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# Catholic Women, Hidden Work, and Separate Spheres: The Columbian Catholic Congress of 1893

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## Abstract

In September 1893, Catholic laypeople, clergy, and prelates met at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago as the Columbian Catholic Congress to discuss their church's history and chart its course into the future. The leadership of Catholic laywomen in shaping the course of the Congress has been virtually absent in scholarship, much as it was hidden from contemporaries in the past. The act of a Catholic woman speaking among both men and women in a public space was significant, as it demonstrated an increasing assertiveness on the part of Catholic women, including those holding to a conception of gendered, separate spheres, that women had key roles to play in shaping public Catholicity and Catholics' ideas about their own community of faith. A core group of Catholic women played a hitherto underappreciated part in bringing the Congress to life. This study therefore centers women in the history of, more narrowly, Catholicism's place at the World's Columbian Exposition and, more broadly, the Catholic public of the early Progressive Era, and demonstrates the often-invisible labor in which women engaged to develop their church's intellectual life in the early Progressive Era.

**Keywords:** Catholicism; Chicago; gender; intellectual history; Progressive Era; religion; separate spheres; women; World's Fairs

From September 4 to September 9, 1893, Catholic laypeople, clergy, and prelates met at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago to discuss their church's history and chart its course into the future.<sup>1</sup> This gathering, the Columbian Catholic Congress, was one of celebration and confidence.<sup>2</sup> The American Catholic community grew substantially over the course of the nineteenth century and was poised for national leadership on the eve of the twentieth century. The Chicago World's Fair was itself the commemoration of the exploits of a Catholic, Christopher Columbus, and American Catholics saw the event as an opportunity to stake a claim for themselves as both national founders and visionaries for the modern age.<sup>3</sup>

While the Chicago exposition has played an important role in scholarship on world's fairs of the period, the Columbian Catholic Congress remains the subject of relatively minor attention from historians of American Catholicism. Of less notice is Catholic

women's day-to-day participation in the proceedings of the Congress. Historian Deirdre M. Moloney has examined some of the women's papers at the Congress, arguing that they "focused on historical subjects rather than on contemporary Catholic women's issues," but this perspective implicitly downplays the relevance of historical lessons to contemporary concerns and obscures the ways that Catholic women made their voices heard in public alongside Catholic men in the making of Catholic America.<sup>4</sup> Other works on turn-of-the-twentieth-century American Catholic women by Paula M. Kane and Kathleen Sprows Cummings have examined their participation at the 1893 World's Fair, but their planning and speaking roles at the Columbian Catholic Congress have been treated only briefly. More attention has been paid to Catholic women's attendance at the fair's World's Congress of Representative Women or at the Catholic Women's Congress, events that did not provide space for men and women to speak together, or for women to speak publicly in what was perceived as a solely masculine space.<sup>5</sup> This act of a Catholic woman speaking among both men and women in a public space was significant, as it demonstrated an increasing assertiveness on the part of Catholic women, including those holding to a conception of gendered, separate spheres, that women had key roles to play in shaping public Catholicity and Catholics' ideas about their own community of faith. One Congress presenter, Eliza Allen Starr, wrote to Pope Leo XIII in 1899, "At the request of Mother M. Angela, C. S. C., of St. Mary's Academy, Notre Dame, Indiana, I gave lectures ... before the Woman's Congress in the Columbus Hall of the World's Columbian Exposition, introduced by a bishop, while five bishops most graciously sat on the platform, the subject being 'Woman's Work in Art.'"<sup>6</sup> Women joined male Catholics, both lay and clerical, in the work of presenting American Catholicism to the country, and they did so in a single sphere, not separate ones.<sup>7</sup>

The private correspondence of Congress organizer and layperson William James Onahan demonstrates the work of Catholic women, who, from behind the scenes, shaped the course of the Congress. Catholic men such as Onahan have been depicted as the primary movers of late nineteenth-century American Catholicism and of the planning and execution of events such as the Columbian Catholic Congress. Onahan certainly deserves credit for his tireless work in boosting the reputation of his church and in gathering Catholics from across the country to share their perspectives on religion, society, history, literature, and politics. However, a core group of Catholic women played a hitherto underappreciated role in bringing the Congress to life. Their work, often obscured from public view, provides an opportunity to learn how laywomen increased their influence in Catholic circles and how they played central parts in developing public Catholicism at a critical time of expansion for both their church and their country.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that this group was likely not representative of all Catholic women. Its members were highly educated, white, middle- and upper-class women who represented themselves as the voice of female Catholicism. Even though they ultimately composed a fairly exclusive group, it was one that attained a significant degree of influence in developing the public face of their religious community on an international stage. This article thus interprets the Congress through the lens of "female presence," to use religion scholar Ann Braude's term—a recognition that, despite women's minority status in positions of institutional authority in much of American religious history and their consequent absence in much scholarship on the subject, they have virtually always composed the majority of American religious groups—and presents a collective biography of several Catholic women intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> It centers women in the history of, more narrowly, Catholicism's place at the World's

Columbian Exposition and, more broadly, the Catholic public of the early Progressive Era.

The Columbian Catholic Congress was an affiliate gathering of the World's Parliament of Religions, an early, watershed moment in the history of modern ecumenism.<sup>10</sup> It was a follow-up to the American Catholic Congress, a meeting of laypeople in Baltimore on November 11 and 12, 1889, which celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the American episcopacy.<sup>11</sup> The planning for the Congress began in the late 1880s under Onahan's supervision and with the approval and enthusiastic assistance of the church hierarchy. At the conclusion of the Baltimore meeting, leading laypeople and prelates moved to conduct their next congress in Chicago, where Onahan lived and where the World's Fair would be held.<sup>12</sup> Onahan and the planning committee of what would come to be called the Columbian Catholic Congress contemplated having leading Catholics present papers on a variety of subjects, similar to the proceedings at the American Catholic Congress.<sup>13</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to regard Onahan and the other male delegates as the sole organizers of the Congress—an image propagated by contemporary chroniclers of the event. Katherine Eleanor Conway of Boston, along with James Jeffrey Roche, her co-editor at the *Pilot*, a leading Catholic newspaper of the day, offered suggestions to Onahan of “prominent men, good Catholics, and good speakers” whom they felt would serve as capable representatives of the New England region at the Congress. Moreover, Conway remarked in a private aside to Onahan, they were “born Catholics,” who as a group, she claimed, may have been perceived to be neglected, presumably in favor of convert Catholics, who had become an increasingly prominent group within transatlantic Catholicity in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Mary M. Meline, a chronicler of Mount St. Mary's College and Seminary in Maryland, sought, without an explicit, individual invitation, to participate in the Congress's activities. While she ultimately did not wind up presenting a paper in Chicago, one of her male contacts, M. J. Harson of Providence, Rhode Island, served as an intermediary between her and Onahan, promising the latter that if Meline were given a chance, her “paper ... would give eminent satisfaction.” Harson submitted examples of Meline's work from the October 1890 edition of the *Catholic Review* to demonstrate her ability to hold her own intellectually at the Congress.<sup>15</sup> Mary Theresa Elder of New Orleans similarly proposed her own paper topic to Onahan, after he had previously told her that “the utmost freedom of discussion is invited.” Elder took him up on this offer of free intellectual exchange, telling Onahan that she was writing to him “with the greatest confidence.” Her planned research on the “neglect of rurals” by the Catholic Church wound up serving as the basis of a paper at the Congress.<sup>16</sup> She also proposed a second paper dealing with pauperism and offered a strong recommendation to Onahan for John B. Fischer to read the paper on her behalf at the Congress. She described Fischer as a “right promising young lawyer” who “consented to ‘adopt’ and deliver my article.” Just before the Congress, Fischer agreed to deliver Elder's paper on poverty, and a judge named Lawrence O'Donnell agreed to read her paper on Catholic losses in the United States. This shows that there were several men in the Catholic Church—Onahan, Fischer, and O'Donnell among them—who were willing to introduce Catholic women's perspectives in public forums, even when the women were speaking through them. At the same time, it is important to remain mindful of the burden placed on Catholic women whose ideas but not voices were represented at public gatherings such as the Congress. Elder entertained the thought that part of her hesitation in preparing but not presenting a paper on pauperism may have

stemmed from her “being jealous of another’s assuming my work.” She was also not confident that surrogate male speakers could approximate her ideas and delivery. This was her research and her intellectual labor, and she would have preferred the credit for presenting it in original form at the Congress.<sup>17</sup>

While deferring to Onahan’s judgment on the matter (and also on the choice of speaker on her behalf), Montreal’s Anna T. Sadlier, a member of a prominent Catholic publishing family and a prolific author in her own right, offered up two possible paper topics: “the influence of Catholic women in Canadian history” and “the women of the Middle Ages or of the Renaissance.”<sup>18</sup> A biographer four years after the Congress noted simply that Sadlier was “invited to prepare a paper for the ‘Women’s Congress of the World’s Fair’ ... on condition that she would not be required to read it.”<sup>19</sup> This gives no indication that Sadlier actually devised the paper’s topic. In general, although Onahan may have offered women authors and speakers suggestions regarding preferred topics of discussions, these same women just as often, if not more frequently, suggested their own paper subjects, demonstrating how the Congress’s agenda was formulated substantively by both men and women. Leonora M. Lake of Chicago—who served not long before for several years as the Knights of Labor’s general investigator for women’s work and who traveled as a Chautauqua lecturer, experiences which provided her with ample public speaking and organizational experience—independently proposed her own paper topic as well: “Catholic Women in Temperance work.” Lake’s paper was likely drawn from her work in the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America.<sup>20</sup> This is the sort of invisible labor carried out by Catholic women that was not always appreciated or discerned by historical figures or historians and that can be gleaned not from the Congress’s public records but only from the private archives of the event’s participants.

Even less known are those Catholic women who were invited to speak at the Congress but who, for various reasons, declined to participate. Isabel Shea, the daughter of pioneering American Catholic historian John Gilmary Shea, explained that while she would have been very happy to research and write a paper on “‘The religious Communities of Women in the Church their history and services,’” her “natural timidity at appearing in public” prevented her from delivering a lecture to the Congress; Sadlier declined the opportunity to read her paper for what appear to be similar reasons.<sup>21</sup> Shea’s efforts to undertake a biography of her father were furthermore obstructed by James F. Edwards, a Notre Dame professor who held John Gilmary Shea’s papers after the latter’s death and who refused to grant her access to the documents.<sup>22</sup> This provides some evidence in support of Bonnie G. Smith’s argument that male scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, in the process of professionalizing the historian’s craft, worked often to masculinize their field while portraying women practitioners as amateur interlopers.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most telling phenomena arising out of women’s participation at the Congress was the practice of some women paper-writers either authoring their pieces using male or non-gender-specific pen names or having other women or even men deliver their papers for them at the gathering. Mary Catherine Chase, a convert from Episcopalianism who entered Catholic religious life and resided at the Visitation convent in Hastings, Nebraska, wrote under the pseudonym of “F. M. Edselas.” In agreeing to deliver a paper at the Columbian Catholic Congress, she gave Onahan permission to use her “*pen-name*” in the Congress’s printed material. She noted vaguely that “for some reasons it may be preferable to do so,” perhaps indicating the gender discrimination women faced when speaking publicly.<sup>24</sup> Chase’s/Edselas’s identity was already

known to Onahan, who had received the information from a priest named Father English. Despite Onahan being in on the secret, she wanted no further disclosures made at the Congress, “earnestly request[ing] [Onahan] to preserve the secret for very evident reasons.”<sup>25</sup> Chase/Edselas certainly wished to attend the Congress in person, telling Onahan the month before the event that “a tempting repast ... awaits the privileged guests. Would that I too might share in the *Feast*: but must be content with published reports.”<sup>26</sup> She stressed, though, her “*positive wish* that on no conditions at present my identity shall be known.” In Chase’s/Edselas’s case, her position as a woman intersected with her status as a member of a religious order, rendering her in a place apart not only from other women but also from other Catholics, thus leading her to undertake preventative measures to preserve her identity. She was confident, though, that in the future, “women’s status shall be such that similar precautions will be unnecessary, even though she be *under the veil*,” pointing toward a Catholic feminism uniting both women religious and lay women.<sup>27</sup>

In one notable instance, New Orleans laywoman Mary Theresa Elder—who authored two papers for the Congress, both of which were read by men on her behalf (she was in ill health)—was repeatedly confused by journalists as a man, indicating that they had done insufficient research for their articles and perhaps also that the idea of a woman so forcefully and publicly challenging male-dominated institutions such as the Catholic Church was almost unimaginable for many at the turn of the twentieth century. A history of the World’s Parliament of Religions, published the same year as the gathering itself, assumed multiple times that Elder was a man.<sup>28</sup> Elder seemed delighted by the press’s gender confusion. “Since the public seems inclined to consider me as ‘Mr. Elder,’” she instructed Onahan shortly after the Congress, “please don’t you let on.” She was delighted that her post-Congress correspondence was addressed to “‘Mr. Elder,’ & Elder, Esq.,’ and ‘Rev. Mr. Elder,’ Aha!” “You musn’t spoil this fun too soon,” she reminded Onahan again in her letter’s postscript.<sup>29</sup> This mistake was not merely a semantic one, though. Elder herself, even before her papers were delivered at the Congress, saw the gender performativity behind her correspondents referencing her as a man. She believed that her “style” was “rather masculine than feminine,” and she was “halfway ashamed to let the general public know I have no personal right to that masculinity.”<sup>30</sup>

Elder noted the irony of appearing “uncandid” when she was typically wont to “make such big pretense of being wonderfully outspoken and frank.” She was anything but the timid, deferential woman of the post-Civil War, bourgeois imagination. She was eager for a public debate about what she saw as the failings of her church. Elder welcomed the Catholic press’s animosity: “I have unfurled my colors, and I shall stand by them,” she wrote to Onahan shortly after the Congress.<sup>31</sup> Three months before the Congress, she had already anticipated some of the criticism she would receive in the press, noting to Onahan that she expected her critiques of the church’s hierarchy to be unpopular with some.<sup>32</sup> In a time of an ascendant, international ultramontanistism in the Catholic Church following the First Vatican Council, which took place two decades before the Congress, and increasing power for bishops and priests over laypeople in the United States, this was an understandable concern on Elder’s part.<sup>33</sup> Elder was encouraged, though, that a sizable group of clerics and public intellectuals, headed most notably by “My Most Rev. Uncle, Archbishop Elder of Cincinnati,” supported her potentially controversial work.<sup>34</sup> She would likely have been pleased to hear herself described one month after the Congress in the *Daily Picayune* as “breezy, brainy M. T. Elder” who “created a stir” at the gathering.<sup>35</sup> Much to his credit, Onahan did

not allow any perceived public backlash to stand in the way of Elder's work being presented before the Congress, and Elder was grateful for his support in the lead-up to the gathering, indicating their editorial partnership in shaping her message and, to some degree, the tone of the Congress itself.<sup>36</sup>

Elder's confidence in her ability to shift public opinion was palpable. She was hardly a picture of the docile, domestic "True Woman," a nineteenth-century ideal described by Barbara Welter, but was rather an example of the "New Woman," who Kathleen Sprows Cummings has noted was becoming increasingly visible in the early Progressive Era.<sup>37</sup> Her concern for the welfare of rural Catholics was manifest. Elder claimed, "There is not another Catholic writer, nor one C. speaker nor C. publisher, devoted to this cause. There are only three or four who are not absolutely indifferent to it." She was confident, "without a shadow of doubt," she told Onahan before the Congress, "that my paper (if accepted) will be the only one of its kind."<sup>38</sup> While certainly a standout at the Congress in terms of its frank criticisms of the church's hierarchy and also for its focus on rural issues, the frontier was also very much on the mind of at least one other figure who spoke at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. That figure was historian Frederick Jackson Turner, whose promotion of his "Frontier Thesis" and concern over the closing of the frontier at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association shared some similarities with Elder's fears that the lack of attention to frontier and rural issues had resulted in there being "so few really great Catholic Americans."<sup>39</sup>

In the planning of the Congress, one of the most persistent controversies dealt with the rhetorical and physical place of women at the event. Just as the practice of men reading several women's papers at the gathering reflected contemporary concerns about women's place in public life, the question of whether women ought to have their own separate conference—mimicking the dominant social ideal of gendered, separate spheres—or should instead participate alongside men in the main body of the Congress demonstrated the significant fault lines within an emerging Catholic feminism in the late nineteenth century. Several scholars have noted the sharp tension between Victorian ideals of feminine domesticity and many women's desire to enter public life. Historian Nell Irvin Painter points out the serious consequences for a woman, whether Catholic or non-Catholic, contemplating social activism or a life as a public intellectual: "In a society that denied the existence of a middle ground between purity and immorality, women who fell off the pedestal had to prove they were other than prostitutes. If a woman attracted public notoriety, she undermined her good reputation and courted infamy."<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Robyn Muncy argues that aspiring professional women of the Progressive Era who "donned the behavioral garb appropriate to professional life ... invited criticism for being unfeminine," as seen in the gender confusion surrounding Mary Theresa Elder's contributions to the Congress.<sup>41</sup> The risks to women's reputations inherent in public speaking before audiences filled with men or in working alongside them professionally or in the realm of social reform may explain why several Catholic women were reluctant to present their papers at the Congress.

Onahan set aside space in the schedule for a separate Woman's Day at the Columbian Catholic Congress. Katherine Eleanor Conway became one of this day's most vocal critics, challenging the very idea of Woman's Day.<sup>42</sup> Her lengthy correspondence to Onahan is revealing for the insights it offers into debates about and among Catholic women in the early Progressive Era and for similarities it shares with other controversies unfolding at the fair. In a confidential memorandum to Onahan, Conway noted, "Of course, I'll have nothing to do with this." She objected principally



to the “segregation of Catholic women.”<sup>43</sup> A parallel debate emerged around the planning of the fair’s Colored People’s Day. Ida B. Wells, for instance, argued that segregating black fairgoers and speakers would reinforce racist depictions of black Americans and would further entrench inequality.<sup>44</sup> While fair organizers may have tried to portray the Exposition as a symbol of American unity, protests from figures such as Conway and Wells serve as examples of the contested group identities developing at the end of the nineteenth century.

Conway emphasized strongly in another letter to Onahan that she simply would not associate herself with any event disuniting Catholic public life in such a way. “I must beg you,” she wrote, “to take my name off that programme. I cannot possibly appear in it.” For Conway, her objections to Woman’s Day were “a matter of personal conviction as well as of professional consistency.” Not only did she reject Catholic sex segregation on principle, but it was “also the policy of my paper [*The Pilot*], which I will represent in Chicago during the Congress.” She asked Onahan, “how can I appear in that gallery[?],” and she did not need to wait for his response: “It is impossible, and I should only lay myself open to deserved ridicule if I did it.” She also expressed disappointment in Onahan and the Congress organizers, feeling that the figurative rug had been pulled from beneath her after she had already agreed to participate in the event, but only because she assumed men and women would present alongside each other in the same physical and intellectual space. By explaining that she “accepted [her] engagement in good faith,” she implicitly accused Onahan and the other organizers of bad faith.<sup>45</sup> In her next letter to Onahan, Conway made it known that she had “shelved the ‘Woman’s Work in the World,’” possibly the paper she had been scheduled to present in Chicago. Conway remained defiant in not participating in the event, noting, “I feel free to speak freely, as I am now off your list of essayists.” She was sure that she was acting in defense of “the common interest.”<sup>46</sup>

Conway, though, did not conclude her campaign against the separate Woman’s Day by simply bowing out of the planned gathering. She instead promoted an alternative vision of the Congress. She believed that the “ideal thing” to do to depict the place of women in modern Catholicism would be to have not a lay woman but rather “a gifted and broad-minded nun to write [Onahan’s] paper on the ‘Work of Women in the Church.’” This presentation, whoever would be responsible for it, Conway thought should take place during the main meeting of the Congress rather than in a separate women’s gathering. She firmly believed it imperative for women to participate in the gathering alongside Catholic men; she expressed frankly her “hope it [the planned Woman’s Day] will fall through,” projecting minuscule attendance at such an event.<sup>47</sup> She detested the idea of segregating the Congress by sex, which would have an effect beyond the gathering itself by introducing divisions “in the intellectual order” of American Catholicism. As evidence of this, Conway pointed out that women speakers were not tasked with presenting on any “topic[s] of general interest,” but were instead cordoned off by event organizers into areas of inquiry coded traditionally as feminine. This was abhorrent to Conway, who explained to Onahan in July 1893 that she objected to the “exploiting of women as women in any public gathering.” While still noting that her position was allied with “the similar opinions of eminent men,” Conway rejected Christian complementarianism in the cognitive and academic realms. She explained to Onahan “that it is a misuse of language to speak of ‘Woman’s’ work in the intellectual order, that it is a mistake to try to sex the working faculty.”<sup>48</sup>

The separate Woman’s Day “would be a mistake,” Conway argued further, in that separating women from men would cast Catholicism as a denomination unfriendly

to women's leadership. In her view, "non-Catholic circles" lagged behind as far as women's rights went. The Catholic Church, Conway maintained, had already handled the woman question quite well. Integrating men and women in the same space at the Congress would give American Catholicism an opportunity to "show to the observant non-Catholic public that clever women are not a brand-new thing, but a nine days' wonder in the Catholic Church." This would not only increase the reputation of the Catholic Church in a period of resurgent anti-Catholicism, but would also be a "fulfilment [*sic*] of God's plan." Conway argued that while "the work of men is for the race," women's efforts shaped those of men, challenging Onahan—ultimately unsuccessfully—to reconsider what she considered to be his unnecessarily divisive plans to rend asunder the Catholic community on the lines of sex. She urged in no uncertain terms using the event as an avenue for building Catholic power in a largely non-Catholic country.<sup>49</sup> Conway's efforts to remind Onahan of Catholicism's record of publicly active, intellectual women fit well with larger currents of Americanizing Catholic thought of the period, which sought to portray the Catholic Church as a progressive force for women's empowerment. Isaac Hecker, a notable face of public Catholicism in the second half of the nineteenth century, took a position similar to Conway's in his 1887 book, *The Church and the Age*, writing that Catholic "[w]omen, no less than men, are free to occupy any position whose duties and functions they have the intelligence or aptitude to fulfil [*sic*]."<sup>50</sup>

The entire Congress, with its project of gathering a diverse array of coreligionists from across the country, was an exercise in reducing "sectionalism among us American Catholics," Conway maintained. Forging a united Catholic front would be difficult if the Congress was divided by sex. "Get the best women possible for the papers," Conway stressed, "avoiding those who are known *only* in Catholic circles. This Congress is for America and for the world, as well as for the Church." Catholicism must advance outward from parochialism and toward active participation in society, and promoting more prominent women speakers would increase the church's social capital. Placing Catholic women in their own, implicitly inferior space would not only damage Catholicism's reputation among non-Catholics and its potential for national leadership, Conway argued, but would also encourage the worst sorts of Catholics to stand in as representatives of the church to the world. She argued that such proceedings would amplify the voices of Catholic "cranks and pushers."<sup>51</sup> At best, Conway felt that a Catholic Woman's Day would be redundant at the fair since, she argued, "these 'Women's Congresses' will be done to death by the 'Woman's Auxiliary,'" which was already sponsoring other women speakers in Chicago. Conway denigrated "the Catholic women likely to figure in them," whom she characterized as "not big fish." She urged Onahan to keep these purportedly inferior women away from the Columbian Catholic Congress; if Congress organizers could not ensure that only Catholic women with high name recognition in the larger American society would represent the church in Chicago, Conway's solution was blunt: "exclude the women altogether."<sup>52</sup>

If appealing to Catholicism's reputation in the country's wider intellectual culture would not convince Onahan to rethink Woman's Day, Conway also raised the practical concern that such an event might repulse some Catholic men from participating in the Congress. In May 1893, Conway suggested inviting a scholar of the American Carmelite community, Rev. Charles Warren Currier, to speak on the subject of women's religious orders. "There is no reason on earth," Conway argued regarding the task of presenting such a paper, "why it shall necessarily fall to a woman." Conway was reasonably



confident that Currier would deliver a paper. She cautioned Onahan, though, that Currier could be counted on, but only “if you don’t scare him off with talk about a ‘Woman’s Day’”—the event in which she “declined to have any part.”<sup>53</sup> The irony of a specialist in the study of Catholic women’s history being frightened by the prospect of a day devoted to the scholarship and intellectual work produced by Catholic women seemed to be lost on Conway, Currier, and Onahan.

Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan of San Francisco voiced the dominant, male conception of Progressive Era Catholic womanhood that Conway opposed. Declining to take a leadership role in the Congress, Riordan mentioned in a February 1893 letter to William Onahan that the week before, he read an article by Mollie Onahan (likely Mary Josephine Onahan, William’s daughter), who, according to an early chronicler of the World’s Parliament of Religions, “had the honor of being the first woman to address a Catholic congress in the United States.”<sup>54</sup> Riordan described Mollie Onahan and her writing using the language of an idealized American Catholic femininity, highlighting her modesty, faith, and selflessness. Her article, Riordan told William Onahan, was “plain simple unpretentious as her life has always been, yet full of dignity and the grace of a Catholic woman.” Despite the adult Mollie Onahan being a published author, Riordan rendered her childlike in his letter, noting that he was “proud of my Chicago girl whom I have known from her infancy.”<sup>55</sup> Conway’s description of Mollie Onahan posed a striking contrast with Riordan’s. Instead of gendering this Catholic woman’s writing and intellectual labor, Conway informed William Onahan that Mollie was “doing splendid work—not ‘woman’s work!’”<sup>56</sup>

In spite of her fervent opposition to the Woman’s Day, Conway did not wish to alienate Onahan, whom she considered both a colleague and a friend, but she was also not prepared to defer to his wishes simply because he was a man or because he was the main organizer of the Congress. She was adamant that her objection to the separate Woman’s Day was not designed to disrupt the Congress, and she was confident that all that separated the two was a simple disagreement not over guiding principles but rather regarding “methods”—a dispute that should not lead to them “getting off the lines of mutual good will.” Conway was willing to give the event’s organizers the benefit of the doubt, floating the idea that perhaps “the talk of a ‘Woman’s Day’ was put forward simply to elicit opinion.”<sup>57</sup> She explained to Onahan two months before the Congress that there was still time to come around to her position and eliminate Woman’s Day from the Congress agenda. Conway rejected Onahan’s claim that such a late change was impossible on the grounds of “keeping up the continuity or natural sequence” of the schedule, and laid out a detailed plan that would integrate women speakers into the main body of the Congress. Her proposal led off with a suggestion that a paper on “‘Isabella the Catholic’ would come in beautifully on the first day.”<sup>58</sup> Onahan took Conway’s advice to heart: his daughter Mary Josephine Onahan actually delivered this paper on the first day of the Congress, just as Conway suggested. Similarly, Conway told William Onahan that a paper on Catholic women’s alumnae associations would be best positioned during the Congress’s fifth day, which was devoted to discussing Catholic education. Onahan again followed her advice, with Elizabeth A. Cronyn presenting the paper. Conway herself also delivered a paper, “The Catholic Summer School and the Reading Circles,” the same day.<sup>59</sup>

Pleased with “the new arrangement”—presumably referring to some of the rescheduling of papers that she had suggested previously—Conway reassured Onahan that the reworked Congress agenda “will be for the best interests of the whole work, and will please you best yourself.” So long as she was not scheduled to appear as part of a

separate Woman's Day, Conway was willing to present on a topic dealing with Catholic women during the main body of the Congress, originally proposing a paper titled, "The Social Apostolate of Catholic Women." Immediately, however, she thought better of this paper title, instead suggesting one on "The Social Apostolate' simply," which deemphasized the separateness of Catholic women's social work. Conway continued to petition Onahan to refine the Congress's program in a manner she deemed most logical. Though she left the final scheduling to Onahan, she still managed to place before him her thoughts on the sequence of presentations, which apparently paid positive dividends given the scheduling of Mary Josephine Onahan's and Cronyn's papers. Conway was adamant, however, that her paper should not be scheduled against another one titled, "Woman in her Own Field,' as there is the likelihood of both running over similar ground."<sup>60</sup>

Conway also indicated to Onahan that there was a potentially popular opposition emerging to Woman's Day through the "large constituency" of her newspaper's readers. Onahan himself took this critique seriously, expressing to another Congress participant, "The suggestion of a Woman's Day' does not meet with favor in some quarters."<sup>61</sup> Whatever the reasons for the separate women's gathering, Conway made it clear to Onahan that she was not the only invited woman speaker who objected to Woman's Day: "I know that Elizabeth Cronyn feels as I do." She additionally named Agnes Repplier, Louise Guiney, Mary Elizabeth Blake, and Margaret Sullivan as others who "wouldn't care to figure in the sort of 'Woman's Day' we will inevitably have." Conway may have also subtly reminded Onahan of the power she held over public opinion through her ready access to *The Pilot's* Boston readership, noting about Woman's Day, "I must stand by my own convictions and those of my paper."<sup>62</sup>

Rose Hawthorne Lathrop of New London, Connecticut, whose paper at the Congress was devoted to discussing a Catholic ideal of femininity—one that enjoined women to lead the nation by way of their domestic purity—was also skeptical about the value of the planned Woman's Day, albeit for a different reason.<sup>63</sup> Lathrop was the daughter of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, and like her father, took up a career in writing.<sup>64</sup> Although Lathrop saw some good in affording "women who write earnestly, & especially those who have a gift for making public addresses, an opportunity to do their best," she was "always a little more in favor of women's leaving all public work except charity & singing—to the lords of creation"—presumably meaning men. "[I]f there should, after all, be no Woman's Day," Lathrop admitted, "I should, personally, be satisfied."<sup>65</sup> Several Catholic men, though, hoped that women would be admitted as featured speakers and intellectual leaders at the Congress. Besides Onahan, who extended several invitations to women presenters, Father James M. Cleary of Minneapolis agreed with Onahan that, regarding the topic of temperance, lay voices should lead the way. Furthermore, Cleary's "plan would be to ask some woman" to serve as one of the speakers on the subject. He reflected Lathrop's perspective on women as the guardians of domestic peace and purity, asking, "Why should we not hear woman's protest against a vice that has done more to wreck woman's hopes and happiness than any other?"—an illustration of the rise of what Daniel T. Rodgers terms "social maternalism" in the Progressive Era, which focused political conversations on "the particular vulnerabilities of women, children, and families." Cleary recommended that Conway, who was already well-known through her editorial work for *The Pilot*, should be tasked with presenting a paper on temperance.<sup>66</sup> However, just a month before the Congress, when a planned paper from Mary J. Cramsie fell through, Cleary seemed to denigrate implicitly the

intellectual contributions from other women presenters, “regret[ing] that we cannot have a good paper from a woman.”<sup>67</sup>

Lathrop was concerned that the papers women were slated to deliver were on topics of too “general” a nature. In contrast to Conway, Lathrop felt that investigating women’s work in particular fields would be more profitable for the Congress delegates. She therefore suggested that she could write a paper on “‘Woman In Her Own Field,’ or ‘Woman & Mammon.’”<sup>68</sup> Lathrop eventually settled on the latter title.<sup>69</sup> While Lathrop was unable to present the paper herself at the Congress, she requested that Onahan keep it from being republished elsewhere, as she wished to publish it on her own—more evidence of Catholic women’s active engagement in print culture and of their participation in a burgeoning Catholic intellectual sphere at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>70</sup>

Lathrop also wished to earn money from her intellectual labor, expressing reluctance to allow her paper to appear first in published form in the Congress’s proceedings. Instead of acquiescing quietly to her writing’s expropriation by Congress planners, Lathrop told Onahan, “We do not believe in doing literary work *gratis*, on principle, any more than we believe in a mechanic’s being asked to build a Catholic Church for nothing, profound as his service for the Church would be.”<sup>71</sup> Intellectual labor was authentic work, Lathrop argued, and women’s work should not be taken for granted. It should instead be remunerated in the same manner as male labor. This was an especially personal concern for Lathrop; she and her husband George often struggled financially as they both worked hard to attain success in writing and publishing. Additionally, her biographer Patricia Dunlavy Valenti explains, while Rose and George shared writing credit for a work of religious history they published just after the Congress, Rose Lathrop was in fact the sole author, “with her husband assisting in a limited editorial capacity”—another example of the frequent erasures of women’s work in this period.<sup>72</sup> Lathrop’s defense of her work was also a direct challenge to the nineteenth-century, middle- and upper-class ideology that portrayed women as non-laboring guardians of morality and domestic tranquility and men as out-of-household workers providing security, financial and physical, for their families.<sup>73</sup> Lathrop, a recent Catholic convert, joined with many Protestant women of the period in defying this gendered, public/private division.<sup>74</sup> Historian Maureen Flanagan argues that the Protestant social gospel “opened a doorway to public action for many women.”<sup>75</sup> Lathrop likewise used her new religious identity as an entrée into the public sphere, eventually separating from her husband in 1895 to begin a consecrated religious life of caring for the sick poor.<sup>76</sup>

The Catholic Women’s Congress hoped to solve the problem represented by an “army of lay women, all eager to help in beneficent work, but all without orders and all ignorant of the plan of battle.”<sup>77</sup> Delegates to the Catholic Women’s Congress sought to determine what role women should play and what activities they should undertake in their own sphere, and they maintained that the Catholic Church, not secular American society, offered women the surest opportunities for advancement. The experience at the World’s Fair of one of the Catholic Women’s Congress delegates, Alice Timmons Toomy, confirmed for her that Catholic women had a leading role to play in shaping their religious community’s spiritual, social, and political agendas. Toomy wrote three months after the Catholic Women’s Congress that “many vital questions of morals and progress have been ably considered by experts” in response to the goals set at the Chicago fair. Significantly, Toomy grouped women among these experts and noted that “even some of these women were Catholics. Can any one doubt that the church and the world have gained by their success?”<sup>78</sup> At the same time, Katherine Eleanor Conway,

participating with Toomy and Eleanor C. Donnelly in a roundtable reflection on the “woman question among Catholics” just before the Columbian Catholic Congress, asserted that “woman, as woman, can have no vocation to public life.” Conway, though arguing against Toomy’s defense of a public sphere for Catholic women, maintained 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.” While “some women ... may have a special call to some public duty,” Conway argued that this was “by virtue, not of their womanhood, but of their strong individualities, marked ability, and the demands of unusual environment.” Conway wrote that the Catholic Church had a “liberal attitude” toward women’s opportunities for learning and advancement.<sup>79</sup> These diverging perspectives have an important element in common. They both support historian Kathleen Sprows Cummings’s argument that turn-of-the-twentieth-century U.S. Catholic “new women” demonstrated that their Catholicism “serve[d] as a vehicle through which women contested and renegotiated the parameters of their experience,” and that women members of the patriarchal Catholic Church could still find a “route to empowerment” through their Catholic identities.<sup>80</sup> This comports with the finding of several scholars that any separate spheres that may have existed in the long nineteenth century were often used by women as vehicles for gaining public influence and autonomy.<sup>81</sup>

Though Columbian Catholic Congress planners maintained something approximating a Woman’s Day, they also scheduled women speakers throughout the week, decreasing the gendered separateness that Conway abhorred. On September 4, 1893, the first day of the Congress, Mary Josephine Onahan delivered to an audience of 5,000 her paper on “Isabella the Catholic,” which examined the life of Isabella I of Castille. Superficially, Onahan’s paper may appear to fall exclusively within the “historical subjects” category described by Deirdre Moloney in her analysis of the Congress, but the text of Mary Onahan’s address demonstrates its importance to “contemporary Catholic women’s issues.” Mary Onahan was the day’s sole woman speaker.<sup>82</sup> She contrasted Isabella’s femininity with that of Elizabeth I, whom Mary Beard has described as “avow[ing] her own androgyny” when rallying English troops to resist the advance of the Spanish Armada.<sup>83</sup> Isabella’s womanhood, though, was not confined to the past but was rather, Onahan argued, simply one link in a much longer historical chain extending from the beginning of human history to the present: “The 19th century hugs to itself many delusions, none greater than the claim that it has discovered woman—woman that has come down to us from Adam all the way!” It was Catholicism, Onahan maintained, that provided women with the proper feminine ideal.<sup>84</sup> Onahan’s first-day address at the Congress also set the tone for other Catholic women’s speeches during the week of meetings. With just one exception, the other women speakers delivered papers dealing directly with women and women’s concerns as subjects.

While women were not included among the diocesan delegates to the Columbian Catholic Congress, on the ways and means and resolutions committees, or among the meeting’s officers, they continued to deliver papers for the duration of the conference.<sup>85</sup> The third day hosted Mary Catherine Chase’s (“F. M. Edselas’s”) paper on “The Catholic Sisterhoods,” in which the author argued that a woman fulfilled the feminine ideal through “an insatiable desire to have a finger in every benevolent pie.” This was a “master passion of her nature,” one with a divine origin.<sup>86</sup> A biographer noted that Chase/Edselas had “written upon subjects of public interest with such force and clearness as to attract much attention, giving the general impression that a masculine mind guided the pen”; the biographer was aware that Chase/Edselas was a woman.<sup>87</sup> This

popularity led to her paper at the Columbian Catholic Congress. Chase's/Edselas's written work had become masculinized by virtue of its vigor and its public quality, while her speech at the Congress dealt explicitly with the subject of women's benevolence and Catholic sisterhoods.

The Congress's fourth day, which, as an early history of the gathering noted, "might well be called Woman's Day, the claims and glories of the gentler sex being eloquently presented by some famous Catholic ladies," was described by a Catholic publication one month after the Congress in the traditionally gendered language of the time: "The audience was preponderantly feminine—a huge bouquet of varying charms—crowned with the chief charm of all, an intense earnestness." The day's agenda featured the following papers by women: "Woman's Work in Art," by Eliza Allen Starr (a poet, art historian, recipient of the University of Notre Dame's Laetare Medal, and Catholic convert); "Woman and Mammon," by Rose Hawthorne Lathrop (whose "paper was loudly applauded," according to a contemporary commentator); and "Woman's Work in Literature," by Eleanor C. Donnelly (a poet and magazine editor).<sup>88</sup> Donnelly's paper followed Mary Onahan's first-day discussion of Isabella, locating the founding of the New World not in the work of a man, Columbus, but in that of his female royal patron: "It was the genius of a woman, the generosity of a woman, that first made possible the discovery of America." At the same time, Donnelly tried to fit this image of women's genius into a larger Catholic mold sketched out by Orestes Brownson, "that woman was made for man and 'in herself is only an inchoate man.'" Donnelly, though, subtly pushed back against this image of woman as "inchoate man," instead adopting Alfred, Lord Tennyson's formulation that "Woman is not undeveloped man, / But diverse. / Not like to like, but like a difference," and accepting his "prophecy" that in the future, "The man be more of woman, she of man, / He gain in sweetness and in moral height, / She, mental breadth, nor fail in childward care." Donnelly ultimately saw in women's literary labors the work of God.<sup>89</sup>

The next day, Conway delivered her paper on "The Catholic Summer School and the Reading Circles." She argued that the reading circles

aim[ed] not to raise a crop of women publicists, disputants, and debaters, but simply to increase the good influence which we can exercise on the normal womanly lines by making us more numerously able to write, at need, a plain statement of fact or opinion; increasing our resources for dull and lonely days, making us more tolerant and reasonable and therefore more companionable in our home and social life.<sup>90</sup>

In Conway's view, then, women's education should be properly directed toward improving students "on the normal womanly lines" of writing and of increasing their "companionability" in domestic and social spheres, but not toward strengthening their ability to speak publicly, an ability that Conway would likely characterize as a normal manly line. Conway was deeply uncomfortable with a separate Woman's Day at the Congress, but she still held to some notion of gendered behavior and social roles.

The sole exceptions to papers delivered by women that did not deal explicitly with the subjects of womanhood and femininity were those written by Mary Theresa Elder on immigration and pauperism. The latter address was characterized as the "sensation of the congress," as it called Catholic leaders to task for not adequately assisting poor Americans in rural areas, in contrast to supposedly more effective Protestant churches.<sup>91</sup> Significantly, this was the sole paper that suffered any public criticism.

Estimates of the percentage of Congress attendees who walked out during its presentation ranged from one-half to two-thirds. The newspapers providing these estimates both incorrectly described Elder as a man.<sup>92</sup>

Condemnation of Elder was swift. One Catholic layman, P. C. Boyle, the publisher of Oil City, Pennsylvania's *Oil City Derrick*, was dismayed by Elder's accusatory tone toward clerics. He beseeched Onahan a month after the gathering to "adopt broader rules" at future congresses in an effort to "prevent the scandal of another such paper by prompt repudiation on the spot."<sup>93</sup> Even when commentators praised Elder for her arguments, her prose styling came under attack. *Donahoe's Magazine*, a Catholic periodical in Boston that also incorrectly identified Elder as a man, claimed that her "diction at times degenerated from the fine range of the other speakers into something perilously like slang." Furthermore, despite Elder's claims being fundamentally sound, *Donahoe's* found her anecdotes "hardly felicitous."<sup>94</sup>

Boston's *Sacred Heart Review* correctly identified Elder as a woman. The editor thought that Elder's heart was in the right place in criticizing Catholic leaders, but took her to task for allegedly protestantizing American progress. The newspaper took an obvious swipe at her as an author and activist: "This writer seems to be one of those who try so hard to stand up straight that they fall over backwards."<sup>95</sup> On the other side of the press debate over Elder, Chicago's *Daily Inter Ocean* strongly praised Elder for her criticisms of church officials not paying enough attention to residents of rural areas, who were presumably then flocking to Protestant churches. The Chicago newspaper ridiculed Elder's opponents as "a host of unreasoning, impulsive editors and writers who, themselves incapable of discerning the signs of the times, are fiercely pugnacious against those who see with clearer vision and resolve with wiser minds." Again, though, Elder was portrayed as a man.<sup>96</sup>

Despite several women presenting at the Congress and participating actively in its planning, their partial erasure from the Congress's history was underway. Already, on the very last day of the Congress, one Catholic newspaper editorialized, "The Catholic Congress at Chicago this past week has brought together a great number of distinguished men and has proved in every respect as important and striking an occasion as was anticipated." Conway, who worked tirelessly in the lead-up to the Congress to convince Onahan to reduce the separation between men and women presenters, was highlighted in this piece: "Miss Katherine E. Conway read an interesting paper."<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, a record of the World's Parliament of Religions produced in 1894 positioned Catholic women as leading figures in the Congress: "The part taken by women in the Congress was by no means unimportant. Several of the most important and valuable papers were prepared by women."<sup>98</sup> The history of women's place in the Congress and in Catholic intellectual life was therefore being contested and revised as the event and its aftermath were still unfolding. History and memory here were actively intertwined.

The Columbian Catholic Congress offers instructive lessons about the place of women in the narrative of American Catholic history. Scholars of U.S. Catholicism have long been attentive to women, both lay and religious, in the development of Catholicism as both religion and culture. At the same time, when historical actors themselves portrayed their pursuits—in this case, the conception and planning of the Congress—as primarily male endeavors, it is necessary to interrogate more fully the archives by which these accounts are composed. Furthermore, casting a more critical eye toward events such as the Congress and reading against the grain primary sources stemming from the gathering partially breaks down the separate spheres ideology in which historical actors believed, even as their actions and writings in the aggregate



complicated their own adherence to their religious community's and the nation's prevailing gender norms. Drawing Catholic women away from the periphery of the Congress and resituating them at its center demonstrates the incompleteness of a narrative of the event that focuses primarily on its published and public work and places Catholic thinkers more firmly in dialogue with larger intellectual currents of the Progressive Era.

## Notes

1 On the Chicago fair, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, 2nd ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007), 208–34; Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 38–71; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 341–69; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31–41; Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2009), 151–70; Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 756–64.

2 On the Columbian Catholic Congress, see William S. Cossen, “The Protestant Image in the Catholic Mind: Interreligious Encounters in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2016), 25–51.

3 On U.S. Catholics' historical memory of Columbus and on Columbus's role in American civil religion, see Christopher Kauffman, “Christopher Columbus and American Catholic Identity, 1880–1900,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 11 (Spring 1993): 93–110. On the changing images, memories, and usages of Columbus by Americans between 1792 and 1892, see Thomas J. Schlereth, “Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism,” *The Journal of American History* 79 (Dec. 1992): 937–68.

4 Deirdre M. Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups and Transatlantic Social Reform in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 25.

5 Paula M. Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). My thinking on women's speech in masculine spaces has been shaped by Mary Beard, *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017).

6 James J. McGovern, *The Life and Letters of Eliza Allen Starr* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1905), 430–31.

7 On the separate spheres ideology in history and historiography, see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151–74; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1–29; Estelle Freedman, “Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870–1930,” *Feminist Studies* 5 (Autumn 1979): 512–29; John Mack Faragher, “History from the Inside-Out: Writing the History of Women in Rural America,” *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1981): 537–57; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,” *The Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9–39; Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Kim Warren, “Separate Spheres: Analytical Persistence in United States Women's History,” *History Compass* 5 (Jan. 2007): 262–77; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

**8** My thinking on women's archival and historiographical erasures has been informed by Faragher, "History from the Inside-Out"; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; Boydston, *Home and Work*; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Ann Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 87–107; Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

**9** Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," 87, 88–92.

**10** On the World's Parliament of Religions, see J. W. Hanson, ed., *The World's Congress of Religions: The Addresses and Papers Delivered Before the Parliament and an Abstract of the Congresses Held in the Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., Aug. 25 to Oct. 15, 1893, Under the Auspices of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: International Publishing Co., 1894); Egal Feldman, "American Ecumenicism: Chicago's World's Parliament of Religions of 1893," *Journal of Church and State* 9 (Spring 1967): 180–99; James F. Cleary, "Catholic Participation in the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893," *The Catholic Historical Review* 55 (Jan. 1970): 585–609; Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); David Mislin, *Saving Faith: Making Religious Pluralism an American Value at the Dawn of the Secular Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 40–62.

**11** *Catholic Journal* (Rochester), Oct. 5, 1889, 1; "Call for a General Congress of the Catholic Laity of the United States, to be Held in the City of Baltimore, MD., Nov. 11–12, 1889," correspondence IX-1-a 1889/09, William J. Onahan Papers [hereafter cited as ONA], University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, IN; *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Catholic Congress, Held at Baltimore, Md., Nov. 11th and 12th, 1889* (Detroit: William H. Hughes, 1889).

**12** Hanson, *The World's Congress of Religions*, 984; *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Catholic Congress*, ix–x.

**13** "Around the Globe," *Catholic Journal*, Nov. 21, 1891, 1.

**14** Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, July 13, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA [emphasis in original]; Seraphine Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature: Compiled from the Works of American Catholic Women Writers by the Ursulines of New York* (Chicago: D. H. McBride & Company, 1897), 199. In her next letter, Conway also recommended Boston's Thomas B. Fitzpatrick, "a very wealthy Catholic of extraordinary generosity and great interest in all national Catholic events." See Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, July 14, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA. On conversion to Catholicism, see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), esp. 277–349; Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Lincoln A. Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 221–69.

**15** M. J. Harson to William J. Onahan, Feb. 24, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA; ; Mary M. Meline and Edward F. X. McSweeney, *The Story of the Mountain: Mount St. Mary's College and Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland* (Emmitsburg, MD: The Weekly Chronicle, 1911). The author wishes to thank Philip Gleason and Charles Strauss for their assistance in learning more about Mary M. Meline.

**16** Mary Theresa Elder to William J. Onahan, June 6, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.

**17** Mary Theresa Elder to William J. Onahan, Aug. 21, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA; Susan B. Elder to W. J. Onahan, Aug. 30, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA; M. T. Elder to William J. Onahan, Aug. 16, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA.

**18** Anna T. Sadlier to William J. Onahan, Feb. 1893, correspondence X-1-d, ONA; Anna T. Sadlier to William J. Onahan, Aug. 11, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA; Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 413.

**19** Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 413.

- 20 Leonora M. Lake to William J. Onahan, Aug. 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA; Susan Levine, "Labor's True Woman: Domesticity and Equal Rights in the Knights of Labor," *The Journal of American History* 70 (Sept. 1983): 331–35.
- 21 Isabel Shea to William J. Onahan, Jan. 18, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA; Anna T. Sadlier to William J. Onahan, July 2, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.
- 22 Isabel Shea to Mr. William J. Onahan, Jan. 11, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 23 Smith, *The Gender of History*.
- 24 F. M. Edselas to William J. Onahan, June 29, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA [emphasis in original]; Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 180–81.
- 25 F. M. Edselas to William J. Onahan, June 22, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.
- 26 F. M. Edselas to William J. Onahan, Aug. 21, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA [emphasis in original].
- 27 F. M. Edselas to William J. Onahan, June 23, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA [emphases in original].
- 28 John Henry Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), 1,410, 1,414.
- 29 Mary Theresa Elder to William J. Onahan, Sept. 18, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA [emphasis in original].
- 30 Mary Theresa Elder to William J. Onahan, Aug. 1893 [no day on letter], correspondence IX-1-e, ONA [emphasis in original]; Susan B. Elder to W. J. Onahan, Aug. 30, 1893.
- 31 Mary Theresa Elder to William J. Onahan, Sept. 18, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA [emphasis in original]; Mary Theresa E. to William J. Onahan, July 17, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA [on Elder's health].
- 32 Elder to Onahan, June 6, 1893.
- 33 On Vatican I and ultramontaniam, see John W. O'Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018). On the nineteenth-century power struggle between American bishops and laypeople, see Patrick W. Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 158–94, 221–40; Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47–70.
- 34 Mary Theresa Elder to William J. Onahan, July 13, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.
- 35 "Catharine Cole's Columbian Correspondence," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Oct. 1, 1893, 7.
- 36 Elder to Onahan, July 17, 1893.
- 37 Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood"; Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith*.
- 38 Elder to Onahan, June 6, 1893.
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- 40 Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877–1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 231.
- 41 Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xiii.
- 42 On Conway and disagreements among Catholics on women's roles in the church and at the Congress, see Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups*, 23–26.
- 43 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 44 Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 94–97; Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 158–69.
- 45 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, July 7, 1893, correspondence, IX-1-e, ONA [emphasis in original].
- 46 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, July 11, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.
- 47 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, Apr. 5, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 48 Conway to Onahan, July 7, 1893 [emphases in original].
- 49 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, Feb. 12, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.

- 50 I. T. [Isaac Thomas] Hecker, *The Church and the Age: An Exposition of the Catholic Church in View of the Needs and Aspirations of the Present Age* (New York: Office of the Catholic World, 1887), 177.
- 51 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, Feb. 12, 1893 [emphasis in original]; Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, July 25, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.
- 52 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, Feb. 19, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 53 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, May 10, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 54 Hanson, *The World's Congress of Religions*, 998; Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 433.
- 55 Patrick W. Riordan to William J. Onahan, Feb. 18, 1893 [year corrected from 1892 by archivist; "1892" was preprinted on Riordan's stationery and was likely used in error on this letter], correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 56 Conway to Onahan, July 7, 1893 [emphasis in original].
- 57 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, June 30, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA; Conway to Onahan, Feb. 19, 1893.
- 58 Conway to Onahan, July 7, 1893.
- 59 *Progress of the Catholic Church in America and the Great Columbian Catholic Congress of 1893*, vol. 2: *World's Columbian Catholic Congresses*, 6th ed. (Chicago: J. S. Hyland and Company, 1897), 28–33, 106–11, 183–85.
- 60 Katherine E. Conway to William J. Onahan, July 12, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.
- 61 Rose Hawthorne Lathrop to William J. Onahan, July 21, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA.
- 62 Conway to Onahan, June 30, 1893.
- 63 *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 82–83; Hanson, *The World's Congress of Religions*, 1,015–16.
- 64 Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 440.
- 65 Rose H. Lathrop to William J. Onahan, Mar. 25, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 66 James M. Cleary to William J. Onahan, Feb. 17, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 19; Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 199; Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups*, 24. Jackson Lears also notes that mainly Protestant women reformers of the Progressive Era "were inspired by a belief that they could use the values associated with woman's sphere (the bourgeois home) to transform the public realm—to 'make the world more Homelike,' in [Frances] Willard's phrase." See Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 198.
- 67 James M. Cleary to William J. Onahan, Aug. 26, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA.
- 68 Rose Hawthorne Lathrop to William J. Onahan, Feb. 21, 1893, correspondence IX-1-d, ONA.
- 69 Rose H. Lathrop to William J. Onahan, Aug. 27, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA; G.P. Lathrop to William J. Onahan, Aug. 28, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA.
- 70 Rose H. Lathrop to William J. Onahan, Aug. 24, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA. Lathrop's husband, George (*The Atlantic's* editor), mentioned to Onahan a month before the Congress that domestic affairs—namely, establishing a new home—played a role in her inability to attend. The same factor caused George to express concern about his ability to present a paper at the Congress. See George P. Lathrop to William J. Onahan, Aug. 5, 1893, correspondence IX-1-e, ONA; Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 440. Rose wrote previously to Onahan to regret her paper's delay, which was caused by her family's "change in residence." This "crowded all [her] work very much." See Rose H. Lathrop to Onahan, July 21, 1893.
- 71 Rose H. Lathrop to William J. Onahan, Sept. 2, 1893, correspondence, IX-1-f, ONA [emphasis in original].
- 72 Patricia Dunlavy Valenti, *To Myself a Stranger: A Biography of Rose Hawthorne Lathrop* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 53, 120.
- 73 Boydston, *Home and Work*; Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*; Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*; Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*.
- 74 Valenti, *To Myself a Stranger*, 100–01.
- 75 Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s–1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35.

- 76 Valenti, *To Myself a Stranger*, 126–31.
- 77 Alice Timmons Toomy, “There is a Public Sphere for Catholic Women,” in Alice Timmons Toomy, Eleanor C. Donnelly, and Katherine E. Conway, “The Woman Question Among Catholics: A Round Table Conference,” *Catholic World* (New York), Aug. 1893, 674; Toomy, Donnelly, and Conway, “The Woman Question Among Catholics,” 671.
- 78 Toomy, “There is a Public Sphere for Catholic Women,” 676.
- 79 Katherine E. Conway, “Woman Has No Vocation to Public Life,” in Toomy, Donnelly, and Conway, “The Woman Question Among Catholics,” 681, 682, 683.
- 80 Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith*, 3, 4.
- 81 Freedman, “Separatism as Strategy”; Faragher, “History from the Inside-Out”; Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*; Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*.
- 82 “Columbian Catholic Congress,” *World* (New York), Sept. 4, 1893, 4; Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups*, 25.
- 83 Beard, *Women & Power*, 22.
- 84 *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 28, 33.
- 85 *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 41–42; “Columbian Catholic Congress,” *World*, Sept. 4, 1893, 4.
- 86 *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 72.
- 87 Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 180, 181.
- 88 *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 78–87; “The Columbian Catholic Congress,” *Donahoe’s Magazine* (Boston), Oct. 1893, 377; Hanson, *The World’s Congress of Religions*, 1,015–16, 1,021; Leonard, *Immortelles of Catholic Columbian Literature*, 45–46, 151; Eleanor C. Donnelly, “The Personality of a Favorite Poet,” *Catholic World*, Mar. 1897, 772–76; Thomas M. Schwertner, “Eleanor Donnelly—The Singer of Pure Religion” *Catholic World*, June 1917, 352–60. Boston’s *Sacred Heart Review* reported a month before the event, “A special session of the Congress will be devoted to papers on the work of woman in the Church and in the world. The writers are well-known Catholic women.” See “The Catholic Congress,” *Sacred Heart Review*, Aug. 12, 1893, 16. Donnelly’s paper was actually delivered by a substitute speaker because, on the second day of the Congress, she lost her voice due to “a severe bronchial attack.” See P. C. Donnelly to William J. Onahan, Sept. 5, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA.
- 89 *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 84–85.
- 90 *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 111.
- 91 Hanson, *The World’s Congress of Religions*, 1,014; *Progress of the Catholic Church*, 179–83.
- 92 “A Paper Which Made a Sensation,” *Daily Charlotte (NC) Observer*, Sept. 9, 1893, 3; “The Catholic Congress,” *Irish American Weekly* (New York), Sept. 16, 1893, 2.
- 93 P. C. Boyle to William J. Onahan, Oct. 8, 1893, correspondence IX-1-f, ONA.
- 94 “The Columbian Catholic Congress,” *Donahoe’s Magazine*, Oct. 1893, 374, 375.
- 95 “Editorial Notes,” *Sacred Heart Review*, Sept. 23, 1893, 8.
- 96 “Mr. M. T. Elder Again,” *Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago), Jan. 1, 1894, 12.
- 97 “Editorial Notes,” *Sacred Heart Review*, Sept. 9, 1893, 8.
- 98 Hanson, *The World’s Congress of Religions*, 1,021.