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NEW FOOTSTEPS IN WELL-TRODDEN WAYS A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CATHOLIC JOURNALIST KATHERINE ELEANOR CONWAY

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NEW FOOTSTEPS IN WELL-TRODDEN WAYS
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CATHOLIC JOURNALIST KATHERINE ELEANOR CONWAY

By

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ABSTRACT

BY

Denyse Lynne Smith

Katherine Conway was a journalist, editor, author, poet and artist who lived at the turn of the last century. Her accomplishments as a writer were significant, but she also made a huge contribution to the future of women in journalism as the first and only female editor of the *Boston Pilot*, a Catholic newspaper published today by the Archdiocese of Boston.

Conway had edited secular newspapers in New York in the 1880s, and became managing editor of the *Pilot* in 1905.

Interestingly, Conway, who never married, was an advocate of marriage and family. Although she opposed the suffrage, she thought that women should be lauded for their accomplishments, not because they were women, but because they were individuals. She was against the suffrage but stood for equality.

As editor of the *Pilot* Conway editorialized against "Woman Suffrage," and spoke out against women in the workplace, all the while living the life she so staunchly railed against. Access to information about Conway is available through an archive held at the John Burn's Library of Boston College, as well as microfilmed newspapers archived at Notre Dame University.

DEDICATION

To Whitney, Joe, Emily and Wayne. I couldn't have done this without you!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the librarians at the John Burns Library of Boston College for their assistance in researching the Conway Archives, Margaret Gonsalves, Associate Archivist at the Archdiocese of Boston, Sr. Connie Derby, Archivist at the Diocese of Rochester New York, my committee members, Brett McLaughlin and Dr. Kim Piper-Aikin, and especially my advisor, Dr. Lucinda Davenport.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It's been nearly a century since the one and only woman held the position of editor-in-chief of the Boston Pilot, began publishing in 1836. The *Pilot*, the official publication of the Archdiocese of Boston, was once a privately owned newspaper in Boston, publishing Irish American-Catholic news.

A century ago when most women struggled to gain recognition in the newsroom and society and the Catholic Church dictated that women stay home, raise their children and submit to their husbands, fathers or brothers as the case may have been, Katherine Eleanor Conway nearly single handedly ran one of Boston's premier Irish American-Catholic newspapers for over a decade.

Even though her name never graced the masthead, and her by-line was seldom on its pages, Conway's heart and soul were on nearly every page of the *Pilot* from the day John Boyle O'Reilly hired her in 1883 until May of 1908 when Archbishop William O'Connell dismissed her from her duties.

Hired by O'Reilly as an editorial assistant, Conway and James Jeffrey Roche assumed editorial control of the Pilot when O'Reilly died suddenly of an accidental overdose of sleeping medication in 1890.[1] Although Roche was officially editor-in-chief and held stock in the *Pilot*, Conway carried the bulk of the

[1] Pioneer Catholic Journalism, Paul J. Foik, 1930, p. 179

load for publishing the weekly paper because of Roche's ill health and then his assignment to the American Consular Service in Genoa in 1904.[2]

Although she remained single and was a career woman, Conway wrote and spoke about the virtues of womanhood, taking the Catholic Church's position that women had two choices in life: 1) wifehood and motherhood or 2) the convent.[3]

Conway was unique in her achievements in the newsroom, at a time when other women tried to make their way into the man's world and failed. The few women who were hired as reporters ended up writing society columns or features. Hard news stories, matters of politics and managerial duties were strictly a man's job.

Women journalists such as Helen Winslow of Boston and Elizabeth Cochrane (Nellie Bly), did outrageous things to get their feet through the doors of the newsroom. Cochrane "feigned insanity" to get her job at the *New York World*, while others waited for editors to return their calls or wrote outrageous stories, or "make news" to get noticed in the newspaper business. Male counterparts usually didn't take the women reporters seriously,[4] yet Conway and her contemporary Louise Guiney who both worked for O'Reilly, seemed to have commanded respect unmatched by many women of their time.

Conway's career as a journalist began when she was 15 years old and ended with her final editorial column the week before she passed away at the

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[2] Ibid, p. 180

[3] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, Eleanor C. Donnelly, 1894, p. 152

[4] American Journalism, Winter 2001, *Grit Your Teeth, then Learn to Swear: Women in Journalistic Careers, 1850-1926*, Agnes Hooper Gottlieb

age of 74. In direct conflict with her convent education, Conway never married nor did she have any children of her own yet; she spent most of her creative energies extolling the virtues of motherhood and wifehood and calling women to abandon the idea of entering public life in deference to their true vocations.[5]

Although Conway's career was vast and varied, this paper looks at a brief period of time during which she not only trod in man's footsteps, but she dared fill his shoes as managing editor of the *Boston Pilot*, an Irish-Catholic publication owned by the Patrick Donahoe family.

Conway's life and work were fraught with irony. She was a career woman who considered women in the workplace a threat to home and family life. She was the founding member of the John Boyle O'Reilly Reading Circle and the New England Women's Press Association, but she railed against women becoming too involved in social clubs. Conway's lack of putting into practice what she preached made for interesting research and was the objective of this study.

One overriding factor that seems to have made itself plain in the research is that Conway railed against the suffrage because she believed women and men were equal in intelligence and capability in most respects. In conflict with what she had been taught, Conway believed that woman, as woman, had no place in public vocations, but woman as human did.

Conway was also an interesting subject because not much had been written about her in the past, other than short entries in journalism and Catholic biographies.

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[5] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, 1894, p. 149

Paula M. Kane, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, wrote the most comprehensively about Conway. She has a lengthy biography in her book, "*Separatism & Subculture: Boston Catholicism 1900-1920*"[6] Conway was also the focus of Kane's paper "*The Pulpit of the Hearthstone: Katherine Conway and Boston Catholic Women, 1900 – 1920*" in the U.S. Catholic Historian.

Conway is mentioned briefly in Professor Patrick W. Carey's 1993 book, *The Roman Catholics*, Paul Foik's 1969 *Pioneer Catholic Journalism*, and her name is mentioned in Apollinaris W. Baumgartner's 1967 thesis, "*Catholic Journalism, A study of its development in the United States, 1789-1930*," however in Baumgartner's study there is a greater history of the Pilot.

Other brief biographies about Conway have appeared in *US Catholic Historian*, and *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*. Conway's friend and contemporary Annette Driscoll wrote a memorial to Conway after her death in January 1928, which was published in *Catholic World*.

This paper looks cumulatively at Conway's work as well as what has been written about her by other biographers, her diary entries, and personal correspondence.

Biographical and historical information on Conway, O'Reilly, O'Connell, the *Pilot* and the *Republic* were available in original and archival documents from Boston College and the Archdiocese of Boston, and the University of Notre Dame.

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[6] Separatism & Subculture: Boston Catholicism 1900-1920, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 1994

Looking at this brief period of Conway's life opens a window to a when women journalists were not welcome in the newsroom. Furthermore, in the Catholic press they also struggled with the Church's doctrine that women should stay home with their families or enter the convent.

Conway found an ally in her friend and mentor Bishop Bernard McQuaid in her hometown of Rochester New York, and her letters to him were an additional window into her life that couldn't otherwise be seen.

Conway broke through the barriers of the newsroom and worked in defiance of the Catholic Church, at the same time touting the Church and society's doctrine. The main focus of this paper will be to look at how her Catholic view of life affected her professional view of life, and also how she was treated as a woman working in a man's world.

Her correspondence with both Archbishop William O'Connell and Bishop Bernard McQuaid shed some light on the latter, while her diary entries, articles and clippings from her scrapbooks gave perspective to the former.

Conway's Catholic-ness dictated much of her life, but it was also a contradiction to the way she lived. This paper takes a brief look into her life and work as a Catholic woman working in a man's profession.

Her life and work shed an interesting light on what it was like to be a journalist at a time when women weren't welcome in the newsroom, and as a Catholic writer worked against the male establishment, but also the male dominated Church as well.

CHAPTER 2

Katherine Eleanor Conway - A Woman of Her Time

Looking back about a hundred years, one at first sees a simpler day. Women were mothers and wives, training the next generation. Their jobs were at home, not in the public arena, unless out of necessity. Men headed off to the workplace every day leaving their wives to tend the household and keep up social appearances. It was the turn of the twentieth century. Women were expected to keep the home and raise the children.

On close examination, one sees women who weren't content with the life of servitude to men that society demanded. A growing number of women were beginning to enter colleges and the professional workforce as teachers, bookkeepers, accountants, secretaries and cashiers. And, despite our founding father's refusal to give women equal citizenship or even human status, (a woman was her father's property until she married, then she became her husband's chattel,) it was a time when many women fought on both sides of what was known as "The Woman Suffrage."[7]

When the United States was born, the newly drafted Declaration of Independence contained a phrase that almost immediately started an uprising among the "gentler" sex. The phrase, in the opening lines of the document reads, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all *men* are created equal..." [emphasis mine] but made no provision for women. Beginning with the wives of

[7] Although referred to also as Women's Suffrage the Library of Congress reference is Woman Suffrage.

the founding fathers, demands were made for change. The wife of John Adams, Abigail Adams, was one of the first suffragists, and the movement continued from the eighteenth into the early 20th century.[8] Still today, women fight for equal pay for equal work.

In addition to societal norms, church norms dictated the behavior of women. The Catholic Church taught that a woman was a man's companion and "must so remain – under the power of love and affection, but always under his power."[9] With that, there were women who fought on both sides of the issue - from the perspective of freedom vs. the pulpit of their religious leanings.

Conway, a prominent Catholic journalist, poet and author in Boston felt that Woman Suffrage would serve only one purpose: to destroy the dignity of the family, particularly those of a Catholic persuasion. Her life was so steeped in Catholic tradition that she believed as she would have been taught by her religion that there was only one place in society for women: at home.

Conway, who never married or had children of her own preached from a self made pulpit of the virtues of womanhood and family. She spoke often and wrote oftener that women should find their dignity in changing society from within, rather than from without, the home.

As a journalist on the opposing side of one of the largest women's issues of the day, Conway and her contemporaries were criticized for their views.

She argued against the notion that the church oppressed women. She wrote in her essay published in "A Girlhood's Handbook of Woman," compiled by

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[8] www.historychannel.com/exhibits/woman

[9] Separatism and Subculture, Paula M. Kane, Chapel Hill Publishing, 1994, p. 146

Eleanor C. Donnelly: "What doors indeed, has the Church closed on intelligence and ability as manifested by women, but the doors of the sanctuary and the pulpit?"[10] She wrote that although divine law prohibits women from becoming priests or preachers, "women may have free scope in philosophy, law, medicine, letters, the liberal arts, the trades and industries." However in earlier paragraphs she wrote, "The vocation of the overwhelming majority of women is to wifehood and motherhood; and their bodily and mental sensitiveness and timidity, and the fixed aversion, or at least indifference, of most of them to public work, are safeguards raised by God's own hand about the sanctuary of life."

Described as a frail, "small woman with dark complexion, eyes and hair, and a very animated way of talking,"[11] Conway believed that it was God's divine plan that women be stay-at-home mothers. They weren't built for the labors of the working world or the rigors of public office. The Church taught and still does to this day that the family is the sanctuary of life. She believed in a natural law theory about the complementarity of the sexes, that God has different purposes for men and women, and that it was important for the different genders to be committed to the purpose God set before them.

Among anti-suffragists Conway's arguments were not dissimilar, but the irony is, she didn't practice what she preached, and in an 1894 article published in the Suffragist publication, *The Woman's Journal* Conway's views were attacked. "Miss Conway claims that the suffrage movement 'fosters disesteem for private life, and for that vocation which is down in the divine plan for the

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[10] A Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, 152

[11] Miss Katherine E. Conway, Biographical sketch in scrapbook

overwhelming majority of women.' This is a common idea among those who have little inside acquaintance with the suffrage movement, but it is an entire misapprehension."[12] Meaning the author didn't subscribe to Conway's belief in complementarity of sexes.

The same author disputed Conway's claim that "the movement for suffrage was mainly a movement of, by and for unmarried women." The author wrote that the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association had only 8 unmarried women, while it had 20 married women and a handful of men.

Conway also wrote editorials and features often about the social ramifications of allowing women to vote or hold office. As member of the Women's Press Association, founding member of the John Boyle O'Reilly Reading Circle and other clubs, Conway also spoke often on the topic. Into the early 1900s, she urged women to stop flooding the newsrooms in search of careers, and stop looking toward elected office.

She claimed that giving women the right to vote would prompt them to want to hold public office, a job for which women were not well suited. "I fear the emotional nature by which we are inevitably partisans," she told an interviewer in the 1890s. "I don't doubt for a minute our ability to grasp political topics so as to discuss them intelligently, but I doubt the power of our poor little bones and muscles to withstand the strain of campaigns."[13] Although this article, found in her scrapbook, omitted the newspaper citation and by-line, Conway's own editorials and other writings reflected the same attitude about women working in

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[12] Woman's Journal: Boston, on April 21, 1894

[13] A Decoration for Miss Conway, Scrapbook, Boston College Archives

the public arena.[14] including her editorial in the *Pilot*, "Woman has No Vocation to Public Life," among others.

But, in *The Normal Christian Woman,* as in much of her other work, there always seemed to be an acknowledgement that the writer wasn't doing what she told her reader to do - more or less a "do as I say, and not as I do" statement. The following paragraph Conway wrote seems to be more about her own choice to be a career woman and follow her own path than the one she believed was pre-ordained by God.

"While believing that woman, as woman, has no public sphere, she believes also that the woman as an intelligence, a rational creature, responsible for her own deeds, and free to choose her own state of life, may be, or do, what she can; that some women by virtue, not of their womanhood, but of their strong individualities, marked ability, and the demands of unusual environment, may have as special call to some public duty."[15]

The Woman Suffrage was not only a movement to gain women access to the voting booth, but also equal access with men to education, safe working environments, equal pay for equal work, and the ability to keep what they earned. Up until the passage of the equal rights amendment in 1920 women were considered part of their husband's property, and everything a woman had belonged to her husband, father or, in some cases, a son.[16]

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[14] "Woman Has No Vocation to Public Life," the original title of her essay published as "The Normal Christian Woman" in a Girlhood's Handbook of Woman reflected what she had been taught about women taking on work outside the home.
[15] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, 152
[16] www.historychannel.com/exhibits/woman

Conway's arguments were largely against the right to vote issue, and the notion that women hold public office. In an article published in the *New York Times*, Conway is quoted as saying that the suffrage movement would cause a breakdown in the family and "cause many divorces." She called for women to return to "the virtues of yester-year – the virtues of our foremothers, their kindness, sweetness, forbearance, and devotion to their children which called forth the respect of men."[17]

Conway also thought that women should seek professional careers only as a necessity to support themselves. Fifth of 13 children born to James and Sarah Conway, Katherine spent nearly 60 years as a career woman at a time when few women were allowed through the hallowed doors of the newsroom. She began her career at 16 when her first work was published. But, she hadn't planned to make a career of journalism.

Conway's parents were political activists, having fled Great Britain and immigrating to Rochester, New York, after the Chartist movement deteriorated in his homeland. The Chartists was a political group in Victorian England who sought social reform in parliament and was also known as a workingman's suffrage.[18] In America, James Conway embraced the Democratic Party platform, which at the end of the 19th century befriended the immigrant families as they flooded into America, helping them gain access to the American mainstream. Ironically, the Democratic Party was also a strong supporter of the Woman

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[17] New York Times Article from archives scrapbook, "College Women on Dr. Abbott's Trail, Equal Suffrage Leaguers to Argue for Ballot at Meeting on December18", December 12, 1908

[18] www.britainexpress.com/history/victorian/chartism.htm

Suffrage movement, but that didn't dissuade Katherine from her political leanings even as she followed lockstep in her father's shoes.

By trade, James Conway was a bridge-builder and railroad contractor, but his political conversations with friends gave Katherine insight into the outside world. In an interview with the Boston Post, she told her interviewer, "My father was a good thinker and to him I owe my interest in public affairs. The atmosphere of our home was literary; there were books, papers, magazines; there were grave discussions on topics of the day by my father and his friends."[19]

Her mother, Sarah was a homemaker, but is referred to as "cool-brained and expressive."[20]

Conway's home and school life were filled with books. She was exposed to great works through her friend and mentor Bishop Bernard McQuaid of Rochester, who "was a friend of the family, and interested himself very kindly in me and in an informal way directed my reading."[21] Throughout her career she kept close contact with McQuaid up to his death in 1909.

Prior to her tutelage with McQuaid, Conway was a student at St. Mary's Academy in Buffalo, New York, where her teacher exposed her to the great writers of the time. "She was a singularly gifted woman, accomplished, earnest, who had known personally many of the famous people of the Dickens-Thackaray

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[19] Scrapbook article, Boston Post, circa 1900
[20] Ibid
[21] Ibid

Era, and the glimpse she gave her young pupil into that golden time was a not to be forgotten delight,"[22] according to "The Story of the Irish in Boston".

It's possible that through her love of books and reading she became such an advocate of education, especially the education of women, and a staunch supporter of Catholic schools for girls.

Conway, who helped start a Catholic Summer School in Boston, wrote to McQuaid in 1907 supporting Rome's proposal for a girls' school "under distinctly Catholic direction at Oxford." She asked McQuaid to work at turning a hall at Cornell into a "distinctly Catholic Hall."[23]

Conway credited the Suffrage movement with raising the standards for women's education. "This reflex action has been good in so far as it has accelerated the opening of new and befitting avenues for the woman wage-earner on the industrial or intellectual lines; or stimulated the ambition of the woman capable of taking it, for the higher education."[24]

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[22] The Story of the Irish in Boston, edited by James B. Cullen & Company, 1899
[23] Letter to McQuaid, April 27, 1907
[24] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, 151

CHAPTER 3

Katherine Eleanor Conway - A Woman Before Her Time

From her first published work, she moved into the publishing world, writing and editing a "modest little Catholic monthly"[25] paper in Rochester, New York, called the *West End Journal*, before embarking on her professional career. When her father fell on financial hardship she joined the editorial staff the *Rochester Daily Union* and later joined *The Catholic Union and Times* of Buffalo[26].

Although it isn't stated anywhere in the research, from Conway's view of motherhood and wifehood, she had probably aspired to that end herself. She told an interviewer for the *Buffalo New York Morning Courier* in August of 1889 that she hadn't intended to write as a means of self-support. "It was because I felt like writing. I felt as if I must write, but I have supported myself in this way since my early twenties, but for three or four years at the start I had no thought of doing anything for myself in that way."[27]

She also hadn't planned to join the staff of the *Boston Pilot*, which became the cornerstone of her career. After working for the smaller *The Catholic Union and Times*, Conway was invited to work on the *Pilot* by editor and publisher John Boyle O'Reilly, who became her mentor and close friend. The story of how Conway came to O'Reilly's attention varies depending on the source, but by all accounts her work impressed him and she was invited to a position on his staff.

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[25] In Memoriam – Katherine E. Conway, Catholic World, Fall, 1927, Annette S. Driscoll p. 481
[26] Encyclopedia of American Catholic History, Glazier/Shelly, p. 376
[27] Scrapbook article, 1889

Driscoll wrote, "It was he who had given her the first check for a poem, and who now invited her to join the editorial staff of *The Pilot*, which he and James Jeffrey Roche were brilliantly conducting."[28] She took a position as editorial assistant. It was her steerage of the *Boston Pilot* that gained Conway the most notoriety.

Conway wasn't the first female newspaper editor, but she was the first and only to ever manage the *Boston Pilot*. Before her there were many pioneer women journalists, though few in the Catholic press.

Agnes Hooper Gottlieb wrote extensively on women in newspapers during the late 19th century, particularly in her book *Women Journalists and the Municipal Housekeeping Movement 1868 – 1914*. Gottlieb gives a historical overview of women's struggle to get their feet through the doors of the male dominated newsrooms. She wrote that women were hired primarily to write the "women's page," which was added to newspapers and magazines to increase readership among women to attract them to the advertisements.

The women's pages also helped boost advertising among department stores, but despite the fact that they helped bring in more revenue for the papers they didn't elevate the status of women in the newsroom.[29]

Unlike Winslow and Elizabeth Bisland, Louise Malloy and others in Gottlieb's "Grit Your Teeth..." article, who seemed to be met with more barriers to the newsroom doors than they were with paychecks, Conway didn't have the same disesteem. Her stories weren't just coverage of the women's clubs and latest fashions, but the politics and news of the day. Many women journalists

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[28] In Memoriam – Annette Driscoll, Catholic World, 1927

[29] *Women Journalists and the Municipal Housekeeping Movement 1868 – 1914,* Agnes Hooper Gottlieb, Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., NY, 2001

became "disillusioned and dissatisfied with newspaper work," because it seemed they could never gain the respect of their editors. There were those who didn't give up, though, and found a way to keep pushing their agendas.

Elizabeth Cochrane, also known as Nellie Bly, opened a whole new door to women journalists, taking them off the society and "women's pages" and into a whole new level of journalism, called "stunt journalism," where the journalist became part of the story. Bly and other women like her posed as beggars, servants and sometimes lunatics to get a good story, and the racier the story the better.[30] Bly's stunt journalism became the investigative journalism of today.

Gottlieb wrote that the numbers of female journalists rose significantly between 1890 and 1900. In 1870 there were "only thirty-five persons, less than 0.6 percent of all working journalists." But by 1900 there were 2,193 women who claimed journalism as their profession.[31]

Conway worked for a conservative Irish Catholic newspaper where she wrote editorials and stories about the ideal Catholic society, and had the respect of her editor.

Early in her career, Conway, like most other female journalists[32] wrote under a pen name. She used the name Mercedes[33] until she went to work for O'Reilly at the *Pilot*.

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[30] Ibid

[31] Grit Your Teeth, then Learn to Swear: Women in Journalistic Careers, 1850 – 1926, Agnes Hooper Gottlieb, American Journalism, 2001.

[32] Up to 1900 the use of pen names by female journalists was not uncommon, particularly among stunt journalists, and were used as a way to preserve the journalist's anonymity - Gottleib

[33] Separatism and Subculture, Kane, p. 221

Conway also wrote often from her apartment, as was the case of many women journalists. For most women journalists "writing could be done at home and was seen as a more genteel way of earning a living," as Gottlieb wrote in "Grit Your Teeth..." But, for Conway writing from her apartment was more or less a necessity. She was often stricken with fitful coughing and bronchitis, and sometimes wrote from her bed. She was frail and unhealthy throughout most of her life, writing once to Archbishop John O'Connell that she'd been diagnosed with "a very rare condition – one to one hundred thousand in troubles of bones and muscles – a species of mal-nutrition which has left those wretched little bones in a state resembling those of an underfed adolescent."[34]

She also suffered long, unrelenting bouts of insomnia but managed to keep up her own as well as the workload of James Jeffrey Roche for several years.

For Conway, writing from home also presented a means to living her Catholic faith. She had been taught that even though she was not married or raising her own family, she still had responsibilities to the Church family. As an unmarried woman she was expected to live the cloistered life, and avoid competition with men. One way she did that was by working from her small apartment.[35]

Despite having all the responsibility of editing and publishing the paper for three years, Conway's name didn't appear on the masthead, and though he had

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[34] Letter to Cardinal William O'Connell, July 1, 1921, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston
[35] Separatism and Subculture, Kane, p. 228

left the paper in 1905, James Jeffrey Roche was still listed as editor and publisher until well after the archdiocese took over its steerage.

Conway's devotion to the Blessed Virgin would have given her the piety and humility to write anonymously for the *Pilot*. Like most Catholics of the time, Conway would have been schooled in a devotion to Mary that would have called her to be like the Blessed Virgin.

In her paper on "Editorial Work," Conway explained, "It has always seemed to me to be a magnificent thing to feel behind one's written word the momentum not only of one's own strength, but of the strength of all one's equally unseen associates."[36]

Unlike other female journalists of the time, Conway didn't seem to have the same struggle in the newsroom. She had found in O'Reilly an editor who saw in her a talent, and who trusted her not to allow her feminine sensibilities to bias her work. She was also loyal enough to her Catholic and Irish beliefs that O'Reilly trusted that her conservative view would remain constant.

"She has the heart of a woman, and the brain of a man," O'Reilly is quoted as having said of Conway, giving her an advantage the Suffragists and women journalists with social agendas didn't have. Conway could walk in a man's shoes if she believed in and spoke the same language as a man, but in the end, even though she had "the brain of a man," she still couldn't wear the pants of one.

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[36] Article from scrapbook, "On Editorial Work"

In the 1880's when Conway had her foot firmly planted in the *Pilot* newsroom, other women struggled to get through the newsroom doors. It would be another decade and a half before women were finding themselves more accepted in the male dominated world of the newsroom, and by then Conway was on her way to editing.

By the time other women journalists were making their names known in the New England Women's Press Association, Conway's name was already becoming known in wider circles. In 1893, Conway was invited to help in planning the Catholic Congress in Chicago. The following statement was used to describe Conway: "An active, assertive, and unmarried career woman, she extolled the importance of marriage for women and strenuously opposed Woman Suffrage initiatives in Massachusetts." [37]

William J. Onahan asked Conway to help organize a "Women's Day," as part of the Catholic Congress that year in hopes that it would draw a larger female contingent, but Conway objected, saying that men wouldn't attend if there were a women's day "because it would seem a 'dreary bore' to them."[38]

Conway wanted equal representation for women at the congress, but didn't want them to be exploited just because they were women. Despite the fact that Conway believed women were subordinate to men, she also believed they were equal to men in many ways, including intelligence. "Conway implied that women should not raise issues of particular interest to their sex but should

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[37] American Catholic Lay Groups and Transatlantic Social Reform in the Progressive Era, Deirdre M. Moloney. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002 p. 10
[38] Ibid

instead demonstrate their intelligence only on general topics in forums alongside men."[39]

In objecting to the "Women's Day" part of the Catholic Congress, Conway told Onahan, "I have always had a horror of the exploiting of women as women in any public gathering." She also didn't want to open any discussion to the feminist or suffragist viewpoint, which she disagreed with so vehemently.[40]

Conway wasn't successful in keeping the "Women's Day" off the agenda, but she was able to keep it from being named such. The paper she presented "Woman Has No Vocation to Public Life," was published as part of a book titled "Girlhood's Handbook of Women," compiled and edited by another of Conway's contemporaries, Eleanor C. Donnelly. When it was published the title of Conway's essay was changed to "The Normal Christian Woman."[41]

Conway also wrote editorials about what was known as the "woman question." The "woman question," as it was called, was a notion that focused on whether gender should be a factor in granting rights or not, particularly when it came to voting, education and holding property. In an unattributed editorial, titled only "Written for Congress of Women Journalists, World's Fair," and signed by hand, Conway explained she thought the focus should be less on women, and more on individuals.

"If I may venture to interpret the suggestions which it was my pleasure and my profit to hear, I would say rather, that she would have us for one thing to

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[39] Ibid
[40] Ibid
[41] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, p. 151

eliminate from the consideration of our "woman's work," the "woman's," and think simply of the work." She wrote further that, "The patient study of such work, the persistent aspiration to equal excellence, must marvelously develop the ability of the woman who has ability to develop."[42]

It seems that Conway would rather avoid the "woman question" all together, than allow debate on the Suffrage, which to Conway was the antithesis of womanhood. Conway's view of "the woman question," also seemed to be a contradiction to her belief in gender complementarity.

A regular column in the *Pilot* was news briefs pulled from European papers. The opening paragraph in the column "Frivolity" for January 11, 1908, would have summed up Conway's feelings about why discussions about the Suffrage in America were best avoided. "An English suffragette visiting in the United States says that the American woman is generations behind the English woman in 'emancipation'. Suffragette is a good word to designate the person to whom it is applied for it conforms to no law, means nothing, and is ugly, and it is to be hoped that it will be many generations before the comparatively quiet female suffragist of the United States developed not the brawling, booing English suffragette who deliberately disturbs the peace and is 'removed' from political meetings."[43]

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[42] Written for Congress of Women Journalists, World's Fair, Scrapbook page

[43] Boston Pilot, January 11, 1908 – The brief paragraphs in "Frivolity" were typically written about European gentry, including on this particular day, the German Emperor, and Prince Olaf of Norway among others.

CHAPTER 4

Katherine Eleanor Conway - the *Pilot* Years

During her school years Conway received numerous awards for her poetry, and had edited a little monthly newspaper in her hometown called the *West End Journal* then going to work as a writer for *The Catholic Union and Times* of Buffalo.

John Boyle O'Reilly, an outspoken Irish-Catholic conservative, and publisher of the *Boston Pilot* had seen Conway's work and asked her to join his staff. In 1883 at the age of 21 as an editorial assistant, the young journalist, who hadn't planned to be a writer for the rest of her life, accepted the position, and began a journey that would span the next four and a half decades.

O'Reilly was a well-respected publisher in Boston who was politically and religiously outspoken. He used the *Pilot* as a vehicle to forward his agenda, which was to promote the Irish and Catholicism in America.

Professor Paul J. Foik offered a brief biography of O'Reilly in his book, *Pioneer Catholic Journalism*. He was an escaped political prisoner, who had been charged with treason and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment for his activities in the Fenian Brotherhood, a group whose mission was to eradicate the British from Ireland. O'Reilly fled the island in a rowboat from a penal colony in Western Australia before finishing his sentence. After some time he was

rescued: "At last an American whaler signaled to him. In utter exhaustion he sank on the deck of the *Gazelle*."[44]

A year after arriving in America in 1870, O'Reilly took the helm of the *Pilot*, owned by Patrick Donahoe. Under O'Reilly the *Pilot* was read by the Catholic population nationwide. By the time Conway took over as managing editor, some two decades after O'Reilly's death in 1890 readership had fallen off and the paper became largely a local Catholic publication.

Founded in 1836, the *Pilot* survived three fires and financial turmoil before being bought by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston in 1908.[45] "The older generation that supported the *Pilot* had died out, and with changes of years and customs and the growth of other diocesan weeklies, the *Pilot* lost its national circulation and prestige."[46] By 1930, weekly circulation was 50,000 but the paper was no longer a private enterprise.[47]

Conway's tenure with the *Pilot* spanned thirty-five years, from 1883 until Cardinal John O'Connell dismissed her in early 1908. Under O'Reilly, Conway flourished as an author and journalist. Her first assignment as a reporter for the *Pilot* was to cover the Catholic Centenary Congress of 1889.[48]

Quite possibly the reason she attracted the attention of O'Reilly, and seemed to have such a thriving career at the *Pilot*, was because of her devout Catholic faith and her staunch adherence to the teachings of the church. That,

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[44] Pioneer Catholic Journalsim, Paul J. Foik, Greenwood Press, 1969
[45] Ibid
[46] Ibid
[47] Catholic Journalism in the United States, Apollinaris Baumgartner, AMS Press, NY, 1967 – circulation statistics for prior years are not available.
[48] Encyclopedia of American Catholic History, Glazier/Shelley, p. 376

along with a gift for writing, gave her the advantage she needed to secure and maintain her position on one of Boston's most highly recognized Catholic publications.

Because most of the articles were unsigned and without by-lines, it is difficult to tell what exactly Conway wrote, although some of her work is archived in personal scrapbooks in the John Burns Library of Boston College.

In trying to determine what Conway would have written for the *Pilot*, it was necessary to get a sense of her writing style by reviewing the editorials she contributed other newspapers and the books she published. While employed at the *Pilot*, Conway wrote a series of books entitled *The Family Sitting Room Series*, so it is highly possible that the column "In the Family Sitting Room" in the pages of the *Pilot* is also her work.

"In the Family Sitting Room" was a regular column that appeared weekly even after Conway left the *Pilot*. However, after Conway's departure the column took a different tone. In her analysis, Kane concluded that Conway could have written the column, saying, "subject matter and stylistic evidence support the theory."[49]

In the column, the writer, presumably Conway, wrote often about issues concerning women and issues in the Catholic Church. In the weeks before Conway's dismissal, she wrote a series on "Some Heroic Women of Today," and "In Answer to Many Questions," and finally, "The Argument of Example." Each

[49] Separatism and Subculture, p. 227

series of columns stretched for five to six weeks and dealt with matters of faith or family.

Conway, who had been raised with a convent education and taught in the Catechism that girls should aspire to motherhood and wifehood, wasn't interested in forwarding the agenda of the Suffragists. Her books, titled *A Lady and Her Letters, Making Friends and Keeping Them, Questions of Honor in the Christian Life, Bettering Ourselves* and *The Christian Gentlewoman and the Social Apostolate,* were were filled with the sentiment that she'd been taught as a conservative Catholic Christian girl. It was a conservative view that served the *Pilot*, O'Reilly and Donahoe.

Women such as Ida Tarbell, Elizabeth Cochrane, Ishbel Ross and Helen Winslow were using their journalistic talents to affect social change, but Conway used hers to keep the status quo. Conway's religion taught that a woman's place was, if not in the convent as spiritual mother, then in the home as mother and wife, training the future leaders of society and their wives.

"Their intellectual force has ordinarily been expended in the training of their own children," Conway wrote in *The Normal Christian Woman*, or, "in the training of the future congenial wives of intelligent men."[50] This was exactly the conservative thinking that O'Reilly and the Archdiocese of Boston would have revered in a newspaperwoman. As a trusted journalist, Conway would have had the audience that her male counterparts couldn't reach. Much like the editors of the large city dailies who wanted to increase their female readership by adding

[50] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, 151

the "women's pages," it made sense that O'Reilly would add women to his staff to "preach to the choir."

Katherine Conway worked and mentored under O'Reilly until 1890. Then her world was shaken, but not so immeasurably as to be taken off course. On October 10th, O'Reilly, who, like Conway suffered from unrelenting bouts of insomnia, took a sleeping potion that proved fatal.[51] When O'Reilly died suddenly of an accidental poisoning, the staff of the *Pilot*, and the readers of the Catholic Northeast mourned. "He was gone," Conway later wrote to Bishop McQuaid, "and the earth rocked under me."[52]

O'Reilly seemed to have a strong influence over Conway, just as he did over all of his staff. Conway wrote to Bishop McQuaid in December of 1886 that he is a "generous and considerate employer – a man to be thoroughly respected as well as liked by all who are associated with him."[53]

The front page of the next issue was taken up with a lengthy biography of O'Reilly and his accomplishments as a publisher, poet and journalist the week after his death. And, the *Pilot* continued, without a misstep,.

Conway, also a poet, wrote a poem that could presumably have been about her relationship with the late *Pilot* editor and close friend. After his death she wrote the forward to a book of O'Reilly's poetry called, "Watchwords."

Seventeen years later, Conway's poem entitled "Not Out of Sight," and was published in the *Pilot*.

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[51] Pioneer Catholic Journalism, Foik
[52] Letter to McQuaid, April 10, 1907
[53] Letter to McQuaid, 12/14/1886

So sad in life, even when thy lips were smiling,
Those comforting, compassionate eyes of thine;
So eloquent, another's pain beguiling,
"Lo, my friend grieves, and all his grief is mine."
Who knew thee came to thee to trust unbounded –
Was ever depth thine own soul had not sounded?

I wonder is it joy to thee in Heaven,
Oh, loving, helping, giving – now to know
The love and grief to they dear memory given.
Thou art not gone – we cannot let thee go –
Beyond our reach – ah yes! – and crowned with light,
But still in sight – oh, never out of sight!

And shall it be in vain, oh, dear befriender?
Nay, ours the blame, if thou no blessing bring.
Thou art unchanged – man-brave and woman-tender
And Christ-like merciful and pitying.
Look with remembering eyes to God, while we
Look on thee and grow faintly like to thee.[54]

Although it was published years after O'Reilly's death, in light of Conway's seeming adoration of him, it fits that the poem would have been about him and the loss she felt at his death.

James Jeffrey Roche took over the editorial responsibilities of the *Pilot*. Roche, like Conway had been an assistant editor at the *Pilot* under O'Reilly, and held many of the same conservative views. But, in the years after O'Reilly's death, it was Conway, and not Roche, who ran the paper. Roche made editorial decisions, but she handled the day-to-day operations.

Throughout her years at the *Pilot* Conway kept in contact with Bishop McQuaid, chronicling her life and work through letters. From 1886 to 1907, Conway wrote to the bishop frequently. The letters, archived at the Diocese of

[54] Boston Pilot, March 1907

Rochester in New York, offer a glimpse of Conway that can't be seen in her editorials, and are more detailed than her diaries.

The research doesn't speak to directly to the nature of her relationships with either McQuaid or O'Reilly, only to say that Conway was devoted to both as teachers and mentors. She met McQuaid as a girl in Rochester, New York when he was her parish priest, and continued a close relationship with him until he died in 1909.

The letters reveal that throughout her life, Conway was troubled with illness. She was frail as a girl, and many of her adult winters were spent bedridden, with her nights fraught with the sleeplessness of insomnia. In her diaries she wrote of taking veronal powders to help her sleep, but to the bishop, she asked for prayers and mentioned that she was "seemingly on the verge of the grave" quite often.

Somehow despite her "wrecked" health Conway managed to publish the 16- to 24-page broadsheet newspaper every week. Whether from her bed, or whether she managed to get into "headquarters," this was an admirable feat for someone who suffered illness frequently enough that "brought me to death's door" or suffered rare maladies that made her bones as brittle as a "malnourished teenager."[55]

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[55] Letters to McQuaid, 1886-1907 – In the Roman Catholic Church the Bishop is the chief priest of a diocese. Bishops are responsible for the pastoral care of their dioceses. In addition, bishops have a responsibility to act in council with other bishops to guide the Church.

Conspicuously, there is a lapse of about two years between letters, from June of 1890 to February of 1892. Conway presumably didn't write after O'Reilly's death because of her grief, the constant workload and her own mother's death in early 1892.

The friendship she had with Bishop McQuaid was one of the closest she had in her life, second only to her parents. "I never forgot – but I never fully realized till I came here to Boston – how much I am indebted to you for whatever good there is in my life,"[56] she wrote in the first of the archived letters in July of 1886.

Although McQuaid was her teacher and mentor, Conway's letters reflected a special friendship with the Bishop of the Diocese of Rochester. Very often she wrote to him when either she would be traveling to Rochester or in anticipation of his visits to Boston. "Counting on taking every minute you can spare for me,"[57] and "looking forward to the happiness of seeing you soon, as ever."[58] There is no mistaking that there was nothing untoward in her friendship with the bishop, just that it had been long and close.

Conway seemed content with the way things progressed at the *Pilot* after O'Reilly's death, and didn't mention him to McQuaid in all of the 15 that years she corresponded with the bishop (1892 to 1907.) In her letters to McQuaid, at least there were no mentions that she was unhappy in her work, or that things weren't going well.

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[56] Ibid, 7/1886
[57] Ibid, 1/2/1893
[58] Ibid, 1/17/1899

Whether in praise of his work or discussing church politics, Conway continued to write to McQuaid until 1907. The last letter was written just before she received the Laetare Medal from the University of Notre Dame.

It was during the last few years between 1904 and 1907 that Conway had taken over or was in process of taking over as Managing Editor of the *Pilot*. Up to that point, Conway didn't write much about her circumstances on the *Pilot*, except to occasionally write about an upcoming vacation or an editorial she'd written.

From O'Reilly's editorship to the death of owner Patrick Donahoe in 1901, the *Pilot* was a conservative Democratic, Irish-Catholic publication. But in 1904 Conway voiced her concern that Roche was endorsing Roosevelt in the election: "No one objected to a good word for Roosevelt. What was deplored was the abuse of the party through whom the fathers and grandfathers of most of us won their own civic standing and ours."[59]

Conway grew up in a democratic household, and was a friend to many Democrats in Boston. "When the change was foreshadowed, I thought it meant that the *Pilot* would be an 'Independent.' I never expected that its friendship for Roosevelt would involve an aggressive Republican campaign; and I protested with all candor to the editor against the first page articles of Joseph Smith; who six months ago was assailing Roosevelt in one of our dailies."[60]

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[59] Ibid, 12/4/1904

[60] Ibid - Joseph Smith was the founder and president of the Mormon church.

Conway assumed that Roche supported Roosevelt because of his own political ambitions. She was right. That same year Roche was appointed to the American Consular Service in Genoa.

"If he is to have an office, it must be an easy one, because his health is poor, and long hours and severe labor would be beyond him," Conway wrote to McQuaid on December 4, 1904.[61]

Because of Roche's ill health Conway took on the task of editing and publishing the paper nearly single handedly, a burden she bore in near silence, except in correspondence to Bishop McQuaid and in her diary pages. In early 1905 Roche left for his position to the American Consular Service at Genoa, leaving Conway fully in charge of the *Pilot*, which was also a relief.

"He spoke of his prolonged ill-health as the cause of his anxiety to get out of the *Pilot*," Conway wrote to McQuaid on December 29, 1904, "and, as to my long upholding of the paper during his protracted illnesses and absences, informed me that I could not have done differently, that it was, in effect, all in the day's work, and that as a matter of regard for public opinion, I could not have left him while he was sick!"[62]

Prior to Roche's departure Conway feared that Roche would sell his stock in the company and she would lose her job all together. Once Roche left the *Pilot*, Conway kept up the weekly publication of the paper, sometimes working without pay, and oftentimes paying employees out of her own savings. She wrote to Bishop McQuaid on September 13, 1905, just nine months after Roche's

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[61] Ibid

[62] Ibid, 12/29/1904

leaving, that "the *Pilot* is in better shape in a business way than it was a year ago." She also added a comment from Archbishop Williams, of the Archdiocese of Boston, "which amused me not a little: 'Well, you have a position now; you are free from that man's dictation or interference."[63]

During that time Conway toiled without vacations and "a load of work and detail that one of my daily paper brethren calls 'cruelty to animals.'" Conway wrote to McQuaid that despite the workload and lack of time off, "my head never aches, but I seemed to get strained about the heart."[64]

Conway had enjoyed the support of Bishop McQuaid and Archbishop John Williams. Then in 1907 her friend and confidant Williams passed away, leaving Conway vulnerable to the new Archbishop of the archdiocese, William O'Connell.

According to Kane's biographical sketch in her book *Separatism and Subculture*, O'Connell was self-serving and power hungry.[65] Other recorders of Boston's Catholic history, including Professor Thomas O'Connor of Boston College and Professor Patrick Carey of Marquette University, wrote of O'Connell in a more favorable light. "Although he was never popular among the American bishops, and although his national leadership in American Catholicism decreased after the death of Pius X in 1914, he had a significant conservative impact on the

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[63] Ibid, 9/13/1905
[64] Ibid, 4/27/1907
[65] Separatism and Subculture, p. 17

Archdiocese of Boston throughout his reign and was a forceful public figure there."[66]

After he was appointed Archbishop of Boston in 1907, O'Connell bought the *Pilot* from the remaining shareholders, including the heirs to Patrick Donahoe, and brought it under the auspices of the Archdiocese. Conway was told in March 1908 that she would have a place on the paper, but if she were offered another job she shouldn't turn it down.

Conway wrote the following in her diary on March 31, 1908: "The last day of St. Joseph's Month and the old *Pilot* has crashed down in ruins – a friend told me after mass of the selling of the *Pilot* stock at Mr. G's[67] office – after a brief consultation — I went down to headquarters. News cautiously confirmed but not a date set."[68]

There was no date set for the take over, and it was all done quietly enough. Archbishop William O'Connell took over editorial control of the *Pilot* in May of 1908 and dismissed Conway without fanfare or recognition of her efforts. There was no change on the front page, no front-page story, and the masthead didn't reflect any change in ownership of the paper for several more months. Conway's name had never been on the masthead as managing editor, so she had never been given recognition within its pages for her work.

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[66] The Roman Catholics, Patrick Carey, Greenwood Press, 1993, p. 289

[67] In Conway's diaries she often used only initials or sometimes — to identify people she was writing about. Mr. G. could have been Mr. Gargan she referred to later in a letter to Bishop O'Connell.

[68] Diary page, 3/31/1908

During that year, it seemed as though Conway had developed a good working relationship with O'Connell, but it is evident through her correspondence with him later that their relationship was more of a convenience than a friendship.

Staunchly conservative and educated in a school that taught there were two categories of women, "nuns, who were revered and laywomen, who were dangerous"[69] Archbishop O'Connell practiced what he preached. He also believed in gender complimentarity and thought women had no place in society, other than as wives and mothers, or nuns. Conway, in her editorials and writing for the paper probably would have repeated O'Connell's mantra as a way of appeasing him to an extent because for many years, even before O'Connell was appointed head of the Boston Archdiocese, Conway believed the same thing.

It is not inherently clear what happened or why, but somewhere within the weeks prior to her leaving the *Pilot*, Conway's thinking appeared to have changed. Perhaps it was because of distaste for the new Archbishop, or mourning the prior Cardinal of the Archdiocese and her friend, Cardinal Williams, but, just before the Archdiocese took over the *Pilot*, Conway published in the *Pilot* a paper she gave before the New England Women's Press Association that might have sealed her fate.

Kane wrote in *Separatism and Subculture* that Conway wasn't dismissed because of any "personal or budgetary reasons,"[70] So perhaps it was something else. On Saturday, March 14, 1908, just two weeks before the *Pilot* stock was sold to the Archdiocese, Conway wrote, "The spread of democratic ideas, the

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[69] Separatism & Subculture, p. 170
[70] Ibid, p. 223

diffusion of popular education, the opening of new opportunities for women's abilities, have not revolutionized women. They have merely given fresh demonstrations of a truth already proved, that women can do many things as well as men can, and some a little better."[71]

Up to this point Conway had railed against women in the work place and preached that women should find their satisfaction as wives and mothers, or spiritual mothers, in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church. However, in this paper, Conway wrote something completely converse to what she had spoken of in the past. "American women of today have conquered a field undreamed of anywhere until a comparatively recent date – scope full and free on the newspaper press. A woman can enter on journalism more easily than on any other intellectual work."

It seemed interesting that a woman who believed that God had ordained specific gender roles for men and women would further write, "Not only can she do some newspaper work as well as a man can, but she has created lines of work in which she can have no masculine competitors. The occupation by which she lives enables her to help in the social uplift. But to this latter good end, she must respect herself and her calling."[72] Perhaps this is when Conway found it appropriate to voice the opinion she'd long held, that women, as humans did have a place in public vocations.

Compared to Conway's 1893 essay, "The Normal Christian Woman," Conway may seem in 15 years, to have changed her mind about women working

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[71] *Boston Pilot,* Women and Newspapers, Vol. 71, No. 11, Mar. 14, 1908
[72] Ibid

outside the home. In the early days she wrote, "Woman being after man, and from man, does not represent the full and complete sense that man does. It cannot be necessary, nor even useful, that she should try to do what she cannot do."

Also the sentiment in her early book *The Christian Gentlewoman and the Social Apostolate*, published in 1899, reflect a longing for the days of the "old fashioned gentlewoman." She wrote, "The reflex action (of the Suffrage) is bad again for it fosters disesteem for private life, and for that vocation which is down in the Divine plan for the overwhelming majority of women."[73]

In her later life, Conway contradicted herself and the things she so clearly taught and believed for many years. Perhaps it had to do with knowing that her days as editor of the *Pilot* were numbered, so she decided to write what she actually believed, or perhaps she realized that the numbers of women in the newsroom were growing faster than she could dissuade them, and if she couldn't stop them, why not encourage them?

Conway's emancipation speech was published on March 14, 1908. One week later, in the column titled "The Family Sitting Room," Conway, wrote about the Catholic Church and the Education of Women. It continued the mantra that Conway chanted throughout her career - that the Catholic Church didn't oppress women. "After all there is not much prohibitive ecclesiastical legislation in regard to women. They are interdicted from the offices of priest and preacher by the divine, not by the ecclesiastical law. In the Old Dispensation, women of force of

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[73] The Christian Gentlewoman and the Social Apostolate, Katherine Conway, Pilot Publishing, 1899, p. 14

character and great mental ability cut their own channels of activity as they do today; without reprehension."[74]

As Kane noted, the columns are unsigned, but comparing the above with Conway's earlier work shows that the paragraph nearly mirrors a paragraph she wrote 15 years earlier in her "Normal Christian Gentlewoman," essay at that time where she wrote, "What doors indeed, has the Church closed on intelligence and ability as manifested by women, but the doors of the sanctuary and the pulpit? And here, the ecclesiastical law but emphasizes the Divine law against women as priests and preachers. Women may have free scope in philosophy and theology, law, medicine, letters, the liberal arts, the trades and industries, as students, and teachers – their own ability and opportunity alone determining their limitations."[75]

Upon closer examination, the two similar essays show that Conway changed her mind not about women's roles in the church, but about in the workplace, and as individuals. She seems to have given in to the notion that women would be leaving home despite the Church's teaching to the contrary.

The question could be asked: why did she choose to publish her essay on Women and Newspapers at just the time when Archbishop O'Connell was planning the take-over of her beloved *Pilot*? At a time when it would have been crucial for Conway to consider losing her position and her livelihood, Conway chose to toss before O'Connell a bone of contention.

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[74] Boston Pilot, March 21, 1908
[75] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, p. 152

And, was it her words about a woman being able to do anything a man can do, and sometimes better, which would have riled the archbishop, or farther into her speech, where Conway called on women journalists to have their own minds in their work?

"I know the newspaper woman cannot often choose her tasks; but her opportunity to serve her paper and herself will come through, keeping the freshness of her sympathies and doing a common thing in an uncommon way."[76]

Within this speech to the Social Education Congress of Boston in 1908, Conway seemed to be calling women journalists to social reform, in much the same way the suffragists tried to in years previous. "We are on the eve of perhaps the most thrilling epoch in our country's history," she wrote. "It has been tried before in conflict with royal rule; in the 'brothers' war' over the evil legacy of slavery; by its sudden development into a world power; by its immense material prosperity. In all these tests, liberty has far held its own. But now true liberty is menaced by its worst foe – license."[77]

It isn't clear what the cataclysm is that she wrote about, but she called on the women journalists to make a difference in the future of newspapers. "And here the conservatism of women in private life, and as exponents on the press of all life, will be potent in saving the home and the nation."[78]

Based on limited knowledge of Conway's relationship with Archbishop O'Connell, it would seem her speech had bearing on her dismissal as managing

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[76] Boston Pilot, 3/21/1908
[76] Ibid
[78] Ibid

editor of the *Pilot* in May of 1908. Her diaries only attest that she left the *Pilot* with an offer to work for John F. Fitzgerald on his newspaper, *The Republic.*

Kane alluded that O'Connell dismissed Conway solely because he wanted complete control of the paper, and not because of financial concerns or his personal feelings about women in the workplace.[79]

Just a year earlier, O'Connell had praised Conway as a journalist and as a Catholic when she received the Laetare Medal of Notre Dame University. The Laetare Medal is an annual award given to Catholic Laity by the University of Notre Dame for distinguished service to the Church or humanity. O'Connell called Conway a "valiant woman. A quarter of a century of noble work done with no fitting recompense is tonight in some measure rewarded."[80]

O'Connell, in his speech before 1,500 people at Boston College on May 17, 1907, lauded Conway for her work as a journalist and for her devotion to her faith. "First of all, and above all, her work is her own life. Without that her work would mean much less. Let me sum it all up in a word – she is a Catholic lady; Catholic in her true piety, a lady in her true gentleness. Here indeed is the foundation of whatever she has done," and "her sex is a debtor to her pen, for in all her volumes she has given women the noble place with which Christianity endowed her, near the alter and the fireside. No modern fad, no new phrase of the feminine has moved her from that true standpoint. And she could write about what a good woman ought to be because she was one herself."[81]

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[79] Separatism and Subculture, p. 223
[80] Boston Pilot, 5/25/1907
[81] Ibid

CHAPTER 5

Training the future journalist

During her tenure with the *Pilot*, Conway had the opportunity to speak and write often about what a good, female journalist should be. In many of her unsigned editorials she wrote about journalistic excellence, and how to compete with men in a male dominated profession, and also why women should *not* take up the pen as a means of support.

As a young student at Sacred Heart Convent, Conway hadn't intended to write as a means to earn a living. While in school her poetry and essays won her praise and an occasional prize. She later put those talents to use to help her family when her father suffered a financial loss in the late 1870s. Conway went to work for *The Catholic Union and Times* of Buffalo. She later told an interviewer, "I did not begin to write as a means of self support; it was because I felt like writing."[82]

Conway was outspoken about women as professionals, especially those who thought the writing life would be an easy way to make a living. She took her profession seriously, and asked other women entering the newspaper business to do the same.

She worried about the effect that the suffrage would have on women trying to enter the newsroom, especially those who worked hard to achieve success. In "The Christian Gentlewoman," Conway wrote of the "bad reflex action" of the suffrage, "when it fosters disesteem for private life, and for that vocation which is

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[82] Scrapbook article – Boston Post

down in the Divine plan for the overwhelming majority of women; - and also, when by incessant clamor over occasional feminine successes on unusual lines, it stimulates an army of women with slight qualification save conceit and inordinate ambition for a hazard of new fortunes on the same lines."[83]

Her fear was that while some women might work hard to succeed, and after months or years without any recognition, finally find some fame, there would be a "hundred strike out for a short cut to the same eminence, without thought of the need of similar qualifications and similar long apprenticeship."[84]

Conway advocated that if a woman should take up the pen or come to the printer's case, she should have "a standard of excellence, and that which conforms thereto must be not 'good – for a woman' – but good on general principles."[85]

In 1890 she wrote an editorial on "Editorial Work" for the Congress of Women Journalists, World's Fair, in which she educated her reader about editorial principals. "Still another and most important aspect is the sense of relation and proportion in the editorial writer: to understand clearly her own relation to her newspaper, and her newspaper's relation to the public. She must believe earnestly and absolutely that her personal opinion is a small matter, but that her newspaper's opinion or policy is a very grave affair, with a strong shaping influence on individual destinies and public events."[86]

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[83] Christian Gentlewoman and the Social Apostolate, Conway, p. 14
[84] Ibid
[85] Scrapbook article "Editorial Work"
[86] Ibid

For Conway, journalism was more than a career, it was her life. Her writing was a much a part of her life as her Catholic faith, and through her editorials she sought to educate the public about the Catholic faith, and influence Catholics in their daily lives.

"Journalism, when held true to its ideal possibilities, is ministry as well. And, the true journalist is one in whom professional zeal and personal love for humanity meet and find their reconciliation. It is much to write; it is perhaps, more to live," wrote a biographer of Conway in the *Boston Traveller* in June of 1896, for an article on Newspaperwomen in Boston Journalism. "To a remarkable degree Miss Conway illustrates in her own life this high truth."[87]

On a visit to Rochester, presumably in 1900, she told an interviewer, "Since I began, I have been turning out 'copy' so continuously, that I would not know how to get along without writing. Really, if anything prevented me from using my pen, I should get grave ideas and look for a tombstone."[88]

Through the many articles written about Conway and the editorials she wrote, one understands that Conway believed what she wrote. She went on to say that working as a journalist was hard work, and that "if it is in one to write, she will attain her end by and by. But, there must be hard work; no amount of inclination or aptitude will take the place of hard work in the case of man or woman." [89]

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[87] Scrapbook article – Boston Traveller, 1986
[88] Ibid, Her Old Home, 1900
[89] Ibid

As a reporter and editor for the Catholic press, she wrote to Bishop McQuaid, "I try to use for good my opportunities in journalism. Achievement, alas, must always fall far short of aspiration!"[90]

As a journalistic role model she was consistent, hard working, and pursued her writing with an untiring passion. Excellence, to Conway wasn't just cliché, it was paramount, and that made her a writer worth emulating.

Conway had a strong work ethic, probably handed down by her father. "I am sure that in newspaper work as elsewhere, good work done earnestly will bring its reward."[91]

Education was something else Conway believed strongly in. Even though she didn't believe that women should join men in the workforce, she did advocate that women be educated and judged not as intellectual women, but as intellectuals. "This higher education – we use the word education in its fullest sense – will produce not a more abundant yield of women publicists, but of noble, intelligent, and virtuous women for the home and social life."[92]

After leaving the *Pilot* in 1908, Conway was offered a position on the faculty of St. Mary's College at Notre Dame University in Indiana, teaching women journalists. No doubt she passed along the things she had learned as an editor and reporter during the three decades she spent working on the *Pilot*.

While on staff at the *Pilot*, Conway wrote some 20 books. While on the Pilot staff she wrote the five books in the Family Sitting Room Series; *A Lady and*

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[90] Letter to McQuaid, 12/14/1886
[91] Scrapbook article – Her Old Home
[92] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, Donnelly, p. 154

Her Letters, Making Friends and Keeping Them, Questions of Honor in the Christian Life, Bettering Ourselves, and *The Christian Gentlewoman and the Social Apostolate*. She also published two works of fiction through Pilot Publishing, *Lalor's Maples* and *The Way of the World and Other Ways*. *New Footsteps in Well Trodden Ways* is a travelogue on her trip through Europe and the Vatican. She also wrote *The Footsteps of the Good Shepherd*, and several volumes of poetry.

CHAPTER 6

Katherine Eleanor Conway - A woman beyond her time

"In all this 'Woman question,' the partisans of alleged progress seem to forget one foundation fact: that, as between men and women, it is not so much a question of greater or less, or better or worse, it is a question of different."[93]

Katherine Conway spent the better part of a 60-year career extolling the virtues of wifehood and motherhood. Even though women were taking their places alongside men in the newsroom, and in public vocations throughout the working world, Conway continued to rail against the suffrage and career women. She had been taught that a woman's true vocation was in the home.

In the "Christian Gentlewoman," Conway wrote, "No observant and sensible man doubts today that women may have as well-defined vocations to certain professions as men may have. But when the private history of the exceptional women who have succeeded in letters, art, or what you will, is lade bare, how often is it discovered that the secret of their success lay largely in the necessity of providing for the dependent parent or household, which forced them to their best work, for the sake of the larger money returns, and made them value their widely-known names as an important part of their capital stock."[94]

Conway's notion was that women only had one reason to work outside the home: necessity. Like her, women should have a reason to need to leave the cloister of their homes. Although the Woman Suffrage was successful within 12

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[93] Ibid, p. 155
[94] Ibid, p. 152

years of her departure from the *Pilot*, Conway remained true to her faith convictions. Her belief that the suffrage would harm home and family came not from any stubborn political leanings, but from her Catholic faith.

It may seem an old fashioned notion, but Conway was taught, as were many Catholics that social regeneration must come from within – not from without. "Regenerated society will draw its pure life from the guarded well-springs of those homes whence women trained and developed on normal lines diffuse high motives, refined tastes and virtuous examples through the channels of ordinary domestic and social opportunity – where the old-fashioned Christian gentlewoman exercises the social apostolate."[95]

Conway's Catholic view of life and her professional view of life intersected every day during her tenure at the *Boston Pilot*, and continued to intersect while she wrote and managed the *Boston Republic*. As evidenced by her editorials and columns in the *Pilot*, so steeped in Catholic teaching was Conway that she could do nothing less than forward her beliefs in her writing, and she seemed perfectly content in it.

In an article signed simply "F." in *Catholic School and Home Magazine*, the author asks the reader questions that could be asked of any aspiring young Catholic journalist, who dreams of one day filling the shoes of an editor: "Young woman, you who read these lines, and think you have within you that which would justify your entrance upon a literary life, can you, like Miss Conway, look upon hard work, ceaseless work, without flinching? Can you bear up under

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[95] Christian Gentlewoman and the Social Apostolate, Conway, pp. 20-21

disappointments, discouragements, and wait patiently for success long delayed? And, can you through it all keep your woman's heart as uncorroded, your woman's faith in God and good as unwavering, and your woman's endowment of delicacy as fresh and pure as in the springtime of your days? If you can, then in God's name go on and follow in Katherine Conway's footsteps. The world and the Church have need of women like her and thee."[96]

Conway enjoyed a relatively secure career on the *Pilot* both as editorial assistant and as managing editor from 1905 until 1908 when the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston bought the *Pilot* and for its official publication. Although supposedly Archbishop O'Connell had no personal or financial reason for dismissing Conway, he dismissed her after 25 years of loyal service.

In reading his speech at Conway's Laetare Medal conferral, it was easy to see what he thought of women, and it left the distinct impression that he not only wanted complete control of the paper, but also didn't want a woman running it. After lauding Conway's accomplishments as a journalist, author and well rounded Catholic, he describes the "true Catholic editor, "*His* attitude, to be potent and efficient... sure of *his* position, for *he* speaks not for *him*self, but for truth. And that security and sureness come only to *him* who has toiled for years in acquiring them." [emphasis mine].[97]

Not only was Conway loyal to the *Pilot*. She was loyal to Archbishop Williams, whose job O'Connell was stepping into. So, it also made sense that he would be eliminating loyalists to his predecessor.

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[96] Scrapbook article
[97] Boston Pilot, May 25, 1907

When Katherine Conway left the *Pilot* in 1908 she took a year off from newspaper work to rest before going back to work. For a short time she taught journalism classes at St. Mary's University at Notre Dame in Indiana before her health forced her back to Boston in 1915. She continued to work for *The Republic* from then until the paper ceased publication in 1926.[98]

From 1910 to 1920 Conway wrote letters to Cardinal O'Connell asking for consideration for back pay. It took two years after she left the paper before she received any correspondence from O'Connell, then another ten years to receive all of the pay she was due. In 1910 she was paid $1,432.00 for part of what she was owed. "Much of the money due dates back nine years, and even longer."[99]

"It has often come to me during the past few months that Your Grace could not know that the late Manager of the *Pilot*, Mr. James T. Murphy, never did anything towards the settlement of my long-standing account with the *Pilot* Publishing Company," she wrote. "Mr. Gargan got all of his; Mr. Murphy took care of his own interest as is well known in Boston business circles; but there was not thought of the poor little editor, who nearly destroyed her life in trying to hold things up until Your Grace came in."[100]

The tone of her letters to the Archbishop seem almost patronizing, and conciliatory. "Pardon me for troubling you about this matter, but I don't know to whom else I can appeal. All my hope is in Your Grace, and I beg to remain in

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[98] Separatism and Subculture, Kane, p. 224
[99] Letter to O'Connell, 1/31/1910
[100] Ibid

continued hope," Conway wrote.[101] Conway finally managed through years of such correspondence to be repaid for the years she took no salary, as well as the money she loaned the *Pilot* to make payroll.

In the 1920's the Archbishop sent Conway extra money, which may or may not have been out of guilt for his earlier mistreatment of her. "The chivalrous felling of Your Eminence impels you to say 'back pay', but truly I feel this substantial help to be a free gift."[102]

After an absence of nearly two decades, at the age of 73, Conway resumed writing unsigned editorials for the *Boston Pilot*, submitting her last entry one week before she died, January 2, 1927.

Despite her years of unwavering loyalty to the *Pilot*, when Conway died she wasn't afforded the same full front page biography as her predeceased contemporaries, John Boyle O'Reilly, James Jeffrey Roche, and Patrick Donahoe. Conway was recognized simply with a small five paragraph epitaph in the middle of the front page headlined "Hold Funeral of Catholic Writer."[103] Following two paragraphs of information on her funeral, the third paragraph read, "Miss Conway was born in Rochester, N.Y. in 1852. In the days of John Boyle O'Reilly she was an editor of the *Pilot*, holding that position through the nineties and then taking up other literary work."[104]

The brief obituary speaks to the respect, or lack of it, that O'Connell had for Conway. In her life he didn't recognize her for the servant of both the Church

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[101] Ibid
[102] Letter to O'Connell, 8/25/20
[103] Boston Pilot – 1/6/1927
[104] Ibid

and the press that she was, and in her death he also couldn't recognize her for what she had done so many years earlier to keep the *Pilot* a viable weekly publication. His belief in gender roles wouldn't permit O'Connell to hold any esteem for a woman in a leadership role in the public sphere.

Conway was a woman before her time, of her time, and beyond her time. As a woman editor, especially of a Catholic newspaper she was before her time; as a Catholic woman, she was a woman of her time, but as a woman in society she was a woman beyond her time. Despite that she was an unmarried career woman, Conway never gave up the notion that women should find their fulfillment at home. And, she never spoke out against the Church that taught her that. Other women in society were changing and evolving, finding fulfillment outside the home, while Conway continued to rail against it.

For further research it would be interesting to read, as Kane noted in *Separatism and Subculture*, Conway's unpublished papers that she presented before the various clubs and reading circles. A handful of the papers were published in the *Pilot* and *Republic*, on occasion, but many were not. Some of those papers, like the one published in the Pilot in March of 1908 may have revealed more of the irony and contradictions in Conway's life.

It might also be interesting to try to discern through her writing style and content, just which editorials in the *Pilot* Conway wrote. Those dealing with women's issues can often be attributed to her, based on style and content, but there were other women working at the *Pilot* as well, who might have contributed.

There is also correspondence from Conway to Rev. Fr. John Cavenaugh and Rev. Daniel Hudson at the University of Notre Dame Archives that have yet to be explored. Reading the letters Conway wrote to McQuaid were very helpful in learning how she felt about a number of individuals and issues in her work and personal life. Correspondence with these other two individuals may offer a view into the period after the correspondence with McQuaid ended when he passed away in 1909.

The present research was enlightening in that it offered the opportunity to explore, however briefly, the lives of other pioneer female journalists, like Cochrane and Winslow.

As a Catholic, I learned more about my faith through this study, and I found Conway to be an interesting subject, as both a Catholic and as a writer. She didn't deny her faith to follow her career path. She found a way to use her career to foster her faith and weave it into the fabric of the community she lived and worked in. Too often there are writers who put aside their faith to write so as not to offend, but Conway kept her faith in the forefront no matter whether she was on the side of right or not – an admirable feat. Too often today we change our opinions based on trends or fads, but Conway stayed with her convictions, even as she watched more and more women flood the newsrooms and take on public roles.

Although I don't believe, since she was on the opposite side of a losing battle, that Conway had much to contribute by way of changing society's norms, but, when she had the opportunity to offer her expertise to a new generation of

journalists, she did. And, after the Suffrage passed in 1920, Conway told women that if they were to go into the voting booths, to make sure they voted responsibly. I think she could see that the times were changing and she and her contemporaries had little control over it.

There is a definite struggle between what Conway was taught and the way she lived her life, though, and I don't believe she was alone in her plight. There were probably any number of women who struggled with the notion that their place was at home with a husband and children, but their hearts were somewhere else. Conway was fortunate enough to have been thrust into the workplace because of circumstance and never found herself in a situation or of the desire to get married and raise a family. Even though she was taught that women had specific roles, ordained by God, Conway didn't fit the mold. She may have tried, but her lifestyle was in conflict with the church and that could have been the catalyst behind her fall from O'Connell's grace.

She may have found some relief from the conflict in her own life by believing that she was an individual working to support herself in a world full of individuals, rather than a woman working in a man's world, as well. Conway lived a contradictory life, and believing that woman, as woman, had no public vocation, she was in conflict with her own moral beliefs, but believing that as individuals we are all called to a vocation, she, as a working journalist, was just answering that call.

If I had the opportunity to do this research again, I would spend more time at Boston College reading through Conway's diaries archived in the John Burn's

Library, and recording more of them. I would also have saved more pages from her scrapbooks, and studied more of the other characters in Conway's life, such as O'Reilly, O'Connell, Williams and McQuaid to get a better understanding of just how they all fit into Conway's life.

Several pages were missing or had been pilfered from scrapbooks in the archives, making it difficult to do much of the research, but her diaries and the pages left behind were invaluable. I would also make a trip to Notre Dame to St. Mary's College to obtain any archival information available there.

I found the two trips to Boston most helpful, especially the time spent at John Burn's Library and the Archives at the Archdiocese of Boston, but I would have liked to be able to access the documents stored at the Boston Athenaeum.

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[50] Girlhood's Handbook of Woman, p. 151

[51] Pioneer Catholic Journalism, Foik

[52] Letter to McQuaid, April 10, 1907

[53] Letter to McQuaid, 12/14/1886

[54] Boston Pilot, March 1907

[55] Letters to McQuaid, 1886-1907 – In the Roman Catholic Church the Bishop is the chief priest of a diocese. Bishops are responsible for the pastoral care of their dioceses. In addition, bishops have a responsibility to act in council with other bishops to guide the Church.

[56] Ibid, 7/1886

[57] Ibid, 1/2/1893

[58] Ibid, 1/17/1899

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[60] Ibid - Joseph Smith was the founder and president of the Mormon church.

[61] Ibid

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