the character of its membership would be affected by the inclusion of such women. The main purpose of the article was to encourage Catholics to see the CWL as a suitable conduit through which modern Catholic girls could channel their energies.⁴⁵⁶ Not only was the CWL adapting its educational aims to accommodate the “new woman” but it revised the tasks it recommended to its members to undertake. Ellen Lambert provided the CWLM readers with an insight into this new world of work. Her article is also designed to encourage a wider range of Catholic women to volunteer to do menial tasks such as in munition factories and serving in canteens.⁴⁵⁷ Much time and effort was spent during the war to encourage women to staff canteens and engage in tasks requiring skills unfamiliar to many of its members. Few middle-class women at this time were responsible for cooking and cleaning in their own homes.

By May 1916 the CWL had also revised its educational aims and objectives in relation to the working class. Prior to this date CWL efforts were to educate women who would then undertake social work among working-class girls and women. CWL members engaged in such work were expected to develop the skills necessary to provide an informal programme of classes in religious observance, practical skills such as needlework and wholesome recreation. Margaret Fletcher heralded an adaptation of CWL aims when she suggested that the “working girl” should also be given a chance to study social issues. By 1916 the CWL experience of war work had widened its view of education and it had become conscious that the:

active mind of the working girl... is already unsettled. She is already the material for endless propaganda, economic and ethical. Our task... [is] giving her the right foundations. We perhaps think that Catholic girls do not share the intellectual ambitions of their fellow workers. The facts are against such a theory. Catholic working girls are to be found in university vacation schools, girls who have ... contrived to save the money for the summer school. The danger is that they ... will get no help from the university lecturer or tutor in bringing their knowledge into line with their faith... Are such ambitious girls to be discouraged because of a possible danger to faith. An attempt to discourage them... would not succeed... [what is needed is] an increase of sympathetic understanding and a great deal more intellectual help from educated Catholic women than is given at present.⁴⁵⁸

Besides educating these girls with active minds, Margaret Fletcher also advocated a programme that would develop the skills needed to turn them into leaders among their own working class. There were many

without intellectual ambition... [who] come up against questions which are too big for them in connection with the ordinary machinery of labour [and] at every turn they meet agents eager to recruit them into the ranks of this or that opinion.⁴⁵⁹

As part of this new awareness of the needs of the working class the CWLM published Dorothy Lenn's article on the Workers' Educational Association.⁴⁶⁰ She set out to explain the nature of the WEA and to encourage women to participate in it.

The citizenship campaign launched in January 1918 was to recruit CWL members to a special programme designed to develop skills associated with the responsibilities of enfranchisement. Apart from the well-established CWL educational skills of study and leadership this new campaign also involved taking an examination. Successful candidates would be certified as lecturers in Catholic social teaching and the responsibilities of voting. They were

encouraged to form local committees from the existing membership of branches who would co-ordinate local activities, providing an associate membership of the CWL for a nominal fee of 1d per annum. There are some contradictory elements to this citizenship campaign: it appears to be designed to welcome every Catholic woman with a vote into the fold, an approach certainly in keeping with war time trends yet at the same time they created an associate membership and a certificated leadership to train them and form a controlling committee. The CWL may not have been clear as to the path they should take. The traumas of the war, the social and political consequences of enfranchisement and the peace combined to form an enormous challenge. (The CWL citizenship campaign is treated in more detail in the following chapter.)

After the war the CWL's commitment to the development, among the working class, of the skills needed for study and leadership was directed into support for the CSG initiative of providing a residential educational experience for working class men and women at the Oxford based Catholic Workers College (renamed Plater College).

While the CWL was building a reputation for efficient organisation and practical work it also achieved its aim of uniting Catholic women in a bond of loyalty to the Catholic hierarchy. From the outset the CWL had valued its close relationship with the hierarchy often symbolised by the attendance of Cardinal Bourne at its AGMs. Hierarchical endorsement was displayed in the form of the heading: "Under the Special Patronage of His Grace the

Archbishop of Westminster”⁴⁶¹ which appeared on the CWL Constitution and was repeated on the inside cover of every edition of the CWLM. For some critics the CWL appears to have succeeded too well in its desire for an efficient and practical workforce. Complaints that the CWL was “not spiritual” were taken seriously as this could have been very damaging. Although religious observance was never overtly expressed as an educational aim it was central to the CWL’s life. The criticism was strongly refuted with descriptions of their overtly religious work, for example, running catechism classes in the parishes. Throughout the pages of the CWLM were reports of CWL pilgrimages, reviews of devotional books and during the First World War a national novena of prayer for victory was organised through its pages. Meetings began and ended with prayers to the Holy Spirit, Council meetings were preceded by Mass, obituaries were published in the CWLM asking for prayers for the deceased members and branches ran retreat days. During the war the spiritual and the secular were successfully blended as the following appeal for more volunteers demonstrates:

more ladies who would like to visit our wounded soldiers twice a week regularly in London hospitals: and as it is obviously unfitting that our visitors should go empty-handed, we make an earnest appeal to our members to send us ROSARIES, PRAYER BOOKS, MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS, GAMES AND PUZZLES, WRITING PAPER AND CIGARETTES to cheer the convalescents.⁴⁶² (original emphasis)

The CWL managed to combine its loyalty to the Catholic Church with patriotism. This resulted in support for the war not just as a matter of patriotism but of religious conviction as well. The war was represented as a fight for Christian civilisation. This spiritual patriotism permeated much of the pages of the CWLM with overt exhortations such as in M. M. Salome’s article

“The Spiritual Army Service Corps” in which members were reminded that those unable to work physically for the war could pray for victory.⁴⁶³ Margaret Fletcher’s challenge to Catholic women: “shall we grudge any sacrifice, any spending of ourselves, if, in so doing, we can help to preserve this land of ours as a Christian country?”⁴⁶⁴ Illustrates the strong feeling engendered by combining patriotism and religious beliefs.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has established that the CWL drew on three educational traditions to provide a basis for developing its educational theory. From the public schools it adapted the male model of educating an elite for leadership and employed it to create Catholic women leaders. The model of academic endeavour combined with unmarred femininity was borrowed from the new high schools for girls. From the Convent school’s traditional emphasis on individual self-sacrifice and strict observance of religious duty they fashioned the ideal of the educated, loyal Catholic woman who was prepared to enter the public sphere to help the poor and defend the Church.

The examination of the CWL’s relationship with the women’s movement explained how the development of Christian Feminism, a conservative position in the women’s movement provided an ideological space where Catholic women could reconcile their faith with some aspirations of feminism. Christian Feminism was designed to safeguard Catholic women from those

aspects of feminism which rejected traditional Christian morality and from the dangers of an alliance between feminism and socialism.

To reinforce its ideological position the CWL employed a number of iconic female role models such as Joan of Arc. In the post-war period Christian Feminism was able to embrace the new challenge of female enfranchisement.

The CWL formulated its educational aims on the assumption that most Catholic women were inadequately educated to be effective agents of social care in the complex industrialised society of the early twentieth century. The CWL aimed to train Catholic women to form an effective organisation whose members could defend the vulnerable Catholic working class from non-Christian influences and represent the Church on public bodies concerned with welfare provision. To realise its aims the CWL encouraged its members to develop a variety of skills including the study of the social sciences and participation in the CWL decision-making process.

The First World War provided the CWL with a variety of opportunities to engage in social work directed at such disparate groups as Belgian refugees, Catholic women munitions workers and Catholic servicemen. The war also saw the CWL adapt its theories to focus on the educational needs of Catholic working-class girls and women.

The next chapter appraises the strategies the CWL employed to realise its educational aims. The chapter demonstrates the effectiveness of these strategies by examining in detail three whole league activities: the study of socio-economics, the welfare of mothers and babies and the promotion of active citizenship.

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Chapter Seven: The Educational Programme

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the strategies the CWL employed in its endeavour to educate its members: lectures, articles and reports of CWL activities in The Crucible and the Catholic Women's League Magazine [CWLM], debates and other afternoon/evening activities arranged by the branches, CWL annual general meetings, conferences at national and branch level and encouragement to participate in the CWL decision-making process. In addition participants were constantly provided with role models. Three whole league activities will be examined to demonstrate how these strategies formed a coherent process when employed first, to further the study of socio-economics and its application to social work, second, to facilitate improvements in infant welfare through Schools for Mothers, and finally the citizenship campaign aimed at newly enfranchised women in the immediate post-war period.

2. Strategies

A. Lectures

The importance the CWL gave to lectures as an educational strategy is demonstrated by the promptness of its Executive Committee forming two lecture committees in February 1907. These two sub-committees started work immediately to produce a Spring syllabus for the London area. As each

Branch was founded a similar priority was given to providing lectures for CWL members. Lectures continued to occupy a central position in CWL activities until 1915 when war work began to dominate members' disposable time and energy. In April 1908 the two lecture sub-committees were amalgamated to form the Lecture Committee which met regularly to propose subjects, contact potential lecturers and set time and dates of lectures in London.⁴⁶⁵

The minutes of these executive sub-committees provide valuable information about the early, London-based autumn, winter and summer syllabi. Reports in The Crucible of lectures vary in detail and are irregular. Between September 1906 and March 1911⁴⁶⁶ eighteen CWL reports were published but only nine included information concerning lectures. The quality of the reporting varied from a detailed list in December 1907 to the brief June 1908 entry which stated only:

the summer lecture programme which was unusually attractive included such names as Madame Cecilia, Hon. Charles Russell, H. Belloc, Esq., James Britten, Esq., and Signorina Cimino.⁴⁶⁷

The CWLM which began in June 1911 reported on London lectures in various formats. Lectures were advertised as the Autumn Syllabus, from October to December, the Winter Syllabus from January to March and finally the Summer Syllabus from May to July. This was not done with the fine detail associated with The Crucible. For example, the entry in the December 1911 issue of the CWLM for London stated: "Limited space prevents our doing more than briefly allude to most successful lectures given during the past month".⁴⁶⁸

Branch reports, now taking up a considerable proportion of the CWLM,

provided more detail than The Crucible but they varied. Some branches like Bournemouth and Leeds Diocese adopted a system of reporting using the London idea of a syllabus.⁴⁶⁹ Branch reports differed in length and quality of writing as well as being intermittent. The reports do not state the numbers attending lectures; some reports included summaries of a lecture.

The detailed lecture lists of June 1910 and December 1910 provide enough information to allow some analysis.⁴⁷⁰ The June 1910 report contained no reference to London-based lectures but in the eight branch reports, 28 lectures can be identified. They took place between the end of February and the beginning of May. Of these 28 lectures 14 were given by laywomen, seven by priests, two by lay men and in five the lecturer is unnamed. The titles revealed that 12 concerned social issues such as the reform of the Poor Law and Catholic schools, while ten were more general in character ranging from 'The Blessed Joan' to the 'Value of Physical Exercises', and four others had no title. The December 1910 report contained details of 50 lectures; 21 were given in London and 29 were based in the eight branches. Of these 50, 20 lectures were given by women, 17 by priests, 11 by laymen and in two the lecturer was not named. Twelve of those ascribed to women were on social issue. There was a considerable diversity of content, such as 'Girls' Clubs', 'Professions for Educated Women' and 'Labour Exchanges'; 25 were on a variety of general subjects ranging from psychology to a slide show of Oberammergau; and there were five that carried no identifying title.

The two reports together give 78 lectures on which to base the following conclusion that at this early stage the CWL did not concentrate on a narrow programme of social education but rather a mixed programme that was designed to draw Catholic women together and encourage the forging of the bond referred to in the Constitution. At this early stage, women formed the largest group prepared to deliver a social lecture and many of them were members of the executive committee. For example Margaret Fletcher gave four of them and Ada Streeter gave six.

As the CWLM included branch reports an examination of CWL lectures can take on a more national character. Branch reports, however, are a mixture of adverts for forthcoming activities and congratulations of successes. It is possible to draw some conclusions on CWL lecturers. The vast majority of lectures were provided by priests with some names recurring, such as Basil Maturin and Charles Plater, both well-documented supporters of the CWL. Others priests like W. D. Strappini SJ were contributors to The Crucible and the CWLM. Topics provided by such priests varied greatly but tended to be serious, such as, "The Feminist Movement", "The CWL and its International Connections" and "Catholic Women in the USA."⁴⁷¹ Other priests can be categorised as providers of a diverse programme including, "The Structure of the Universe", "Catherine of Siena" and "Wagner's Parsifal".⁴⁷² Such lectures may have cultivated not so much a strong social message, but a Catholic culture which encouraged a sense of Catholic identity and loyalty. Lectures on Rome and Lourdes were frequently listed and provided a distinctly Catholic atmosphere to an evening.

Laymen delivered lectures of a more general nature such as Philip Gibbs who spoke to a London audience about his "Adventures in Journalism".⁴⁷³ Some laymen were frequent lecturers as in the case of Mr Anstruther who, during 1913, provided five talks to various branches on a variety of subjects: "The Work of the Catholic Truth Society",⁴⁷⁴ "The Apostolate of Literature"⁴⁷⁵ and "A Pilgrimage to Rome".⁴⁷⁶ While Mr Anstruther was prepared to travel, Mr Morden Bennett appears to have confined himself to Bournemouth. Between 1912 and 1914 he provided them with four lectures ranging from "The History of Bournemouth" and "Scutari in Albania and The Picture of Mother of Good Counsel" to "Malta, Flower of the World."⁴⁷⁷ Perhaps Mr Morden Bennett was a professional lecturer.

In the branches, far fewer lecturers were women and in most cases they were members of the CWL executive committee visiting branches such as Miss Anstice Baker, Mrs Boland and Mrs Arkwright. Miss Anstice Baker took her lecture on the "Motor Mission" (the CWL had helped raise money for this project) to Bournemouth and Brighton in the autumn of 1912. Mrs Arkwright, in February 1914 made a special journey to Bournemouth to lecture on the work done in England by the international society for befriending Catholic girls.⁴⁷⁸ Margaret Fletcher (vice-President) in 1911 repeated her lecture in more than one branch on the Eucharistic Congress that she had attended in Madrid. Lady Denbigh, the President of Birmingham Branch gave them a lecture in May 1912, entitled "Some Aspects of Women's Work". Miss Teetgan a founder of the CWL Emigration Society explained the problems facing Catholic women emigrating to Canada..⁴⁷⁹

Doubtless repeated names reflect in some cases a similar sentiment to that expressed by the honorary secretary of the Newcastle Branch, E. M. Wells, who stated she had invited Virginia Crawford to lecture because her “eloquence and practical experience of social work captivated many at the Congress”⁴⁸⁰ and other honorary secretaries had similar reasons for booking these women as lecturers. Some lecturers were local CWL members with a particular expertise such as Mrs Reader of Wakefield who was a Lady Guardian and delivered a lecture to her branch on the prevention of consumption, in December 1913.⁴⁸¹ Officers of the League such as the President Mabel Hope, and the Honorary Organising Secretary Ada Streeter combined attendance at branch meetings with giving lectures separately or, as in the case of Manchester, together giving two lectures on the same occasion; Mabel Hope spoke on the subject of CWL involvement in emigration to Canada and Ada Streeter on the strength Catholic women found in united action.

The first report of lectures appeared in June 1907 in The Crucible which published a list of lectures already given to its London members. Among the subjects covered were: the Poor Law and Catholic children, prison visiting, district visiting.⁴⁸² Such lectures were not chosen as entertainment but the content remains hidden behind the titles. There are a few exceptions. Between December 1907 and March 1911 The Crucible published a small

number of articles derived from lectures given to CWL meetings, for example, the article "Evolution" by G. A. Elrington OP in September 1909 was a lecture. Two lectures given to the Leicester Branch as reported in the December 1909 issue of The Crucible, namely, "Joan of Arc" by B. Anstice Baker and "The Training of Social Workers" by Emily C. Forty B.Sc were published in the September 1909 and the June 1910 issues respectively. Identifying other lecture/articles is not always easy. For example, the article "St Mary's Nursing College" by Florence M. Mole published in March 1908 may have been also the lecture, with the same title, given to the Clifton Branch as reported in the March 1910 issue of The Crucible. As the name of the lecturer is not supplied it is impossible to come to a definite conclusion.

One lecture that can definitely be linked with an article in The Crucible is "Helping Hands" by Frances Zanetti. As the article carried the footnote, "a paper read at a Meeting of the Catholic Women's League, on Friday October 11, 1907"⁴⁸³ it is reasonable to assume that this printed version provides some insight into the nature of the lecture. As Frances Zanetti was a prominent campaigner, both within and outside the CWL on social issues this lecture/article should be examined in some detail. She delivered her paper in the first person drawing directly on her own experiences as the Inspector of the Chorlton Union in Manchester. Frances Zanetti's subject was the benefits of a mutual aid society to Catholic girls when they left school for employment mainly as domestic servants. Such employment resulted in young girls leaving home, school or orphanage and in many cases losing touch with their faith community. The lecture/article described the Church of England's Girls'

Friendly Society and then pointed out that no such national network of aid existed for Catholic girls. Frances Zanetti called on her listener/reader to “increase the interest of Catholic women in useful and pre-eminently womanly work”. The work she wanted done was, she argued “a field of labour for many who, unsuited to rescue work, [and] district visiting” could help establish a system of mutual aid societies and thus “diminishing the number of unfortunates in Rescue Homes”.⁴⁸⁴ Frances Zanetti examined the work of the Sisters of Charity at Tottington in Lancashire where the ex-pupils of the orphanage were encouraged to join the mutual aid society run by the sisters. She argued that religious orders, like the Sisters of Charity, were not suited to the care of Catholic girl wage earners, that, she said, belonged to the laywoman worker.

Dangerous as it might be to extrapolate from a small sample such as the above article, its content fits into the overall pattern of CWL activities.

Generally CWL printed material on social issues was based on personal experience and highlighted an area of charitable work either neglected by Catholic women or particularly concerned with the welfare of Catholics. When Frances Zanetti complained to her audience that “we have held aloof from social work too long: we must admit that it is not fair to lay all the burden on the religious orders”,⁴⁸⁵ she was only one of many to complain that Catholic women as voluntary social workers were late to enter the field. Many more lectures/articles were to follow reinforcing this message over the next seven years.

There are a small number of occasions when a branch report included the title of a lecture and a summary of its content. For example, Basil Maturin's lecture to the newly formed Liverpool branch of 26 October 1911, occupied a page of the CWLM. According to the summary Basil Maturin dealt with the changes taking place in society commonly known as the woman's movement. He perceived dangers in the "feminist movement" which would lead to chaos. The summary revealed conservatism of Basil Maturin in reporting:

woman must always act in a womanly way, using her own powers, and never seeking to use the weapons of man. The woman must realise her position, for it was perfectly clear that God made her to be the helpmate of man, and not his rival.⁴⁸⁶

Basil Maturin followed this by suggesting that aspects of the feminist movement could be anti-religious in tendency. The lecture appears to have concluded with Basil Maturin encouraging his female audience to seek changes in society through their traditional role:

home-life... depended on the woman, and in the home character was formed. If the family life was conducted aright, the face of the world would be changed.⁴⁸⁷

Such a limited programme of change would safeguard society from the extremes of feminism. This conservative feminism expressed by Basil Maturin was in keeping with the CWL's commitment to improving the lives of women as they fulfilled their traditional roles. Bearing in mind that we are in the hands of the summariser, it still appears that the Liverpool audience received an unsympathetic examination of the 'feminist movement' and were

discouraged from participating in it, except in a restrained and cautious way, because in his opinion it was irreligious in its more radical aspirations.

Some of the difficulties faced by the CWL in London in arranging lectures, deciding on time, place, the targeted audience and booking lecturers were revealed in the executive committee meeting minutes covering the period 1907 to 1911. As early as April 1907 a combined meeting of the two sub-committees responsible for arranging 'General' and 'Social' lectures could not agree the timing of lectures and the matter had to be referred back to the executive committee. The obstacle to setting the time of these lectures lay with the problem of who they were intended for. Various times between 3.00 pm and 4.30 pm were suggested. The earlier time was thought convenient so as not to "interfere with afternoon social engagements" and this time was also favoured so that voluntary workers could attend. It was pointed out that any lecture held before 4.30 or even 5.00 would exclude women engaged in paid work. The meeting agreed to a 3.00 pm start after Margaret Fletcher suggested that they had to consider what public it was catering for:

The present syllabus of lectures was obviously addressed primarily to voluntary workers and therefore their convenience should determine the hour. Later on there would be other courses addressed to other classes of workers and it might then be advisable to provide evening lectures. She therefore proposed ... the present course be given at the hour originally agreed, at 3.00.⁴⁸⁸

Subsequently the first programme of lectures was advertised as starting at 3.00 pm.⁴⁸⁹ The problem of time was returned to in July 1907 at a lecture sub-committee, when it was pointed out that evening meetings were

preferable as this would allow “school teachers and professional workers”⁴⁹⁰ to attend. The meeting agreed to ballot its London members.⁴⁹¹ The results of the ballot are not clear: the meeting in September 1907 agreed to hold ‘social’ lectures at 3.15 pm. The time, however, remained flexible as in the case of Dr Alice Johnson’s course of lectures leading to the St John’s Ambulance diploma which was held at 5.30 during the autumn of 1907. Three lectures, given by the Rev. Basil Maturin, were timed for 5.15 pm during the same autumn programme. As the other lectures listed in the same report as Dr Johnson’s and Rev. Maturin’s carry no references to time it can be assumed that 3.15 remained the normal time for lectures.

In the branches afternoon lectures appeared to be the norm as most reports draw special attention to any activities held in the evenings, for example Bournemouth’s report commented:

The experiment of an evening lecture, to enable members of girls’ clubs, workers, etc., to attend, was tried on November 10. Miss Allis Smith gave an address on ‘A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land,’ illustrated by lantern slides... and the experiment was a complete success.⁴⁹²

The lectures were held in a variety of locations. In London private homes were frequently used. Some branches hired municipal halls, the choice of such public spaces may reflect regional and class diversity: thus the Duke of Norfolk chaired the London lecture, “Some Modern Dangers to Religion”⁴⁹³ held in Caxton Hall, Mabel Hope and Ada Streeter addressed the Manchester CWL in the Midland Hotel,⁴⁹⁴ while the Bradford section of Leeds diocese

used the Mechanics Institute⁴⁹⁵ for one of their lectures. Was the audience in the Bradford Mechanics Institute significantly more representative of the working class than that assembled in the Midland Hotel some four years earlier? Most common were premises linked to the Catholic community, convent rooms, school rooms, cathedral halls. Bournemouth had access to Corpus Christi Hall where both afternoon and evening lectures were held.⁴⁹⁶ It may be that access to such a space enabled Bournemouth to experiment with an evening lecture “arranged specially for ... young women in business... and also for those members unable to attend afternoon lectures”.⁴⁹⁷ Branches did provide public lectures by which they seem to mean that tickets were freely available to anyone not just CWL members. Public lectures provided an opportunity for fund raising either by ticket sale or “after the lecture a silver collection”.⁴⁹⁸ Municipal buildings including town halls were also venues as in Newcastle where the Rev. A. G. Green⁴⁹⁹ gave his talk on “Lourdes and its Miracles”.⁵⁰⁰ Perhaps they were confident that such a popular topic would attract a large proportion of the Catholic community in the area. In London members of the executive committee often lent their private houses for CWL activities. Religious orders also joined in providing space, such as the Convent of the Assumption, 23 Kensington Square, London.⁵⁰¹ The League both in London and in the branches was, however, prepared to hire larger premises for lectures or meetings that they assumed would attract a sizeable audience. Even the relatively small branch of Boscombe hired the Guild Hall for Miss Montague Burnham’s hygiene lecture.⁵⁰²

The minutes of the London-based lecture committees reveal some of the difficulties the CWL experienced in providing a programme. Such difficulties were probably replicated in many branches but reports in the CWLM give few details.

Occasionally, the CWL offered courses to the membership, such as Miss Cimino's Italian course⁵⁰³ which ran in the autumn of 1908 and F. Urquart's six lectures on English Social History⁵⁰⁴ for the autumn of 1910. Branch reports, however, rarely refer to a series or course of lectures. One exception was Leeds Diocese Branch which ran a home nursing course⁵⁰⁵ in the winter of 1913. Some of the difficulties involved in arranging courses are shown when the Lecture Committee attempted to run a course on scholastic philosophy. The CWL secured the services of Dr Aveling who provided a course of eight lectures in the autumn of 1907 with the understanding that a follow-up course would be given in the Spring programme of 1908. The course was considered a success but in early March 1908 Dr Aveling told the committee that he could not re-start the course until after Easter. A couple of weeks later he again postponed until the autumn. In the autumn, however, the doctor informed the CWL that he would not be able to resume his course of lectures but had found them a replacement lecturer. The next reference to the elusive Dr Aveling is in the report of the autumn programme of 1910 when he completed a course of eight lectures on psychology whose titles range from 'Experimental Psychology' to 'The Ego'.⁵⁰⁶ No doubt such negotiations were replicated throughout the CWL and plague the contemporary educationalist.

Who were the lectures for? The obvious answer was, for CWL members, but whether all lectures were to be open to all members was an issue. There was some discussion about the suitability of lectures dealing with social issues. The London minutes record various standpoints on this question. Were they exclusively for the CWL? Part of the difficulty was price. In some cases lectures were free to League members but not to the public or guests. One shilling seems to be the usual price of a ticket. For special lectures some branches made charges as did Bournemouth for Mr George Milligan's evening lecture in the Electric Palace which was free "with the exception of those in the gallery ...charge of 1s and 6d will be made".⁵⁰⁷

There was an early suggestion by Margaret Fletcher that for some lectures the audience should be restricted to

those engaged in the same work ... [to] enable them to discuss freely on matters connected therewith, from the Catholic standpoint without having to arrange the matter with a view to untrained and unprepared ears, such subjects as rescue work, girls' clubs, medical profession, nursing and teaching.⁵⁰⁸

Margaret Fletcher's caution revealed perhaps her assessment of the lack of knowledge and understanding among Catholic women of the realities of social issues. Therefore a general audience would contain so many "untrained" that too much time would be spent on basic information rather than dealing with contemporary developments. There was also an awareness that for many in society respectability, particularly prized in young single women, (a target group for membership of the CWL) was linked with an innocence of the privations of the poor and the social deprivations of the working class. The

CWL could not afford to offend those guarding the “unprepared”, by exposing them to the disturbing realities of life for the urban poor. Margaret Fletcher’s idea was rejected. Other CWL committee members had voiced the opinion that such a policy could lead to exclusive specialist groups forming among League members. The issue was not referred to again. It may be that audiences were self-selecting. Quarterly Public Service Interest [PSI] conferences on social issues probably only attracted women already involved in the field discussed. There are no indications as to the numbers attracted to these lectures either in London or in the branches.

B. Articles

Every issue of the Crucible (1906-1911) and the CWLM (1911-1923) carried articles which chronicled the progress of the CWL. As the sole organ of the League from 1911, the CWLM promoted the League under such headings as ‘What the League is Doing’, ‘At the Centre’, ‘Branch News’ and during the war ‘Hut News’. In this way members, for a shilling a year, could follow the progress of the CWL at national and local level. The purpose of all this information was undoubtedly to encourage ordinary members to replicate these activities in their own communities. During the First World War information on charities providing services for the casualties of war was included and there was extensive coverage of the CWL’s contribution both at home and near the front. Book reviews were introduced and at the request of several readers, transcripts of London-based lectures were printed. The

CWLM also tried to keep its readers informed of developments in Catholic thought and action.

The educational articles can be placed in three broad categories: one, to provide information on social issues or an aspect of local government; two, those designed as instructions that is 'How to...'; and three, those of a more general interest.

Information on social issues was the purpose of articles in The Crucible such as: "Work and Women," by Clementina Black" (1906), "The Feeble Minded," by Dr A. V. Johnson (1909) and one on poor law children⁵⁰⁹, by Mary Blanch Leigh (1907). The Crucible was directed, not to the CWL exclusively but to teachers (see Chapter Four) so most of its articles were concerned with pedagogy. The CWLM printed similar articles, such as, "Juvenile Labour Exchanges and the Voluntary Worker" by Irene Hernaman (1911), "Housing Reform" by M. Gwynn (1912), "The Work of the Trade Boards" Anon. (1913).

During the war most articles supplied the CWL members with information directly relating to women's war work such as "Munition Work" by M. E. King (1915), "Women in Agriculture" by A. Streeter (1916), "Food" by A. A. Anderson (1917) and "Voluntary Patrol Work in London" Anon. (1918). In the immediate post-war period this type of article appeared far less frequently. The much slimmer editions of the CWLM which appeared after the war are

mainly concerned with Branch News and articles directly relating to the League's Citizenship Campaign. Two exceptions are, in November 1920, "The Work of the Central Committee of Women's Training and Employment," Anon and in May 1921, "The Work of the Women Police Service," by V. S. Laughton.

Some of these information articles were designed to keep the CWL members up to date with state initiatives such as the Juvenile Labour Exchanges and encourage them to participate as volunteers.⁵¹⁰ Other articles such as "Truck Acts" presented the CWL members with an investigation of a social issue. This lengthy article, over nine pages, explained how young women were forced to live in and pay exorbitant accommodation fees and in some cases fines. The author pointed out that the Truck Acts were designed to protect employees from this exploitation but they mostly applied to men's work leaving shop-assistants in the large London department stores unprotected.⁵¹¹ This article contained no call for action unlike the 'How to' articles of which "District Visiting"⁵¹² is typical for it gave the reader clear instructions to copy.

Most CWLM articles appear to have been commissioned for the magazine but in a few cases articles were reports of lectures given to a CWL meeting (mainly those held in London) and sometimes reports of a public lecture or conference. For example, the article "Police and Sanitation" consisted of notes produced by a CWL member who had attended a lecture with this title, organized by the Women's Local Government Society.⁵¹³ A report which

appeared in the CWLM on the Annual Conference of the National Union of Women Workers (UWW) fulfilled two roles. It provided information on this conference and drew attention to good conference practice by commenting on:

the very high standard of public speaking heard at these Conferences, and we in the League might be of more use if we could learn and practise more fluent speaking [and] the best corrective of possible verbosity was supplied by the very short time accorded to each speaker by the Chair of the NUWW, ten minutes being a usual allowance...and as if this habit had taught them to concentrate, these latter managed to give a great amount of information in the minimum of time.⁵¹⁴

With such a direct approach the reader could not fail to appreciate the educational content of this article.

C. Debates

The activities provided for members were an important part of their educational programme. All branches adopted the London activities of lectures, debates, conferences and general meetings. Taking part in debates was strongly recommended as a means of learning how to speak in public. It was recognised that for many women public speaking was an ordeal but it appears only the London Debating Society tried to make it compulsory. Early in 1914 the members of the London Debating Society agreed to a system of cards being handed out as people arrived to listen to a debate. These cards would be used during the general discussion phase of the debate to force the unsuspecting and unprepared to make a contribution.⁵¹⁵ Whether this compulsory debating system worked is not recorded but the subject was

returned to in May 1914, when the Society inaugurated a system of Team Debates with members sharing a subject and being prepared to approach a subject from different standpoints. The Society explained “for we should not rest satisfied with the fact that our Society possessed a few good, and a few more fairly good, speakers, but should endeavour to form a body that the League can really count upon to advocate its principles and extend its work”.⁵¹⁶

Debating societies were to be found in most branches. At the same time as London was trying to force members to speak at debates Leeds Diocesan Branch raised the profile of its Debating Society by engaging in a competition among northern branches for a challenge cup. In the winter of 1914, as part of this competition, Leeds debated with the Liverpool Branch that: “Philanthropy will never cure the evils of our social system”.⁵¹⁷ Another round of the competition was between Leeds Diocesan Branch and Salford Diocesan Branch. The report, most unusually, includes the score which reveals that about 260 members voted. Recorded resolutions debated by branches, such as, “Hospitals should be Maintained and Managed by the State”, “Indiscriminate Charity does More Harm Than Good”, “Co-operation Should Supersede Capitalism,”⁵¹⁸ demonstrated that debates performed a dual purpose. Besides being a training ground for would-be public speakers they were also occasions to rehearse the arguments involved in social issues.

D. Decision Making

Participation in the CWL's decision making-process at national and branch level was an important educational tool. The founding generation was aware that the majority of Catholic women in 1907 had had little experience of the formalities involved in committee work. The CWL wished to educate the voluntary workers who were well-meaning amateurs whose offers of help were "useless because they came from those who had nothing definite to offer",⁵¹⁹ compared with "the trained woman [who] will have been seen to justify her training in all directions [and] the capacity of voluntary workers to mobilize for national usefulness will have been tested and not found wanting".⁵²⁰ The CWL's aims when setting up its own machinery of government were to provide the Catholic community with a framework of volunteers that could communicate with each other and so be more effective in charitable work and to train women to serve on committees, local government councils and how to act as publicly elected representatives.

The CWL placed great emphasis on correct procedures in committees. As the CWL expanded to seven branches by the end of 1909 the status of its council and its national executive committee grew. Each branch held its own elections to an executive committee and officers, held an Annual General Meeting and submitted annual reports for publication. As branches grew, local committees were set up under the authority of the branch executive committee, thus providing another level of government. By 1923 there were 36 branches all sending delegates to the Council which met twice a year while its National Executive met more frequently. Council also sent delegates to conferences held by the International Federation of Catholic Women's

Leagues. A woman who had experience at any level of the CWL was expected to be equipped to serve as a local councillor, a Poor Law Guardian and after 1918 to be an educated voter.

An examination of some aspects of the relationship between the Council (the central authority), and the branches reveals deliberate attempts to educate women to be effective participants in CWL committees. While this education is implicit in the relationship, it became explicit when the expansion of the CWL by five new branches, all in the north of England, between March 1910 and May 1911 highlighted the need for education. At the beginning of 1912 the National Committee to Council asked the Honorary Organising Secretary to issue guidelines on CWL procedure to the branches.⁵²¹ Characteristically the CWL turned the formulating of these guidelines into an educational process and called branch secretaries to a two-day meeting, 21-22 February 1912. There are no records of this consultation nor any details of the guidelines which were accepted by the National Committee. The Honorary Organising Secretary was instructed to issue these guidelines.⁵²² A similar process was employed early in 1915 to find a solution to the financial difficulties of the Council. Margaret Fletcher, as Treasurer to Council called a conference of branch treasurers to discuss the Council's main source of income, the capitation fees. Council minutes record many references to the problem of collecting capitation fees from the branches. After the branch treasurers' conference Council minutes contain favourable treasurers' reports and no complaints of unpaid fees. There are no minutes for the branch

treasurers' conference and no details in the Council minutes. It must be assumed that hard economics were discussed and the realities of the need for a reliable income in order for the Council to lead the CWL.⁵²³ After such an experience many of the women involved must have felt better qualified to serve on public bodies and be responsible for budgets.

The role of a branch delegate to the Council (and its Executive Committee) was considered during 1913 and 1914. Attempts were made both by the Council and its National Committee to clarify this complex relationship. One issue was the problem of communication when delegates failed to attend national meetings. During the first Council meeting of 1913 (6 March 1913) after some discussion of the need for good communication between the Council and the branches, the meeting agreed that the importance of branch delegates attending Council meetings should be emphasized.⁵²⁴ The problem of communication between Council and branches was raised again at the next meeting of the National Committee on 7 April 1913. The Honorary Organising Secretary pointed out at this meeting that they wanted her to circulate the minutes to the branches but this appeared to run counter to the stance adopted by the Council. Council had resolved that delegates were responsible for communication with their branches, not the Honorary Organising Secretary. It had been standard practice for the Honorary Organising Secretary to send out copies of the resolutions passed at national level to the branch secretaries not the minutes. A compromise was achieved when the meeting instructed the Honorary Organising Secretary to send a summary of the minutes.

Allied to the responsibility of communication was the issue of confidentiality. Members were reminded that discussions in these meetings were confidential and only its decisions should be given by delegates to the branches.⁵²⁵ The meeting formalised this principle of privacy in a resolution with the sanction that any delegate breaching it would be suspended.⁵²⁶ The issue was returned to at the following meeting on 14 May 1913 when some members were concerned that the privacy rule broke the link between branch and delegate. The meeting agreed that the privacy rule only applied to the discussions during the meeting and that delegates should be conveying its decisions to the branches.⁵²⁷ Thus the CWL was providing a lesson in formal behaviour outside the experience of many women at this period.

The role of branch delegates was raised again when Council considered the freedom, or lack of it, of delegates when voting in Council:

Miss Chadwick... emphasized the point that the instructions given to a delegate would represent the view of a particular Branch. The discussions in Council as representing the consensus of opinion would represent the view of the whole League. Was a delegate after hearing and possibly being convinced by the latter to be tied to her Branch's instructions?⁵²⁸

There followed much discussion but a suggestion that the situation required a resolution was refuted by the Honorary Organising Secretary who said the constitution had defined members of Council as delegates and there was no need to change the constitution.

Unfortunately, the Honorary Organising Secretary tried to clarify the terms by stating:

Representatives were tied down to vote according to their individual opinions, delegates, on the contrary, might be vested with discretionary powers [from] the authority delegating them. The latter was therefore the freest and widest definition.⁵²⁹

Instead she appears to have confused matters by swapping the terms delegate and representative around. After even more discussion the meeting agreed that:

It being clearly understood that while members of Council remained in a position of delegates they possessed in each case such discretionary powers as their respective executives the authority delegating them thought fit to confide to them.⁵³⁰

The status of branch delegates was referred to again but this time to give them a strong endorsement. When Council was asked to consider reducing the number of delegates, and that they should act in unity when voting, Margaret Fletcher rejected both suggestions and instead argued that Council should be a kind of parliament for Catholic women.⁵³¹ This may not have clarified the 'delegate' versus 'representative' dilemma but it did encourage women to see themselves in a position of responsibility and the reference to 'parliament' could not have been lost on women surrounded by the suffrage campaigns of the pre-war period.

E. Role Models

Implicit in all the activities described in The Crucible and the CWLM was the expectation that they would provide role models for would-be activists. 'How to' articles, as described above, were designed to be practical and make their subjects seem within the reach of ordinary women. Articles often provided a sketch of the ideal: the girls' club worker, the study club secretary, the district visitor with the purpose of showing how such roles were within the grasp of ordinary women.

Occasionally the CWL was explicit in its use of the role model strategy as in June 1910 when The Crucible published in its section on branch news

Miss Kate Irwin, a member of the Branch, has been elected on the Board of Guardians. She is the first Catholic woman who has secured this position in Leicester.⁵³²

And a year and a half later in the CWLM even more explicitly:

Congratulations to Miss Gilchrist recently elected to the Hammersmith Board of Poor Law Guardians. We trust that other members will follow this lady's example and courageously come forward to offer themselves for what is undoubtedly onerous work, but work that gives an immense opportunity to us Catholic women to exercise a beneficial influence both as Catholics and as women, and thus to fulfil our duty as citizens.⁵³³

Another example provided in The Crucible was the information that Miss Zanetti was the Inspector of the Chorlton Union and in this capacity she gave evidence before a Select Committee preparing an amendment to the Infant Life Protection Act 1897. The message was driven home by the writer who reminded the reader that Miss Zanetti was a member of the Manchester branch of the CWL. She was again evoked as a role model in the Manchester Branch report of October 1911. Readers of the CWLM were told that she had

attended a conference in Berlin on infant mortality. She was there not as a CWL representative but as a member of the Board of Guardians. With Frances Zanetti was Esther Howard representing the Corporation of Manchester. Both women the report pointed out were CWL members.⁵³⁴ Once again the lesson was that Catholic women could do such work and bring to non-denominational social work their Catholic principles.

The CWL also promoted formal education and by publishing information about Catholic women engaged in higher education was employing such women as role models. The September 1910 edition of The Crucible published a list of the successes of Catholic women students at Oxford and Cambridge universities. The same issue began its article on the CWL with two announcements:

Miss Margaret Mary Brown of Brackley Villa, Hulton has been awarded the League's scholarship to study science at Victoria University, Manchester.

followed by congratulations to Miss Gladys Broughton

the holder of the second League Scholarship at the London School of Economics, upon having won the Joseph Hume scholarship of £20, tenable for one year at University College (London), and awarded for economic history.⁵³⁵

The achievements of Gladys Broughton are brought to the attention of the CWLM readers on several occasions culminating in the announcement that as the holder of several scholarships she had been appointed Inspector of Schools in the Central Province, India under the Indian Education Board.⁵³⁶ The purpose of these notices was to encourage, through example, Catholic women to undertake formal education and in turn to help provide the means

for others. CWL members shared in Gladys Broughton's career because the League had assisted her at the crucial point with money for her studies.

3. Whole League Activities

A. The Study of Social Issues

The study of socioeconomics and its application to social work is an example of the CWL's employment of its educational strategies to pursue one issue. In the early period the CWL encouraged the study of social problems and economics but this appears to have been centred mainly in London. By 1911 the CWL leadership was becoming aware of its national character and so in October 1911 readers of the CWLM were given the practical article by "X", "How to Form a Study Circle". The writer declared that, "we have room only to be practical" and she agreed that most Catholic women felt "present day problems are very complex ... yet these must be understood before any useful action is possible." The writer set out to convince her readers that a complete lack of knowledge of social science should not form a barrier. Her blunt declaration that "study circles are intended for the ignorant and that there is no need to be afraid of them"⁵³⁷ may have been reassuring but perhaps a little shocking. In this direct way the writer challenged her readers to see the problem and then she gave them the solution by reassuring them that the best way of acquiring this understanding was to join a study circle.

First the would-be student was taken to an imaginary study circle and then led through the process of forming a circle which was given as eleven simple rules including:

1. The Study Circle shall not exceed fifteen students in number...
4. The meeting shall not last more than one and a half hours...
6. Each student shall act as chairman in turn... she shall be reminded by the Secretary at the previous meeting that her turn comes next... It will be the duty of the chairman to set three questions ... which three students... shall answer in writing and read at the following meeting.⁵³⁸

These rules seem somewhat over-prescriptive to tell the would-be students that the chairmanship of the meeting must be done in turn “according to her alphabetical order” and that the three students preparing the answers each week should “also [be] in alphabetical turn, but inversely, *i.e.* beginning at Z”⁵³⁹ though it is possible that to the novice such advice might have given confidence to get started. The article also included six rules of procedure for every meeting, these are fairly obvious and make it clear that the meeting should be businesslike with,

5. Chairman then sets the three or more questions on that chapter or portion of text-book which shall be answered at the next meeting...
6. Chairman calls upon the secretary to name the students whose turn it will be to read papers.⁵⁴⁰

The rest of the article was full of sound advice: study circles for younger members were suggested so that they would not feel overawed by older women; whatever their age students should be drawn from women who were determined to study in order to make a difference and a study circle should be

kept to fifteen members. If thirty students presented themselves then two circles should be formed. Maintaining the supremely practical theme, the reader was told how to contact such organisations as the Women's Industrial Council to find outside speakers for end of term lectures and the writer gave the address of the London School of Economics to get help in choosing a textbook and subjects suitable for study such as:

Economic Theory, Economic History, or some social problem such as Insurance, Housing, Labour Exchanges, Poor Law, Trade Unionism... Unemployment, Wages and Work for Women, Trade-Boards.⁵⁴¹

The writer suggested that at the end of a year's study the circle should move on to another topic leaving the secretary to act as an expert in the area already studied and making herself available as a lecturer. In this way a CWL branch would build up a group of experts they could call on for lectures and advice. It was recommended that any surplus money arising out of the modest study circle subscriptions be used to buy extra books and to form a social science library.

The subject of social study was returned to in the summer of 1915 when the war had heightened people's awareness of social problems. For Virginia Crawford the only solution was "for Catholic women to take up the systematic study of social problems and civic administration in order to fit themselves"⁵⁴² for the work. She blamed Catholics and others for the apathy she saw towards social problems such as drink, thriftlessness, gambling, insanitary housing and preventable disease. She argued that this apathy was born of

ignorance. She used housing as an example where knowledge not “merely sentimental regrets” would make the difference because if :

disinterested social reformers push their way on to our Town and Borough Councils in far greater numbers than they do at present... one active, well-informed, persistent Councillor can effect wonders in improving slum conditions but too often there is no one who both cares enough and knows enough to take the initiative with success ⁵⁴³

Virginia Crawford’s message was reinforced in two articles some six months later. M. E. Bretherton commented on the difference between “the dictates of a kindly heart” ⁵⁴⁴ and those who had studied politics, economics and economic history and were then able to serve, for example, on a Care Committee. The latter would spend public money wisely. Susan Cunnington was even more hard hitting when she wrote:

Complex as are our modern social relations, puny as may seem any reasoned individual endeavour there is no scope for evasion of responsibilities, no line of harmlessly irrelevant action, no area of honourable abstention By our attitude of mind, as well as by our active support or opposition, we help or hinder progress. ⁵⁴⁵

These writers recommended study as the solution: Virginia Crawford supplied the names of books and pamphlets available to Catholic women, M. E. Bretherton encouraged readers to join study circles and seek out the publications of the Catholic Social Guild [CSG] and Susan Cunnington promoted the book by Margaret Fletcher, Christian Feminism.

In May 1916 ⁵⁴⁶ the CWLM ran another article by Margaret Fletcher in which instructions were once again given on the setting up of study circles. Aware

that many older women saw study circles as too reminiscent of distant school days, Margaret Fletcher recommended 'discussion groups' which were designed to be less formal and where the study would be more closely linked to experience. Younger women and girls however, were better suited to the formal study circle where their lack of experience would not be too obvious.

B. The Citizenship Campaign

The CWL leadership responded to the political developments of the autumn of 1917 when the partial enfranchisement of women began to appear inevitable, by renewing its call for study, so that the large number of newly-enfranchised Catholic women would be intellectually prepared for their new status as voters. The new campaign was opened by Margaret Fletcher and Ada Streeter through the pages of the CWLM. In her long article "Reconstruction"⁵⁴⁷ Margaret Fletcher revealed some of the difficulties the League's neutrality on the suffrage had brought. Once that controversy was over, she encouraged members to study in order to use their vote to enable society to be reconstructed on Christian principles. Catholic women, she pointed out, like other newly-enfranchised women would be sought after and without knowledge of both public affairs and the Church's teaching on social issues the opportunity would be lost. Ada Streeter built on Margaret Fletcher's article and demanded:

Are we Catholics who have so magnificently proved our good citizenship in the world of action, going to lose the opportunity of proving it also in the world of practical thought – namely the application of definite principles to social conditions? ...is there not sometimes a

tendency amongst us... to ignore the wider outlook, which should embrace intelligent inquiry into the causes and remedies of the evils which have produced these needs?⁵⁴⁸

Ada Streeter swept away any would-be opposition to study with her supremely practical suggestion:

when you go to your work, whatever it may be, you probably travel by tube, motor-bus, or railway, to get there... [which would] allow of reading... such little volumes as the CTS pamphlets...for example [the] Primer of Social Science are light and easily carried in one's pocket.⁵⁴⁹

In January 1918 the CWL launched one of its most ambitious and innovative educational programmes, the Citizenship Campaign. The CWL drew on the confidence it acquired during the war, when CWL members entered public life in large numbers to embark on the new campaign. The campaign was announced in the editorial of the January 1918 issue of the CWLM; by March citizenship study circles had been formed in fourteen branches ranging across the country from Bath to Liverpool and back to London.⁵⁵⁰ By April a further eight centres were listed. To allay any fears the editor reassured her readers:

the success and enjoyment of the study whether it has been in the form of Lectures from Priests and others, or in the form of Discussion Circles, proves that this work is within the powers of all our members, and that none need be afraid that it is too difficult.⁵⁵¹

The enthusiasm of its members appeared to take the CWL leadership by surprise so that initial plans to form a Citizenship Guild, to run alongside the CWL and to be composed of those committed to citizenship was abandoned. The danger was that the Guild would come to overshadow the CWL and

divide rather than unite Catholic women. It was decided to “enrol Citizen Associates, at 1d. a year, from among those who, for one reason or another, are not likely to become full members”. Thus were formed citizens associations linked to the CWL branches by sub-committees formed from CWL members who had successfully completed the citizen course and passed the CWL citizen test. By April the purpose of the campaign was set out clearly as:

to spread the knowledge of Catholic principles, and to organise women in defence of their Catholic rights and liberties as well as their material interests as women⁵⁵²

The campaign also involved the use of two more strategies, other than study circles, namely, lectures and examinations. Both were reported in the CWLM thus employing another strategy, advertisement, to encourage members to participate. A list of CWL accredited lecturers was published in the September 1918 issue and consisted of thirteen lecturers of whom four were men. The subjects offered included the obvious ones of voting responsibilities and the ideal of citizenship, but also made proposals to abolish the Poor Law, promote the living wage, eugenics and clubs for working girls.

The CWL continued to employ a multi-strategy approach providing members with articles such as “How to Use the Vote” by Susan Cunnington which was also available from CWL offices as a separate leaflet. It contained a brief explanation of the different layers of local government and parliamentary procedure. Her style was direct, she told her readers “keeping things clean is a very important part of Local Government. A good deal of the money paid in

Rates is spent on this.”⁵⁵³ Cunnington related the rather dry details of town and district councils and parliamentary elections to women who had no previous experience of political participation and used topics like sanitation to draw women in. Her article ended with a straight call to “every one of us [who] must take some trouble to understand what is wrong and how best to cure it or to know what is needed and how best to obtain it.”⁵⁵⁴ Informed participation, for Cunnington, was essential. This strategy of first publishing articles in the CWLM and then issuing them separately as leaflets was continued throughout 1919. The leaflets were sold at 1/3d per 100, thus making them affordable to the majority of women.

In September 1919 the Citizenship Campaign was reported on in the CWLM, giving details branch by branch of study circles. Without access to accurate membership figures it is difficult to calculate how many members were involved and branch reports did not follow a set pattern. Birmingham, for example, gave more space to describing the lectures provided by Monsignor Parkinson instead of details of its study circles. Portsmouth, on the other hand, in a succinct entry listed four study circles concentrating on different subjects such as economics and social science. Eight members had passed the CWL test and one ‘graduate’ had gone on to found a fifth study circle concerned with training its members to be public speakers. Was the two year old Portsmouth Branch more dynamic and successful than Birmingham, one of the oldest branches, or was the reporting of the former more revealing than the latter?

Details given for London are also confusing. The report recorded four study circles, two of which met in the CWL offices and two in suburban parishes.

The entry then explained:

Many more circles could have been started in London if only more leaders had been available. The object of the existing circles is to supply leaders for future ones and though our work has failed in quantity it is full of promise as regards quality.⁵⁵⁵

This confession is surprising considering the large membership and the presence of the CWL headquarters. According to reports the campaign was more effective in the provinces. Perhaps the London membership, having been active for so long was now too busy for a new venture, while many in the provinces were new recruits and ready for participation. Maybe the lack of enthusiasm in London was the result of re-organisation. By the end of 1919 it was subsumed into 'Headquarters' and its officers transferred to Council standing committees. Nevertheless, in the Foreword to the Annual Report for 1919, Margaret Fletcher reviewed the situation and concluded:

Our own citizens campaign, however, has gone on bearing fruit in all those branches in which it had taken root. New leaflets have been brought out, further speakers' tests held compared ... with other bodies we have every reason for encouragement.⁵⁵⁶

The CWLM continued to run reports on study circles and the CWL citizenship tests etc usually as part of the Branch News section. The CWLM continued to support the campaign: in October 1920 it reported on the CSG Summer School. In October 1921 it ran a review of Susan Cunnington's CSG pamphlet Christian Citizenship. Both reports reminded the reader of the

issues and the need to study the socio-economic background to the social problems of the day. The message was not lost: there were successful study circles and clubs such as the Halifax Study Club described in the Leeds Diocesan Branch report. Under the guidance of Father O'Sullivan, the club had studied such topics as Soviet Russia, democracy, unemployment and housing.⁵⁵⁷

C. The Care of Mothers and Babies

At the same time that the CWL ran its campaigns for the study of social science and citizenship it promoted concern for the welfare of poor mothers and their children which had been a feature of the CWL from its inception . Even in the pages of The Crucible, a magazine designed for teachers, articles and notices appeared drawing attention to working-class mothers and their children. For example, in June 1907 an article concerning poor law children,⁵⁵⁸ in December 1907 "Helping Hands"⁵⁵⁹ and in March 1910 "Feeding School Children."⁵⁶⁰ The campaign to reduce infant mortality began in 1912 and employed three educational strategies, first a published article, then a CWL conference which was followed by a conference report in the CWLM. Within four months the CWLM was able to report the success of a 'school' in Liverpool. The first stage was the publication of "How the League Can Check Infant Mortality"⁵⁶¹ which began with details of the very high infant mortality rate in a number of northern towns such as Blackburn, where "the rate [is] of 200 per week...in Manchester the figure is 151 per 1,000" and

then described the work being done in a CWL 'School for Mothers' in

Manchester. The work had been so successful that the writer boasted:

during the exhausting heat of last summer [1911] when infant epidemics were reigning in the city, members of the League remained steadfastly at their posts, caring for the little ones, teaching the mothers, fighting, with constancy and energy, the battle against ignorance, and disease... when infantile diarrhoea was sweeping off the children in Manchester *not one baby's life was lost* in the League's 'School for Mothers.'⁵⁶² (Original emphasis.)

Although the article does not provide a detailed account of how these schools worked it did convey a clear message that such work was not difficult or technical and, apart from the advisability of engaging a trained nurse to visit the group, volunteers did not require specialist knowledge. The main purpose of the article was to engage the sympathy of the CWLM readership and sting them into action. The writer demanded:

What Manchester does to-day, England does to-morrow. What about... those little ones 'who perish for lack of knowledge' – in Preston, Northampton, Newcastle, Liverpool, Leicester, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Leeds? Cannot our Branches in all these districts emulate the achievement of the Manchester League?⁵⁶³

This issue was familiar to Frances Zanetti, part of the founding generation and a leading figure in the CWL Manchester Branch. She was appointed an Inspector for the South Manchester Guardians and had given evidence to the House of Commons on the subject of infant life. If she did not write the article she would certainly have approved of it and encouraged the work. Frances Zanetti may well have encouraged the calling of a CWL conference, hosted by its Public Service Committee, and held in London in February 1913. The conference was reported in the CWLM as "Schools for Mothers" in March

1913.⁵⁶⁴ The report was designed to make the work seem attainable to ordinary women with goodwill and only a little training to run such 'schools' and make a significant difference to the welfare of fellow women and their infants. The August 1913 article⁵⁶⁵ drew on practical experience and provided detailed instructions on the setting up of a 'school'. The tone was plain and straightforward. Readers were told of how the Liverpool School was founded with very little money but with the co-operation of a religious order. The 'school' started in a room in a local convent. The author advised that meetings should start with "a decade of the Rosary said in common" and workers should establish a "prevailing feeling of sympathy and friendliness".⁵⁶⁶ Details were given of how to procure cheap cloth, second-hand clothes and stockings for the mothers to convert into useful items for themselves and their children. To encourage self-help and thrift, the writer insisted that "no money or free gifts are given. The mothers pay for the materials... and buy for small sums the garments they make".⁵⁶⁷ Sewing was a big part of the schools' activities, the women made quilts during the winter months. The most important aspect of these schools was illustrated by the inclusion of a table which demonstrated the importance of weighing the babies, the weighing machine had been the most expensive item purchased and it tracked the progress of six infants ranging in age from three months to seventeen months. All the babies were shown to have improved in weight and short notes on their general progress confirmed the school's success. The article implied that any CWL member could start such a school and make a dramatic contribution to the lives of such needy mothers and babies. The only work described in the article requiring expertise was the visiting nurse.

To the researcher the article conveys a mixed impression of condescension with comments such as “the mothers are all greatly improved in appearance and manners thanks to the good influence of the workers.”⁵⁶⁸ Yet elsewhere the would-be volunteer was encouraged to create an atmosphere of “prevailing sympathy and friendliness ... [so that] confidences are made by the mothers.”⁵⁶⁹ The friendliness is also apparent to the researcher in the recounting of a summer party provided for the mothers which appears to have been a mixture of tea party, garden fete and religious devotion.

The war brought forward new issues and problems but the concern for infant life was not forgotten and the CWL sent delegates to the inaugural meeting in the Guildhall, London on 26 October 1915 of a national campaign “to promote the welfare of motherhood and infancy.”⁵⁷⁰ The subject had been renewed in the public press with stories of increasing numbers of illegitimate war babies. Having alerted the membership to the issue, the CWLM then ran an article in February 1916 with the eye-catching title, “The Crying Need” which was designed to shock the reader with such comments as “four hundred and eighty potential lives are therefore lost to the nation daily.”⁵⁷¹ The author May Bateman then went on to compare the “expectant mother in our own class...she sleeps comfortably... she has proper nourishment.. everything is done is done to prevent her from suffering unnecessary strain” with the mother who “is at the wash-tub, is scrubbing, cooking, mending”⁵⁷² and doing without so that her husband and the other children did not suffer. The main purpose of the article was, however, to explain how Maternity Centres could

be set up with a grant from the Local Government Board and run by volunteers.

In order to further the infant life campaign the CWL made it the subject of their AGM thus reaching a large number of delegates and ordinary members and educating them face-to-face on the subject. The membership was informed that the Council had proposed the resolution:

That the meeting urges the membership of the CWL to increase their interest in the great national campaign against Infant Mortality, and for that purpose to establish more Mothers' and Babies' Welcomes, and similar organisations calculated to preserve Infant Life.⁵⁷³

To reach an even wider audience this was reported in the CWLM. The subject was not returned to in the CWLM until May Bateman also published her article, "National Baby Week" in which she described the national campaign to reduce the infant mortality rate.⁵⁷⁴

By 1919 many CWL branches had transformed their work with mothers into unions of Catholic mothers. As for the infant life campaign it disappeared from the pages of the CWLM. Articles and discussions concerning the nature of the Christian family, the living wage and "Neo-Malthusian Propaganda"⁵⁷⁵ received attention in the post-war period. This shift in emphasis reflected the changes in society which became apparent during the 1920s and 1930s.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that for the CWL before the First World War the priority was to educate women so that they could participate in public life, in order to improve the lives of the poor, while remaining true to their Catholic principles. The League's achievements during the war were the proof that this education had been successful. After the war the emphasis shifted as the CWL came to terms with female enfranchisement.

The following chapter provides personal details of seven key women concerned with the formation of the CWL during the period of this study. Some of the motivations of the founders of the CWL are identified by a close analysis of their writings, speeches and obituaries.

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⁴⁶⁵ For example in CWLM, Vol. 1913-1914, Feb 1913, p. 867, May 1913, p. 994, Feb. 1914, p. 61.

⁴⁶⁶ These two dates denote the period when The Crucible was the official magazine for the CWL. After March 1911 the CWLM took over that function.

⁴⁶⁷ The Crucible, Vol. 4, No. 13, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁸ CWLM, Vol. 1911-1912, Dec. 1911, p. 250.

⁴⁶⁹ CWLM, op. cit., Oct. 1912, pp. 694-695.

⁴⁷⁰ This is not a run of information as the September issue carried no lecture list.

⁴⁷¹ CWLM, op. cit., Dec. 1911, p. 353, Vol. 1913-1914, Jan. 1913, p. 829, Feb. 1914, p. 67.

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⁴⁷³ CWLM, op. cit., Oct 1913, p. 1186.

⁴⁷⁴ CWLM, op. cit., May 1913, p. 988.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 994.

⁴⁷⁶ CWLM, op. cit., May 1913, p. 1002.

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- 574 Bateman, M. (1918) "National Baby Week", in CWLM, op. cit., Jun. 1918, pp. 18-22.
- 575 Editor, (1921) "PSI Conference", in CWLM, op. cit., Aug. pp. 12-16.

Chapter Eight: The Personal Touch: Biographical Profiles of the Founders of the CWL

1. Introduction

This chapter considers some of the characteristics of the networks women formed and discusses the extent to which they can be identified among key members of the CWL. Seven biographical profiles of women in the CWL are provided in order to demonstrate similarities and differences among the founding generation. Margaret Fletcher, Agnes Gibbs, Mabel Hope, Alice Johnson, Flora Kirwan, Ada Streeter and Frances Zanetti were not 'ordinary' members of the CWL but innovators and policy makers. They created the formal structures of the CWL and interacted with the administrators and policy makers of the Catholic Church. They moved between other societies and among informal networks of Catholic women engaged in social action. This collection of biographies could form the beginning of a prosopography of Catholic women⁵⁷⁶ who can be characterised as occupying a borderland between the radicalism of the feminist movement and the conservatism of orthodox roles within the Catholic community during the period of this study. These biographies place the women in their social and educational background.

No published biography of any of the women exists and only Margaret Fletcher produced an autobiography. Her autobiography, the considerable primary sources linked to her role as the founding president of the CWL and her extensive published works, make it possible to construct a more detailed profile of Margaret Fletcher than for any of the other women. Jane Read has noted “women have appeared in histories of education, but as ‘wives, sisters, followers, assistants and believers; rarely as leaders, ideologues, founders or policy makers”.⁵⁷⁷ Here then is an opportunity to redress the situation. Four of these seven women were part of the very first Provisional Executive Committee formed at the beginning of 1907. They were at the forefront of the policy making process. Margaret Fletcher, Ada Streeter, Flora Kirwan, Alice Johnson were soon joined by Mabel Hope and Agnes Gibbs. These six were key figures in the development of the League. Agnes Gibbs contributed to the construction of a theoretical basis for the CWL’s educational work. Frances Zanetti was a founding member of the first CWL branch in Manchester. All of them occupied leadership roles: public speaking, publishing articles, serving on committees and as official delegates liaising with Catholic and non-Catholic societies. The biographies vary in length because of limitations of available source material.

Edith Sykes, as the third president of the CWL between 1921 and 1923 warranted inclusion among these women but there is little evidence of her involvement in the CWL prior to her presidency and she made no literary contribution to the CWLM. This absence of written sources has made it

difficult to construct a biographical profile. The little that is known of Edith Sykes is through her husband, who was Sir Mark Sykes of Sledmere who she married in 1903. Between 1905 and 1911 she had six children. In 1919, Sir Mark Sykes died of the Spanish flu after a career in politics including serving as a Conservative MP for Kingston upon Hull and as a consequence of the Arab Revolution during the First World War he helped formulate in 1917 the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Marriage to a high profile politician and frequent child bearing may account for Edith Sykes' 'invisibility' among the CWL membership. Widowhood may have freed her to take a more prominent role in the CWL. Perhaps her experience of politics at such an elevated level made her a natural choice for the CWL as it emerged from its pioneer days into a more established organization concerned with its relationship with the formal structures of the Catholic Church and the State.

In this chapter I have chosen to refer to the three married women by their first name and married surname to make it clear exactly who is discussed thus 'Mrs Philip Gibbs' is referred to as 'Agnes Gibbs', the author of several published articles. Another reason for the use of their names in this way is the commitment to revealing these women as important individuals in their own right. As was the common usage Mabel Hope is listed as Mrs James Hope and Edith Sykes as Lady Sykes. Likewise the unmarried women are referred to in CWL documents as Miss.

These biographies illustrate some of the limitations in constructing accounts of women's lives. Mabel Hope, Flora Kirwan and Edith Sykes are in Burke's Peerage but only as offspring or wives; that directory does not record the education of daughters, unlike sons. Therefore their educational experience remains unknown. Birth certificates did not include a place for mothers to record an occupation and likewise marriage certificates did not record the occupation of the bride. Thus it is not possible to know whether Agnes Gibbs on her marriage was engaged in paid employment.

Did these women form a network? As Eckhardt Fuchs states "the use of the term *network* does not imply the application of social science methods for historical research". Instead of a quantitative, statistical approach⁵⁷⁸ most historians seek to describe networks. Fuchs proposed that "Historical network analysis is the reconstruction of networks, their modes of interrelations, and the foundation of their stability as well as their genesis and mechanics."⁵⁷⁹ Such an analysis would require a larger amount of personal data than is hitherto available. A formal framework was constructed by members of the CWL in which they could share ideals and exchange experiences and interact with other formal structures. They also participated in social activities that helped forge an informal set of social relations. Peter Gordon and David Doughan comment in their introduction to the Dictionary of British Women's Organisations 1825-1960 that it is often assumed that "activists... belonged to a relatively small circle and possibly spent much time and energy taking in each other's washing"⁵⁸⁰ but this as they admit is very hard to prove. In their

research they found few examples of women who were 'officers' in more than one society unless they were closely linked in objectives. This latter point is certainly borne out in the seven biographies that follow. Margaret Fletcher, Agnes Gibbs, Flora Kirwan and Ada Streeter were all involved in the CSG which had a similar aim to the educational work of the CWL but this is to assume that a network analysis must refer to formal structures. As several historians have shown middle-class women engaged in educational work formed informal communities of like-minded women that would not appear in the above named dictionary.⁵⁸¹ The CSG was launched during the Catholic Truth Society Conference held in Manchester when a group consisting of laymen, priests and a small number of women including Margaret Fletcher, Agnes Gibbs and Frances Zanetti met for lunch with Charles Plater, a charismatic priest who was an enthusiastic supporter of the CWL.

All that is suggested here is that there are some indications that a network existed. If Fuchs' definition that networks

are communicative and mostly horizontal links between interdependent agents-individual, corporate or collective actors- that are relatively equal, trust each other and share similar interests or values⁵⁸²

can be taken as a guide then some of the above characteristics are identifiable. These women did communicate with each other through the committee structure of the CWL and there evidence of personal correspondence between Margaret Fletcher and Ada Streeter, between Margaret Fletcher and Mabel Hope. Ada Streeter and Flora Kirwan shared a home. Ada Streeter described Flora Kirwan as "the companion of nearly half

a life-time"⁵⁸³ and described her commitment as a "home-tie".⁵⁸⁴ The exact nature of this relationship is not made explicit, but clearly it provided a bond between two powerful women at the heart of the CWL. Besides their membership of the CWL these women shared common values based on their faith and their commitment to education as a means of benefiting women in general and Catholic social workers in particular.

Martin and Goodman's suggestion that networking is to do with the conscious use of causes and organizations to connect and advance women's interests⁵⁸⁵ is relevant when considering the links formed by the CWL with the Catholic hierarchy. Ada Streeter was personally recommended to Margaret Fletcher by Archbishop Bourne and both women exchanged letters and had private meetings with Bourne. Several priests wrote for both The Crucible and CWLM. Among the more prestigious were Charles Plater, W. D. Strappini and Joseph Rickaby, all of whom were Jesuits. Several women religious also wrote for both publications, for example Sister Mary Aquinas OSB and Sister Mary Catherine SHCJ. The connections, formal and informal, with religious orders are too numerous to mention. References to co-operation between convents and CWL branches to provide accommodation for clubs, lectures and social events are found in nearly all the branch reports throughout the period of this study. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus provided the venue in London where Margaret Fletcher launched her idea for a league. It also opened the first official hostel for Catholic women students at Oxford University to which Margaret Fletcher was a frequent visitor. Mary

Segar, a Catholic lecturer to women students at Oxford University, was a contributor to The Crucible. Virginia Crawford also wrote for both The Crucible and the CWLM and she was closely involved with the CSG, she had been a member of the LOC and the non-Catholic Women's Industrial Council. Links with non-Catholic organisations such as the NUWW were important from the founding of the CWL but became of paramount importance during the First World War.

Margaret Fletcher as editor of The Crucible had made contact with Frances Zanetti and Ada Streeter before the formation of the CWL. While Mabel Hope was not listed as a member of the LOC she was of the same social class as many of the titled members of the LOC and must have been aware of its work. Mabel Hope and Edith Sykes were both married to prominent members of the Conservative Party and must have met socially. Mabel Hope could have recruited Edith Sykes into the CWL as Catholics were a minority among the upper class they had much in common.

2. Founders of the CWL

The following biographies are set out in alphabetical order and not according to the subject's importance or length of biography. It is convenient that this

order results in Margaret Fletcher appearing first as she was clearly the single most important figure in the founding and the early development of the CWL.

A. Margaret Fletcher

Margaret Fletcher was born in Oxford, the second oldest in a family of nine children. In 1871 her father Carteret Fletcher was Curate of St. Mary Magdalene in Oxford. Her mother Agnes was from Richmond in Surrey and had the assistance of a nurse, Elizabeth Wood from Leeds and an under-nurse Louisa May from Duckington, Oxfordshire to care for the growing family. By 1881 they were resident in a house, "Earls Croom", Leckford Road Oxford.⁵⁸⁶ Carteret Fletcher came from Earls Croom in Worcestershire and matriculated at Worcester College, Oxford in 1860. In 1872 he is recorded as Rector of St Martin's, Carfax and as one of the city lecturers.⁵⁸⁷

Margaret recorded in her autobiography that she attended the Oxford High School for Girls, though she did not mention that when the school opened in 1875 she and her sister Agnes Constance were among the first twenty-nine girls to enter the school.⁵⁸⁸ Later the other sisters Philippa and Dorothy joined the school. Agnes Constance married Bertram Rogers in 1891, he was a son of James Edwin Thorold Rogers. His sister was Annie Rogers who campaigned for women to take degrees at Oxford University. In 1891 Philippa Fletcher was recorded as being a student participating in university courses

under the Home Students system.⁵⁸⁹ Philippa at her death was a Roman Catholic but whether her conversion is linked to Margaret Fletcher's is not known.

The Oxford High School encouraged its pupils to engage in charitable work such as providing Christmas entertainment and presents for poor children. In 1889 Margaret Fletcher was a member of the school's Guild which consisted of past pupils and staff in raising money for charitable work: for St. Ebbe's, St. Thomas' Home for Friendless Girls, Day Industrial Home, All Hallows Mission.⁵⁹⁰

O, Call Back Yesterday, Margaret Fletcher's autobiography was first published in Oxford in 1939. She began with early memories of her Victorian childhood:

I was given a white rabbit which lived in the little hutch in the garden and I was carefully taught what to give it to eat and how much. I had larger ideas. The rabbit was to have what I liked myself. I found a cold rice pudding in the nursery cupboard. I saw that this was the very thing and hugging it in my arms made my way carefully down to the garden. I poked it into the hutch by the side of the adored one and I got safely back without being seen...Next morning I found the hutch quite empty and the door standing wide open. Nurse told me that its little brother rabbits must have come in the night to call it away to play with them. This was dreadful, I must have left the door open.... Nurse promised that when spring came we would go and look for it. ... I heard long after that the poor creature had been found dead beside the half eaten pudding with its body horribly swollen.⁵⁹¹

Margaret Fletcher included this story of the death of her rabbit to illustrate:

the delicate understanding of a child's mind. The realisation of the gradual unfolding of its powers and the injustice of judging its actions in

the light of knowledge it did not possess that was present in our home... which shows that nothing was done to humiliate a child.⁵⁹²

This charming story provides the historian with some useful insight. First, it rather challenges the stereotypical view of the Victorian vicarage and the austerity of its parenting. It is also the first hint that Margaret Fletcher received a liberal education both at home and as a result of parental decisions to send her to the newly opened Oxford High School for Girls. Surely some Victorian parents would have followed the rice pudding incident with punishment and nightmarish details of the demise of the rabbit. Secondly, it raises the question, why did Margaret Fletcher include the incident in her autobiography? The story has the appearance of a well-worn family favourite. After almost a lifetime's reflection did it represent to her an early example of those characteristics that took her into public life?

Margaret Fletcher was in her late seventies when the book was published.

The reflection of the adult on this story included her comments that:

I had done what I preferred. Carried out my own ideas... what a sequence of sins, disobedience, stealing, secrecy and dreadful cruelty if not murder... [I] was just a little shaken about the value of my own ideas.⁵⁹³

It seems strange to the modern reader to hear such innocent mistakes made by so young a child described as "sins". This story may have represented to Margaret Fletcher an example of the strength of her character. The historian may draw the conclusion that there was an underlying conflict for Margaret

Fletcher between authority and her own individualism. Further into the autobiography we find the student Margaret in conflict with the authorities at the Royal Academy. In middle age the independent-minded child/student had become the faithful servant of an authority-based institution, the Roman Catholic Church.

Her account of her return to Oxford from serious studio work in Paris, illustrates Gary McCulloch's point that autobiography provides historians, psychologists and social scientists with the opportunity to examine the everyday experiences of the author.⁵⁹⁴ Margaret Fletcher, like many nineteenth century women, found herself at twenty-six recalled to assume the place of her dead mother in the Oxford family home. In her own case, aged twenty-six, a decision had to be made:

The map was altogether changed since the days when I had been encouraged to make a career for myself. Death, marriages and a vocation had thinned the ranks of the family. There remained my father, now a lonely man, and the four youngest members. It was now clear that whatever I did must be done from home. Was it any longer possible to go on working on the professional lines which I had set before myself? How much had my original choice been influenced by an urge in my nature, how much by the lure of entering a woman's 'crusade'? What, looked at objectively, did my talent amount to? It seemed rather like a flickering night -light darting up and dying down. Who would be the loser if it went out? Of two things I am sure, that the family must be the first care, and my own personal life must squeeze in as it could; and squeeze was the word: there would not be much room left for it... if there was anything of the genuine artist in my equipment it must lie dormant...and I must earn money.⁵⁹⁵

Is this an illustration of Linda Anderson's point that the reader of women's autobiographies should bear two questions in mind: what is it women are

trying to remember and what is it that they have forgotten?⁵⁹⁶ It is hard to believe that the artist gave up her ambitions with so little anger or resentment. Perhaps the author judged these events from the distance of many years and saw that this rupture brought her to Oxford and eventually to a public life of service to her chosen faith community. It is unlikely the devout woman of the early twentieth century regretted some fifty years later that her career had not been as an artist. The mature Margaret Fletcher certainly valued the family unit and gave it an orthodox religious treatment when in 1920 she wrote:

Society is made up of families, and upon the soundness of each separate family the solidity of the whole fabric depends. All the missionary and philanthropic work in the civilised world is only engaged in saving the wreckage, and supplying the work left undone by unsound families.⁵⁹⁷

She did not, however, view the family as a controlling force antagonistic towards the individual:

Religion is concerned with the individual soul, and the family exists for the individual, but the family is part of the Divine plan, and there is a sense in which we may say that its individual members exist for the family.⁵⁹⁸

After her conversion to Catholicism in 1897 all of Margaret Fletcher's literary works were concerned with religious issues. One of the first of these, The School of the Heart provided some insight into her experiences as a single woman. Her definition of the leisured woman was in fact the single woman confined to the parental home with no particular responsibilities. In the chapter on "The Woman of Leisure" she approached the realities of life for many single women in her contemporary society with some understanding of its sense of loneliness and wasted life, well-attested to in biography and fiction:

We must now endeavour to see how we can ensure for ourselves a share in the realities of life and attain to the full dignity of womanhood,

in spite of a life at leisure from enforced work, devoid of fundamental changes, and bare even of the commanding sorrows that are so healthful for the Christian soul.⁵⁹⁹

One of her solutions to this life of leisure was to cultivate whatever artistic talents a woman might have even if they were not of the highest nature. This reflected her own experience of working in a studio built for her by her father in the garden of the family house. Another was charitable work but for this to be an effective solution:

I want you to observe that there is a great difference between making a few garments for the poor, or visiting a few selected poor families, from a sense that it is a kind of pious debt...it is only when what we do is done from consistent motive and purpose, and with *all* our faculties, that we can feed our nature satisfactorily.⁶⁰⁰ (her emphasis)

This insight into her own situation may explain her decision to start The Crucible in 1905 and then to found the CWL.

The Crucible which was dedicated to the dissemination of information on educational subjects as they affected Catholic women as parents, teachers and students has been discussed in earlier chapters of this study. Here it is worth noting that it impacted on the isolation experienced by many women at that time. Margaret Fletcher who had grown up surrounded by university people, had included in her magazine accounts of women students taking university courses. One enthusiast wrote to Margaret Fletcher, at the time of the closure of the magazine, with descriptions of women who had attributed their success in teaching to its articles. Articles on the position of women

students at Oxford enabled at least one Catholic woman to understand that
 “University life was possible for Catholic students.”⁶⁰¹

Margaret Fletcher’s explanation of how she came to found the CWL has a self-deprecating disclaimer, typical among women more than men, recounting great events.

There existed in 1905 a group of ladies who met in London at the Holy Child Convent under the chairmanship of a layman to hear lectures and take part in discussions. The title of the little society escapes my memory. However, they honoured me with an invitation to lecture to them on some subject connected with history or art. I was no lecturer and said so and was too busy with my own practical work to get up anything worthy of them. But if they would like to hear some ideas on present day social work for Catholic women I would come. The subject was not a draw and the lecturer unknown and there were just fourteen present...those fourteen caught fire...I cared too much for my dream of a national league to risk its foundering on misunderstanding. Escapist as I was I thought to hand over an idea to those who would carry it out and then return quietly whence I came... the escapist had not escaped... for at each stage of development each new official appointed had stipulated, ‘I will do some work if you will take all the responsibility.’ So I had to figure as president.⁶⁰²

A brief examination of her achievements shows that Margaret Fletcher was no such “escapist”. This is surely an example of false modesty. She had helped found the CWL with the intention of drawing Catholic women together. She also helped found the Catholic Social Guild which sought to bring Catholic social teaching to Catholic men and women of the working class. In 1913 she was awarded the cross *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*. In 1920 she was a co-founder of Plater College and provided a hostel to enable Catholic working-class women to attend the courses. In 1922 Margaret Fletcher brought out a new publication The Catholic Woman’s Outlook .

Margaret Fletcher brought to the presidency of the CWL many qualifications. She had spent some time in Oxford engaged in amateur dramatics which must have helped her career as a public speaker. She was competent in French which she had mastered while studying art in Paris. This fluency was certainly an asset when she attended international conferences where French was often the preferred language. Her experiences of a sketching holiday in Hungary in 1889 and pilgrimages to Rome and Madrid must have prepared her for the extraordinary journey she made, as President of the CWL, in 1919 to Czechoslovakia to encourage the Catholic women of the newly formed country. At the age of 70 in 1932 she was travelled to Munich to discussing issues of social work with economics students at the University.⁶⁰³

On her resignation of the presidency after the First World War she gave her own assessment of her character:

qualities were now wanted which were not mine... I was essentially a 'frontiersman'. Unless I was conscious of opposition and disapproval, I did not feel that I was doing my own work.⁶⁰⁴

In a speech to mark the 21st anniversary of the founding of the CWL, she described the post-war period as when "the social landscape did indeed begin to move in an alarming fashion"⁶⁰⁵ and they had had to face new difficulties and to make new adjustments at a time when they were "accepted as respectable and orthodox in their obedience". This fusion of these new adjustments with their orthodoxy in matters of religion had been formulated

into a conservative feminism, “Christian Feminism”. This spirit of the ‘frontiersman’ may explain why in the 1920s she appeared to be far less active in the CWL and why she undertook the new pioneering work of Plater College.

Margaret Fletcher died in December 1943 at the age of 81. Her death was reported in both The Times and the Daily Telegraph, in other national newspapers and in the Oxford Times. The latter’s obituary described her as “one of its [Oxford’s] most interesting personalities” and besides founding the CWL, listed her many achievements in art, in amateur dramatics with the O.U.D.S., in publishing and as Principal for women students at Plater College.⁶⁰⁶

While she described herself in conservative terms as a Christian Feminist historians can identify in Margaret Fletcher’s public roles a challenge to patriarchy. She was an innovator, a policy maker and a leader who moved among the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in England, among women leaders at the international level and among informal groups that met in each others’ houses both in Oxford and London. Through her writings she provided the CWL with a theoretical framework to negotiate the women’s movement. In her work to improve the education of Catholic women she was assisted by Agnes Gibbs.

B. Agnes Gibbs

Agnes Gibbs was born in 1875; her father William Rowland who was born in 1844 was an Anglican priest; her mother, Margaret, was born in 1849. Agnes had at least two sisters, one twelve years and one nineteen years younger than her. Agnes converted to Roman Catholicism when as a young woman she studied in a Belgian convent. She married a fellow Catholic, Philip Gibbs in 1898. The service took place in the Roman Catholic church of St Aldhelms near to her parents' home in the Somerset village of Stoke-sub-Hamdon (sometimes known as Stoke-under-Ham). She had one child, Anthony. Philip Gibbs was described on their marriage certificate as "author" and he went on to establish a successful career in journalism. In her husband's autobiography, The Pageant of the Years,⁶⁰⁷ his few comments about his wife were appreciative but nowhere did he acknowledge her achievements as a writer and social activist. Agnes Gibbs had her own entry in the Catholic Who's Who⁶⁰⁸ because of her translations of books from French, German and Italian. Perhaps the Belgian convent (not named) can take the credit for her fluency in these languages.

Agnes Gibbs helped found the CWL and served on its Executive Committee for several years. In 1909 she was a delegate on the Council of the CWL. She also helped found the Catholic Social Guild during the Catholic Conference held in Manchester in September 1909 and she went on to contribute to the CSG's publications.⁶⁰⁹ It is not surprising Agnes Gibbs was

included in a CSG list as a “well-known student and worker”.⁶¹⁰ She was also a member of the Catholic Truth Society.⁶¹¹

No sources of a personal nature exist to provide an insight into her personality and character but it is possible to establish some understanding of her character from her published articles and speeches. In March 1909 (before any of her written articles were published) she addressed the second CWL AGM as the representative of the Lecture Committee. She congratulated the CWL on its provision of lectures and the stimulation they had engendered. She may indeed have been revealing something of her own life when she described the “craving which most cultivated women have... to get, now and again outside the narrow groove of thought and experience and to see the broad horizon of the world of knowledge”.⁶¹² Her description of the CWL’s work, providing lectures and courses, as

remarkable in the way they have excited the interest of our members, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say they have, to some extent, taken the place of a Catholic Women’s University in London⁶¹³

revealed her enthusiasm. This enthusiasm was perhaps the product of a sense of exclusion from intellectual intercourse experienced by many women at that time, heightened by the isolation of Catholic women behind barriers erected both within and outside the Catholic community.

Her articles revealed her commitment to the Church’s social teaching and her knowledge of Leo XIII’s encyclical Rerum Novarum. Agnes Gibbs was able to

reinforce her conviction that activities in the public sphere for the improvement of society were in keeping with the Christian life, by frequent references to the Bible. Although she attacked those women who lacked “that ‘social sense’ which like a golden chain, which binds us altogether into one vast brotherhood, one great family with God as our Father”⁶¹⁴ and refused to engage in charitable work, she did not advocate radical reassessment of women’s role in society. For example she did not approve of campaigns for women’s suffrage.⁶¹⁵ Agnes Gibbs did, however, endorse some of the changes in women’s lives which she described as a:

leap forward to liberty...women have broken down a thousand barriers, they have shattered many customs more binding than statute law, they have captured places formerly held unchallenged by men.⁶¹⁶

There is, however, evidence of a dichotomy in Agnes Gibbs’s understanding of the characteristics of the two sexes. On the one hand she thought it important for women to cultivate the special endowments of sympathy, modesty and patience which contributed to the special influence: “every woman in her turn will discover that her influence is greater when least felt, that her power is strongest in lowliness, obedience and humility”.⁶¹⁷ On the other hand she encouraged women to take an active role in public affairs and join committees where:

the committee woman should never yield on a matter of ultimate principle: she should resign rather than that... she should know how to give way readily when she is in the wrong, or the matter is indifferent.⁶¹⁸

In trying to bridge this division Agnes Gibbs stated that she did not believe the cultivation of these womanly qualities meant that a woman should be weak or

lack intellectual capacity nor give herself up to sentimental love. Yet her reservations were apparent in her view : “A woman may be on an intellectual equality with the average man, but she has not the same kind of intellect. And though her body and spirit may be strong it is not the same kind of strength as that of man.”⁶¹⁹ Indeed Agnes Gibbs was against those women who:

cultivate a long stride, the habit of smoking strong cigars, a tendency to strong expressions of speech, but these things do not change her feminine nature into masculine nature. She will only become a twisted caricature of womanhood... but at the heart of her... [she will be] weak and ineffective because she has distorted her own natural qualities.⁶²⁰

Apart from her horror of this distortion she did envisage a certain independence of spirit for women. Agnes Gibbs did assume that women would make their own decisions concerning their commitment to family duties and the amount of time they could devote to social work. Her solution to the conflict between social work and family responsibilities was that only the woman herself could decide how much time she had left after discharging her “more primary duties”⁶²¹ concerning her family. Women active in social work must also realise that there was more than they can do and they must be autonomous in deciding what their contribution could be.⁶²²

Through all of her articles her commitment to education was a constant theme. To Agnes Gibbs education would solve two problems facing society. The first was the deprivation visible among the industrial working class. With a knowledge of economics improvements could be made in the material condition of the poor. In her view this was equally valid for a Catholic philanthropy as efforts to improve the spiritual welfare of the poor because:

Any work, therefore, which increases the material welfare of the race helps, by creating leisure for self-culture and divine worship, to advance its spiritual welfare... Riches are not a cure for vice, but, on the other hand, destitution, as distinguished from honourable poverty, is even more detrimental to spiritual welfare.⁶²³

Another need for education was in order to counter the spread of socialism.

The time was coming when:

a practical acquaintance with the true principles of social reform may sometimes turn out to be as necessary to the salvation of souls... as in a knowledge of the penny catechism.⁶²⁴

Perhaps when Agnes Gibbs urged members of the CWL to study economic history she was drawing on her own experience. She was confident that a student of economic history would “broaden her sympathies and enlarge her outlook upon life”.⁶²⁵ Maybe Agnes Gibbs also experienced an awakening such as she envisaged for:

the Catholic, believing as she does in an over-ruling Providence, will experience ... an awakening. It will open her eyes to perceive, if only in the vague and from afar, some traces of the vast plans of Almighty God.⁶²⁶

From the reproduction of a paper Agnes Gibbs read at the Catholic Congress held in Leeds in July 1910 we may discern some idea of her direct approach. She told an audience no doubt composed of many upper and middle-class Catholics: “active charity is a duty, especially of the leisured and wealthy”.⁶²⁷ Equally challenging, she went on to urge a practical approach to the evils of society and “learn to work in clubs and on committees, not only of a purely Catholic character, but everywhere where work is being done for the relief of poverty or the spreading of morality in whatever shape or form”.⁶²⁸ She then

gave the example of the successful defence of Catholic religious teaching in English schools to encourage her audience to do more.

By remaining firmly within the traditions of the Catholic Church Agnes Gibbs used her knowledge of the scriptures and Catholic social teaching to exert her intellectual authority to promote women's role in the public sphere. Even though she limited this to civic maternalism she was advocating a challenge to narrower views of women's role in society and hence made a contribution to the development of Christian Feminism.

C. Mabel Hope

Mabel Hope was the second daughter of a family of six children. Her father was a Northumberland landowner, Francis Henry Riddell who married in 1862. The Riddell family were connected with many of the landed gentry and Mabel's eldest brother added the name Blount to his surname when he inherited Mapledurham in 1908. Mabel Riddell married James Hope in 1892. Between 1897 and 1901 she had three sons and one daughter. James Hope was the grandson of the daughter of the 14th Duke of Norfolk and consequently both Mabel and James were members of Old Catholic families of England. Mabel Hope drew on the traditions of the Old Catholics (see Chapter Two) to describe the three generations since Catholic emancipation as the start of a new Catholic age which had arisen

in spite of persecution, in spite of spoliation, in spite of every perfidy that the petty brain of man can devise... the Catholic faith, has triumphed over all.⁶²⁹

The Old Catholics had tenaciously hung on to the Faith through the penal years. Mabel Hope moved among the highest aristocratic families with her husband who was a Conservative MP and at one time Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. He also wrote articles for the CWLM on industrial relations advocating a system of worker involvement and partnership in the management and profits of industry.

Although there are few details of Mabel Hope's involvement in charity work before she joined the CWL in 1906 there is some evidence that she did have a social sense. In 1901 Mabel Hope had joined Josephine Ward in appealing for funds for the parish of Rotherhithe which they described as the most "densely populated...[and] destitute"⁶³⁰ of all the Southwark diocese. Mabel Hope had already helped found a settlement in the area and financed two resident social workers. In 1901 the appeal was for £400 to rent a room to hold mothers' meetings and girls' clubs. It is not clear from the letter if this was part of a larger organization or an initiative by a small group of women. If it was the latter, then it is an example of the piecemeal, patchwork form of social work that the CWL sought to unite and systematise.

Perhaps Mabel Hope's involvement with the settlement house in Rotherhithe, had by 1906 convinced her that a more planned and less spasmodic

approach to the needs of “the most miserable of their fellow Catholics”⁶³¹ was essential if any lasting improvements were to be made. Her experience may account for subsequent involvement in the founding of the CWL. By September 1907 she had joined the first CWL executive committee and was from then on a prominent member of the League including being elected three successive times to the CWL presidency. She held this position for seven years including most of the First World War. It is not clear why she resigned the presidency in 1918. In 1912 she held the presidency of the *Fédération Internationale des Ligues Catholiques Féminines*. In 1920 she was awarded the OBE for her work during the war.

Mabel Hope made no literary contributions to The Crucible and very few to the CWLM. It is therefore difficult to assess her character or to gain much insight into her ideas and beliefs. In one rare article with the strange title “Napoleon’s Column: A Hundred Years After” she gave the readers of the CWLM a detailed account of her visit to a CWL Canteen Hut near Boulogne. It provided some glimpses of the individual. Besides giving a detailed description of the Hut her comment that “most of my readers are familiar with the journey to France”⁶³² reminds the historian of her aristocratic origins. Her presumption suggests that she envisaged the CWL membership as belonging to that privileged class who could then afford holidays abroad. On the other hand the article also gives us a glimpse of an English woman confronted by the realities of war when she wrote:

my window at the hotel overlooked the harbour. I gazed on the unaccustomed sight of hospital ships and mine sweepers... the heights

around seemed covered with tents and where ever one looked one saw signs of War and felt that in three short hours one had been brought into touch with it far more closely than is possible in England.⁶³³

Her comments about the use of the Hut as a chapel on Sundays revealed that “her religious life was deep and strong”.⁶³⁴ For Mabel Hope the CWL’s work in France symbolised that combination of practical help with the commitment to caring for the spiritual welfare of fellow Catholics. For her:

its object is to alleviate as far as may be some of the suffering caused by the destructive ambitions of men, and to be a means for spreading and dispensing the consolations of the Church, the ever-living testimony of the power and the love of God.⁶³⁵

The article reminds us that Mabel Hope, in keeping with many of these eight women, was prepared to travel despite discomforts, to fulfil their CWL obligations.

In Margaret Fletcher’s obituary for Mabel Hope in 1938 a little more is added to this biography. Margaret Fletcher provided few details but did attempt a character sketch. She commended Mabel Hope by then ennobled as Lady Rankeillour for her ability to “chair a meeting with all the impartiality of a Judge on the Bench”.⁶³⁶ Of Mabel Hope’s war-time presidency, Margaret Fletcher commented, “how great was the burden of ultimate responsibility which she had to bear and the immense amount of constructive work which she inspired... the serenity with which she carried on in those difficult times was an immense asset to her fellow workers”.⁶³⁷ Dr Rewcastle⁶³⁸ (President of the CWL in 1938) wrote praising Mabel Hope’s hard work and common sense

while President and continued support for the CWL for many years after the war.

Mabel Hope, as president of the CWL, performed a political role. She represented the CWL in its official relations with the leadership of the Catholic Church and, particularly during the First World War, provided the link between the ordinary members of the CWL and the formal structures that co-ordinated the national war effort. Her social training as a member of the upper class, as wife of the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons and her religious orthodoxy gave her the leadership skills necessary during this period of enormous challenge and change for English women.

D. Alice Johnson

Alice Johnson was born on 31 January 1869 in Kensington, London, the daughter of Edward Johnson and Alice nee Vowe. Her father described himself on her birth certificate as “gentleman” for his rank and occupation. According to the British Medical Journal Alice was educated at Katherine Lodge and Les Ruches Fontainebleau.⁶³⁹ This school had been founded by Marie Souvestre (1830-1905) as an independent private school for the daughters of the wealthy. Marie Souvestre moved the school to England in the early 1870s when the defeat of Napoleon III and the fall of the Paris Commune convinced her that France was too uncertain for her school. Thus Les Ruches became Allenswood Academy (near Wimbledon) where Marie Souvestre realised her ambition to provide an education for independent

intelligent girls.⁶⁴⁰ It is therefore unlikely that Alice Johnson attended the school in France. If the name “Les Ruches” was used before the adoption of Allenswood, after the move to England this would explain the apparent inaccuracy in Alice Johnson’s obituary. From the little information available about the school it appears to have provided Alice Johnson with a vigorous education with an emphasis on learning foreign languages. According to Eleanor Roosevelt (a pupil at Allenswood in the 1890s) girls were expected to confess if they uttered a single word in English.⁶⁴¹ Alice Johnson’s home address in 1893 is recorded as The Elms, Exmouth.

Alice Johnson entered the London School of Medicine for Women in 1888⁶⁴² when she was nineteen years old. The London School of Medicine for Women took its first students in 1874. Among these fourteen women was the pioneer for medical education for women Sophia Jex-Blake. Sophia Jex-Blake having struggled for several years to gain women the right to study medicine at Edinburgh University moved to London, where supported by some members of the medical profession she opened the London School of Medicine for Women. The struggle for the right to enter the necessary examinations continued for four more years. It was not until 1877 that women were able to get clinical training when the Royal Free Hospital, London, admitted women students to its wards. By 1880 twenty women had succeeded in fulfilling the requirements necessary to be entered on the Medical Register.

In 1893 Alice Johnson was registered by the Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries⁶⁴³ which was how many women at this time gained the right to practise medicine. Like many medical women Alice Johnson sought further recognition by accumulating foreign qualifications open to women. In the following ten years she took a number of higher diplomas including the MD from Brux, [Brussels] DPH Cam. and FRCSI while she was gaining clinical experience at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, at various mission hospitals and the Carmarthen Joint Mental Hospital.⁶⁴⁴

During the First World War “she worked as honorary medical officer at the Chelsea Red Cross Hospital”.⁶⁴⁵ Later she served as medical officer to the Lambeth Schools’ Infirmary and medical inspector to the Board of Education.

Her best known work was... at the Bird in the Bush welfare centre which she helped Mrs Una Morris to start in a little shop at 616 The Old Kent Road. Here she was medical officer for twenty years and it was largely by her that difficulties were surmounted and the centre firmly established... she was, it is said, a friend of all the lame dogs.⁶⁴⁶

These achievements established her both as a doctor and as an independent woman with her own career. She joined the CWL and served on its Executive Committee for many years. She wrote two articles on the care of the ‘Feeble Minded’ for The Crucible between March 1909 and December 1910. These articles, no doubt, drew on her experiences both in Carmarthen and as a medical officer of the LCC. Her March 1909 article is based on a visit she made to a settlement in Massachusetts USA. The bulk of the article is a sympathetic account of the Waverley School and Templeton Colony. She

described it as “consisting of some sixteen blocks of buildings... [as] situated on the top of a hill eighteen miles from Boston, and... [standing] in 149 acres of picturesque woodland.”⁶⁴⁷ Her approval of the separate nature of the provision is abhorrent to modern principles of inclusiveness but it does convey a compassionate and practical approach to people who a short period before would have been treated more harshly.⁶⁴⁸

Alice Johnson’s photo was included in the Catholic Who’s Who because in 1912 she was appointed the medical officer for a settlement in High Wycombe for feeble-minded girls. She also gave evening lectures for the CWL of a distinctly practical nature, such as first aid and home nursing,

In her spare time she campaigned for the suffrage and appears to have belonged to the CWSS. Apart from Margaret Fletcher, Alice Johnson was the only one of these eight women to have a professional qualification and to earn her own living. She reminded the CWL AGM in 1909 that “there are seven million working women in the English labour market”⁶⁴⁹ and that the CWL should be prepared to extend a helping hand to them. Her comment to the AGM, that “people were a little apt to forget”⁶⁵⁰ these working women may be a reflection of her own experience among its members. Certainly many of the CWL’s early activities were timed for the afternoon, a time which would exclude women such as Alice Johnson.

Alice Johnson provided for the CWL a bridge across several divides: from the radical feminist world of the struggle for professional registration for women doctors, from the controversial CWSS, from the realities of a single woman earning her own living and from her professional care of the poor in The Old Kent Road. Alice Johnson and Margaret Fletcher brought to the founding of the CWL the world of the successful professional single woman.

E. Flora Kirwan

May Flora Amy Kirwan (known as Flora Kirwan) was born on 24 June 1865 at Palmeira Square, Hove. She was brought up as a Catholic in Ireland, the daughter of Lady Victoria Hastings, and granddaughter to the 2nd Marquis of Hastings and Baroness Grey de Ruthyn. Her father John Stratford Kirwan gave his rank and occupation at the time of Flora's birth as "Esquire and JP".⁶⁵¹ Despite such a privileged background she had by the early 1900s established herself as a champion of poor working-class girls in the East End of London where she had set up clubs for them. She was known for her dining rooms for working-class girls, providing safe respectable places for them to eat. She also ran a holiday centre for girls in Herne Bay called St Edward's.

Flora Kirwan did not write articles for The Crucible. She did, however, write for both the CWLM and for CSG publications. It is a CSG article which reveals something of her personal beliefs and her view of the role of Catholic

women in early twentieth century philanthropy. Her article was concerned with the care of Catholic working-class girls after they had left elementary school and become wage earners. Her religious convictions are apparent in this article: she began with a quotation from St Matthew's Gospel. Flora Kirwan saw social work in religious terms, using phrases from the scriptures that would be familiar to her readers. She sought to give social work a spiritual dimension:

In social work, to give is to receive; to strive is to attain; to suffer is to rejoice; and none need turn aside despairing of success; for none save God can know how many young lives have been brightened, how many young souls kept from wandering, by those who deemed themselves failures... because the fruits of their labours were apparently never matured.⁶⁵²

One reward for this work would be

in the increased consideration in which our religion will be held and in the respect with which our girls will be treated... As we to-day sow, they of the next generation shall reap.⁶⁵³

Another reward, not quite so high minded was experienced when:

you come in tired and depressed, but you will find that after two hours' hard work you leave the Club refreshed and in much better spirits, merely from having been among a crowd of young people all enjoying themselves.⁶⁵⁴

She gave us a rare insight into her sense of humour when she told her audience: "Above all, you must be young! The moment you enter the clubroom you must be as fifteen or twenty, even if you have to slide back some years."⁶⁵⁵ No doubt she was not the only person present then in their fifties.

Flora Kirwan's concern for the working class led her to suggest to the first executive committee that they should enrol working-class Catholic women. She may have had a more radical approach to the CWL's claim to "be open to any Catholic woman"⁶⁵⁶ but she was very traditional in her motivation to befriend working-class girls. She saw the work as essential in preparing the girls for "the responsibility of wifehood and motherhood"⁶⁵⁷ and believed Catholic social workers could help in shaping their characters during "these impressionable days"⁶⁵⁸ between leaving elementary school and adult life. Her concern for the working class is again revealed in two articles in the CWLM in 1911 and 1912. The first article, in which she reflected on the causes of the transport strike of the summer of 1911, are somewhat naïve and despite her obvious concern that the "Strike's weight will ultimately fall...[on] men's wives and little children" she also lamented the "intimidation of the leaders" towards workers to strike and the hardships of living on strike pay.⁶⁵⁹ A year after the Liverpool transport strike of 1911 Flora Kirwan returned to the topic of industrial unrest with a rather strange reflection on the causes of labour unrest. Flora Kirwan appeared to believe that conflict between capital and labour could be reduced if employers and employees were polite to each other.⁶⁶⁰ What is clear from her articles is her concern for working-class people. This is again manifested in her suggestion to raise the school leaving age to allow for technical training and grants during the extended schooling.⁶⁶¹ She wanted to extend the role of social worker to include making:

ourselves acquainted, not only with the labour conditions of the neighbourhood wherein we work, but also with the conditions which govern the special trades in which our girls are employed; we shall

then more easily be enabled to discriminate between good and bad workshops, and... discourag[e] our girls from entering the latter⁶⁶²

She expressed the hope that by directing the girls to good workshops the negative publicity would force the bad ones to improve. This may have been a rather simplistic interpretation of labour relations but it does demonstrate her wish that Catholic social workers be not just sympathetic towards these working-class girls but actively to engage in the realities of their daily lives.

On 27 November 1913 as part of the restructuring of the CWL Flora Kirwan was elected the first president of the London branch. She served for many years on the executive of the branch. Up to 1913 the president of the whole League had also been president of the London branch. In 1916 Flora Kirwan had to reduce her commitment to the CWL while she nursed her friend Ada Streeter. Shortly afterwards Flora Kirwan became seriously ill and was in turn nursed by Ada Streeter. Both women recovered but accepted reduced roles in the CWL.

Given the level of Flora Kirwan's commitment to social work she cannot be dismissed as the conventional leisured woman casually engaged in philanthropy. Her commitment to the poor should be seen as part of a 'career' which included running clubs for working-class Catholic girls in London, membership of the LOC, the development of the CWL and the recognition of

the place of education to take women from the amateur to a quasi-professionalism.

F. Ada Streeter

Ada Louisa Streeter was born in 1863 at Sussex Lodge, Hillingdon. Her mother was Louisa Streeter nee Raven (or Ravin the certificate is not clear) and her father Edward Streeter described himself as “gentleman” for his rank and occupation. She became a Catholic in 1885 at the age of 23. No information exists to explain her conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. Was she already a close friend of Flora Kirwan, a life-long Catholic or had she experienced a strong sense of isolation when first joining the Catholic community? Her conversion experience may have prompted her to see one of the CWL’s aims as “drawing her [the convert] into a circle of active interest where she would be associated with others... [sharing] the underlying spiritual fellowship”.⁶⁶³ Some eight years later Ada Streeter helped found Catholic Social Action, a charity at work among the Catholic poor of the East End of London. In 1900 she and Flora Kirwan joined the newly formed Ladies of Charity to which some of the leading aristocratic Catholic women also belonged and which met in the Duke of Norfolk’s London House. It was well named ‘Ladies’ because in the list published by the Tablet in 1900 most of them were titled, Duchess, Lady, the Honourable. In 1905 Ada Streeter compiled the Handbook of Catholic Charities. In 1906 she was part of the

founding executive committee of the CWL and served as its Honorary Secretary for many years. In 1909 she helped found the Catholic Social Guild while attending the Catholic Conference in Manchester.

In her article on Catholic Social Action⁶⁶⁴ in the September 1906 issue of The Crucible she provided some idea of her philanthropic work before the founding of the CWL. Catholic Social Action was inaugurated in 1893 by wealthy Catholics who were concerned that many young people in the poorer parts of London left the Church and abandoned their religion once they left their Catholic elementary schools. Ada Streeter described how the founders decided to emulate the Protestants and found evening clubs to which the young people could go for wholesome entertainment. The need for lay involvement, she explained, was that priests could not be expected to run girls' clubs and as these clubs would have to take place between 8 pm and 10 pm nuns could not do the work either. She described the work as although "religious in spirit and aim, [it] was to be secular in form, and to include such amusements as dancing, drill, dramatic performances".⁶⁶⁵ Ada Streeter acknowledged that class divided Catholics and that one of the aims of Catholic Social Action had been to draw Catholics together. She recorded "that not everyone shared this ambition and some Catholics of the West End thought the initiative would not last long and not succeed.

Ada Streeter explained how the understanding of the Catholic Social action volunteers developed; as they opened more clubs they realised that the girls needed more help. Settlement houses were started in the poorer districts

where volunteers lived and offered charitable support to Catholic families. From this growing awareness of the extent of the problem grew the Ladies of Charity. Ada Streeter, in providing this history, portrayed her own commitment to the work and her pride in the success of St Edward's Club when it enrolled in the London Club Union and participated in competitions with long-established Protestant girls' clubs. The success of Catholic Social Action, its development of settlements in the East End and the founding of the Ladies of Charity to do district visiting, led Ada Streeter to conclude that the legacy of the penal years could no longer be used as an excuse for Catholic lack of engagement in social work. By 1906 Ada Streeter's understanding of the issues involved in Catholic social work had developed into an appreciation of its complexity. She reflected on the inadequacies of the organization of the Ladies of Charity to meet the needs of the Catholic poor. She believed that the LOC could extend itself and develop the necessary machinery if it recognised that:

at present the gatherings take place only within the sacred precincts of the chapel... [but] if these gatherings could, as a first step, be supplemented by periodical meetings in purely secular surroundings, where theories of work could be freely discussed, ideas ventilated, comparisons made, and plans matured, there would result, I believe, an immense gain to both the associates and the Association.⁶⁶⁶

It is not clear if Ada Streeter knew, when she wrote this article published in September 1906, of Margaret Fletcher's plans to launch her ideas for a league in the same edition of The Crucible. It does suggest that she was already identifying the need for a rather different organization with a more secular style than that of the LOC. By 1913 she was committed to the merits

of organization and expressed these forcefully when she declared “the power of Trade Unionism... is... the power of ‘collective bargaining’; if all the Catholic women of this country united together... [they could] ‘bargain collectively’... numbers count”.⁶⁶⁷ To liken the CWL to a trade union may have shocked many readers bearing in mind contemporary industrial history.

Cardinal Bourne recommended Ada Streeter to Margaret Fletcher in 1906 and from the CWL’s earliest days Ada Streeter was its Honorary Organizing Secretary. Several volumes of the CWL minute books are in her handwriting. She attended the first meeting of the CWL 16 March, 1907 and followed Margaret Fletcher’s opening address with her own hopes for the CWL’s programme of meetings and lectures. Indeed she must have attended every executive and nearly every subcommittee meeting held in London for many years. Her skill as a minute writer is evident. Other entries by later secretaries are not so legible. Ada Streeter was also valued for her advice. Margaret Fletcher described how “wise Miss Streeter” had warned at the first meeting of the nascent CWL to “avoid the word ‘social’ at all costs or their [the audience’s] worst fears will be confirmed.”⁶⁶⁸ Ada Streeter had known the character of the audience . It would be highly suspicious that ‘social’ meant socialism and socialism was viewed by many of the clergy and laity as anti-Christian. (See Chapter Five)

In addition to her work as Honorary Organising Secretary Ada Streeter undertook, in 1915, to spend a year as editor of the CWLM clearing the

magazine of its debts. Flora Kirwan wrote as a tribute to Ada Streeter that “by dint of hard work, constant supervision and saving every halfpenny, she has realised her ambition” to hand the magazine over to the new editor Mrs Norman Moore debt free.⁶⁶⁹ Ada Streeter was a very efficient organizer but self-effacingly she described this as “tidiness”. With a witty stab at those she described as thinking “that if they were religious and possessed the Christian virtues, organization was something that could be altogether dispensed with”⁶⁷⁰ she pointed out that to keep things tidy you “took a piece of tape and tied them up; why not a piece of red tape then?”⁶⁷¹

Ada Streeter reflected on her experience as Honorary Organizing Secretary of the CWL and complained that:

the League possesses a complete machinery for representative government: it is regrettable that this machinery is not adequately used by the membership. During the period of my close association with the CWL it was my experience that the large majority of members never responded at all to the voting-papers circulated to them for the election of Committees... individual members do not realise that part of their loyalty to their Society consists in taking their own responsible share, even at the cost of trouble to themselves, in its representative Government.⁶⁷²

This lack of participation took on a greater significance with the enfranchisement of 1918. The CWL’s citizenship campaign in which Ada Streeter was involved tried to ensure that women took their new status as voters seriously. She studied at the LSE to gain a certificate in Social Science and became a lecturer for the CWL citizenship campaign launched in 1918 to coincide with the granting of the partial franchise. Surprisingly, on top of all

this work for the CWL she was also known for her articles on Botticelli which appeared in the Jesuit periodical The Month.

Despite her central position among the founders of the CWL, Ada Streeter is an example of those women who are all but lost to history. This obscurity can be partly explained by her own self deprecation, seen in the example above, in which she described her administrative skills as “tidiness” and in part by being overshadowed by Margaret Fletcher whose life conformed more closely to the gendered bias of the heroic pioneer. As Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman pointed out different criteria are used in history to identify the achievements of men and women⁶⁷³ and Ada Streeter did not display the characteristics of the suffering woman struggling to survive harsh realities of her contemporary society. Ada Streeter was a policy maker serving on all the key committees that formulated the institutional structure of the CWL. She was an innovator, she developed the administrative structure of the CWL and a role model to many women in her role of public speaker, lecturer and editor of the CWLM. Ada Streeter occupied a central position in the formal and informal networks which drew so many Catholic women into social work in the period covered by this study. While Ada Streeter’s focus had been on the needs of the London Catholic poor, another key figure in the development of the CWL. Frances Zanetti had built her reputation as an activist for social care in Manchester.

G. Frances Zanetti

There is no information about Frances Zanetti's personal life. Her activities in the public sphere do provide some insights into her character and beliefs.

From her published articles it is possible to discern that Frances Zanetti along with most of the founders of the CWL held a somewhat ambivalent position towards the women's movement. She deplored the old ideas of finishing a girl's education at a young age. "Book-learning...and a smattering of music [and] drawing," were in her opinion inadequate. She argued instead that education should mean "something higher, a cultivation of all our mental, moral and physical powers."⁶⁷⁴ She identified part of the problem to be the gendered separation of life experiences, that meant boys:

go out into the world, rub shoulders with all sorts and conditions of men, learn business habits...[whereas] a Catholic girl, [is] brought up in the seclusion of a convent and consequently entirely ignorant of any world outside her own restricted circle.⁶⁷⁵

This may indicate that her own philanthropic work was a reaction to a restricted circle in her youth. Her solution to the "narrow, prejudiced and altogether erroneous judgement too often noticeable in women.. [was] active work or interest outside as well as within the home",⁶⁷⁶ but did not involve a radical reinterpretation of the role of women. She advocated voluntary work for women. The suitable field for their philanthropy was a traditional one because "there are no subjects more specially interesting to women than the welfare of the aged, the sick and the children".⁶⁷⁷ Therefore the administration of the Poor Law was the best place for Catholic women to do this work. Indeed she argued that the improvements already seen in the provision for

the recipients of the Poor Law had been in direct response to the involvement of women.

In her description of the provision made for Poor Law children in the Manchester area where she was an inspector, she tried to encourage Catholic women to participate in the Poor Law as volunteers. One reason, besides the usual references to Christian charity and Christian duty is, "the delightful satisfaction felt after the performance of real useful work".⁶⁷⁸

Frances Zanetti like many of the earliest supporters of the CWL was conscious that many Catholics left social work within the community to religious orders and outside their faith community they were content to leave it to other denominations. She made her disapproval clear when she lamented:

They put us Catholics to shame... we are too delicate, too lethargic, too prone to shut our eyes to the seamy side of life, leaving others to do our duty. Yet we are the first to cry out against the proselytizing of those whose bodies we will not try to save but whose souls we dare to claim.⁶⁷⁹

She referred here to the Catholic hierarchy's long held suspicion of state welfare as a means of converting Catholic children into Church of England/Protestant children and implied a criticism of this position when it was not followed up by useful social work.

Frances Zanetti warranted her own entry in the Catholic Who's Who because of her work under the Infant Life Act. It is not clear how old she was when she began this work in 1896. Indeed her authority on this subject was so recognised that she gave evidence to the Select Committee which prepared the amendment forming part of the Children's Act of 1908. Frances Zanetti was already well-established as the Inspector of the Chorlton Union in Manchester.

As part of her continued commitment to reducing the infant mortality rate she reported to the readers of The Crucible her experiences at the International Congress held in Berlin in 1912 on this subject. The English delegation consisted of over sixty men and women including official delegates from the CWL. Her report was full of praise for methods employed in Germany to reduce their infant mortality rate. Frances Zanetti noted that in Germany "these committees, though composed of volunteers, are hampered by no trace of the amateur methods so frequent an accompaniment to unpaid work"⁶⁸⁰ in Britain. Within a few months of her report in The Crucible, the CWLM published its first call to members of the CWL to start mothers and babies groups. In February 1916 Frances Zanetti was the obvious choice of the CWL to speak at their AGM on "The Preservation of Infant Life". (See Chapter Seven for details of the CWL campaign to reduce the infant mortality rate.)

In common with many women engaged in voluntary social work during this period, Frances Zanetti was a member of the National Union of Women Workers. This umbrella organization had been set up in 1895 to maximise women's efforts and act as a pressure group taking welfare concerns to the government. The NUWW was a non-denominational organization. Frances Zanetti was a member of the NUWW before she joined the CWL. When the CWL became an affiliated society to NUWW she acted as an official CWL delegate to its annual conference. Frances Zanetti's report on the 1912 conference appeared in the CWLM where she indicated her attitude to Catholic involvement with non-Catholic organizations. She recorded the enthusiasm of the 600 delegates who represented over 170 organizations. Frances Zanetti saw:

the great value of the Conference lay in the association of every description of worker- the professional, the Poor Law, Public Health, Medicine, Art, and the Drama; the well-trained amateur serving on Boards of Guardians, Town and County Councils, and Industrial Committees, or engaged in systematic social work; and the learners anxious to find an outlet for their social energy⁶⁸¹

and the importance to women of presenting them with an opportunity to feel empowered if only as a non-political pressure group. Many of the papers she reported on were concerned with government bills and acts on subjects such as The Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Mental Deficiency Bill.

Judging by the content of her first article in The Crucible⁶⁸² she shared similar ideals to the other founders of the CWL before it had been formed. This first

article was in fact a paper she had read to a branch of the Catholic Truth Society nearly a year before Margaret Fletcher published her "Proposals for a League of Women Workers" in September 1906. It was therefore natural that when the CWL was begun in London in the winter of 1906 Frances Zanetti was eager to get involved. She arranged a meeting of Catholic delegates already attending the NUWW conference in Manchester which both she and Ada Streeter addressed. That meeting resulted in some thirty women joining the CWL. The Manchester branch of the CWL was formed out of these members.⁶⁸³ Frances Zanetti remained an active member of the branch and served as its honorary secretary.⁶⁸⁴ (It was later renamed The Salford Diocesan Branch.)

In 1911 Frances Zanetti served as the chairman of the branch. Later she was the honorary secretary of the Girls' Club Union formed in Manchester. She twice represented the CWL at the International CWL in Madrid and in Vienna. In 1922 and 1923 she was one of three delegates to the CWL Council for the Salford Branch. As honorary secretary she was author of both the annual reports for 1922 and 1923. Frances Zanetti was recognised in her lifetime both by the Pope with the Cross *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* and by the King of the Belgians with *Medaille de la Reine Elizabeth*.

On her retirement she was commended for "standing for the League first and last", and urging close co-operation with existing Catholic societies. In particular she had contributed to a close relationship and active co-operation between the CWL and CSG.⁶⁸⁵

When Margaret Fletcher spoke at the celebrations for the 21st anniversary of the Salford (Manchester) branch Frances Zanetti was one of the two women she singled out for particular mention. Part of her tribute was:

when in 1911 the newly founded Union Internationale des Ligues Catholiques des Féminies met in Madrid it was Miss Zanetti who read a paper on the conditions of women's work in the Lancaster cotton industry, which set a standard for the industrial section, and was printed in full in the Madrid secular press.⁶⁸⁶

Apart from her continued interest in infant welfare, Frances Zanetti also worked for the benefit of working-class Catholic girls in the Manchester area. In October 1907 she focused on the needs of Catholic girls leaving Poor Law protection and embarking on wage-earning. She saw the solution to be a national society similar to the Church of England's Girls Friendly Society. She argued for a national society that would befriend these girls and prevent them from falling into bad company. She lamented the "patchwork philanthropy" and the "expenditure on the cures of evils which should never have been allowed to arise".⁶⁸⁷ She commended her idea to her audience/readers that the work "should appeal to all on the grounds of its common sense and economy [for] prevention is... cheaper" than the cure.⁶⁸⁸ In November 1908 the Manchester Branch set up a sectional committee under her leadership to start girls' clubs in the area. The first one began work in St Anne's Hall Ancoats. By June 1909 it had a regular attendance of over 100 members and held classes on Wednesday nights.⁶⁸⁹

Despite the CWL's recommendation of girls' clubs to all its branches, Frances Zanetti as late as 1917 still complained:

Catholics as a body do not appear, as yet, to realize the importance of Club work. It is for this reason that so many of our girls are drawn into non-Catholic organizations and it should be our aim to prevent this by providing our own Clubs to preserve the Catholic environment so necessary for these girls and to save them from influences which, however well meaning, may in time cause indifference and even laxity in religion.⁶⁹⁰

From her advice to those who did set up such clubs we have an insight into her own contribution to the work: "the ideal club naturally should aim at education, judiciously combined with recreation, and should realize that to many industrial workers an education in recreation itself is an urgent necessity".⁶⁹¹ She went on to recommend entering the girls in inter-club competitions and holding regular social evenings and Christmas parties to which guests of both sexes could be invited. In an article made up of club reports given by actual members of the CWL girls' clubs in Manchester and published in the CWLM Jennie Hyde, Agnes Slatter and Annie Smith had originally delivered their reports as speeches; these reports were of course, entirely favourable but the fact that the reports were presented by women who came from "one of the poorest districts in Manchester"⁶⁹² represent a measure of Frances Zanetti's success. These reports are the only example of the CWLM publishing a response by recipients of their social work. It may also suggest that Frances Zanetti was committed to giving these women a public voice.

Frances Zanetti was an experienced lecturer. Several of her published articles began as lectures (See Chapter Seven). In the report on her lecture concerning the Infant Life Protection Act and the Children's Act she was described as beginning with "general remarks on what had been accomplished for children during the reigns of Queen Victoria and King Edward VII, and gave much interesting information, to which the large audience listened with evident appreciation."⁶⁹³ She was also a participant in the Manchester branch's debates. Clearly she was an accomplished public speaker. Her philanthropic work before the formation of the CWL had already led her to identify the need for Catholic women to be educated and trained in social work in order to remove the stigma of the amateur. Frances Zanetti's work for the poor of Manchester crossed the divide between the formal structure of the Poor Law and the informal world of Catholic social work. Her commitment to the reduction of the infant mortality rate brought her in contact with central government and with the international community. While her writings gave no indication of a conscious identification with the women's movement, her energetic pursuit of improvement for the poor of Manchester, her leadership within the Manchester Branch of the CWL and her attendance at several conferences at home and abroad as the official delegate for different societies showed her disregard of those restrictions that still operated against women.

3. Conclusion

Analysis of these biographies reveals similarities and differences. The women were all Catholics but three at least were converts. It is possible that Alice Johnson was also a convert; from the scant evidence she did not have a traditional Catholic schooling. This means that a significant proportion of the founding executive committee was composed of converts. Of these converts Margaret Fletcher and Agnes Gibbs as daughters of Victorian vicars must have been familiar with parish-based charitable work and with the stereotype of the women who usually carried out much of the philanthropy of the nineteenth century. Converts are often more enthusiastic about their chosen faith than those familiar with its teachings all their life. Thus Margaret Fletcher, Agnes Gibbs and Ada Streeter may have been more zealous in their commitment to their faith community than lifelong Catholics.

These women came from the upper and middle classes and their experiences were of a comfortable family in which, except for the clergymen, their fathers did not need to earn their own living. Margaret Fletcher and Alice Johnson did have professional careers. The former after studying art in Paris taught art at the Oxford High School for Girls and the latter was a successful doctor of varied experience. Of the married women only Agnes Gibbs' husband is recorded as earning his living. He was a successful journalist and author. James Hope and Mark Sykes had distinguished careers in politics but these were unsalaried posts for most of the period covered by this study. Although the financial status of Flora Kirwan, Ada Streeter and Frances Zanetti, all single women, is not known it would appear that they were able to live without recourse to wage earning. Despite their leisured lifestyle these women did

not advocate a life of leisure. Their writings are permeated with references to the merits of hard work. By 'work' they meant voluntary work, that is, unpaid. They held in contempt the woman not prepared to engage in any charitable activity but they never challenged the idea that married middle-class women should not engage in paid employment. They frequently lamented the need for working-class married women to be wage earners and ascribed to that necessity many of the ills besetting working-class families.

For the founding women, education was an important function of the CWL. Margaret Fletcher benefited from the expansion of secondary education for girls in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Alice Johnson experienced a feminist inspired education provided by Marie Souvestre at Allenswood. Agnes Gibbs was educated in a Belgian convent. (Her entry in the Catholic Who's Who does not give its name.) Of these three women only Agnes Gibbs probably received a traditional convent schooling, though as a non-Catholic she would have been spared the close observance of religious rituals. It is possible that the other five women did not go to school at all and received all their education at home. All were aware of the changes in female education during the nineteenth century and were conscious of the widening opportunities for intellectual development. Perhaps these women had a shared sense of deprivation in their own education which engendered a subsequent desire to compensate members of the CWL for opportunities missed.

Except for Alice Johnson, the women are not recorded as supporters of the suffrage campaigns but in their writings they do reveal themselves as supporters of the more conservative aspects of the women's movement.

Margaret Fletcher, Agnes Gibbs and Frances Zanetti expressed their approval of many aspects of the women's movement in their articles and all the women rejected the domestic ideology which sought to confine women to the home and exclude them from the public sphere. The CWL's relationship with feminism has been examined in Chapter Six, here it is worth pointing out that despite what they wrote, by their actions they challenged the stereotypes of wife, mother and single woman. They advocated the study of economics (not a common subject for women), personal contact with the working class and the poor, co-operation with non-Catholic societies like the NUWW and participation in all forms of local government open to women. They wrote articles and gave lectures on social topics such as the infant mortality rate and they travelled across England and on the continent in their various roles as CWL representatives. By a careful compromise negotiated between the conventions of behaviour and a determination to bring about changes for Catholic women, they were able to balance the conservative with the radical and carve out a role for devout women committed to reforming many aspects of early twentieth century society especially with regard to the poor.

These women brought with them to the founding of the CWL varied interests and experiences that placed each one at the centre of a web of relationships with informal networks and the formal structures of local and central government. It is far easier for the historian to demonstrate how these women

engaged with formal networks in the form of the CWSS, the CSG, the LOC and the CTS but it is more problematic to identify involvement in friendship networks. The scant personal correspondence extant suggests that like so many women of the nineteenth and early twentieth century such networks did exist among them. Networks also involve an interdependence which outweighs differences among its individuals. What differences the women had, for example concerning the women's movement were not significant enough to disrupt their interdependence, which they acknowledged as essential when they advocated loyalty to the League.

The following chapter concludes with an appraisal of the findings presented in this thesis. The chapter also includes suggestions whereby the present research could be extended among other Catholic leagues.

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Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to identify how the CWL was able to deliver an informal education to English Catholic women during the early years of the twentieth century and their reasons and purpose for doing so. In fulfilling this aim this study has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the process by which women developed their own organizations, reconciled conservative religious belief with the Women's Movement and provided for their own education. It has revealed some of the motivations for conservative feminist activists.

This study has subjected, for the first time, the CWL minute books covering the period 1906 to 1923 to close documentary analysis which has revealed the complex process by which the CWL moved from being a tightly knit London based organization to a national society able to place large numbers of women volunteers into the community during the First World War, and meet the challenge of the immediate post-war period.

This study has focused specifically on the CWL as part of the English Catholic community. The role of the CWL in Wales should be the subject of separate research so that full consideration could be given to the unique features of the Welsh Catholic community. Scotland and Ireland with their own Catholic hierarchies developed women's leagues after the founding of the English

CWL and in different circumstances. These leagues would provide new fields of investigation which could lead to the construction of a comparative history.

The CWL was part of the Fédération Internationale des Ligues Catholiques Féminines, an international grouping of women's leagues with similar aims and objectives, under the authority of the Vatican. This Fédération held several conferences before the First World War including the 1912 meeting located in London and chaired by Margaret Fletcher. The Fédération resumed work in the 1920s. The Fédération was an international organization founded for women and run by women located within the Roman Catholic Church and as such an examination of it would make a valuable contribution to the history of Catholic lay women in the early twentieth century to complement the findings of the current study.

The only detailed historical research that has included the CWL focused on the period after 1919 and did not make use of primary sources relating to the earlier period. The findings of this study concerning the characteristics of the organization of the CWL helps us to understand the processes women employed to create their own organization. This investigation into the CWL from its birth in 1906 to its emergence as a high status national society by 1923 breaks new ground.

The analysis of the minute books coupled with printed primary sources has provided insight into the mechanisms by which the CWL grew its structure. In the pioneer period branches were often formed in a town or city by a small enthusiastic group but process this became more formalised. In Leeds with the personal intervention of the hierarchy in 1910 a new structure, a diocesan branch was formed. By 1919 there were four diocesan branches with twenty sub-sections between them. By replicating the geographical structure of Catholic dioceses the CWL reinforced its close relationship with the hierarchy. The flexible nature of the organization is demonstrated by plotting the development of the Council. As the ascendancy of the London membership gave way to a more balanced national model the Council became the significant decision-making body to which all branches sent delegates. From 1913 the CWL responded to further expansion by holding Council meetings outside London. It is interesting to note that in the pre-franchise period CWL members were encouraged to see the Council as their parliament. Members of the CWL were given a structured system of branch government in which to participate, electing delegates to the national Council and attending national Annual General Meetings. Involvement in the decision-making process was seen as educative and empowering. Overall, the women involved were committed to 'democratic government', correct committee procedure and maintaining control over expansion.

This thesis has identified social class as one of the most significant issues that provoked conflict and disagreement among the founders of the CWL.

Despite its declaration to unite all Catholic women into one organization, the founders resisted attempts to widen the membership to include working-class women. CWL membership consisted of Catholic women from the leisured classes who had already engaged in charitable work. It assumed women of the upper and middle classes would possess the right qualities and potential to become activists in the public sphere. This policy was successful with the initial membership growing from 500 members to about 1,250 in 1909 and by 1912 it had expanded to over 6,800. After the initial discussions over working-class membership the subject was dropped. It is suggested here that the subject of the relationship of the CWL to the class structure of Edwardian society proved too painful for the founders to refer to the issue again. To draw a firm conclusion from the subsequent silence in the minute books to the issue of class is difficult but the episode points to a repeated strategy for conflict resolution used by the CWL, to postpone further discussion and quietly to drop the subject. Throughout the period which forms the focus for this study middle-class assumptions permeate the accounts of social activities such as afternoon lectures and garden parties.

The formation of the Rome branch against the expressed policy of the CWL and its constitution, illustrates the care the CWL took to maintain good relations with the Catholic hierarchy. Faced with the hierarchical interference which resulted in a branch of the English CWL being formed in Rome, the CWL submitted to this infringement of its constitution and accepted the anomaly of having a branch outside England and Wales.

This study has demonstrated how the CWL successfully provided large numbers of Catholic women with an organization that worked closely with the English Catholic hierarchy in providing social care to the deprived and vulnerable of the Catholic community. It gave its members a semi-autonomous society designed to translate CWL social care policies into action at branch level. Catholic women created their own high status society visible in the public sphere through its links with organizations such as the NUWW and Women's Industrial Council.

In addressing the second key research theme of the study concerning the CWL's construction of the ideological space, "Christian Feminism" it has been possible to make a further contribution to the extensive historiography on the Women's Movement of the early twentieth century. The debt owed by the Women's Movement to the Enlightenment, socialism and radical Protestant Non-conformist groups has been documented by historical research but few historians have examined the relationship between Catholicism and feminism. By focusing on women who made religious beliefs their central motivation for their activism the current study has shown how women within the institutional patriarchal Church constructed an ideological space where they could be both feminist and Catholic. The aim here has been to trace the development of a conservative feminism which drew on traditional Catholic teachings. This study traced the development of "Christian Feminism" as the ideology which

informed its members and empowered them to grow the organization into a national society. By placing their discussion of women's involvement in the public sphere in terms of traditional religious teaching on the Christian vocation to care for the poor, CWL writers were able to avoid the more radical positions of suffrage societies such as the CWSS. Exhortations to Catholic women to engage in active citizenship challenged the Catholic version of the separate spheres ideology in which girls were trained to a life of religious devotion and self-sacrifice within the home or the convent. The CWL believed that industrialized society needed a systematic approach to social care, not pious individual acts of charity. Where the aims and aspirations of Women's Movement did not challenge Christian teachings on marriage and the family, for example, in its demand for better opportunities in education and paid employment "Christian Feminism" endorsed Catholic women's involvement. Conflict came where feminists rejected Christian principles and argued for a radical remodelling of society. The CWL believed Catholic women were in danger of being led by anti-Christian forces away from their faith. "Christian Feminism" besides constructing a useful space for Catholic women to occupy in the Women's Movement also fed into the CWL commitment to education. Educated Catholic women would be better equipped to discern the acceptable ambitions of the Women's Movement. A better knowledge of their Catholic heritage would enable them to defend the Church against the anti-Christian element among feminists. The ideological space provided by the CWL was a conservative feminism which combined those aspects of feminism which focused on the contribution women brought to the public sphere where their maternal instincts influenced social care.

The third research area of the present study directed attention to the field of women's education. Schools and colleges that delivered female education during the period concerned here have received close scrutiny by historians. By focusing on the educational strategies of the CWL this study therefore moves that research into the informal education that women provided for women.

This thesis has considered the theoretical basis for the CWL's educational programme and set out the strategies it employed. At the heart of this theory was the imperative to turn individual volunteers into trained and organized social workers. The transition from individual philanthropy to quasi-professional social care has been the subject of historical research but the focus has usually been on Anglican and Non-conformist charitable organizations or the role of Catholic religious orders. The current work has for the first time provided a detailed investigation of the efforts of Catholic lay women to bring about social reform.

The CWL's educational theory grew out of the twin convictions that Catholic lay women were needed to provide social care to the Catholic community and that care was best delivered by trained social workers. Women learned to combine secular knowledge of the social sciences with the Church's teaching

on social and moral issues through membership of the CWL and its programme of lectures and conferences. Members acquired the skills of co-operation and communication by serving on CWL committees and participating in branch activities. The CWL adapted its educational theory to enable its members during the First World War by promoting co-operation with non-Catholic organizations, training volunteers to staff CWL recreation huts and founding hostels for munitions workers. Further evidence of the organization's adaptability to meet new educational and social challenges is illustrated by an examination of the CWL's citizenship campaign. The Campaign begun in 1919 combined the well-established methods of lectures and study clubs with the new feature of examinations held by accredited women examiners. Examination results were published in the CWLM to encourage new participants.

The contribution of seven key women in formulating a feminist ideology and an educational theory to meet the needs of the society they helped to found is discussed throughout this thesis but they were also the subject of specific research directed into their individual characters and motivations. The close documentary analysis of their published work, along with biographical detail contributes to women's history by establishing that far from being passive victims of an institutional, patriarchal church they were authoritative women. They negotiated a useful space where they formulated theories to endorse their activism in the public sphere.

These women were motivated by two important desires, of improving women lives through education and welfare provision, and that social care was an integral part of their religion. Allied to these was the need to defend a conservative view of the role of women within the family and the Church. In their writings they presented social care as a vocation which in the complex society of the early twentieth century was best fulfilled by engagement with the secular world in the form of the Poor Law, welfare committees and systematic social work. This position involved a deliberate break with the traditional style of the LOC with its emphasis on prayer and the spiritual welfare of the poor. The CWL developed a more secular approach with its concern for an efficient organization that could direct large numbers of women into voluntary work. They were convinced that society had reached a point when it was necessary for women to join together, to learn to work together and construct an organization whose decision making processes would empower them to act as agents of social care.

Members of the CWL were constantly presented with role models to emulate. Members of the Central Executive Committee visited branches providing physical proof that Catholic women could occupy the public sphere without compromising their femininity. The CWL lauded women engaged in a vast array of social work including district visiting, running girls' clubs and hostels for munitions workers and they were presented to the membership at lectures, branch AGMs, conferences as women to be admired and emulated.

What then was the CWL's legacy bequeathed to subsequent generations by its founders? In the short term the CWL built on the foundations of these early years (1906-1923) and continued to provide Catholic women with an organisation that, during the inter-war period, combined defence of traditional Catholic teaching on divorce and birth control with social care. In 1937 the hierarchy set up the National Board of Catholic Women to co-ordinate several Catholic women's societies including the CWL and the newly independent Union of Catholic Mothers. The years 1939-1945 saw the CWL revive many activities first undertaken during the First World War such as providing canteens for servicemen. Immediately after the Second World War the CWL was involved in the care of refugees, displaced persons and concentration camp survivors. This commitment to social care outside the UK also brought the CWL into close association with the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD). The CWL has raised funds for both individuals and projects in many deprived communities across the world.

The long term legacy of the CWL can be found in the activities of their present day successors. The national executive includes a Social Awareness Team which covers: relief and refugee, health, youth and family, inter church and inter faith, parliamentary observation, Our Lady's Catechists, social issues, international, justice and peace and the services. The CWL maintains its links with other national leagues through its membership of the successor to the Fédération Internationale des Ligues Catholiques Féminines, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisation. WUCWO's stated aims are "promote the presence, participation and co-responsibility of Catholic women

in society and the Church in order to enable them to fulfil their mission of evangelisation and to work for human development".⁶⁹⁴

Despite the recent decline in numbers and changes in the socio-religious context in which the present CWL functions it still maintains a commitment to social care that can be traced back to its foundation. At the 2006 national AGM of the CWL support was sought for a group working with rescued trafficked women. Thus demonstrating that, although the lives of its twenty-first century members may have changed in almost every particular compared to those of Margaret Fletcher and her companions, there still exists the need for women to work together for the benefit of deprived and vulnerable women in the Britain of today.

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