The Soul Pictures

of

Margaret Mary Nealis R.S.C.J.

1876 to 1957

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ABSTRACT

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More people have seen the paintings of Margaret Mary Nealis than are aware of the identity of the artist who produced them. A Religious of the Sacred Heart, for four decades Mother Nealis painted religious subjects in and around Montreal. Her output was prodigious and she fulfilled many major commissions. Her paintings were reproduced in large quantities and distributed world-wide through the efforts of the Montreal commercial photographer, J.F.Topp.

This paper presents Margaret Mary Nealis, the artist, for the first time, through personal interviews with her contemporaries, and what little archival documentation was available. It also provides a listing of most of her extant and lost works.

"Quia animae videnti creatorem augusta est omnis creatura."

"Every created thing appears splendorous to a soul which sees its creator. "

Greg. Dialogues 2,35

PREFACE

I met Mother Margaret Mary Nealis R.S.C.J. in the second term of the academic year of 1956-57 at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Montreal. I was a new girl, shy and somewhat overwhelmed. She was the portress, a little old lady in her eighties wearing the long black habit of the Society of the Sacred Heart. There was a slight limp in her walk - and what a smile! What kindness and gentleness! I did not know then what a wonderful painter she was; nor did I connect her with all the reproductions of paintings I had seen during my early childhood in Europe, and later with their originals in North America.

In turning to primary sources for the main corpus of written information concerning Mother Nealis's biography, I was kindly allowed access to the convent archives. Having consulted Nealis's 'box', or file, I found that it contained precious little by way of personal information about the hidden life of this humble nun. There was virtually no personal correspondence, and little in the way of notes. The convent necrology, a five-page typed sheet from which I have taken excerpts and references, was the compendium of her life (Appendix 1). One of her fellow-religious, who knew her well, wrote a long remembrance of Mother Nealis at the time of her death in 1957. This dossier, containing extracts from her journal, was sent to the Motherhouse in

Rome, in accordance with the custom in the Society. There, the information was edited down to the skeletal five extant pages. No copy exists of the original manuscript sent to Rome. Most of the biographical data and anecdotes are gathered from the memories of Nealis's sisters-in-religion, who communicated them through personal interviews. As for her paintings, they speak for themselves and of their creator. For biographical data concerning her publisher, J.F. Topp, I am indebted to George Topp S.J.

When I met her, Mother Nealis gave me a little prayer book containing reproductions of her paintings and three small "holy cards". She signed them: 'To dear Polly, with love from Mother Nealis, R.S.C.J. 1957'. The following pages, too, contain a certain labour of love and are dedicated to the Religious of the Sacred Heart, world-wide.

INTRODUCTION

> "....art that fosters remembrance of all things".
>
> Prometheus Bound
> Aeschilus

The purpose of this thesis is not to be an apologia for religious art - that traditional genre which had such an extraordinary flourishing in Quebec until the past few decades; nor is it intended as a psychological profile of the artist. One has, admittedly, the opportunity of weaving the fertile and ample material into such a study, but that would be an unnecessary intrusion into the privacy of Mother Nealis's deepest personal life. I chose, rather, to locate within the history of art, and to introduce for the first time, a prolific twentieth-century representative of a particular school of Canadian painting - Margaret Mary Nealis 1876-1957, Canadian, woman, religious.

Although possessing little formal art training, having only attended art lessons while at school, her aesthetic was firmly rooted in a European tradition. It was nourished by deep spiritual conviction, and is wholly Canadian. What makes Mother Nealis's oeuvre significant in the theatre of Canadian painting is her special synthesis of a traditional, formal vocabulary, and an iconography imbued

with a particularization of place with such specific Canadiana as the recognizable scenery of the environs of the Sault-au-Récollet by the Back River where she spent most of her life.

Living mostly at the Sault Convent, on Gouin Boulevard on the Island of Montreal which opened its doors in 1858 and was sold in 1970, Mother Nealis also spent many years at the City House on Atwater Avenue, with occasional brief visits to other houses of the Society. Leading a semi-cloistered life, she did not go to art exhibitions, galleries or museums. However, she was fully conversant with traditional painting through reproductions, art books and periodicals that crowded the shelves of her studio. Not being able to see the original works of her contemporaries, she could not have been fully aware of current art trends. Mother Nealis worked alone. However, in working alone, she was part of a tradition here in Quebec. It was a tradition that produced such artists as the rècluse, Jeanne Le Ber (1662 - 1724), whose sumptuously embroidered altar-frontals were much admired (Hubbard, 1964, p.45).

Margaret Mary Nealis R.S.C.J., spent her religious life in and around Montreal painting almost exclusively what one would consider 'religious pictures'. Her output was prodigious; she worked in oils, watercolour, pencil, ink and conté upon anything that came to hand - canvas, the backs of

children's exercise-books, even on cigar box-lids and brown paper bags. She was an amateur, in the best eighteenth-century sense of the word, a lover of her craft; her work is far from primitive. Mother Nealis achieved a high technical standard in many of her works. She was instinctively a fine colourist and the iconography of her paintings reflects her spiritual life. She painted the Child Jesus and his Mother, whom she drew with extraordinary sweetness. Mother Nealis's imagery blossomed forth from the fecund soil of her tranquil and joyous spirit, her secluded life and from the didactic tradition that compelled her to teach and to inspire the countless young girls passing through the convent-school during her lifetime. Nealis's aesthetic aims were offered in the service of those ideals which she herself held dearest. As an educator, she hoped to instill in her pupils Christian values and high standards as envisioned by the Foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, who intended the curriculum and teaching in her schools to develop the soul of the woman and all her gifts, in an atmosphere of family spirit where the teachers were 'mothers'. Respect for self, for others, loyalty and trust were fostered within the framework of a rigorous intellectual training. Since this complete development of personality could not be conceived without the gift of self, which perfects it, social and apostolic training was, and still is, an essential element of the education at the Sacred Heart. (Charmot, 1953, p.51)

Mother Nealis's work is not self-conscious art about art, in the nineteenth-century sense of art for art's sake, but simply painting, often very good painting, with an inspirational and didactic purpose; "I never know what is coming - I just paint, we'll see...."

The primary raison d'être of Mother Nealis's oeuvre was to communicate to her young charges how much they were loved, that they might know their absolute worth. Hers was a private vision, the familiar patterns of organized society serving as reminders of an objective and general reality. She strove, in her work, to affirm the values of her age: not so much utopianism, but a Christian vision of the ideal, rather than an idealization. In Mother Nealis's paintings, one is not affronted by a self-conscious breach of decorum in attempting to depict the transcendent, nor by schematic excess. Even allegory is seldom present. What Nealis's collective work radiates is her own distilled human experience crystallized on canvas, paper or cigar box, purified of all egoism, since she painted without the sense of artistic self.

Some of Nealis's paintings have been lost, given away, destroyed in fires or remain simply unaccounted for. She painted and sketched innumerable small landscapes which she gave away as gifts. Others were sold at annual school bazaars. Many, on the other hand, were reproduced in the

1930's and '40's through the lithographic process and disseminated world-wide in the thousands (see Chapter 3). As a result, more people have seen her works than are aware of the identity of the artist who created them. Having painted prodigiously all of her adult life, Nealis will find a place within the Canadian pantheon of twentieth-century painters. Most of her paintings have been collected and conserved by her community in the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Halifax, Nova Scotia. To be surrounded by Mother Nealis's paintings - some of her best ones - has an extraordinary effect. They share the simplicity and serenity of aspect, described with uninhibited directness and technical expertise, rendered in the vibrant clear colour that is the hallmark of Margaret Mary Nealis.

Every generation interprets the art of preceding ages through its own experience, its own perspectives. The profile of the artist tends to change according to the tastes and exigencies of different eras, cultures and variables of individual experience, now highlighting those of one, now of another.

In placing Mother Nealis in the art historical tradition, I chose as the title of this paper, Soul Pictures. This is a reference, in the broadest sense, to Sumerian art as exemplified not visually, but through meaning, by such works as the temple figures from Kafaje (c.2,700-

2,500 BC), now in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad. These figures were known as 'Soul Pictures', and were placed, open-eyed, to wait in the temple in perpetual wakefulness, serving as a conduit between the divinity and the human devotee they represent and for whom they intercede. As such, they were a sacramental sign of a particular, inner reality. This ancient type of representation is well-established in art historical convention, and indeed, finds its ultimate genesis in the human psyche, subconsciously surfacing again and again throughout the ages, finding expression in the arts. In the religious metaphors of Mother Nealis, her representations of Christ, Mary, and the children whom she chose as models are painted with great reverence that allows the spirit of the artist to shine through. Like the Sumerian temple figures, Nealis's works are analogies, pointing beyond themselves. They are also metaphors, as art ultimately is, of the intangible reality it aims to expose. In approaching religious art as symbol, one is aware that art from its earliest manifestations, was imbued with magical significance, a form conceived as embodiment of spirit. Religious art as a category presents its own problems. In our contemporary materialist and a-religious society one often hears the question: "Is there such a thing as 'religious art'?" There is, primarily, the question of validity. The subjective mystical experience cannot ever be adequately symbolized, let alone represented by sensual metaphor. One is warned against turning the mystical allusion into a

concrete illusion. Symbols are signs, and as such, they are merely awakeners. "The Christian Vision," said the great twentieth-century Benedictine monk and teacher of Christian meditation, Dom John Main, "requires us to be open to God at an imageless depth" (Main, 1989, p.125).

Edgar Wind says that in holy matters, which necessarily transcend the powers of human reason, incongruous symbols are preferable (Wind, 1967, p.277). Therefore, the visual metaphor is at best inadequate, and more often misleading, as our visually-based experience is always at a distance. Vision implies distance, an objective relationship. Therefore, it cannot depict the spiritual which, by its nature, aspires to communion, that is the transcendence of all, beyond duality (Freeman, 1989).

Mother Nealis was one of the those truly wise women whose wisdom has more to do with knowing than knowledge. She knew the essence of things. With utter simplicity, she focused far beyond the metaphor and the symbol that she used to point to this essence - to this reality.

The Platonic notion, expounded in The Republic, lib. III & IV, that all art is image-making and all image-making is the creation of substitutes, and hence undesirable in itself, had a formative and wide-spread cultural influence in the early development of a "Western" philosophy of

Art. Although there were a few exceptions such as at fourth-century Dura Europos, religious art, generally speaking, was anathema to Judaism. For about five hundred years after the death of the Gautama, Buddhists were also iconoclasts. It was in the first century A.D., that the first images of the Buddha appeared at Gandhara and it is of note that they were Greco-Indian representations. The Prophet Mohammed also forbade his followers the use of religious images. Furthermore, the problem of religious representation was the battleground between the Iconoclast and Iconodule Christians during the early Christian centuries of Byzantium, and served the political bias of later ideologies. It is its ambiguity that renders art such a powerful 'aid' in the case of Religion, or such a 'threat' in the case of the politics of totalitarian governments.

The evocative, emotionally charged power of art to move the human psyche has often been harnessed and pressed into the service of ideologies - at best as inspiration, transcendent, pointing beyond itself - at worst, as crude propaganda. From the magical function of the earliest cave paintings, and the watchful temple-figures of Sumer, through Early Christian times when pagan mysteries wore a Christian guise, it burst forth within the magnificence of the monastic art of the Middle Ages, then manifested itself in the propaganda and theatricity of the art of the Counter-Reformation and on to the present day. Throughout, art has

mirrored the zeitgeist of a particular time within history. And it is history that serves as art's supporting framework. It is this supporting framework which illumines its meaning.

CHAPTER 1.

Historical Background

"Art gives us universal truth while history gives us particular truth."

Poetics
Aristotle

It is within the context of historical time and place that the art of Margaret Mary Nealis was produced and within which it acquires some of its meaning and significance.

In a small watercolour, entitled Le 17 Décembre 1842: Le Canada ouvre ses portes et son coeur au Sacré Coeur (Fig. 2), Mother Nealis documents the arrival of the tiny band of the Religious of the Sacred Heart on the shores of Lac L'Achigan. She commemorates their faith in the new venture, their hope for its success and the love that overcame the hardships of their midwinter journey.

Although the spirit of the age was one of reform, the Lower Canada that welcomed the nuns was a land in political conflict, economic depression, and the social unrest that is inevitably coupled with it. The one hundred thousand or so destitute Irish immigrants brought with them the added burden of the cholera epidemic of the 1840s.

Although American democracy had not taken root in French Canada, whose society remained rigidly hierarchic in structure, Canada's proximity to the American States influenced her politics. The rise of Jacksonian democracy in the States subsequently reinforced the long-established influence of the American Revolution upon Canadian political thinking. The outmoded colonial system at home became burdensome to reform-minded leaders such as Louis-Joseph Papineau and William Lyon MacKenzie. As London maintained colonial government, the people of the Canadas demanded responsible British government with certain Canadian features. The political crisis was fueled by the major commercial and agricultural depression of 1833-8. The business community was visibly shaken by financial panic as in London and in the American States.(Wade, 1968, p.157)

With the Rebellions of 1834 and 1839, open conflict erupted in Lower Canada. It was neither a clear-cut conflict between the two ethnic groups nor a struggle between the liberty-loving Canadas and a reactionary England. The populous agrarian majority was in bitter conflict with the oligarchic minority of officials and merchants, and rebellion resulted from the increasing frustration of the majority with the few who held the monopoly of power. These conflicts were heightened by general world-wide trends that were the legacy of the American and French Revolutions. For the first time the right of sovereignty was attributed to

the people. By 1848 this principle and the derivative belief that each ethnic group or nation possessed the right of sovereignty had wrecked the reactionary order imposed on Europe by the Congress of Vienna at the close of the Napoleonic Wars. In the Canadas there was active resistance to the officials appointed by London (Wade, 1968, p.152).

The Rebellions in Canada had a profound effect in England and brought about the action which had so long been demanded. Lord Durham was appointed High Commissioner and Governor-General to investigate grievances and report on their remedy. The Durham Report on the Affairs of British North America was published in February 1839. As a solution to the British North American crisis, the Report recommended the union of Upper and Lower Canada with responsible government. It called for the absorption of French-Canadian society into a whole British North America (Durham, 1837). Durham's policy failed due to the collaboration of French and English reformers. The great achievement of 1849-67 was a working out of a partnership of English and French that guaranteed the rights of both. The threat of annexation to the United States was averted by the establishment of reciprocal trade agreements which did much to cure economic ills. Thanks to Georges-Etienne Cartier, Lower Canada was led to support the Confederation of British North America, which was to be both French and English. French Canadians were the majority in Quebec but they were outnumbered two to one

in the Dominion of Canada. In Quebec, the population was 85% French-speaking but the urban areas were predominately English and controlled trade and industry.

Even before the building of the railways, the Grand Trunk being completed in 1860, the port of Quebec City was beginning to decline in favour of the port of Montreal. With the rise of Montreal, the down-river ports were eclipsed as the city profited by the brisk development of Upper Canada with its rapidly growing population. To meet the competition of New York, Boston and Portland and to maintain itself as the terminus of the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence trade, Montreal began deepening the St. Lawrence shipping channel in 1844, and improved the harbour facilities to receive trans-Atlantic traffic (Wade, 1968, p.334). By 1867, Montreal had become the metropolis of Canada and centre of the import and export trade. Linked to the South Shore and the Eastern Townships by the Victoria Bridge, Montreal was becoming a great rail centre. The Grand Trunk Railway was the biggest business in Canada at this time, employing more people than any other enterprise. Its granaries and freight depots, its offices and shops were all situated in Montreal, which became the financial and banking capital of Canada. But Montreal, like New York, was growing too rapidly. The overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, disease and poverty that accompanied the economic boom that transformed Montreal from a small commercial centre to a

metropolis, port and rail centre threatened the social fabric in the second half of the nineteenth century. Due to its traditional conservatism, members of French-Canadian society were affected less than their English-speaking counterparts.

Nationalism was a c[illegible]able political force in the nineteenth century and the great historical process that began in 1776 continues to this day. French Canada became involved in this process through two channels: one from France, the other from the Vatican. This affected the course of events in Quebec up to the 1950s.

In Quebec, nationalist interests led to the bolstering of hallowed rural and village ways in the hope of arresting the inevitable social change brought on by uncontrolled capitalist business practices. The idea of a specifically agricultural vocation for French Canada was the almost universally held belief. To desert the soil for urban life was branded national treachery. It was imperative to French Canadian survival that the thousands of parishes where rural people, tilling their fields and sustained by Catholicism were masters of their local government, lived sheltered from assimilation and the contaminating morality of the cities. (Wade, 1968, p.231) A flood of pamphlets were produced towards this end, such as Abbé Albert Tessier's Femmes de maison dépareillées, Notre Mère la Terre, and La Patrie, c'est ça!. (Tessier, 1942) Tradi-

tional agriculture was considered to be the only stable base of the Quebec economy, a romantic notion that reflected the Catholic clergy's extreme fear of communism and socialism. (Wade, 1968, p.243) In the election of 1936 the newly formed Union Nationale Party was swept into power in Quebec with Maurice Duplessis (1890-1959) at its helm. His reactionary, ultra-right-wing politics opposed liberal ideas. Duplessis became a supporter of monopoly capitalism. For the sake of immediate gains, he made Quebec dependent on foreign corporations. To attract major corporations he promoted the myth of a peaceful, religious and traditional Quebec, with a cheap labour force that was shielded from troublemakers by a strict law-and-order administration (Baum, 1980, p.185). "Under Duplessis, the critical voices became silent."(Baum, 1980, p.188)

Confronted with the prospect of an ever-diminishing minority population within the Dominion, French Canadians sought support from their own distinctive traditions whose European bulwarks were also threatened in France and Italy. It involved the French Canadians in the European struggle between the Ultramontanism and Liberalism, which was an outgrowth of the conflict between the old and new orders, caused by nationalism. French-Canadian Ultamontanism had a strong nationalist character that resembled Gallicanism, its historical opposite. French-Canadian liberalism differed from European liberalism which had been condemned

by Pope Pius IX in the Syllabus of Errors of 1864. The semantic confusion caused by applying European terms to North American movements aggravated the struggle between these two political views (Wade, 1968, p.341).

The leader of the Ultramontanist faction of the Quebec Church was Msgr. Ignace Bourget (1799-1885), who after serving as Vicar-General since its foundation, became in 1840 the second bishop of the new Diocese of Montreal. Msgr. Bourget had sympathized with the Patriote movement of 1837-8 and in the Diocese of Montreal the ecclesiastical authorities, with the exception of the Sulpicians, took a much less firm stand against the movement than did those in Quebec City with their tradition of loyalty to the Crown that had won for the Catholic Church virtual establishment under British rule, a status far more favourable than under the Gallican Ancienne Régime (Wade, 1968, p.338).

Under the union that threatened to deprive French Canadians of their separate nationhood, Bishop Bourget, zealous, energetic and Rome-oriented, was the dynamic force in providing every defense for the nationalism that came within the province of the Church. This nationalism sometimes used religion for political ends, sometimes politics for religious ends, arousing the hostility of the English population whose tradition is based on the separation of Church and State.

The Ultramontane doctrine of the supremacy of Church over State and the nationalist doctrine of the defense of French-Canadian rights both held the seeds of a religious-political conflict. In 1866, Bishop Bourget's disciple, the Grand-Vicar Louis François Laflèche, advanced the doctrine destined to become a major tenet of French-Canadian nationalism: that whoever lost his language, lost his faith. He insisted on the solidarity of family, language and faith as the basis of French-Canadian nationhood. Both Bourget and Laflèche vehemently opposed the development of political liberalism in Canada, which they mistakenly confused with the liberalism that had brought social revolution to Italy and France (Wade, 1968, p.356). In the mid-nineteenth-century, the Catholic clergy concentrated its unrelenting efforts to increase its political powers in Quebec. The Church proclaimed itself not only to be independent of the state but also superior in matters of education. One of Lord Durham's recommendations was educational reform, he having identified ethnic differences as the cause of political turmoil. Durham's Report proposed a centralized educational system within a united Canada. This would speed up assimilation. The School Act of 1841, which established the Office of Superintendent of Upper and Lower Canada, was short-lived. What followed was a school system divided on the basis of language and religion that reflected ethnic differences (Danylewycz, 1987, p.23).

In the 1840s, responding to social change, Bourget set in motion a building up of religious forces as a bulwark against assimilation in philanthropy and education. Religious communities were encouraged to take on new responsibilities in the fields of education and social services (Danylewycz, 1987, p.134). The expanding Church focused much attention on education and its growth was sustained by the growth of the number of religious orders.

In Quebec religious women have had a history that is different from that of the institutional Church. The rise of women's vocations and the convent expansion that was a corollary to it, can only be understood in the context of women's work. Educational, economic and political opportunities were the factors that created a climate that was hospitable to the rise in vocations that sustained convent expansion into the 1950s. The biographies of women in religion of this period underlined the fact that entering a convent entailed a rational choice. Women did not stumble blindly into convents. Having vocations to the religious life, they selected orders that suited their individual temperaments and occupational preferences. Convents offered an alternative to marriage, motherhood and spinsterhood in a society that valued women chiefly as procreative beings. Within their vocation, women were given the opportunity to pursue a chosen career, could wield power, and on occasion,

enter the public sphere (Danylewycz, 1987, p.159). Religious women had access to economic and political privileges that were denied lay women. Nuns were encouraged to develop their abilities as part of their commitment to their vocation. The era of convent expansion began with the rise of women's vocations that led to the growth of women's leadership in education, and in the realm of private schools independent of secular and religious governance. This also laid the foundations for the Quebec feminist movement as it expanded the roles of lay women in education and social action within the framework of, and as part of, the changing role of the Catholic Church.

In his first decade as Bishop, Bourget established ten new religious orders in his diocese. Of these five men's and three women's communities were brought over from France. He was hoping that these religious orders, especially the teaching ones, would exercise a strong conservative influence on the Quebec population in its reaction against the French political upheavals of 1789 and 1848. In 1842, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was invited to return to Canada. Benefiting from its earlier achievements in New France, the Society exercised an influence through its identification with Rome. Bishop Bourget modeled his new cathedral, Mary Queen of the World, on St. Peter's in Rome. Begun in 1870 by Victor Bourgeau, it was built in two stages and completed in 1894 by the Rev. M. Michaud c.s.v.

In line with his policy of forging closer links with Rome, Archbishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal, during a visit to France in 1841, approached Madeleine Sophie Barat and made plans for the establishment of a community of the Religious of the Sacred Heart within the Diocese of Montreal.

It was into this arena of political upheaval and social change that the first Religious of the Sacred Heart arrived on December 17, 1842. (Fig.2)

> Bishop Bourget thought it best to act prudently and allow the Sacred Heart nuns to begin discreetly, in a remote place; after a while their graduates would be their best advertisement....

One continues to read in the Convent archives:

> ....the nuns came to St. Jacques-de-L'Achigan 36 miles north of Montreal. The first four religious had a journey full of hardships and adventure. Starting from New York on December 11th. 1842, the seven day trip took them up the Hudson River by boat; then over the Adirondacks in a stage-coach, unsheltered from the bitter wind; then across the St. Lawrence River in a row boat, amid the floating ice. In Montreal, Bishop Bourget lodged them with the Congregation of Notre Dame, who received them with warm hospitality. On December 26th, sleighs took them to St. Jacques. Within a week, a day school was opened.
> (Sacred Heart)

La Societé du Sacré Coeur was founded in 1800, by Madeleine Sophie Barat in France primarily for the education of girls and was dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The years after the French Revolution saw the birth of religious communities with a semi-cloistered style of life, both active and contemplative. Previously, religious rules for women in most cases were for contemplatives, living in full enclosure. Until 1964 the Religious of the Sacred Heart were semi-cloistered: guests were received, and there was a regular school in the convent, but the nuns did not leave the premises except in cases of necessity. It is an international order with a motherhouse in Rome. Already during Madeleine Sophie Barat's lifetime, the Society had established houses in Europe, North and South America. During the first half of this century the order numbered over 6,000 members, today there are 4,400 Religious of the Sacred Heart in 44 countries. (Durocher, 1993)

The Society of the Sacred Heart responding to the demands of mid-nineteenth-century English-speaking Montreal, opened English sections in their schools, and later established schools across Canada.

At the suggestion of Bishop Bourget, the Congregation of Notre Dame, Quebec's largest teaching order, adopted the teaching methods of the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

Familiar with the popularity the Society of the Sacred Heart enjoyed with the upper classes in Europe, the Congregation of Notre Dame reformed its curriculum towards this end (Danylewycz, 1987, p.77).

It is difficult for anyone today to appreciate the extent of Mother Nealis's insularity. First and foremost, Mother Nealis was a cloistered religious who lived within the confines of her convent. Religious life entailed the acceptance of living under a common rule, as well as the subjugation of the will to the authority of the Superior who represented Christ. However, her insularity was mitigated by the fact that she was cloistered not in a traditional Quebecois religious community where social and cultural homogeneity was the norm, but rather, in a very European order, with convent schools in many parts of the world. The French-speaking religious came from France and the upper echelons of French society and the intelligentsia of Quebec; their English-speaking counterparts came from similarly privileged backgrounds. Living together, these women sublimated their differences in favour of an international and cross-cultural catholicity animated and inspired by the Rule of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat.

CHAPTER 2.

"Art is the indispensible means for the merging of the individual with the whole."
Ernst Fischer (1963)

Biography.

In Margaret Mary Nealis's lifetime, history hurtled on with more frantic speed than ever before. Yet, she remained serene, detached. She was born in Fredericton on December 9, 1876 and was baptized in the Cathedral on the seventeenth. She later wrote,

> My father was the youngest of a large Irish family that emigrated to America around 1845. My mother, Jean Wilkinson, the daughter of a civil engineer, was strictly brought up within the Anglican tradition, but God gave her the gift of faith accompanied with that of strength to withstand the opposition of her family. Three years after my birth, my parents moved to St. John, N.B. Wanting to give his children a Catholic education, my father sent my brothers to College Notre Dame. Mary and I were boarders at the Sacred Heart.
> (Appendix 1)

The charming personality of Margaret Mary, notes a fellow-student, attracted many friends. Her artistic talents soon became known. At about this time, she painted a tableau, now lost, of the Sacred Heart and it was placed above the altar of the convent chapel (Appendix 1).

In July 1895, one month after she left boarding school, Margaret Mary entered the Society's noviceship in Montreal, where, at the time, Mother Plamondon was the Mistress of Novices. It was to the new convent, opened the year before on the St. Alexander Street property, donated by James Ferrier, that Margaret Mary Nealis came in 1895.[1] There is an anecdote one of her contemporaries relates of how this came about:

> One day, she, Margaret Mary, had been sent over to the convent with a rose from their garden, and when she saw the Reverend Mother, was told that one of the nuns was being sent to Montreal and didn't have a traveling companion and she, Margaret Mary would accompany her on the trip. (McCaffrey, 1989)

A student of this time wrote of Nealis:

> When I arrived at the pensionnat, at the of age ten, the novices attracted my attention a great deal. Mother Nealis seemed to me to be one of the most serenely happy. I regarded her with great reverence. Always the same, smiling, likable, filled with humour when faced with difficulties and sometimes painful situations. She always set things right with her supernatural gentleness. She would never hurt or injure anyone. Her unfailing gentleness with unruly children, her indulgent goodness did more good, I do not doubt than the strictest discipline.
> (Appendix 1)

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1. The Convent Archives list the names of the young women who entered the Society that year: Mary Ann Blagden, Agnès Michaud, Adèle Turgeon, Rachelle Langtôt, Marie Albina Hughes, Margaret Mary Nealis and Blanche de Lormier.

Her years of training in the noviceship was a period of silence and of beauty as prescribed by the Foundress. But St. Madeleine Sophie Barat expected generosity of self and humility from the novices most of all. "She welcomed talents but only one gift was required, the gift of self. 'What are you good for'? she used to ask the timid candidate. 'Nothing'. 'Then humility will supply for everything'. The Foundress' idea of humility included a full surrender to the molding, energizing power of the Rule" (Williams, 1965).

Mother Nealis noted in her journal:

> During my novitiate, our Chaplain was M. l'Abbé Lamarche, future Bishop of Chicoutimi. One day, he asked us our names. Mine he repeated. 'Nealis', 'Nihilis'. That means, less than nothing, doesn't it? This interpretation pleased me.
> (Appendix 1)

After her simple religious vows, which she pronounced on 18 October 1897, Mother Nealis taught drawing and painting in the school. She was only a few years older than some of her students. The following year the young nun was sent to the Society's convent in Halifax. "In September," she wrote, "our Mother Digby came with Mother Stuart and Sister Richardson. They told me that I was to go to Paris for my probation" (Appendix 1). The period of probation preceded the profession of solemn religious vows, binding for life. Margaret Mary Nealis was given a silver cross

bearing the inscription "One heart and one mind in the Heart of Jesus" and a ring with the pronouncing of the words "May this ring be to thee the sign of the faith thou has vowed to the Holy Spirit, that thou mayest be called the Spouse of Christ and give him diligent and faithful service". In addition to the three vows taken at the simple profession, poverty, obedience and chastity, the vows of stability and education were added. The choir nuns of the Society made their profession at the Motherhouse in Paris.[2]

Margaret Mary left Halifax, with a stop-over in the Society's convent at Kenwood, New York, for Montreal. From Montreal, eight probationists left for the Motherhouse.

Mother Nealis wrote:

> We arrived in Paris on March 4th. (1903). An interior window of my cell opened onto the Chapelle du Crucifix near the sanctuary, where St. Madeleine Sophie loved to pray. During my thirty day retreat, I made detailed sketches of it. Révérende Mère de Chélas asked me to make as many as possible, because this dear Motherhouse is soon to be taken from us."
>
> (Appendix 1)

Mother Nealis was professed on July 22, 1903. A few days later, she left for the Sault-au-Récollet, on the

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2. After World War I, the Motherhouse was moved from Paris to Rome.

north shore of Montreal Island, where she was to spend most of her religious life.

Many years later Mother Nealis mentioned to Barbara Joy, destined to be Director of Studies of the school at the Atwater Avenue convent, and at that time a young student at the Sault, her misgivings that when in Paris for her profession she had passed the Louvre in a taxi and, because she was cloistered, could not go in. Barbara Joy remembers this incident only because it was such an uncharacteristic thing for Mother Nealis to do: to complain about anything (Joy, 1991).

For the next twenty years Mother Nealis was involved in the day-to-day work of the convent, rather than with drawing and painting, and therefore her reputation as an artist was slow to emerge. Eventually, however, serious commissions were to came her way, and the number of tableaux that came from her brush greatly increased. Her paint brush was at the service of everyone. She found time to illuminate the front page of many a new missal (Fig.3), or to transform into a flower the ink stain on a little girl's letter to her mother. No favour was too small or too great for Mother Nealis. She never refused a request. She never made any fuss and was always open to suggestions, says one of her fellow religious. Anyone could criticize her, and even the students could safely express their opinions and

suggest changes and have the satisfaction of seeing her comply (Roberts, 1989).

"Her work to her," says one who knew Mother Nealis well, "was a gift, something that she accepted from God in the greatest humility and a kind of objectivity." When the sisters were asked whether the community ever applauded or celebrated her after a painting, one replied: "Oh, the community loved her dearly, but you couldn't lionize her, she wasn't that kind of a person. She was too childlike. She would produce a painting like a child would produce a mud pie or something. She painted as an artisan - as an ébéniste would make a piece of furniture, or a potter a pot. Mother Nealis considered herself a craftsman. She just did them with simplicity and people took it for granted" (McCaffrey, 1989).

Mother Nealis heeded the words of the foundress, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, who wanted her teachers "to profit by everything, making themselves little by becoming children with the children in order to win them to Jesus... and acquire a great gentleness joined with the needed firmness" (Williams, 1965, p11). She also seemed to follow Christ's bidding to the letter: "I say unto you except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew, 18:3).

"She was such a good, good person, kindness itself, unobtrusive, never put herself forward," said another of Nealis's Sisters (Landry, 1989). "One day," recalled one of the sisters, "some distinguished visitors came asking to see Mother Nealis's paintings. As the portress, Mother Nealis said, "I am free now, I can take you around." She showed them all, but never revealed her true identity. On another occasion, an individual came to the door of the convent, asking to meet Mother Nealis and to see her paintings. "I shall go and see whether she is available," the portress said to the visitor. Within minutes, she reappeared. "I am Mother Nealis, and I shall show you around." The visitor was somewhat taken aback, but Mother Nealis explained that she had to ask her superior for permission (Roberts, 1989). It was readily granted of course, but Mother Nealis never compromised any of the monastic virtues.

"Innumerable acts of charity filled her days, and self-sacrifice seemed natural to her," wrote a superior, after Mother Nealis's death, "so that we could only appreciate it all in retrospect" (Appendix 1.). Mother Nealis's flexibility under extenuating circumstances was astounding. Most of her canvases were painted under less than ideal conditions. She often worked in inadequate lighting, on pieces of cardboard or 'toile de fortune'. Being Portress for thirty years , her artistic work was continually interrupted by summonses to answer the door, bells, the calling

of visitors, school children and the members of the community, but she never showed the slightest impatience and was always at the service of everyone. "Nealis, above all, was a religious, loving community life, brightening up our recreations with innumerable amusing incidents and fruits of her personal experiences," said her contemporary, Mother Margaret Roberts (Roberts, 1989). A young professed religious wrote at the time, "I saw Mother Nealis for the first time when she opened the door of the Sault. Her welcome, her kind smile, the immediacy of her manner impressed me as testimony to the joy and peace of the cloister. Later, living with her, I saw that she was a true religious with a single focus. Her welcome never varied, because she greeted Jesus in all encounters" (Appendix 1).

She loved the poor and met their material needs when they came to the door. One would often see beggars sitting on one of the carved benches in the convent foyer waiting for Mother Nealis to return with sandwiches or other things for them. They were her protégés and she acknowledged their dignity by treating them with exquisite courtesy. There is a story told, that at the onset of one winter, three of her habitués came to the door, "to say 'au revoir' until Spring. 'Mother we have to go and commit a small crime,' they said 'Why?' a surprised Mother Nealis asked. 'So that we could be held in detention and have a place to stay during the cold months'" (Filion, 1989).

She called them her 'knights of the bench', and they all loved her. She often asked if they would pose for her - as the child Jesus, Mary or Joseph. Mother Nealis drew and painted the unpaintable - the Logos, the Absolute - but she painted it incarnate. Simply, she saw her God, immanent and transcendent in the people around her - and so inspired - she painted Him.

On 23 June 1929, a major thunderstorm struck Montreal. The main building and annexes of the Sault Convent became a prey to the flames which engulfed and destroyed them when the eastern wing was struck by lightning at 4.15 pm. (City House, 1986, p.59). When it was rebuilt, Mother Nealis was given a modern studio. Here she painted and taught her pupils. By the early 1950s her eyesight was failing as cataracts on both eyes progressively obscured her vision.

In November 1957, at the age of 81, Mother Nealis suffered a fall and broke again a previously fractured hip. She was rushed to Sacré Coeur Hospital, where surgery only aggravated her condition. Amid great physical suffering, compounded by separation from her beloved community, Mother Nealis never lost her serenity or sense of humour. Her deep joy was a source of wonder and amazement to her care-givers. Margaret Mary Nealis died on 17 December 1957, in Montreal, on the eighty-first anniversary of her baptism.

CHAPTER 3

SOUL PICTURES

> "For mark you Phaedrus, Beauty is alone both divine and visible and so it is the senses way, the Artist's way to the spirit."
>
> Death in Venice
> Thomas Mann (1930)

Mother Nealis was an artist through and through, and a self-trained one at that. She had little instruction to form or deform her. She saw God in everything and she painted with her soul as well as her brush, said the Society's Superior General, Revérende Mère de Lescure, of her (Appendix 1).

In considering Mother Nealis's vocabulary, one is amazed by its unity and single-mindedness. The formal elements in some of her works are expressed with a linearity that recalls the style of the English Pre-Raphaelites. The works of the Brotherhood were widely distributed in painting, illustration and stained glass. Mother Nealis would certainly have been familiar with these through illustrations and reproductions in the Convent library. The lost Lurana, Lurana, Lurana (Fig. 4) of the 1930's, Christ with Nicodemus (Fig. 5) of the same year, recalls the work of

Ford Maddox Brown of the early Gothic phase of Pre-Raphaelitism, and Ecce Ancilla Domini (Fig. 6) of 1917 owes more than the title to a work by Dante Gabriel Rosetti. Ite Ad Joseph (Fig. 21A) 1936, although simplified in scope, recalls John Everett Millais's Christ in the Home of His Parents of 1849. These paintings exhibit iconographic and stylistic similarities that point to Pre-Raphaelite prototypes. It is in Sto Ad Ostium of 1940 (Fig.8), however, that the Pre-Raphaelite references are most discernible. In a letter dated 21 April 1940, (Appendix 2) the brother charged with the recruiting of new candidates for his order, des Frères de St. Gabriel, begged Mother Nealis for a picture that would appeal to the emotions of adolescents, "ce Christ frappant à la porte". Would Mother Nealis paint Christ knocking at the door of the heart? In painting Sto Ad Ostium, Mother Nealis is indebted to the subject of William Holman Hunt's The Light of the World of 1853 (Fig. 9). It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854 and a replica was on view in the United States in 1857-58. A significant if controversial work, it was not well-received at the Royal Academy, and an article in the Atheneum was one of many to use harsh words of criticism:

> ...decidedly ignoble...the face of this wild fantasy though earnest and religious is not that of the Saviour. It expresses such a strange mingling of disgust, fear and imbecility that we turn from it to relieve the sight.
> (Atheneum 7, 1854. p.561).

However, the 1854 July issue of The Photographic and Fine Arts Journal proclaims Holman Hunt's The Light of the World to be a masterpiece that is "well worth any passionate art-pilgrim's while to come across the Atlantic and see"(London Art News, 1854. p.216).

With unbridled admiration the New York Times also applauded The Light of the World:

> One knows not which most to admire, the splendour of the tones,...or the delicacy of the sentiment which would have moved the heart of Albrecht Durer... A piece of mere mystical symbolism, but it has the interest of pure power.
> (The New York Times, 1857)

The popularity of The Light of the World had faded by the time Mother Nealis painted Sto Ad Ostium. Nevertheless, Holman Hunt's haunting image of Christ knocking, remained the salient Pre-Raphaelite image on both sides of the Atlantic. Mother Nealis was certainly familiar with the work from reproductions and she modeled her 'jeune frappeur' upon Holman Hunt's adult Christ. Both figures stand knocking at the door - the door of the human heart, the door of personal conscience. The monumental Christ of Holman Hunt contrasts strongly with Mother Nealis's young boy. Both artists take evident pleasure in the realistic depiction of undulating line and the subtleties of texture. But in representing the adolescent Jesus, Mother Nealis departs from the ambiguous iconography of Holman Hunt which is

theologically unclear if not contradictory. In favouring sentiment over iconographic convention Holman Hunt's woeful-looking Christ is Christ the King - Christ of the Second Coming - the Christus Triumphans - Universal Judge - the Christ of the Tetramorph. Arrayed in His royal cloak of richly-worked brocade which is joined with an elaborately ornamented clasp, Christ is crowned with a Royal diadem which doubles as the crown of thorns. One is reminded here of the 'Christus Patiens' image of Christ before Pilate (John, 19:2; Matthew, 27:28-29). Yet Hunt's image is a vague and sentimental composite. With his right hand Christ knocks on an ancient door overgrown with brambles and he carries a lantern in his left. This lantern illuminates neither the day nor the night but possibly serves here as a symbol of Faith and is perhaps a reference to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew, 25), exhorting the viewer to be always vigilant. In The Light of the World, Hunt's manifold allusions and references to Christian scripture, tradition and nineteenth-century religious sentiment are woven into a web of sentimentality and emotion that is stifling to contemporary sensibilities. The picture radiates sorrow and disappointment.

In contrast, Mother Nealis's Sto Ad Ostium radiates a sense of light and joy. Her 'frappeur' is a joyful young lad, knocking with his right hand , as in Holman Hunt's painting, upon a door, but this is a beautiful newly-

painted door to a well-kept house. It is not overgrown, but is adorned with climbing roses. Instead of the lantern in his left hand, Jesus carries a stick that could be a shepherd's crook or a flowering staff. Either would be rich in iconographical references. The lanterns are also seen here, hanging on either side of the door as a pair, but not lit, for it is full daylight. In this painting, Jesus is the Light of the World. Mother Nealis shows an organized and peaceful community where the young Jesus seems to know that the door will immediately open to him. He smiles in anticipation.

Although Mother Nealis found inspiration in the work of he Pre-Raphaelites, especially in terms of their religious subject matter, she also admired their minute rendering of detail apparent in their treatment of landscape. This concern is seen in some of her earlier works and is best illustrated in The Kateri Tekakwitha of 1927 (Fig.10a). In this painting the forest background of trees, flowers, birds and small animals is a study that is reminiscent of the work of William Dyce (1806-1864). Dyce's Woman of Samaria (c.1833), although projecting a sense of Nazarene austerity not found in Mother Nealis's work, exhibits a natural landscape full of minutely rendered detail.

Generally speaking, Mother Nealis rejects the stylized and bloodless historicism that marks much of the

work of the Brotherhood. She paints people of flesh and blood, joyfully alive. Her best paintings, such as Parvulus Pastor (Fig. 11) 1938, Flos Campi (Fig. 12) 1943, are characterized by painterliness. They exhibit a loosening of brushwork that seems to fracture line and dissolve the image into shimmering light. It is in paintings such as these that Mother Nealis is most herself as an artist - original, joyous, and most free.

Her most characteristic paintings, readily identifiable through form and content, are in every case monumentally conceived, conveying a sense of strength and stability. They represent the young Jesus or members of the Holy Family. These were not commissioned works but were painted from her own inspiration in her spare time. Although few in number, when viewed together they nevertheless form an iconographic and stylistic entity and possess consistency and coherence as an oeuvre. Each of these paintings is recognizably Mother Nealis, and together they are the most successful and certainly her most popular works: Vita Mundi, (Life of the World) 1932, (Fig. 13); Mater Mea, (My Mother) 1933, (Fig. 14); The Child Mary, 1934, (Fig. 15); In Manu Ejus Sunt Omnes Fines Terrae, (In His Hands are all the Ends of the Earth) 1934, (Fig. 16); Propter Nos. (For our Sake) 1935, (Fig. 17); Ecce Venio, (Behold I Come) 1935, (Fig. 18); Anno Domini XXI, (Christ at 21) 1935, (Fig. 19); Stella Matutina, (Morning Star) 1935,

(Fig. 20); Lilium Regis, (Lily of the King) 1935, (Fig. 21); Emmanuel, 1936, (Fig. 22); Ite Ad Joseph, (Go to Joseph) 1936, (Fig. 7); Sedes Sapientiae, (Seat of Wisdom) 1937, (Fig. 23); Perpetua Lux, (Perpetual Light) 1938, (Fig. 24); Parvulus Pastor (Tiny Shepherd) 1938, (Fig. 11); Lumen Semitis Meis, (A Light to my Path) 1942, (Fig.25); Flos Campi, (Flower of the Field) 1943, (Fig. 12); Ubi Caritas, (Where There is Love) 1947, (Fig. 26); and Agnus Dei, (Lamb of God) 1949, (Fig. 27).

These works of Mother Nealis are characterized by a simple formal organization. Generally, the frontally conceived figure occupies most of the picture plane, projecting a sense of stability and power: power that is not threatening, but rather made benevolent through Nealis's metaphor of child and mother love. These are archetypal symbols of reassurance and of peace. Not complicated by covert symbolism or esoteric references, these paintings do not moralize in the Nazarene/Pre-Raphaelite mode.

When viewed as a whole, Mother Nealis's work is indebted stylistically to the Italian Renaissance, for it is to this period that she turns for her models. One becomes aware of echoes of Fra Angelico's linearity and pure colour, and the volumetric rendering and sweetness of Raphael's madonnas, although these are elusive. Reproductions of collected works by the great Renaissance masters were avail-

able to Mother Nealis in the convent library and she kept reference books on Raphael and Fra Angelico on her studio shelves. Although she did not copy Raphael directly, his compositions are reflected in her work. Lilium Regis of 1935 (Fig. 21) certainly recalls Raphael's Mackintosh Madonna (Fig. 93) in the National Gallery, London. There are differences between the organization of the two paintings, such as orientation of figures and costume. The figures are reversed and Nealis clothes the child in a tunic. In Lilium Regis the Madonna holds a lily while in the Mackintosh Madonna, Raphael places in her hand the child's foot. In both works the Madonna turns slightly away from the child whose arm embraces her neck. Both are characterized by the tender embrace of mother and child, and share the same gentle spirit of expression. Raphael's madonnas inform each and everyone of Mother Nealis's. Although Nealis's madonnas are naturalistic and in this respect reminiscent of those of Raphael, the spirit animating her paintings is as much Fra Angelico's. Mother Nealis pays tribute to the gentle Dominican Friar in her Emmanuel (Fig. 22). The full-faced frontally-conceived adolescent Jesus of Nealis reflects the Jesus of the Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints (Fig. 94), painted by Fra Angelico at the monastery of San Marco, Florence. Although her Emmanuel is older in years, the head is remarkable in its resemblance to that of Fra Angelico. The freely-rendered mid-length hair, the broad clear brow, wide-set eyes and smiling mouth

point to the same prototype and speak of the power and strength of youth coupled with wisdom and purity of soul. she casts Emmanuel in the role of youthful hero.

The swaddled Christ Child of Propter Nos (Fig. 17) and Ecce Venio (Fig. 18) recall the swaddled infant painted for Cell 10 in San Marco by Fra Angelico. Furthermore, the Veni Sequere Me, (Fig. 28) finds its model in Fra Angelico's Pieta (Fig. 95) in the cloister of San Marco. The benimbed and crowned head of the suffering Christ projecting gentle resignation, is similar in both works. In her rendering of Christ, Mother Nealis turns to Fra Angelico for inspiration. The head of the Risen Christ of Fra Angelico's Noli Me Tangere, painted for Cell 1 at San Marco, is echoed in her adult Christ.

In order to understand the popularity of Mother Nealis's works in the Catholic world, during the first half of the twentieth century, one must understand the part religious devotions played in the everyday life of the faithful.

The ideological expression of Bishop Bourget's turn to Rome accentuated French Canada's unique position in North America. The emphasis on the Roman liturgy, law and spirit generated a cultural revolution in Quebec that brought to bear the full force of religion on popular mores

and collective consciousness. With their bishop the faithful looked to Rome, to the head and heart of the Church. Such traditional practices as pilgrimages to shrines and the veneration of relics were revived, and there was a flowering of Marian devotions such as the daily recitation of the rosary and novenas. The ancient tradition of the Immaculate Conception became a dogma of the Catholic Church under Pope Pius IX in 1854. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception held Mary, the Mother of Jesus to be preserved from the physical and moral effects of original sin. In 1830, Catherine Labouré, as a novice in the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, had visions of the Virgin (Dirvin, 1958). Mother Nealis painted a Mary of the Immaculate Conception in 1936. Her Mater Gratiae (Fig. 29), shows the Virgin as in the vision of Catherine Labouré with the twelve stars crowning her head (Apoc. XII) and the serpent under her feet (Gen. III). Ecce Ancilla Domini (Fig.6) was painted for the feast of the Immaculate Conception: December 8. The burst of Mariology was a universal phenomenon in the Catholic Church and not confined to Quebec. But in Quebec it created conditions for the expansion of new religious communities and gave rise to an enormous popularity of devotional images and the circulation of holy pictures.

At a time when most contemporary religious painters produced conventionally Italianate and mediocre 'holy pictures' that were so familiar to Catholic children of that

generation, Mother Nealis was, in a sense, of them but not with them. She departed from the old convention of strict idealization, which was most often badly painted and sentimental in representation. Mother Nealis's paintings were not in the strict sense in the genre of 'holy pictures' - of 'les petites images dévotes', but rather conceived as large paintings which were reduced for reproduction. If her paintings are not always great art, neither are they always mediocre and only sentimental, to the extent that the plethora of pious pictures of that time were.

In a Laval University publication entitled Les petites images dévotes (Lessard, 1980), Pierre Lessard assembled over a hundred devotional pictures collected in the Province of Quebec. Although mostly by anonymous hands, Lessard cites whenever possible their full provenance. The fact that the bulk of these pictures originated in Italy and France points to their widespread popularity in the Catholic world. Mother Nealis's Salvator Mundi (Fig. 30) is featured as reproduced by J.F. Topp but Mother Nealis's name is not mentioned. [3]

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3. The lack of awareness of the benefits of copyright led to the free use of Mother Nealis's work without acknowledgement of the artist. This situation was rectified in the 1940s.

Polychrome, 6,4 X 10,9 cm, vers 1950
Montreal, Canada.
Prière de l'associé missionaire de Marie Immaculée.
Diffusée par le Convent of the Sacred Heart, Montreal, Canada.

Although not one of Nealis's best works, Salvator Mundi stands out in the book as one of the least sentimental in concept and least simplistic in execution. The emotional and over-florid representation of the two Sacred Heart images from France and Italy respectively (Lessard, 1980, p.68) (Fig. 97) when compared with Mother Nealis's, make her's an ideal of masculinity. La Résurrection (Lessard, 1980. p.63) from the United States, depicts the risen Christ clothed in a collobium that resembles a Roman toga. He is shown rising upon a cloud from a sarcophagus within which plump putti play. This picture, badly drawn and possessing a bizarre iconography, is anything but a credit to the major tenet of the Christian faith it aims to represent - the Resurrection. If its purpose was to awaken and foster devotion, it achieves the opposite. The Saint Isidore, from Montreal (Lessard, 1980, p.53) painted in 1942, shows Isidore the Plowman, patron of farmers. The veneration of St. Isidore was propogated by the Church in Quebec as a tool in promoting the policy of the glorification of rural life. This picture was conceived and executed in a more serious vein and is comparable in style and technique to some of Mother Nealis's work of the late 30's and early 40's such as Anno Domini XXI (Fig. 19) and Ite Ad Joseph

(Fig. 7). They glorify honest work, the labour of one's hands.

The images of internationally acclaimed artists whose iconography was not restricted to religious subjects were often reproduced as small devotional images on 'holy cards'. In the 1970s, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, published in poster form a collection of 60 such pictures with the title, The Madonna in Art (National Gallery of Art, undated). Roberto Feruzzi's (1854 - ?) Madonna of the Street at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, is a popular image of the Madonna as a young Italian girl wrapped in a blue maphorium as she carries her sleeping child in her arms. Her youthful beauty is foiled by the grim realism that is reinforced by the austerity of the bleak stone wall behind her. This is a background that lacks such traditional iconographic 'props' as birds, flowers, etc. Adolph Bouguereau's (1825 - 1925) Madonna with Lilies and his Madonna with Roses, both at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, exhibit a bravura of technical mastery in a style that is reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite, albeit only in so far as it conveys not a sense of immediacy and familiarity as Mother Nealis's madonnas, but rather one of iconic distance. Like Mother Nealis, Edouard Cabane (1850-1910) painted his representations of the Madonna and Child amid household utensils and furnishings in a recognizably contemporary and bourgeois milieu that is both simple and comfort-

able. Cabane's Sleep of the Infant Jesus (National Gallery, Washington) shows the pensive Madonna sitting on her threshold which is adorned with pots of geraniums. Mother Nealis's works are of this genre. Immediate and approachable, her subjects are surrounded by the accoutrements of everyday living. They are of her own time, of her own experience.

The leitmotif of Nealis's oeuvre is the Child - the Child Jesus, The Child Mary, alone or within the family. She modeled the Child after the children she knew around her - idealized, yet present, incarnate, but immediate enough to win the viewer's empathy. Into the child, Mother Nealis poured all her idealism, all her longing, all her love.

Hers was a vision of the golden age of Victorian childhood. The child was idealized to be pure, angelic and trusting. Childhood was the age of innocence, albeit only for the middle classes. This was epitomized by the image of the little girl that was used in the famous advertisements for Pears Soap: 'Bubbles' (Synnott, 1983, p.85).

As a reaction against international socialism and liberalism, this was a period of right wing political views which manifested themselves in the various Fascist movements, inspired by the great German philosopher, Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), and supported by the Catholic Church. Hegel idealized the nation and considered it of greater

reality and value than the individual (Tinder, 1986, p.44). This political philosophy emphasized the ideals of the simplicity of rural life and the value of the stable family unit as mainstays of the nation-state. It glorified, in art and literature, family virtues and idealized children in their simplicity and innocence, and projected this simplicity and innocence onto adults. Nothing exemplifies this more than the spirituality of the most universally popular saint of modern times, St. Teresa of Lisieux - of the Child Jesus, (1837-1897), revealed in her autobiography Histoire d'une âme. (tran. Knox, 1958)

In observing Mother Nealis's paintings whether individually or collectively, one becomes aware of the paradox that, in containing her very personal iconography of mother love, exemplified here by the symbol of mother and child, they are also universal. Mother Nealis was known in her community and by those familiar with her work, as the 'Artist of the Child Jesus and His Mother'. Ultimately, Mother Nealis's representations are archetypes pointing to transpersonal human experience and as such, they have prototypes in the history of art.

"In all the great religious traditions, the Redeemer comes as a child. He comes to restore us to the state of perfect childhood as Children of God. This Child comes to infuse each one of us with light and life and hope

(Main, 1982)". Mother Nealis's Madonnas have their ancient prototypes and derive from the fertility cult of the Near East, where death and rebirth are one and the same in the symbiotic relationship that is the Goddess. One has only to see in early Egyptian sculpture the infant Horus sitting in the lap of Isis his mother (Campbell, 1974. p.136), often suckling, to call to mind the ubiquitous Madonna Lacte of Renaissance art. In early Gandharan illustrations of Buddhist Jataka stories, the birth of the Gautama foreshadows Medieval Christian Nativity scenes. One encounters these archetypes, ever ancient, ever new, as they spring from Mother Nealis's brush. Historically conditioned, her paintings are fully literal and direct, born of a vision intensely personal, yet universal. It was iconological tradition in its broadest sense, filtered down through the ages and having found expression in the art of the West, particularly in the Italian Renaissance and in 19th century English religious painting, that nourished and inspired Mother Nealis's representations of Mary and the Christ Child. She found models in the convent library and the children around her.

To understand Mother Nealis's work, one must be aware of her total isolation from contemporary artistic communities. Through reproductions she was more conversant with the traditional than with the art trends of her own time. She worked in Quebec and one recognizes as familiar

the scenery in her paintings, yet with the vital and vibrant local art scene she had no contact. Mother Nealis was obliged to forego the stimulating influence of such art institutions as the Montreal Arts Club, established in 1912, and she was not in contact with any of the highly regarded Quebec artists of her time. It is questionable as to whether she would have seen many of their works in reproduction.

In 1904 Ozias Leduc was invited by the Religious of the Sacred Heart to decorate their convent chapel in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Mother Nealis stayed there until 1902, missing Ozias Leduc by two years.[4] Ozias Leduc returned to the Halifax convent in 1924 to restore the chapel decoration. He took along as his assistant the young P.E. Borduas. Mother Nealis was at the Sault convent at this time. Regrettably Ozias Leduc's decorations have been painted over and to date only one yellowed photograph testifies to the chapel's former glory (Fig. 99).

One of Mother Nealis's last and most accomplished works, yet also one of her most humble, for it is achieved in conté on brown wrapping paper, is a Madonna and Child (Fig. 31), signed and dated, "M.M.N. 1952." Drawn quickly,

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4. There exists a distinct possibility, however, that Mother Nealis did see the decorations of the chapel at a later date. She might have visited the Halifax convent for shorter periods during her lifetime.

possibly during the nun's communal recreational period, (such as the one shown in Fig. 32), this little work is of the mature artist. The young Madonna enfolds the mischievous baby, resting her chin against his forehead while framing him within the soft folds of her mantle. The child clutches a small cross as an emblem of love, in a small fist. The whole picture communicates serenity and joy. The drawing is executed with expertise and lightness of touch, yet with an economy of line that never compromises its expressive quality. This beautiful small sketch has never been reproduced and never acclaimed except by the one sister who treasures it.

Vita Mundi (Life of the World), 1932 (Fig. 13), is perhaps Mother Nealis's most popular work. This was her first painting to be reproduced through lithography and distributed internationally. Vita Mundi is one of those paintings so typical of Mother Nealis's personal style and best work, that was born of a moment's inspiration. One day, during the Depression, in 'the hungry thirties', a young mother came to the convent door with two small children, asking for charity. The younger one was still on her arm and Mother Nealis was delighted by the child's beauty. She sketched him then and there by putting something on his finger instead of the sparrow and something to substitute for the bouquet of marguerites in his arm. Mother Nealis saw her Redeemer incarnate in the poor woman's son. She

painted Him as a little boy of three or four years, clothed in a simple white tunic, his head encircled by light, the ancient symbol of divine enlightenment, as paying complete attention to the little sparrow on his index finger. In his other arm, the child Jesus holds a bouquet of marguerites - freshly picked - rendered with a painterly expertise and with just as much love and attention. Traditionally, marguerites or daises are the symbols of innocence and simplicity. Margaret Mary Nealis chose these humble flowers as her personal emblem, often putting them in her paintings (Figs. 9 & 56). The simplicity of spatial organization re-inforces the strong visual effect of the painting. The figure, occupying the centre of the picture plane, contrasting with its light, projects from the dark background. The overall effect is one of calm strength achieved in a harmony of subdued colour. There is an apparent loosening of the linearity that is characteristic of some of Mother Nealis's early works, as the figure of the child, but especially the bouquet of marguerites, soften into a painterly mode that becomes fully impressionistic in such works as Flos Campi and Parvulus Pastor. The meaning is clear, reinforced by the Latin title. [5] Christ is the Life of the World - of the sparrow (Matthew 7:26) of the lilies of the field - or

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5. Mother Nealis loved the psalms and the ancient prayers of the Church that the nuns recited each day in choir in Latin. She chose the titles for her paintings from these prayers.

marguerites (Matthew 28, 29) and of humanity, as Mother Nealis saw and drew it in the Child. She loves her model in this and every case, and there is little if any tension between model and painter. She is at ease. Intimacy, single-mindedness of purpose inspires, motivates, indeed drives Mother Nealis's representation. The style is merely its vehicle.

Mother Nealis did not paint this small picture with the intention of having it published. It is painted in oil upon cardboard - the back of a child's examination booklet, all she had at hand - to the consternation of Mother Margery Lanigan who was treasurer at the time and who has brought together Mother Nealis's paintings. "I was always ready to kill her, more or less," recalls Mother Lanigan with a smile, remembering those days, "and offered her all the canvas she needed .... I said please, please don't do it on the back of an exam pad. And Mother Nealis's reply was: 'I didn't know I was going to do it , I just had some paints left and I started'" (Lanigan, 1989).

Those were the Depression years, and the convent was hard-pressed for funds, especially for such additional ventures as publishing, but J.F. Topp (see Chapter 3), a well-known commercial photographer in the 1930's, who was acquainted with the community, proposed the idea. "He said he didn't need money, just permission to publish, so we gave

it, and Vita Mundi is still the favourite of Mother Nealis's paintings" (Lanigan, 1989).

A year later, Mother Nealis again painted a Madonna and Child, entitled Mater Mea (My Mother) (Fig. 14) fondly referred to by her fellow nuns as Vita Mundi and His Mother. There are two versions of this painting. The one that is signed and dated is lost. The extant panel is signed only by the ubiquitous bouquet of marguerites that Mother Nealis was so fond of using as her personal emblem. The lovely young mother, the affectionate child, clearly modeled on that of Vita Mundi, the work-basket, book and the sparrow are all drawn with great tenderness in clear bright colours. The painting is designed to be in an oval frame rather than in the rectangular one that holds it at present. Technically not as successful as Vita Mundi, Mater Mea was nevertheless reproduced and distributed to religious organizations in the thousands.

Most Christmases, Mother Nealis would surprise her community with the presentation of a painting. In 1935, she presented Propter Nos (For our sake) (Fig. 17). This simple but powerfully evocative design is vintage Mother Nealis. "It was her personal vision of the Redeemer coming down from heaven as a little child," Mother Lanigan said. This painting was reproduced and distributed by the tens-of-thousands world-wide. She shows us the Cosmic Christ, not

the adult of traditional iconography, but an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:7). One recognizes the model of Vita Mundi as he appears as a supernova through a star-studded northern night sky in a blaze of light that is achieved, as in Vita Mundi, through contrast with the deepest and richest blue, a colour that not even J .F. Topp's expertise could reproduce. The outstretched embracing arms of the Child as He descends towards earth foreshadow the cross, and remind the viewer of the ultimate, but usually forgotten truth: that it was not Christ's Cross that redeemed the world, but Christ's love. Here, in this painting, the little child is that love. The composition is centrally oriented as in Vita Mundi - and just as powerfully effective. Mother Nealis focused all her intuitive power and expertise within this small work of art.

Mother Nealis produced another canvas about the same time, Ecce Venio, (Behold I Come) (Fig. 18), now lost, showing the same swaddled Christ Child descending towards earth through the night sky, but this time framed against a five-pointed star (Matthew 3:9,10). These two paintings reveal implicitly Nealis's enduring interest in light as an eschatological symbol, calling to mind the verse from the Prophet Isaiah:

> The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: But the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.
>
> (Isaiah 60:19)

Mother Nealis was often called upon to paint portraits, especially portraits of the Saints of the Society. She painted the recently canonized Rose Philippine Duchèsne (Fig. 33), the great missionary spirit and friend of the Foundress, who longed to serve the Native peoples of North America. She painted St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, the Foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart, many times, in formats ranging from altarpieces to small illustrations. Most of these paintings were reproduced and distributed (Figs. 34, 35 & 36). The Sancta Magdalena Sophia (Fig. 37), the original now lost, is from the 1920's. It shows the Saint in a classroom with three children examining a prayer-book. One of the little girls points to Mater Admirabilis, patroness of Sacred Heart Schools. A delightful watercolour study, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat shows the foundress (and a kitten lurking behind a balustrade) standing outside the front door of the school at the top of the stairs welcoming girls and a little boy (Fig. 38). Madeleine Sophie Barat was an educator and Mother Nealis painted her as such. In the words of St. Madeleine Sophie:

> It was the void left by the absence of Christian education after the (French) Revolution and the sight of the resulting evils that determined our Foundation. Christian education is the first and most important means that the Society uses to honour the Divine Heart. ... We must know how to inspire in our pupils, a passion for the beautiful. Let us put history into their souls; without

> that, memories will fade and we shall have wasted our time. In seeing the empires that arise and fall one after another, they will perhaps learn to rise above their own troubles. They will thus better understand the 'sic transit gloria mundi' (thus passes the glory of the world) and their hearts ... will be more strongly drawn to Him, who alone remains in the midst of so many ruins. (Williams, 1965).

An oil painting of 1943, entitled Noel 1862 (Fig. 39), illustrating an incident from the life of the Foundress, shows the Saint at her desk gazing at a tiny crêche cradled in her hands. In this, as in all representations of St. Madeleine Sophie, the face is recognizably hers. Yet, while alive she was never photographed and would not have her portrait painted. "The Society had no portrait of Mother Barat beyond memories that soon would be lost. This was the one point on which she had refused to give pleasure to others," comments Mother Williams. In 1853, a photographer was invited to take a picture, but when the Foundress saw him, she gently asked him to leave. "Take away your machine, you don't understand. It is not my face that should be reproduced, but my affection for you all, then you would have something worthwhile." (Williams, 1965. p.597)

The Foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart died on the feast of the Ascension, May 25, 1864. Bishop Duboy, the Bishop of Paris, said of her at the time, "The life of your holy Foundress is as much an event in our times as were

the lives in other epochs of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Theresa and St. Catherine of Sienna." (Williams, 1965). The day after her death, Savinien Petit sketched the head of Mother Barat and a photograph was also taken. Petit used these studies for the portrait he painted in 1865. This accredited likeness became the official portrait and served as model for Mother Nealis in all of her paintings of the Saint (Fig. 40). Savinien Petit presents a one-third-length portrait of the Foundress who is shown in her habit, an eighteenth-century widow's garb. The face is framed by the crisp white flutes of the bonnet, that serve to accent the contrast of light and dark illuminating Madeleine Sophie's kind and noble face, focussed and shining with intelligence. In her right hand she holds the cross of profession over her heart. This is conventional portraiture and Tridentine in its emphasis on sentiment and emotional content. One finds many correspondences in the religious paintings of Quebec, born of the fertile soil of its religious communities, for example: Hugues Pommier's Marie-Catherine de Saint Augustine (Fig. 41), painted between 1664 and 1667, now at the Monastery of the Hôtel Dieu in Quebec City, and Mére Jeanne-Françoise Juchereau de Saint Ignace, attributed to Jean Guyon, painted before 168· now at the Musée des Augustines in Quebec City, are accomplished examples of seventeenth-century religious portraiture based on European prototypes. Mother Nealis drew on this same tradition in her many portraits. Her unsigned, undated small

canvas Mére d'Youville (Fig. 42) was undoubtedly inspired by the portrait of François Malepart de Beaucourt painted in 1792 that she must have seen in reproduction. The Marguerite Bourgeois, of the Congregation de Notre Dame, was painted by Pierre LeBer in 1700. Also a post mortem representation, it is a more primitive version of this particular genre.

One could say of the faces painted by Mother Nealis that they were not so much idealized as glorified. Yet she was the first to admit that she could never paint the adult Christ convincingly. "Too soft," she used to say of her portraits of Him (McCaffrey, 1989). It was not that Mother Nealis was unable to represent the male; she painted many and she painted them well. St. Joseph for example, who contrary to earlier convention Nealis painted as a young man, is sensitive and kind, yet strong and masculine. In the Ite ad Joseph (Go to Joseph) (Fig. 7), of 1936, the carpenter is shown to be manly yet gentle. It was only in trying to depict the adult Christ that Mother Nealis's 'soul picture' failed her. No one knows what the physical Christ looked like. One of her fellow religious said of Mother Nealis that "she painted from the inside". In this case she did not want to copy conventional representations. Whether it was a conscious decision or instinctive, no one will ever know; Nealis was aware that the Jesus in her soul was the Spirit of the Risen Christ, beyond images, and, as such,

unrepresentable. This fact of her deep honesty concerning sensual representation in the realm of the spiritual affirms and confirms, more than all the accolades of her contemporaries, the authenticity of Mother Nealis's spirituality. Yet she obeyed when called upon to paint, time and time again, the Christ of the Sacred Heart.

Among the many versions and sizes of this traditional theme, the Venite Omnes (Come All) (Fig. 43), of 1938, shows a three-quarter length figure of Christ commanding the centre of the picture plane. He is shown with arms extended forward in a gesture of welcome. Iconographically, this is the Christ of the Eastern tradition. The shoulder-length hair, beard and collobium are as seen in the Rabula Gospels of 586. This Syriac MS, now in Florence, is one of the most ancient prototypes of the Venite Omnes (Schofield, 1983). There is a major iconological shift, however, in this iconography as it came to be adopted from the Christ of the sixth-century Rabula Gospels to the Christ of the Venite Omnes of 1938. This iconological shift was a transformation brought about and mirrored by subsequent changes in social philosophy and in religious ritual that was brought to a head by the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563). The Church of the Counter-Reformation encouraged private devotions, especially the veneration of the Sacred Heart. At the end of the seventeenth century, Marguerite Marie Alacoque, a nun of the Visitation Order, was credited with

seeing visions of the Sacred Heart. Her visions were publicized, originating the popular devotion to the Sacred Heart. In 1919, for the canonization of Marguerite Marie Alacoque, Mother Nealis was commissioned by the nuns of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial, France, to paint a large canvas describing Marguerite Marie's vision, when Christ appeared to her through the sanctuary grille. Raphael's Liberation of St. Peter of 1512 in the Vatican, when seen lit through the grille of the chapel, produces a similar effect. Mother Nealis painted three or four versions of the scene in varying dimensions. [6] The original is in Paray-le-Monial. The Vision of St. Marguerite Marie, 1919 (Fig. 44), is technically a fine work, another testimony to Mother Nealis's craftsmanship. However, in Nealis's own words the face of Christ in The Vision and other versions of the Sacred Heart painted by her over the years, is "too soft". In the right-hand corner of the chapel, a bouquet of humble marguerites watch for her in the manner of the temple figures of old.(Figs. 45-48)

Many of Nealis's paintings are identifiably northern and particularly Canadian. One encounters in them time and time again the familiar pine forest, the ubiquitous

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6. McGill Notman Photo Archives, K9110 "Painted in 1919 for the golden jubilee of Reverend Mother Mahoney, February 4th 1920".

silver birch, the environs of the Sault-au-Récollet and the Back River that bordered the convent grounds. It is the familiar scenery of the Sault, where Margaret Mary Nealis spent most of her painting career, that one recognizes in her religious tableaux - not idealized, but rendered with realism, stone for stone, bird for bird, tree for tree. The scenery she paints is not a self-conscious addendum to the figures, but is invariably rendered with loving familiarity. There is no indication that the watercolour study of the seated Madonna Under a Maple Tree with the Child reaching to pick the maple leaf, has ever been completed as a painting (Fig. 49). Nothing provides a better record of the convent grounds and the Back River bordering them, than the innumerable watercolours Nealis painted (Fig. 50-55), most of which were given away or lost. They are accomplished with characteristic freedom and lightness of touch.

In the painting Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha (Fig. 10), 1927, the Indian maiden is shown in an autumnal forest setting of silver birch and maple trees, and a lake or river forms the background. She is walking towards the viewer on the narrow forest path , dressed in traditional buckskin and homespun, with a blue blanket around her shoulders and a rosary in her hand. She is looking at a roughly hewn wooden cross at the side of the path. A lily blooms at the foot of the cross, the traditional emblem of purity and virginity

here referring to the 'Lily of the Mohawks'. [7]

Nealis's painting of Kateri is preserved in the Museum at Kahnawake Reserve. It was not, however, the first portrait made of her. Père C. Chauchetière S.J. was the originator of a seventeenth-century iconographic tradition (Gagnon, 1975). Mother Nealis established a new iconographic prototype which, over the years, served if not as model, certainly as inspiration to countless Kateri representations in stone, wood, and paint. A lifesize, polychrome sculpture of wood and plaster at Kanawake is a copy of Mother Nealis's portrait. It is unsigned and bears the inscription: "SHE:KON". In 1980, the Canadian Post Office issued a

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7. Kateri Tekakwitha was born of a Christian Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father in 1656 at Auriesville, New York. In 1660, smallpox left Kateri an orphan and stricken with the disease, but she survived. On Easter Sunday 1676, Père Jacques de Lamberville, S.J. baptized Kateri at St. Peter's mission in Kahnawake. Kateri refused marriage, wanting only to consecrate her life to God. In the Autumn of 1677, she fled from the Mohawk countryside to St. Francis Xavier Mission on the St. Lawrence. Père de Lamberville, gave her a note for Père Jacques Frèmin S.J., Superior of the Mission: "I am sending you a treasure, guard it well." On March 25th, 1679, Father Frèmin allowed Kateri to pronounce her vow of virginity and to consecrate herself to the Virgin Mary. In the winter of 1680, her health began to fail. On Tuesday of Holy Week, she received Holy Viaticum, dressed in borrowed attire, having none which she considered good enough to wear in order to receive her Beloved in. On the following day she told her companions that they could go to gather firewood, for she would not die until they returned. Kateri died that evening. She was not quite twenty four years old. In 1980, during a public ceremony, Pope John Paul II, elevated Kateri Tekakwitha to the ranks of the Blessed, of the Universal Church.

(Kahnawake)

17 cent stamp bearing the profile of Kateri Tekakwitha. In another instance, a primitively conceived and executed image of 'La Vierge Iroquoise Catherine Tekakwitha' commemorates the 1934 ordination of the Mohawk Jesuit, Michel Jacobs. Mother Nealis's painting obviously served as the model (Lessard, 1981, p.75).

On the 29 April 1939, Montreal newspaper La Presse carried a reproduction of Mother Nealis's Kateri Tekakwitha, accompanying an article on Kateri, entitled "Il y a cinquante Ans ...," by Michel Jacobs S.J. Father Jacobs says that the first painting of Kateri Tekakwitha was done by Mother Nealis in 1927, and that J.F. Topp printed the image. "Il avait une grande dévotion au Lys des Agniers. Toute sa vie il s'efforça de répandre la dévotion à Kateri au moyen de cette image." Father Jacobs goes on to claim that his sister Cécile posed for the painting:

> Un bon jour je lui présente ma soeur Cécile et deux de ses compagnes. Elle examine ma soeur de près et de loin, de côté et de face. Je crois que ma soeur a donné a Mère Nealis une bonne idée de ce qu'était une jeune Indienne. Aprés coup, Cécile me demanda pourquoi la religieuse l'avait regardée si attentivement.
>
> (La Presse, 1939. p.28)

In 1989, over sixty years later, when familiarizing myself with Mother Nealis's paintings and collecting

data for this project in the Sacred Heart Convent in Halifax, I had the good fortune to be approached by Sister Lena Landry, who generously shared with me her treasured memories. She remembers posing for Mother Nealis, as Kateri.

In an interview, Sister Lena said:

> When I was a postulant, Mother Nealis came to us postulants, and said 'I want to paint a picture of Kateri Tekakwitha'. Father Béchard S.J., who was in charge of Caughnawaga at the time, asked her. She looked around, we were seven or nine, and she chose me. I had long black hair and looked more like an Indian than the others did. I didn't have the habit yet. You wouldn't believe it, but my hair was black and long. So she chose me. We wore black woolen shawls, great big shawls with fringes. Mother Nealis made me stand up and pose with the shawl on, and my hands as in the painting. And I looked as solemn as a prince. I stood in the room and she painted the rest in. She improvised the costume. (Landry, 1989).

The portrait of Kateri is not yet vintage Mother Nealis, since it is more an illustration than an expression of her developed style. But the background, her own Sault scenery, is a different matter. Here, there is no evidence of self-consciousness as her clear, joyous autumnal colours flicker and dance on the canvas. The frolicking squirrels

and little birds are rendered lovingly with fine draftsmanship in colour that is clear, lively, never gaudy and never murky. The overall visual effect of the canvas is one of harmony.

Kateri has always been venerated among the Christianized Indians, but was virtually unknown by North Americans of European origin.[8] It was the Mohawk-born Jesuit priest, Fr. Jacobs who, through the commissioning of the painting from Mother Nealis, gave the major impetus towards the popularization of the cult of Kateri Tekakwitha through his efforts at furthering her cause as a candidate for canonization in Rome, in the 1920s.

As a work of art, the Kateri is perhaps not as successful as Mother Nealis's subsequent paintings; but it is an icon, and it is powerful in evoking emotion. It is in this that its merit lies. The figure of Kateri is ideal-

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8. Dr. Jana Bara makes a fair but perhaps historically incomplete point when she refers to Kateri Tekakwitha in her doctoral thesis (Bara, 1990. p. 30), where she states that "In the light of religiously based cultural values which shap~l the ideologies of New France, such a model was necessary since a native paragon was needed who could stand comparison with the virtues of the culturally remote symbolism in the depictions and examples of European Saints." Kateri's Mohawk background is especially ironic in the light of the salient fact that it was the Mohawk nation, as a member of the Five Nation Iroquois Confederacy, who destroyed Huronia and brought about the death of the Canadian Martyrs.

ized, and carries that aura of sentiment that so visibly reflects the temper of the times, especially in the genre of religious illustration.

In 1927 Msgr. Clabant, missionary to the Polar Missions in the Canadian far north, told Mother Nealis of his difficulty in trying to explain to the native peoples of Baker Inlet that the Crucified Christ, the Sacred Heart and the Eucharist are the same person. He asked Mother Nealis to illustrate this truth in symbolic language. In her quest to make explicit the sacred meaning, Mother Nealis painted two versions of Salvator Mundi (Fig. 30) between 1927 and 1943, differing only in the folds of Christ's perizoma. It was the later version that was reproduced for publication. In this painting Mother Nealis succeeded in expressing the universal as it enfolds the particular. Her design, direct, explicit and simple in the extreme, served its purpose. In the painting, which was well-received in Baker Inlet both by Msgr. Clabant and the natives, Mother Nealis shows the Cosmic Christ. The Crucifixion is seen as an event in time, but transcending time.

It is the nature of God to be universal and the ordinary nature of man to be particular. Nealis painted Jesus, limited, vulnerable, like us. But He made what we alone are incapable of doing, an utter and complete gift of self. The completeness of this commitment was the love of

God for man in Jesus, and the finality of the Cross gained eternal meaning. The Cross is the extreme point of human finitude, of man being limited by the particular. But by the completeness of Jesus's commitment to this particular, it becomes the universal means of humankind's liberation into Divine Reality. In the Eucharist, one encounters the immediacy and ordinariness of bread and wine and the fallible human beings who constitute the community that is, itself, a vital part of the sacrament. We die with Christ, but we do so in the power of the Resurrection which sheds its light both backwards upon the Cross and forwards upon the gathering together of all creation in Christ (Main, 1986. p.67). It is not Christ's Cross that redeemed the world but Christ's love. The appropriate symbol of this love is the Sacred Heart. And so Mother Nealis painted it. The rays, that gather together all creation, shed their light upon Baker Inlet.

In 1924, in the name of the Canadian Jesuits, William Hingston S.J., Rector of Loyola College (1919-25), asked Mother Nealis to undertake to paint a tableau for the canonization of the Canadian Martyrs (Fig. 56). In 1930 her completed canvas was sent to Rome and was raised over the altar in St. Peter's Basilica during the ceremony (Fig. 57). Mother Nealis depicts the saints, six Jesuits and two donnés: Jean de Brébeuf (1593-1649), Gabriel Lalemant (1610-1649), Anthony Daniel (1601-1648), Charles Garnier (1606-

1649), Noel Chabanel (1613-1649), Isaac Joques (1607-1646), René Goupil (1608-1642) and Jean de la Lande (?-1646), in glory. Mother Nealis must have been familiar with Gregoire Huret's 1606-1670 popular and influential engraving entitled Le martyre des missionnaires jesuites, which had been published in Paris by S. Cramoisy in 1666 in Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae, and the anonymous oil painting, Le Martyre des missionnaires jésuites of the seventeenth century, now at the Monastère des augustines de l'Hôtel Dieu de Québec. These were composite arrangements of the artist's impression of the suffering and death of the martyrs (Lacroix, 1984, p.111). This arrangement is also reflected in Mother Nealis's painting. The black robes she modeled on the habits of the nuns in her community. The canvas was on such a large scale that no space could be found with the proper lighting and ceiling height, with the result that when the finished painting was critically viewed, it was realized that the legs of the martyrs were too short. To correct this situation, Mother Nealis asked some of the nuns to kneel or stand with their habits hitched so that she might paint their legs and feet. She often commented to Mother Bourque, with whom she shared a classroom, that she regretted not having taken anatomy lessons.

The formal arrangement of the canvas is traditionally tripartite. The major, central portion of the painting forms the celestial realm, and it shows the martyrs 'in

glory'. Their faces and the figures are individualized and recognized through emblems and attire particular to each. In the lower, terrestrial realm Mother Nealis shows the massacre and torture of each martyr to Huronia as reported according to the annual communications of the Jesuit Superiors in Quebec to their Provincial in Paris. These reports, beginning in 1611, span forty years and constitute a continuous and detailed commentary of the history of the heroic age of New France. [10] Mother Nealis said that while she did not mind painting the Jesuits, the painting of their martyrdom put her in hell, but that she had to do it (Roberts, 1989). The uppermost part of the painting is weak in every respect. Mother Nealis shows angels bearing laurel crowns and palms of victory, the traditional attributes of martyrdom. Divine light sheds its rays upon the Jesuits illuminating the initials of the Jesuit motto: 'Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam' (For the Greater Glory of God).

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10. The Jesuit Relations were written in simple prose in French and in Latin. Jean de Brébeuf, first of thirty Jesuits, arrived in Huronia in 1626 and died a martyr in 1649. His reports 1634-1636 are known as the Huron Relations. The author of the first ten Relations 1632-1641 was Paul le Jeune. Jérome Lalemant wrote in part the Relations for 1646-1650 and 1660-1664. Paul Ragueneau was the author of the Huron Relations from 1648-1650. All the Relations except for the 1637 issue were published by Sébastien Cramoisy and they became best sellers overnight
(Brébeuf, 1984. p.2)

Although the painting was well received by the Society of Jesus and celebrated in Rome, Mother Nealis never saw it in Rome or its final installation above the altar at the Canadian Martyrs's Shrine at Ste. Marie-Among-the-Hurons, Midland, Ontario. Mother Nealis painted at least two other copies of the original altar piece, which are now lost. The lower section of Nealis's painting has since been covered over in the interest of public sensibilities, shortening the painting from about twenty feet to sixteen feet.

In the same year, Mother Nealis painted St. Madeleine Sophie in Glory (Fig. 35), for the 1925 canonization, following the same tripartite composition as in the Canadian Martyrs. This was a more successful work in which she took obvious pleasure. This massive painting, approximately twenty feet high, was destroyed in the Sault fire of 1929.

In 1941 Mother Nealis was called upon to paint a triptych, The First Jesuit Martyrs of America: 1566-1571 (Fig.58). It was a reproduction of an anonymous painting of missionaries sent to Florida by St. Francis Borgia, the Jesuit General. The central panel shows the slaying of Pedro Martinez by the Timuquan Indians at Mount Cornelia, Florida in 1566. The first and third panels depict the martyrdom in 1571 of eight other Jesuits in what is now Virginia. Both the original and Nealis's painting are lost.

One of Mother Nealis's most delightfully 'Canadian' and most accomplished paintings is the Parvulus Pastor (Fig. 11), which she painted as a 1938 Christmas gift for her community. The ancient pre-Christian representation of the Greek Hermes as calfbearer survived through the Jewish, into Christian iconography as the much-loved symbol of Christ, the Good Shepherd (Psalms 23 & 100). Traditionally, however, Christ has been shown as an adult. Departing from this convention, Mother Nealis's shepherd is 'parvulus' - 'tiny'. She paints a young boy of around eight years with a small lamb shielded against the elements, cradled in his arms. He carries a shepherd's crook - which is a reference to the Church in the latter's role as caretaker of the 'flock', the Shepherd of God's peoples. The little shepherd, surrounded by his lambs, is battling a Canadian snowstorm. This is a unique version of the Good Shepherd motif as a child in a blizzard. The raging elements and the mixture of beauty and brutality that is nature in the Canadian wilderness hold no fear for the Lord of the Universe. Here, Mother Nealis is innovative and original. The paint is thinly applied and the colours are translucent. Their crystalline clarity is unfortunately compromised by the reproduction. The figure, but especially the background, is painted with free brush strokes that capture and diffuse light in the 'plein air' effect of early Impressionist painting. It is an effect that is both vibrant and full of energizing movement. The contours of the Child's rose-coloured mantle are reminiscent of

an ancient galleon at sea, as it billows and moves with the unseen wind and fury of the swirling blizzard. This painting is distinctly Mother Nealis, the artist at her best: innovative and free yet retaining the meaning in the heart of the ancient iconography. The child is born of her own spirit; the snowstorm is born of her own day-to-day experience.

In 1942 Mother Nealis painted another Christmas picture, Lumen Semitis Meis (Fig. 25), a painting that is also particularly Canadian. Painted on birch-bark, Christ here is the 'Light of the World' (Matthew 5:14). The Child Jesus (the Child of the Vita Mundi) stands in the snowy darkness of a forest at night, amidst pine trees. Holding an illuminated lantern, His right hand is raised in the ancient gesture of the philosopher/teacher. The Latin title, Lumen Semitis Meis, is a reference to Psalm 68, "Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path ...." Here, as in Sto Ad Ostium, she is concerned with light as an eschatological symbol. Mother Nealis's personal style is stamped on this work; her expertise in integrating design and execution is evident. The subdued yet pure colours are saturated with light. Mother Nealis painted three versions of this picture. Observing Lumen Semitis Meis, one cannot but be delighted by the artist's rendering of the theme, so typically hers, and marvel at her great skill in creating a work of art that is subjective yet unselfconscious, sweet but devoid of sentimentality.

In 1939, Mother Nealis had another opportunity to portray a particularly Canadian subject when the Ursulines of Quebec City published a book in French and English celebrating the tricentenary of the Mother of New France, Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672).[11] They invited Mother Nealis to illustrate it. Give Me Back My Mother (Fig. 59), Prophetic Dream (Fig.60), She Turned to Me Smiling (Fig. 61), and Dom Claude O.S.B. Writes to His Mother (Fig. 62), are the four drawings reproduced in the book. Marie de l'Incarnation a l'ombre duvieux frêne (Fig. 63) is lost and Dilectus Meus (My Beloved) (Fig. 45) is at the Barat Residence, Halifax .

Mother Nealis also painted a large canvas entitled Stella Maris (Fig. 64) in 1944 for the Montreal Sailors' Club of Bonsecours Church. Commissioned during the Second World War, when so many Canadian lives were imperiled not only on land but also at sea, the work derives its inspira-

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11. For biographical data and for an excellent account of her time, see Word from New France, The selected Letters of Marie de l'Incarnation.(Trans. and Ed. by Joyce Marshall, Toronto University Press, 1967). Marie de l'Incarnation was superior of the Ursulines of Quebec on and off from 1639 to 1673. In the sixty-six letters written home to France mostly to her son the Benedictine monk Dom Claude she describes the important events and personalities of her time in New France - Iroquois attacks, peace missions and the adventures of the French missionaries fill the everyday life of this heroic woman.

tion from and is heir to a tradition of early Quebec ex voto painting. Perhaps it is in keeping with her romantic vision that, painted in 1944, Mother Nealis did not depict a contemporary warship, but rather a large traditional sailing vessel.

There is a venerable tradition in ex voto painting. In pre-Christian cultures the paintings were produced "ex voto suscepto", when someone was faced with danger, to gain the good will and protection of a divinity or to give thanks for a favour received. This tradition passed into Christianity and flourished in the art of New France. Faced daily with the manifold danger and the uncertainty of everyday life, people turned to the Virgin or the saints for intercession, imploring them for protection. A large collection of ex voto paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at the Musée de l'Historial de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré bears witness to this tradition. Since Saint Anne is the patroness of sailors the bulk of this important collection at her shrine are marine ex votos (Lacroix and Simard 1984, p.151).

The Ex Voto de M. Edouin, painted before 1711 at Sainte Anne-de-Beaupré, is a representative work (Lacroix and Simard 1984, p.177). Here a stormy sea is depicted rather than the calm waters that Mother Nealis shows and Saint Anne is approached, not the Virgin Mary. In Mother

Nealis's painting, Mary is the 'Stella Maris' and 'Notre Dame de Bonsecours'. She is the star who guides the ships to safe harbour. Mother Nealis shows a large vessel in full sail upon a calm night sea with the suggestion of other ships near by. The only source of light is the half-figure of the Virgin revealed from a cloud with the polar star over her head. She blesses the ship. A large canvas, it is painted in thin oil and possesses a darkly - glowing, jewel-like quality. Mother Nealis painted two identical canvases of this subject.

The meaning inherent in the small painting Ubi Caritas, 1947 (Fig. 26) is unity. "Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est" ('Where there is love there is God also', from the liturgy for Holy Thursday), is so simply stated that the profundity of the message is almost lost. Christ is the uniting principle here, the union of opposites - the sacred and the profane - past and future. The composition is in the form of a cross. The figure vertically bisects the picture plane and occupies most of it. A horizontal bar, like the patibulum of the cross, bisects it again. Mother Nealis paints the child Jesus as a heroic figure of monumental proportions. He is the Lord of History, but also a student, attentive and absorbed as he bends over a globe of the Earth upon which the countries are marked. A finger of his left hand points to the Canadian Arctic while his right hand rests gently over North America. He is surrounded by

a scroll, books, glass - the symbols of education. Behind him, the prosperous contemporary cityscape on the banks of a great river is possibly Montreal. Church and skyscraper in a harmonious relationship that is enhanced by new scientific discoveries, and through more effective communication, as seen by the aircraft flying overhead. This painting exemplifies post-war optimism enriched as much by progress as by tradition. This is Mother Nealis's Canada and in this small painting she reveals a deep fondness for her country, and her faith in its future.

CHAPTER 4

J. F. Topp 1884 - 1974

The world-wide dissemination and the popularity accorded Mother Nealis's work is due, in great degree, to the vision, effort, business acumen and fine craftsmanship of a Montreal freelance photographer, J. F. Topp. From 1932 to the mid-1950s, J.F. Topp lithographed and distributed over thirty of Mother Nealis's paintings.

Francis Joseph Topp was born 19 July 1884 in Bolton, Lancashire, England, into a family of nine. The family emigrated to North America, possibly the United States initially, but by 1910 they were settled in Montreal. Here, Topp married a local girl of Irish background and in 1921 the first of their three sons was born. He supported his family as a freelance commercial photographer in the city, working from premises at 754 St. Peter Street. It must have been difficult in the 'Hungry Thirties' to keep a family and educate his children in a private school, but Topp was extremely good at his craft. In the 1930's he worked as a photographer for the Art Association of Montreal, and the Mappins chain of jewelry stores used Topps's work in their advertising brochures. He was called upon

to photograph private collections such as that owned by the family of William Van Horne. When asked how his father was able to compete in those hard times, George Topp said, "My father's prices were very low. He charged ridiculously low prices for the very high quality of his work. People sought him out.... and we lived very simply" (Topp, 1991).

J.F. Topp was a devout Catholic and, at one time, had had aspirations of joining the Society of Jesus. This never came to pass, but his admiration for the Jesuits endured, manifesting itself in practical ways. Topp did photographic work for such Jesuit institutions as Loyola College, College Brébeuf and Collège Ste. Marie.

Ste. Madeleine Sophie Barat's brother was a Jesuit and when it was founded in 1800, the Society of the Sacred Heart was given the sixteenth-century Rule of St. Ignatius of Loyola modified for women. The two religious societies were always closely associated and continue to be to the present day. J.F. Topp knew the community at the Sault, and one Christmas wanted to offer a cash gift of $100 to the convent. This gave him the idea, according to Fr. George Topp, to reproduce one of Mother Nealis's paintings. Thus in 1932 he reproduced and published the painting Vita Mundi. It marked the beginning of a close association of J.F. Topp with the Sacred Heart Convent and was to result, over the course of the next twenty years, in the reproduc-

tion and distribution of over thirty of Mother Nealis's paintings. When the community protested that it did not have the funds to pay the cost of reproduction, Topp took this upon himself. He reproduced the paintings in three standard sizes: 8" X 14", 8" X 10" and 2 1/2" X 3". Topp's lithographs of Nealis's paintings were of high quality. He painstakingly approximated the artist's colours, and considered her to have an extraordinary colour sense.

According to George Topp, his father made the original colour separations and sent them to a Toronto company, Garbys's, that made high quality lithographic plates. The pictures themselves were printed at the Gazette press. Topp never printed runs of less than 10,000, and distributed them gratis to various convents and missions. In the early 40's, Mother Nealis began to receive a royalty of one cent per picture.[12] J.F. Topp paid Garbys's, the Gazette and the royalties out of his own pocket and considered this work his own personal charity. The pre-war years were hard times in Canada. "The world is in need of joy," Topp said, and for him, Mother Nealis's paintings radiated this quality. He often asked Mother Nealis to paint a particular subject:

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12. It was only in the 1940's that the Convent of the Sacred Heart realized the advantages of copyright. Up until then free use had been made of Mother Nealis's work by all and sundry.

> "Now, Mother, I would like this or that...."
> "Well, if I get the inspiration - but I can't produce just like that." Mother Nealis said, "I must have the inspiration".
> (Lanigan, 1989)

At one time Mother Nealis painted the Child Jesus distributing the Eucharist (now lost). Topp would not publish it, claiming that it was "not theologically sound" (Lanigan, 1989). In 1946 Topp produced A Child's Prayer-book. It contains twelve of Mother Nealis's paintings: Parvulus Pastor, 1938, Stella Matutina (Fig. 63), 1935, Propter Nos, 1933, Mater Mea, 1933, Ite Ad Joseph, 1936, Lumen Semitis Meis, 1942, which is on the cover, Vita Mundi, 1932, Emmanuel (Fig. 22), 1936, The Queen of the Rosary, 1944, Salvator Mundi, 1927, Ave Maria (Fig. 65), 1917, and Venite Omnes, 1938. The black and white drawings in the book are by Alfred Topp, J.F's son. Revised in 1951, one million copies were printed in English. It was also printed in French and Topp sent 500 copies, in Chinese to China, literally on the last boat, before the Bamboo curtain sealed China from the world.

J.F. Topp died in 1974 at the age of 90, in Montreal. Before his death, he inexplicably destroyed all the plates of Mother Nealis's paintings.

CONCLUSION

Although her best work was done in the 1930s and 1940s, Margaret Mary Nealis's artistic career spanned over four decades. Her importance as a Canadian religious artist increases with the currency of her well-known paintings. Mother Nealis's work falls into the category of popular religious art, and it is catholic in both senses of the word. The cultural climate in the Society of the Sacred Heart and its schools transcended local political differences. In Mother Nealis's time French and English education were housed under the same roof, sharing teaching staff, facilities and the daily life of a day and boarding school.

Mother Nealis's sacred subjects, depicted in a humanistic if idealized mode, are charged with sentiment and painted with technical skill. They are life-affirming and sensuous in the sense that all art is. Her vision was clear and unobscured by mere cleverness. There is no overwhelming biographical data to sift through and analyze since to date nothing has been published. One drew upon the rich legacy she left behind in her paintings and in the impressions that have been preserved in the memories and hearts of her fellow-religious and former pupils.

Mother Nealis's contribution is to the genre of religious painting in general, and Canadian painting in

particular. Her works, although of great appeal, were aimed at a particular audience. She was an educator and to the thousands of young girls who passed through the school, she offered the best of herself, and of Christian ideals and inspirations. For her, painting was not vague production, transitory and isolated, but as Kandinsky pointed out, a power which must be directed to the improvement and refinement of the human soul.(Kandinsky, 1977, p.54) In this sense one could call her images political. Although Nealis herself, I think, would strongly disagree. She probably never considered her oeuvre as a whole, as an artistic entity. For her the subjects were of primary importance and she painted them with a didactic purpose. Added to this aspect of her work is also the dimension of transcendence. Her best paintings point beyond themselves, and depend on a contemplative understanding of the beautiful and an experience of God in the values of this world. Quia animae videnti Creatorem....

Religion for Mother Nealis, partially at least, was simply the way she lived out in daily practice her image of God. Her vision was that of the ideal childhood couched in an aesthetic sensibility and mode of expression made visible through dexterity of technique and enhanced by a sense of profound personal experience.

The first decades of this century, devastated by war and social unrest, were shadowed by a deep-seated socio-psychological phenomenon that affected Catholic theology as well. Throughout the past millennia of human existence, man in his deepest being needed to think of himself as Child of God. He needed the reassurance of being dependent on a superior being, who would love and protect rather than destroy him. In this way, like an infant with the infant's total trust, man believes himself to be in total control of his environment and, at the same time, safe.(Klein, 1971) In theology, the infantilization of dogma gave rise to an effort to simplify, to reduce and to transform Christianity's greatest mysteries. Works of artists of every age and era provide evidence of the major concerns of their time. Mother Nealis, in her preoccupation with, and depiction of the ideal childhood, albeit subconsciously, mirrors in her painting this particular concern of her time in an hierarchic and paternalistic Quebec.

Mother Nealis would never paint, unless under obedience, anything morbid or melancholy. One sees, in her work, little anxiety, no anguish, no straining beyond, but rather a very direct, very simple concern with the paradox of immediacy and eternity that is the present moment. Born of her hidden life, Mother Nealis's paintings took over from language and became in a sense poetic creations reflecting the joy of her spirit. She saw with Augustine, Duns Scotus

and countless mystics and poets that the material world is a sacrament, a symbol of God and His beauty. For her, art as created beauty always pointed towards the Uncreated. Mother Nealis's paintings affirm humankind's essential goodness. It was mainly this fact that accounted for the immediate popularity of her works. The world that she saw was, in the words of Gerald Manley Hopkins, "Charged with the grandeur of God" (Hopkins, 1961).

The impact upon the viewer is an emotionally charged one. The grandeur is present within the powerful simplicity of the message. The reading is essentially simple. One is aware of the immediacy of meaning in Mother Nealis's work. If there is obscurity of meaning, it may be due not to the artist's intention, but to the viewer's unfamiliarity with the rich tradition of two thousand years of religious painting - a tradition of which Margaret Mary Nealis was, perhaps, the last flowering in Canada.

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16. In Manu Ejus Sunt Omnes Fines Terrae. 1934, oil, lost, lithographed.

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17b. Propter Nos. Black and white photograph from Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

18. Ecce Venio. 1935, oil on canvas, original lost, lithographed.

19. Anno Domini XXI. 1935, oil, lost lithographed.

20. Stella Matutina. 1935, oil on canvas, 12" X 14", Halifax, lithographed.

21. Lilium Regis. 1935, oil on canvas, 11" X 15", Halifax, lithographed.

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25. Lumen Semitis Meis. 1942, oil on birch bark, 9" X 12", Halifax. Three versions produced, version 2, 10" X 10", in Montreal; version 3, Barbara Joy, lithographed.

26. Ubi Caritas. 1947, oil on canvas, 13" X 16", Halifax, lithographed.

27. Agnus Dei. 1950?, oil, lithographed, lost.

28. Veni Sequere Me. 1941, lost, lithographed.

29. Mater Gratiae. 1936, oil on canvas, 16" X 30", Halifax, lithographed.

30. Salvator Mundi. 1949, oil on canvas, 12" X 16", original of 1927 is in Baker Inlet, Halifax, lithographed.

31. Madonna and Child. 1952, conté on wrapping paper, 7" X 8", water damage, Halifax.

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33a. St. Philippine Duchèsne 1769 - 1852. oil on canvas,undated, unsigned, 24" X 48", Montreal.

33b. St. Philippine Duchèsne. 1940, oil on canvas, 30" X 48", Montreal.

34. St. Madeleine Sophie Barat. 1940, oil on canvas, 30" X 48", Montreal, after T. Gagliardi.

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36. Sancta Madalena Sophia. Triptych, Convent in St. Joseph, Missouri (?).

37. Sancta Madalena Sophia. 1920s, oil on canvas, now lost, lithographed.

38. St. Madeleine Sophie Barat. 1940, watercolour study for 'Alma Mater,' Montreal.

39. Noël 1862. 1943, oil on board, 10" X 12", Montreal.

40. St. Madeleine Sophie Barat. 1865, a portrait by Savinien Petit, Rome.

41. Marie-Catherine de Saint-Augustin. painted between 1664 -1677 by Hugues Pommier, original in the Hôtel Dieu, Quebec.

42. Mère de Youville. unsigned undated, oil on canvas, 6" dia., Montreal.

43. Venite Omnes. 1938, oil on canvas, 16" X 22", many versions, Halifax, lithographed.

44a. Vision of St. Margaret Mary. watercolour (study), Montreal.

44b. Vision of St. Margaret Mary. undated unsigned, 29" X 39", copy of original commissioned by Visitation convent in 1919 at Paray-le-Monial, France. Halifax, lithographed. Several copies were painted by Mother Nealis for other convents of the Visitation.

45. Dilectus Meus. 1938, oil on canvas, 16" X 22", commissioned by the Ursulines and published as an illustration, Quebec, original in Halifax.

46. Sacred Heart. undated unsigned, watercolour (study), 8" X 10", Montreal.

47. Adveniat Regnum Tuum. 1940?, ink and wash, commissioned by the Pont Viau Mission.

48. Cor Jesu. 1936, oil on canvas, lost, lithographed.

49. Mary with Child Jesus Picking Maple Leaves. watercolour study, 8" X 13", Montreal.

50. Children Picking Flowers for Shrine in Sault Garden. watercolour on paper. Montreal

51. Bridge at the Sault. July 17, 1934, 8" X 11", watercolour, Montreal.

52. Sault Buildings. July 18, Fri - 1930, 11 AM. 8" X 8", Montreal.

53. The Sault Entrance. july 25, 1937, watercolour, 14" x 10", Montrteal.

54. View from the Atwater Avenue Convent. signed, undated, watercolour, 10" X 7", Montreal.

55. Evelyn. May 25, 1909, 3PM. 'Sketched by Mother Nealis'. watercolour, 7" X 10". damaged, framed, Montreal.

56a. The Canadian Martyrs. 1924, oil on canvas, 14' X 20', Altarpiece, many versions produced, Midland, Ontario, lithographed.

56b. The Canadian Martyrs. view of Altarpiece, Midland, Ontario.

57. 'The canonization ceremony for the Canadian Martyrs in St. Peter's Basilica', Rome, 1930. Photograph, Massive painting barely visible above the altar. Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

58. America's First Jesuit Martyrs: 1556-71. 1941, Copy of triptych, oil, lost.

59. Give Me Back My Mother. drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939, used as book illustration.

60 A Prophetic Dream. drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939, used as book illustration.

61. She Turned to me Smiling. drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939, used as book illustration.

62. Dom Claude OSB Writes to His Mother. drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939, used as book illustration.

63. Marie de l'Incarnation à l'ombre du vieux frêne. drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939, not used and now lost.

64. Stella Maris. 1939, oil on canvas, 25" X 38", Halifax.

65. Ave Maria. 1917, oil, lost lithographed.

66. Regina Pacis. 1912, oil on canvas, unsigned copy, original lost, Montreal, lithographed.

67. Sister Josepha, undated, unsigned, oil on board, 7" X 9", Halifax.

68a. Philippine Duchèsne Aboard the 'Rebecca'. undated, oil on panel, 13" X 28", Halifax.

68b. detail.

69. St. Madeleine Sophie. 1951, oil on cardboard, 9" X 15" Halifax.

70a Mater Admirabilis. Mother Nealis painted her first 'Mater' at the age of fifteen in St. John. Altogether, she must have painted 12 to 15 during her lifetime. Each Sacred Heart School has one. The original, in fresco, was painted in Rome by Pauline Perdrau RSCJ in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Generally large in size: 40" X 54". Accounted for two in Montreal, two in Halifax, one in Winnipeg; documentation exists for a 'Mater' in Paris with a bolt of cloth, Mother Nealis painted for Mère de Fontainbert in 1935., oil on canvas.

70b. Black and white photographs from Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

71a. Our Lady of La Salette, 1946, oil on canvas, 10" x 12", Montreal.

71b. watercolour study, 1946, Montreal.

71c Photograph of a study for the official Madonna of the Atonement, painted for the Society of the Atonement, Graymoor, Garrison, New york. Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

71d. Unofficial Our Lady of the Atonement. 1944, now lost.

72. Janet Stuart RSCJ, 1857 - 1914, Portrait. 1942, oil on canvas, 24" X 30", Montreal.

73. The Presentation. undated, oil on board, 14" x 13", Montreal.

74. Sacred Heart of Montmartre. unsigned undated, oil on board, 36' X 42", Montreal.

75. Angel with Seated Woman. undated, unsigned, oil on paper, Montreal.

76. St. Madeleine Sophie. undated unsigned, oil on canvas, 24" X 48", after Gagliardi, Montreal.

77. Bienheureuse P. Duchèsne. oil on canvas, lost?

78. Jacinta of Fatima, 1944, oil, lost, lithographed.

79. The Holy Family. 1913, oil on canvas, very large, painted by Mother Nealis's pupils, burnt in the Sault fire in 1929.

80. St. Jean de Dieu. 1935, painted for Br. Matthias at Notre Dame de la Merci, Bordeaux, Quebec.

81. St. Francis of Assisi. 1935, oil, lost.

82. Notre Dame du Cap. 1947 oil, lost, lithographed.

83. Passio Christi. 1933, lost, lithographed.

84. Man with Boy and Girl, (Max Talbot). 1937, lost.

85. Presentation.(Audi Filia), 1938, oil, lost.

86. Brother André. undated unsigned, lost study.

87. The Breadth of my Love. 1905, study in watercolour after Collins.

88. Priest with Monstrance. oil, lost.

89. little Bo-Peep. Illustrations from nursery rhymes, painted by Mother Nealis on the glass of the refectory door. Atwater Ave., Montreal, ruined by 'restoration' in the seventies.

90. Christ With Children. watercolour study, as part of a series illustrating a book by 'Robin' (Catherine Blood R.S.C.J.).

91. Micheline. 15 Janvier, 1940, pencil sketch, unsigned.

92. The Parish Church of Ste. Madeleine Sophie. (Gouin Blvd.) signed, undated, Montreal.

93. Angel. unsigned undated, watercolour study, 9" X 15", Montreal.

94. Jeanne Jougon. 1938, watercolour, Montreal.

95. The Mackintosh Madonna. Raphael, oil, National Gallery, London.

96. Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints. Fra Angelico, fresco, San Marco, Florence.

97. Pieta. Fra Angelico, fresco, Cloister of San Marco, Florence.

98. Deux images dévotes du Sacré Coeur. Lessard, P. Les petites images dévotes, U. de Laval, 1981. p.68.

99. The Sacred Heart Chapel in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as decorated by Ozias Leduc in 1904, photograph, Halifax.

100. Faith. 1929, oil on canvas, lost.

101. The Assumption. 1939, oil, lost.

102. The Sacred Heart. 1939, watercolour, lost.

103. St. Veronica. 1916, oil, copied from Jansenius, lost

104. Death of the Venerable Bede. 1909, oil, after Peacock, lost.

105. Queen of the Rosary. Late 1940s, oil on canvas, original lost, lithographed.

Figure 1.
Only extant photograph of Mother Nealis
taken in the early forties. Montreal, Sacred Heart.

Figure 2.

Le 17 Décembre 1842:
Le Canada ouvre ses portes et son coeur au Sacré Coeur.
Watercolour on paper, 5" X 8", Montreal.

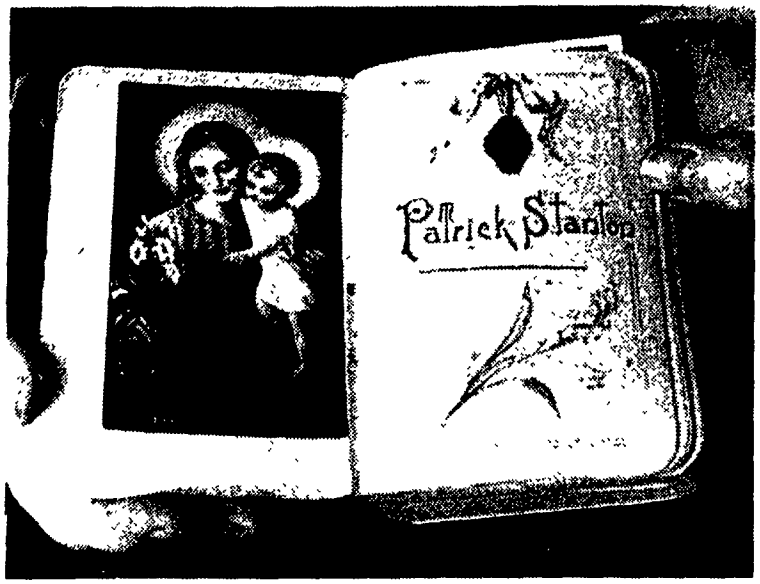


Figure 3.

Illustrations in childrens' prayer books.
Watercolour, private collection.

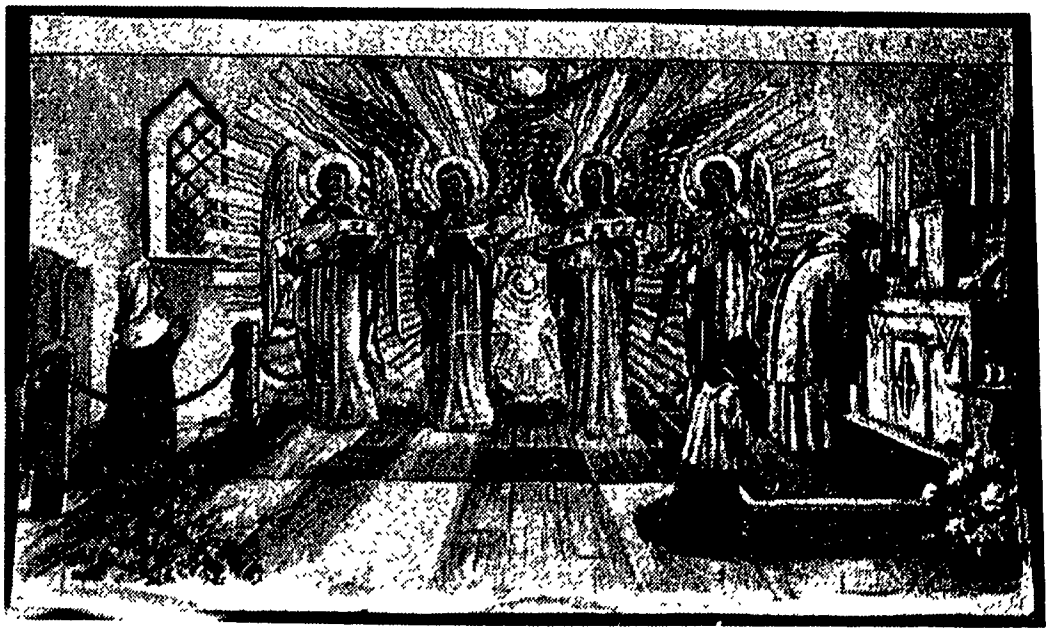


Figure 4.

Lurana, Lurana, Lurana.
1930, Watercolour study, 8" X 16", of lost original in oil, 48" X 96", Montreal.

Figure 5.

Christ with Nicodemus.
1942?, oil on canvas, lost.

Figure 6.

Ecce Ancilla Domini.
8 December 1917, lost, painted for the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Figure 7a.

Ite ad Joseph.
1936, oil on cardboard, 14" X 22", Halifax, lithographed.

Figure 7b. detail.

Figure 8.

Sto Ad Ostium.
1940 Oil on canvas, original lost, lithographed.

Figure 9.

The Light of the World.
1853-56, William Holman Hunt, oil on canvas,
Manchester Art Gallery.

Figure 10a.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.
1927, oil on canvas, 15" X 18", Kahnawake, lithographed.

Figure 10b. detail.

Figure 11a.

Parvulus Pastor.
1938, oil on board, 9" X 11", Halifax, lithographed.

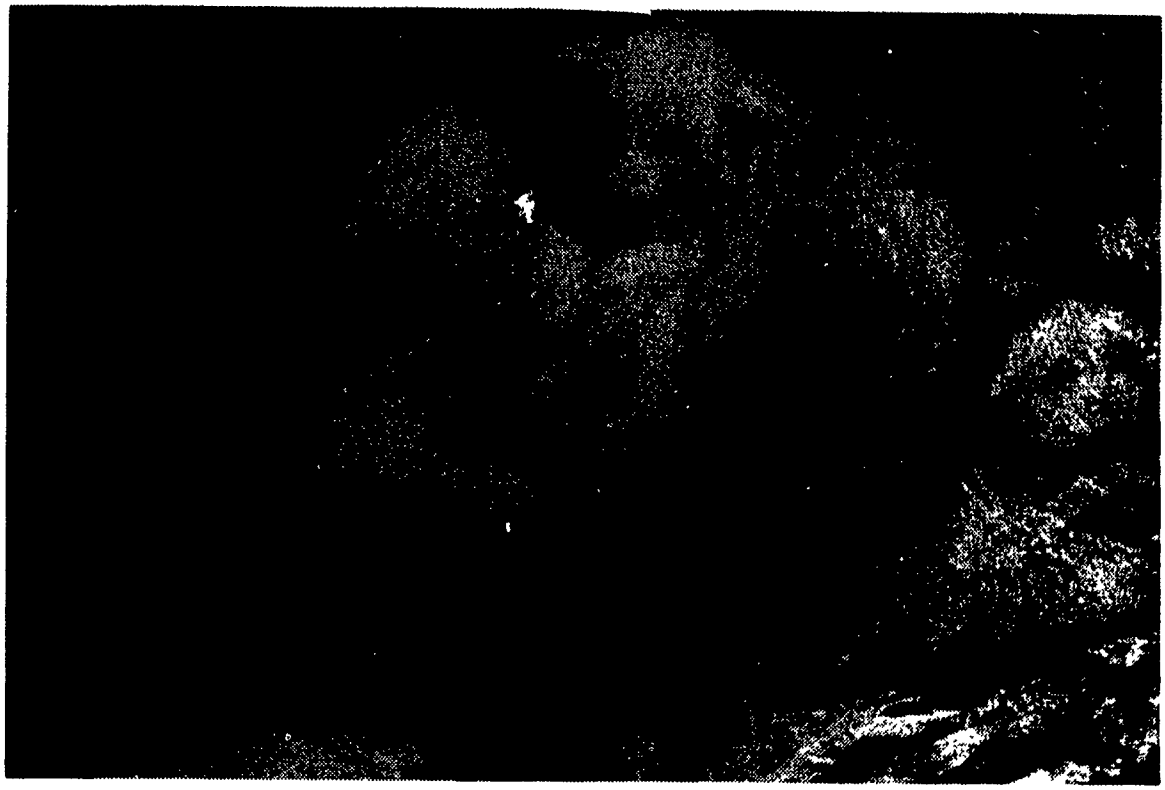


Figure 11b. detail.

Figure 12.

Flos Campi.
1943, oil on canvas, lost, lithographed.

Figure 13.

Vita Mundi.
1932, oil on cardboard, 10" X 14", Montreal,
first work to be lithographed.

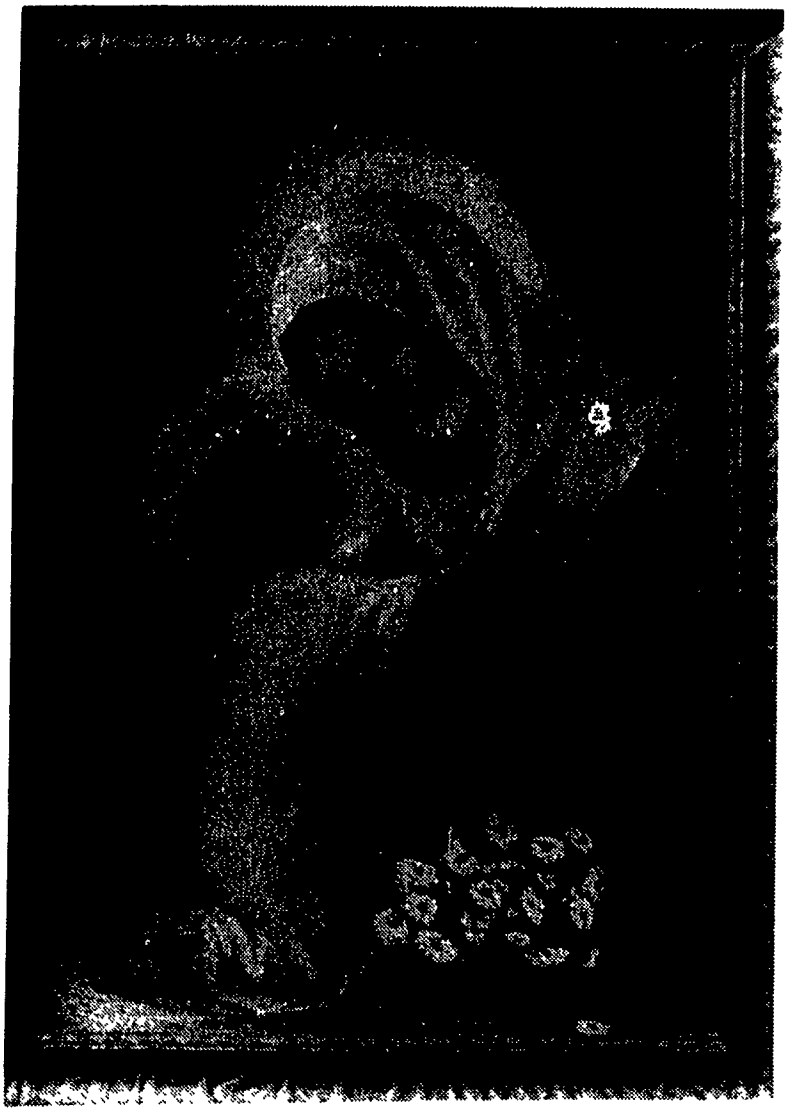


Figure 14a.

Mater Mea.
(version 2), 1933, oil on panel, 14" X 20",
unsigned, undated, Halifax, original lost, lithographed.

Figure 14b. detail.

Figure 15.

Child Mary with Bird and Flowers.
1934, oil, lost, lithographed.

Figure 16.

In Manu Ejus Sunt Omnes Fines Terrae.
1934, oil, lost, lithographed.

Figure 17a.

Propter Nos.
1935, oil on canvas, 9" X 13", signed and dated,
Halifax, lithographed.

Figure 17b.

Propter Nos.
Black and white photograph from Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

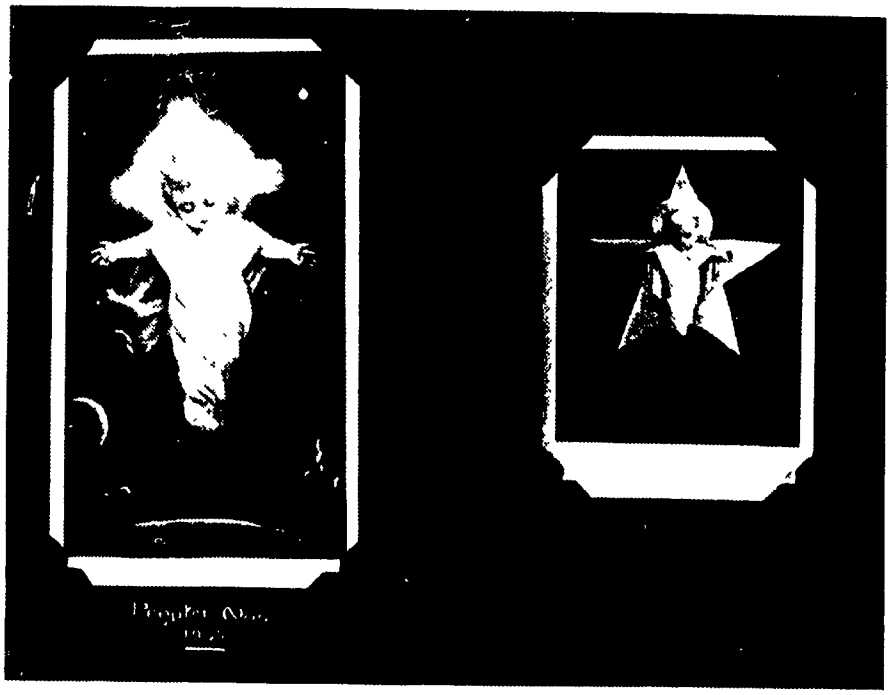


Figure 18.

Ecce Venio.
1935, oil on canvas, original lost, lithographed.

Figure 19.

Anno Domini XXI.
1935, oil, lost, lithographed.

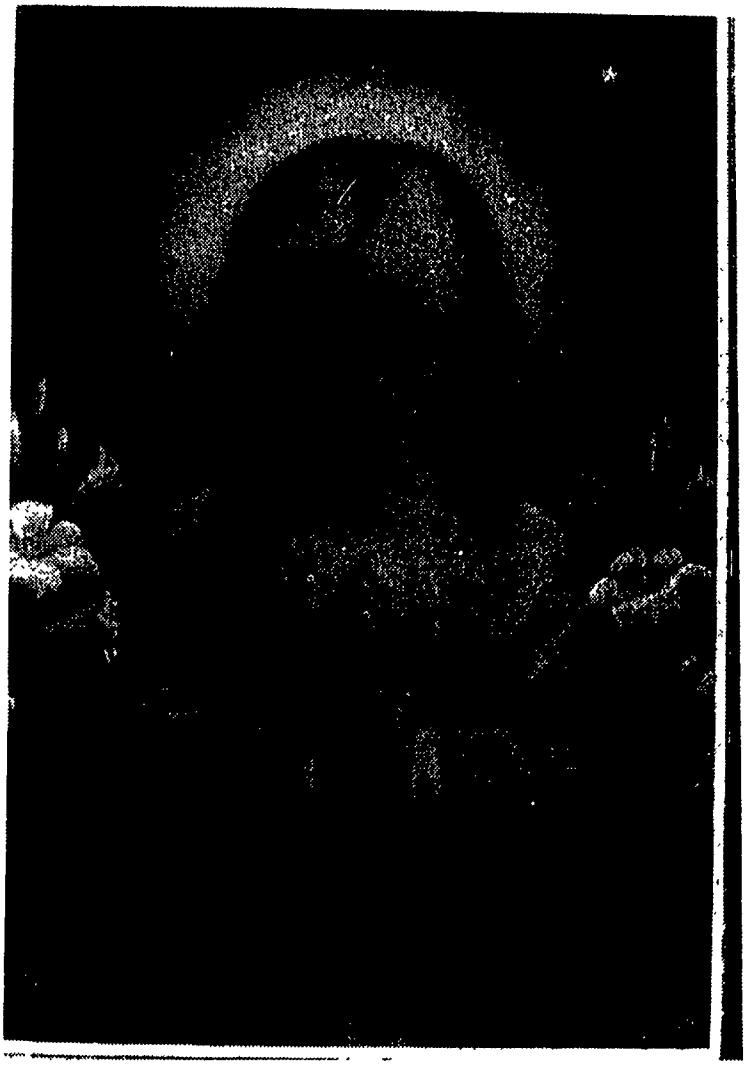


Figure 20.

Stella Matutina.
1935, oil on canvas, 12" X 14", Halifax, lithographed.

Figure 21.

Lilium Regis.
1935, oil on canvas, 11" X 15", Halifax, lithographed.

Figure 22.

Emmanuel.
1936, oil on canvas, lost, lithographed.

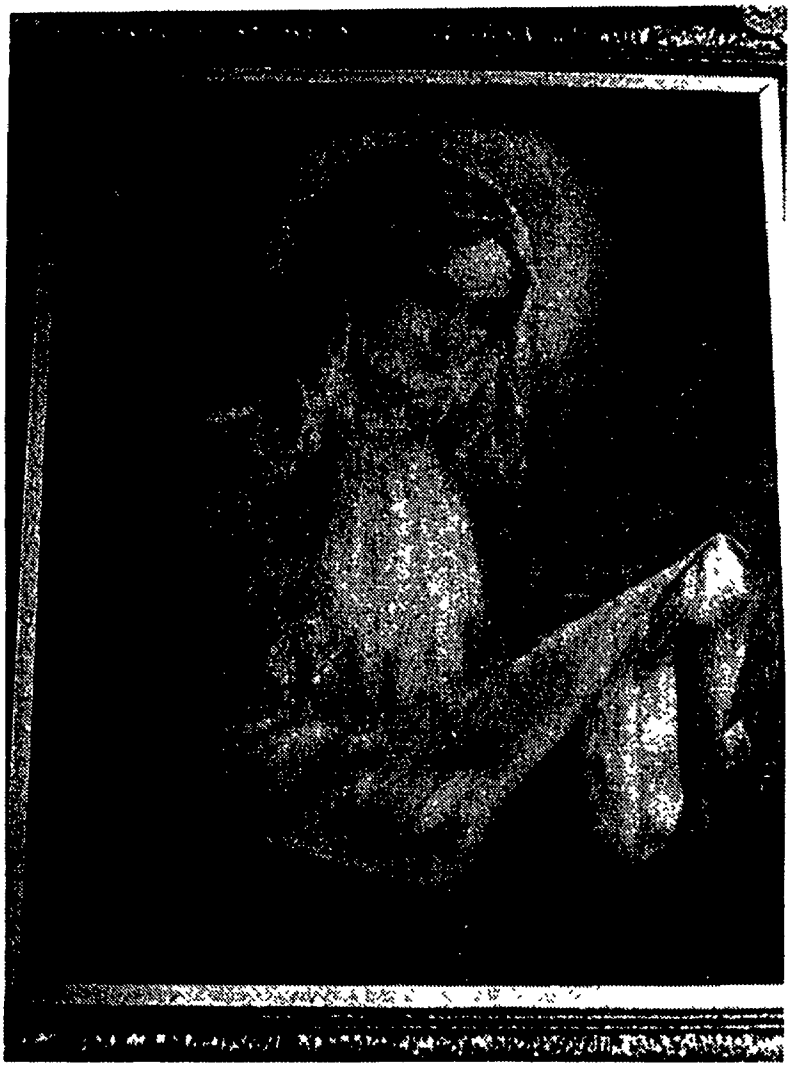


Figure 23a.

Sedes Sapientiae.
1937, oil on canvas, 16" x 19", Halifax, lithographed.

Figure 23b. study.

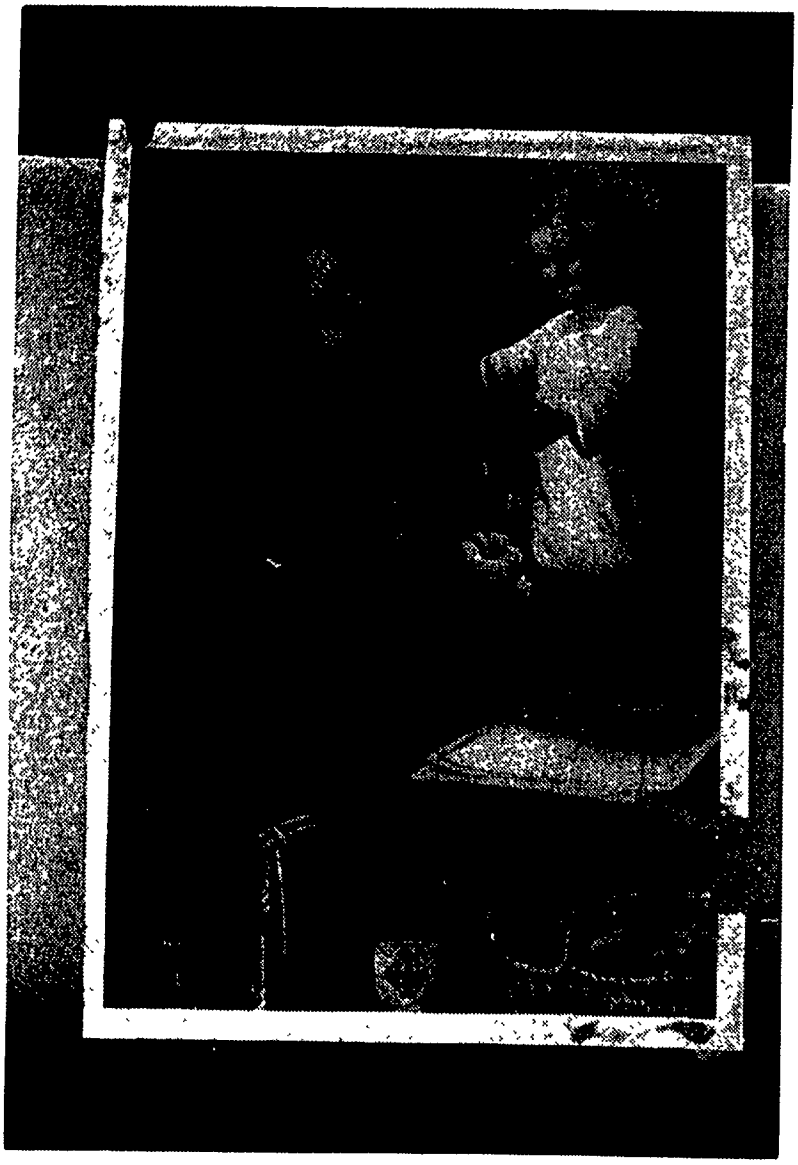


Figure 24.

Perpetua Lux .
1938, oil on canvas, lost, lithographed.

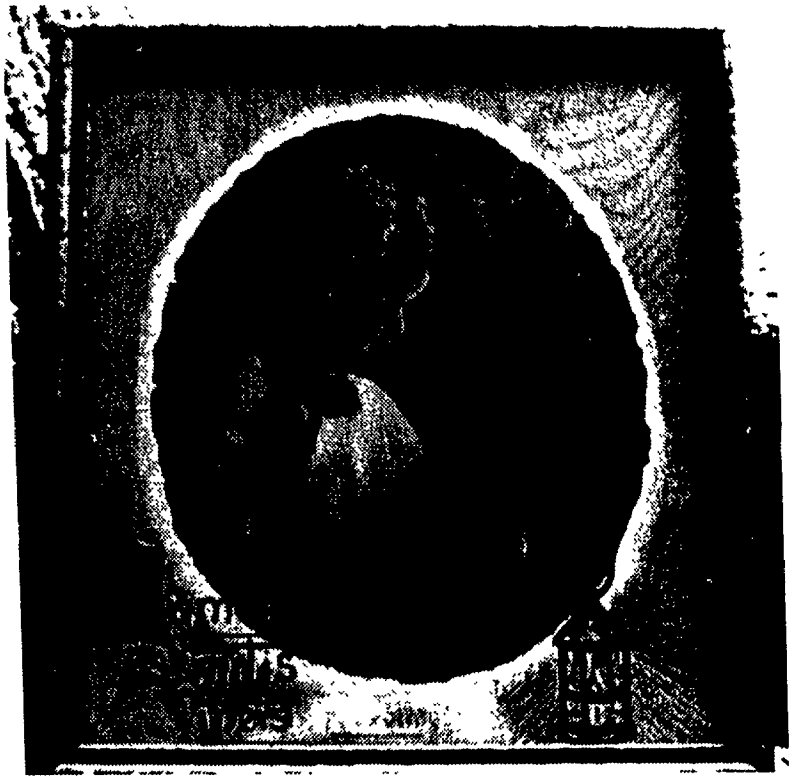


Figure 25.

Lumen Semitis Meis.
1942, oil on birch bark, 9" X 12", Halifax, lithographed.

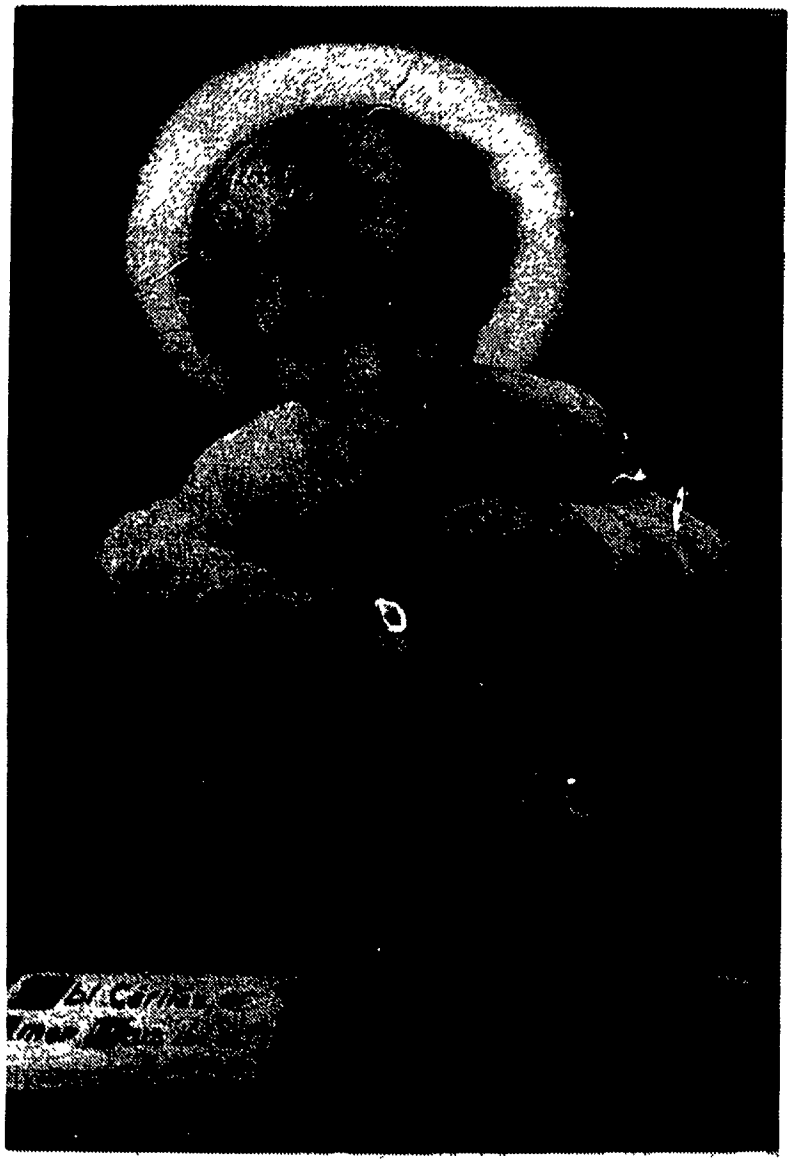


Figure 26.

Ubi Caritas.
1947, oil on canvas, 13" X 16", Halifax, lithographed.

Figure 27.

Agnus Dei.
1950?, oil, lithographed, lost.

Figure 28.

Veni Sequere Me.
1941, lost, lithographed.

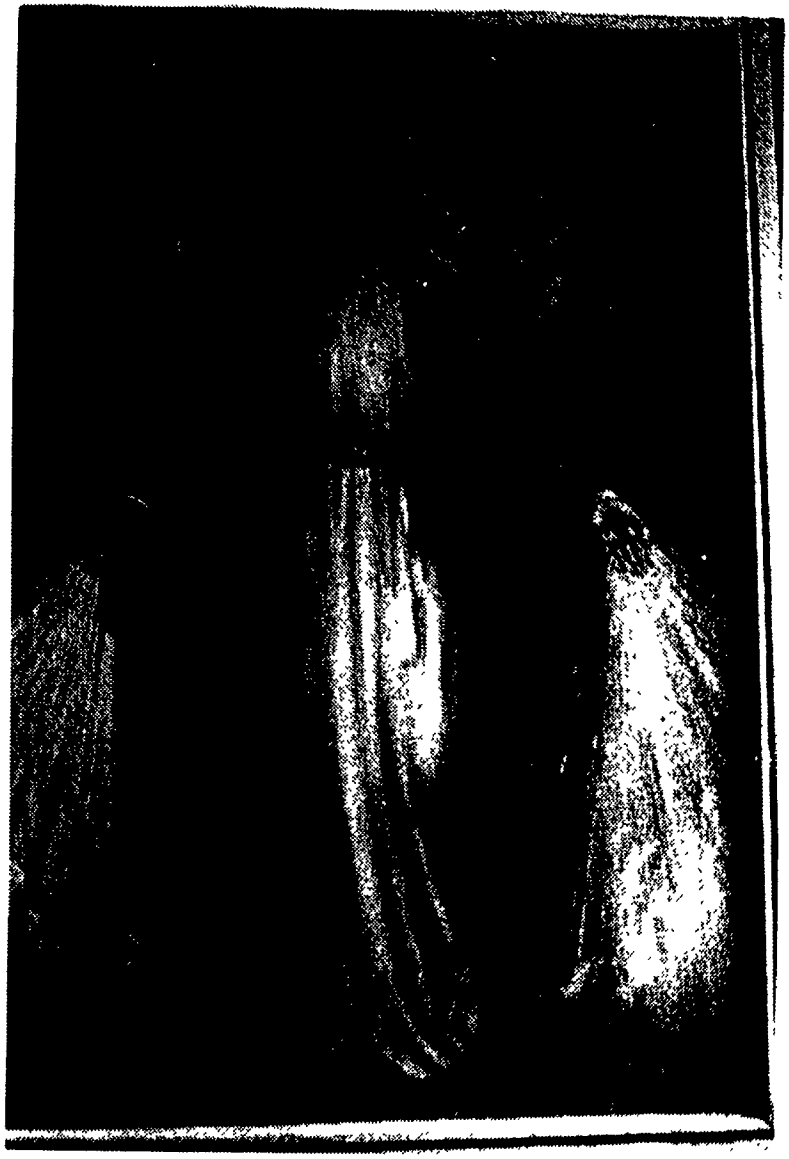


Figure 29.

Mater Gratiae.
1936, oil on canvas, 16" X 30", Halifax, lithographed.

Figure 30.

Salvator Mundi.
1949, oil on canvas, 12" X 16", original of 1927
is in Baker Inlet, Halifax, lithographed.

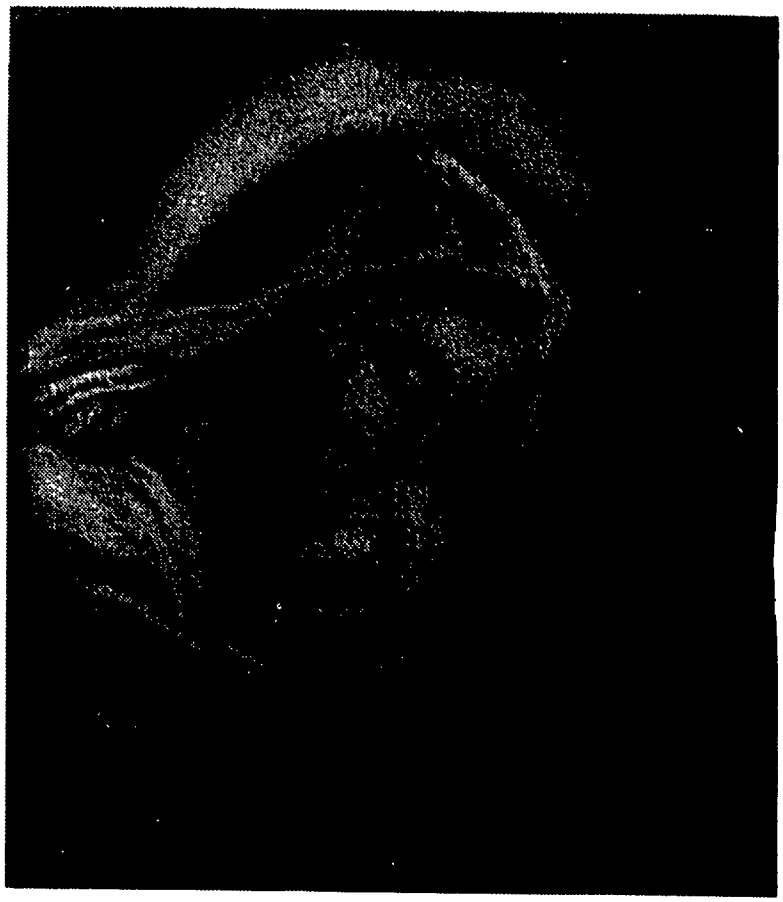


Figure 31.

Madonna and Child.
1952, conté on wrapping paper, 7" X 8", water damage, Halifax.

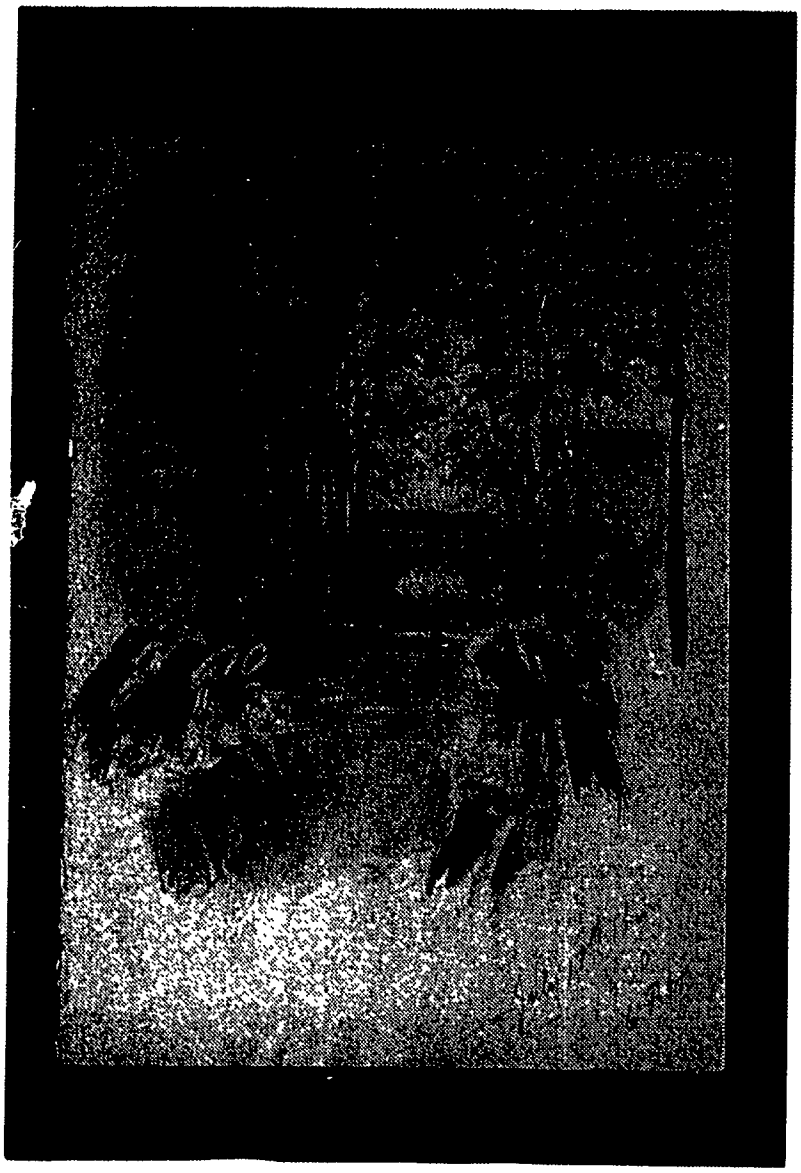


Figure 32.

Nuns' Recreation at the Sault: 6pm.
1930, watercolour, Montreal.

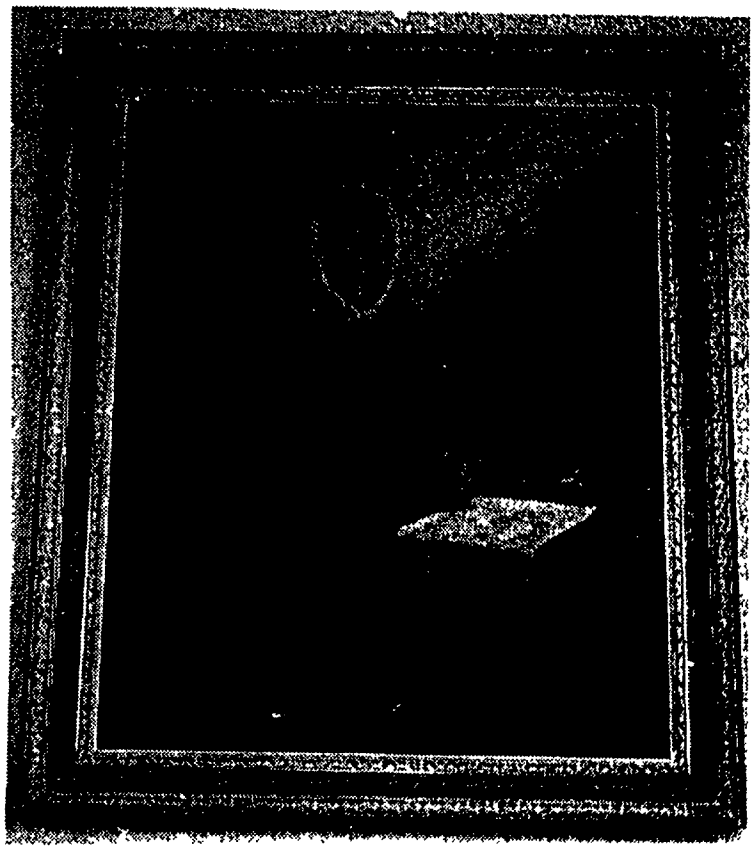


Figure 33a.

St. Philippine Duchèsne 1769 - 1852.
oil on canvas,undated, unsigned, 24" X 48", Montreal.

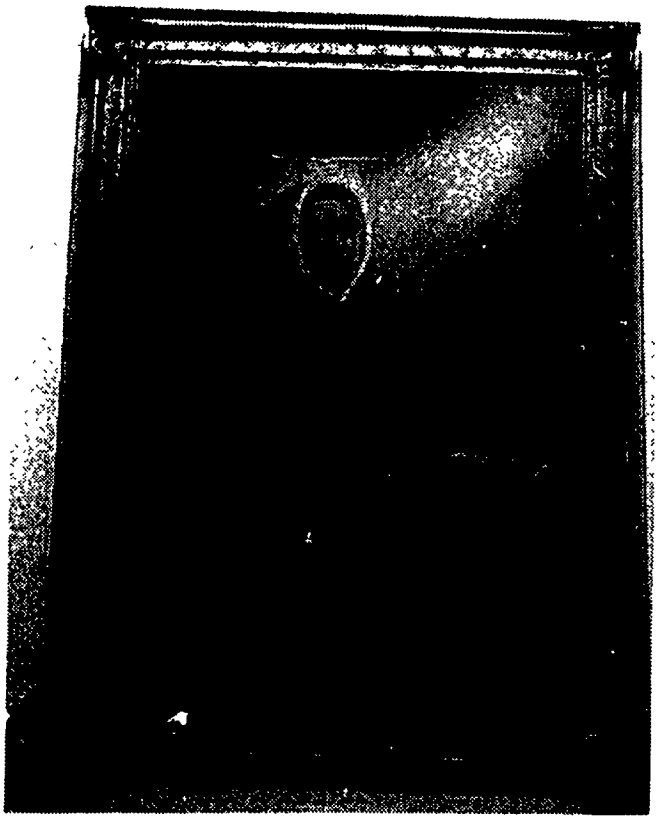


Figure 33b.

St. Philippine Duchèsne.
1940, oil on canvas, 30" X 48", Montreal.

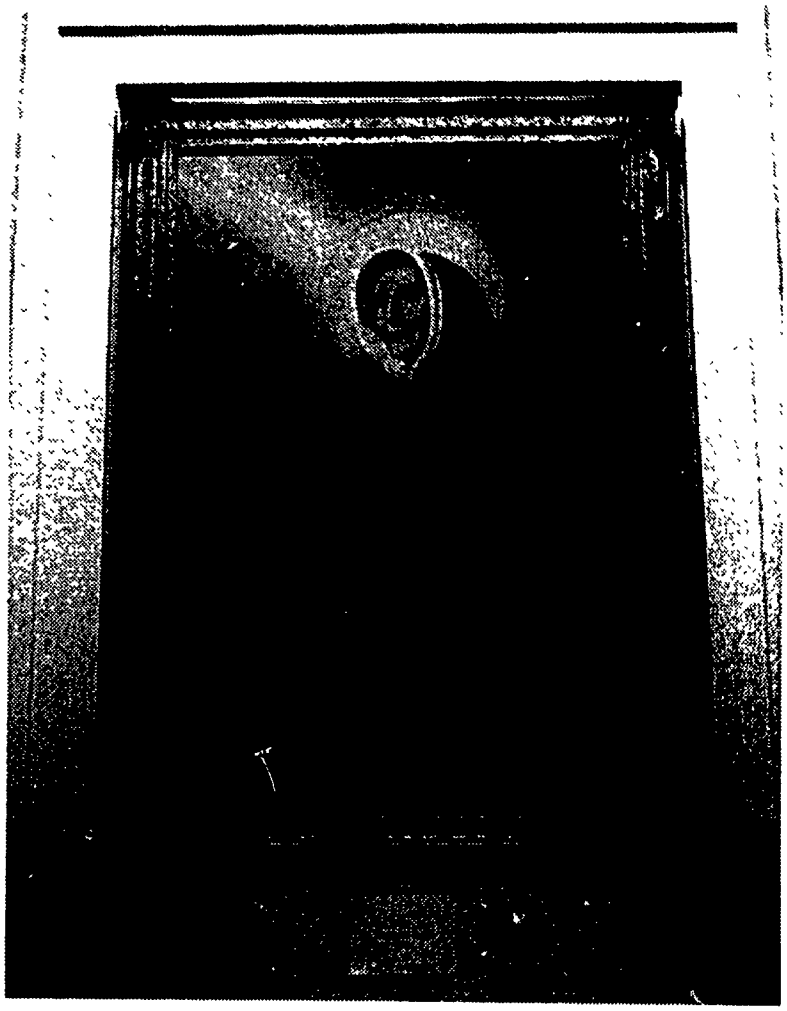


Figure 34.
St. Madeleine Sophie Barat.
1940, oil on canvas, 30" X 48", Montreal,
after T. Gagliardi.

Figure 35.

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat in Glory.
oil on canvas, 20' X 10',
destroyed in the Sault fire of 1929,
painted for canonization 24 May 1925.

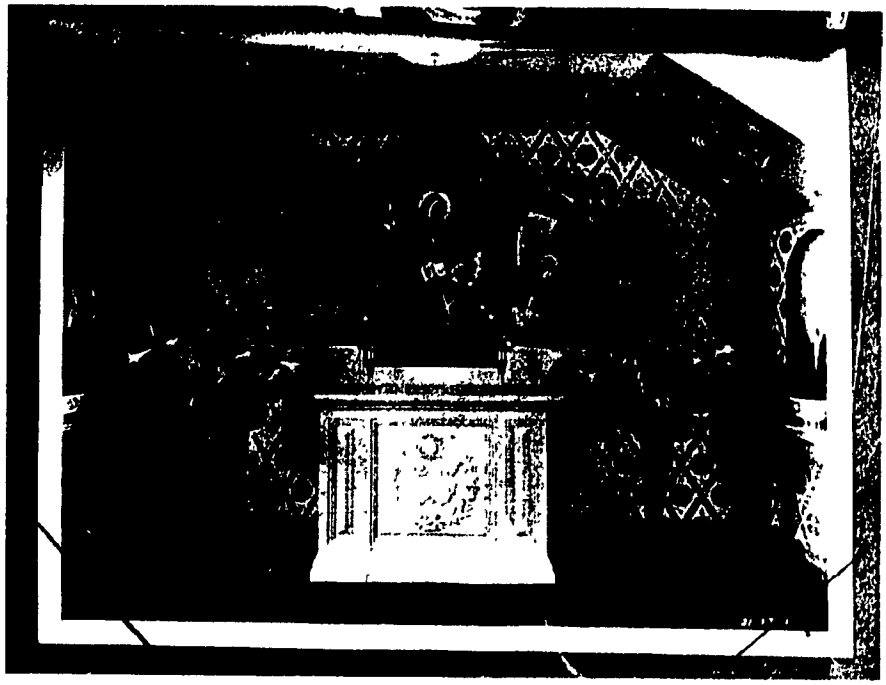


Figure 36.

Sancta Magdalena Sophia.
Triptych, Convent in St. Joseph, Missouri (?).

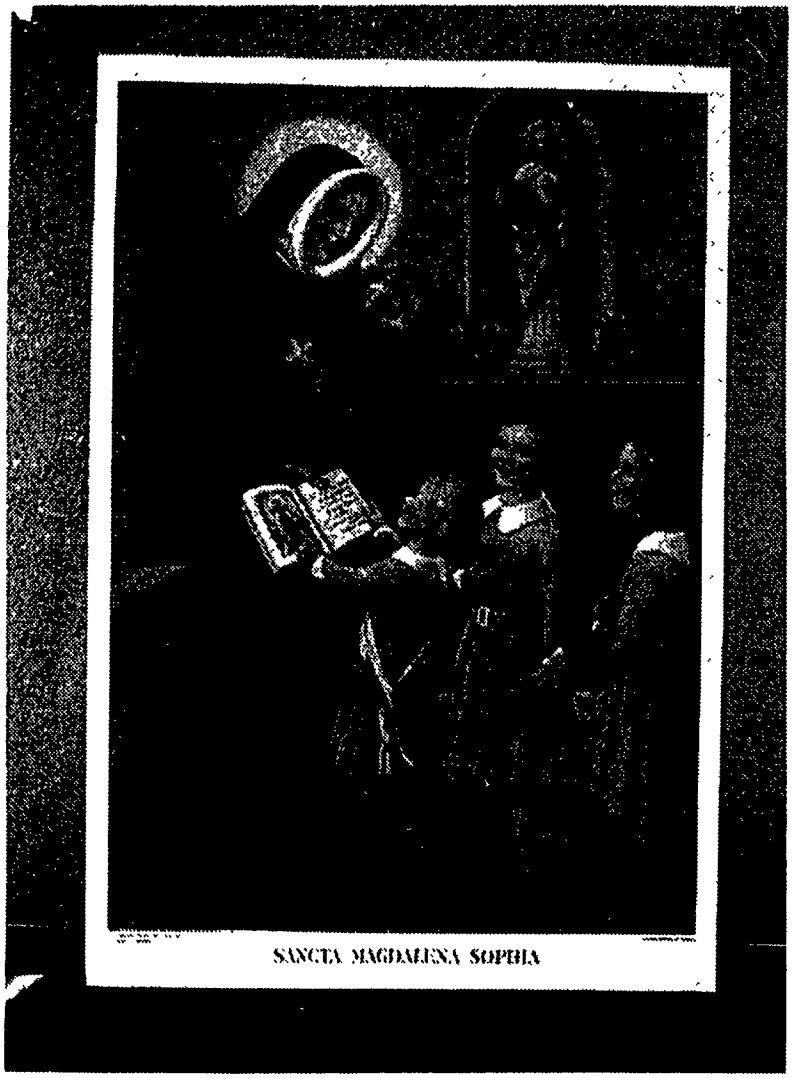


Figure 37.

Sancta Magdalena Sophia.
1920s, oil on canvas, now lost, lithographed.

Figure 38.

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat.
1940, watercolour study for 'Alma Mater,' Montreal.

Figure 39.

Noël 1862.
1943, oil on board, 10" X 12", Montreal.

Figure 40.

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat.
1865, a portrait by Savinien Petit, Rome.

Figure 41.

Marie-Catherine de Saint-Augustin.
painted between 1664-1677 by Hugues Pommier,
original in the Hôtel Dieu, Quebec.

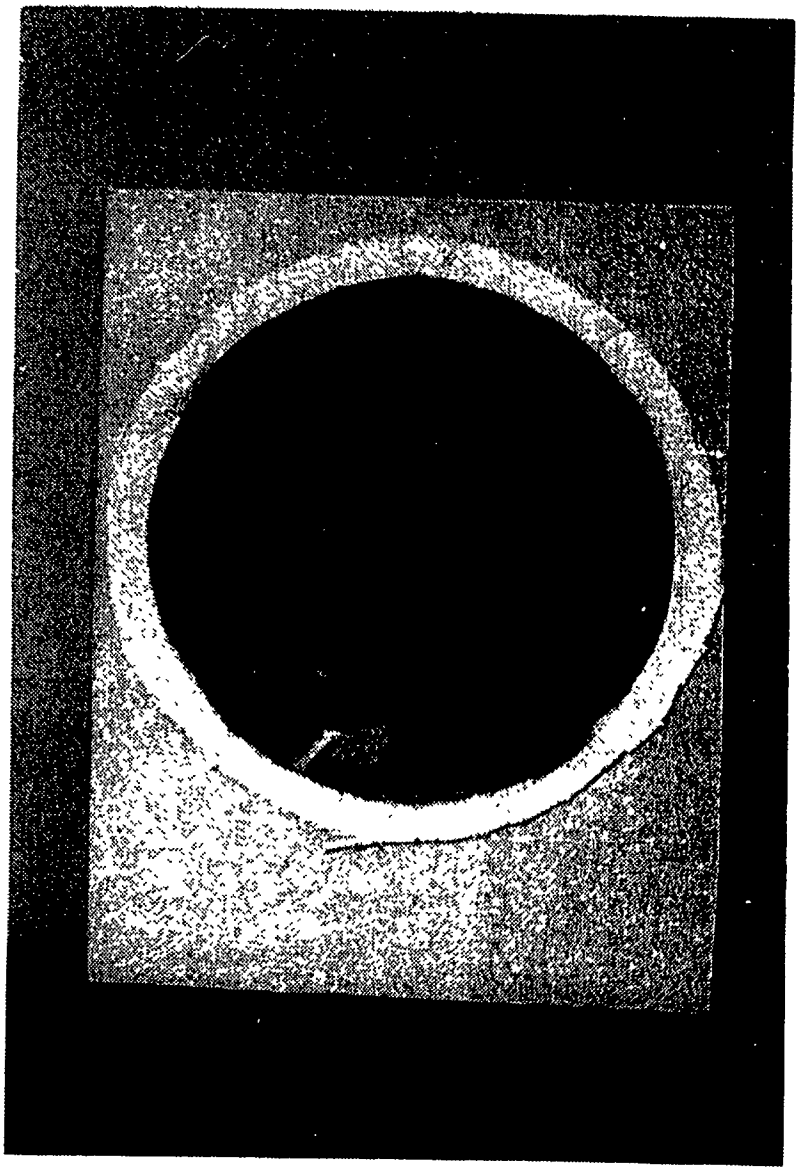


Figure 42.

Mère de Youville.
unsigned, undated, oil on canvas, 6" dia., Montreal.
(after François Malepart de Beaucourt, 1792)

Figure 43.

Venite Omnes.
1938, oil on canvas, 16" X 22", many versions,
Halifax, lithographed.

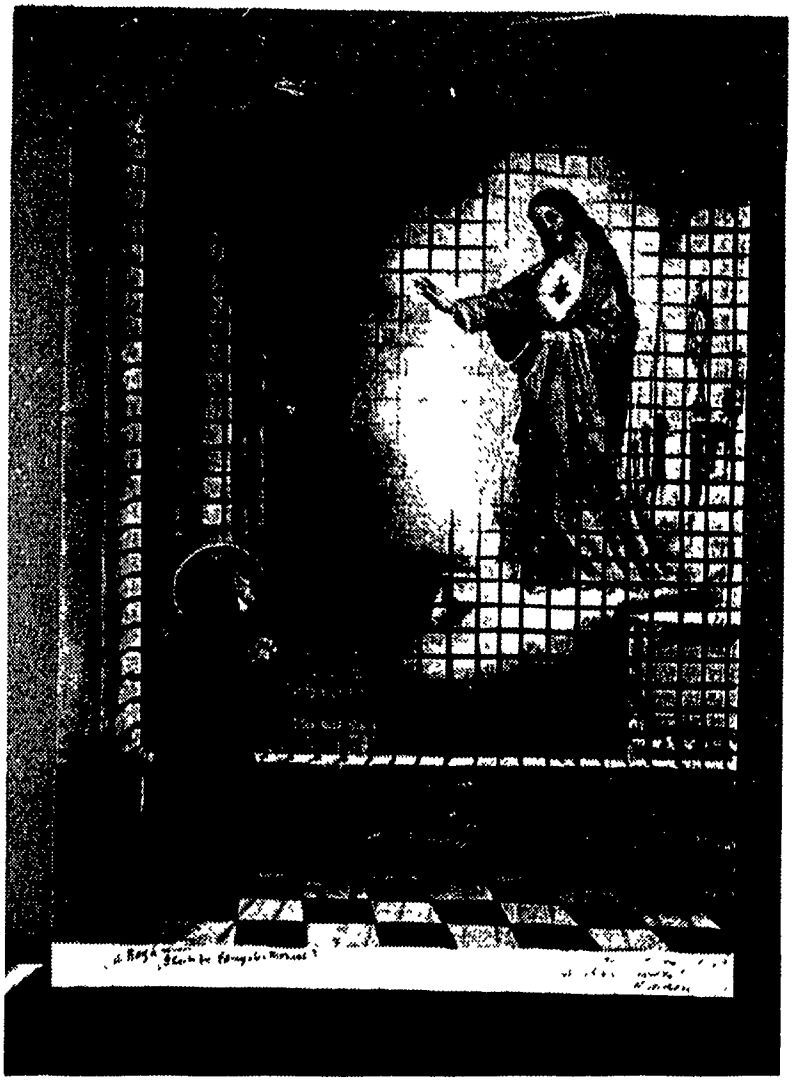


Figure 44a.

Vision of St. Margaret Mary.
watercolour (study), Montreal.

Figure 45.

Dilectus Meus.
1938, oil on canvas, 16" X 22", commissioned by the Ursulines and published as an illustration, Quebec, original in Halifax.

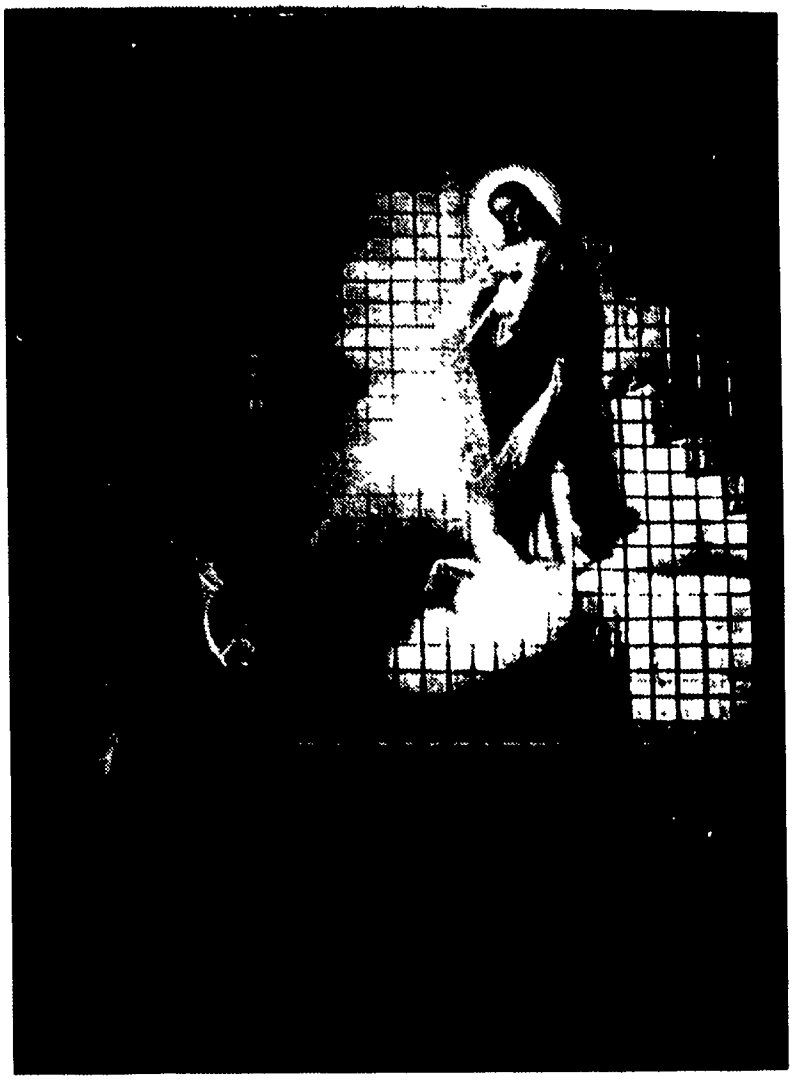


Figure 44b.

Vision of St. Margaret Mary.
undated unsigned, 29" X 39", copy of original commissioned by Visitation Convent in 1919 at Paray-le-Monial, France. Halifax, lithographed. Several copies were painted by Mother Nealis for other convents of the Visitation.

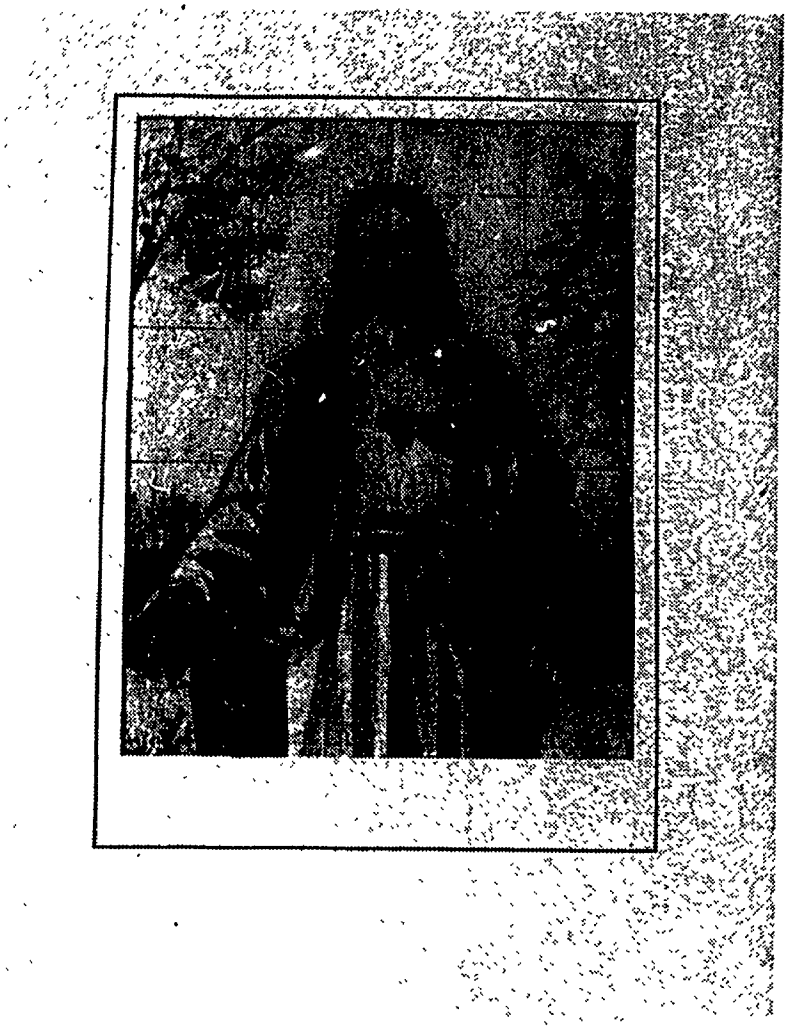


Figure 46.

Sacred Heart.
undated, unsigned, watercolour (study), 8" X 10", Montreal.

Figure 47.

Adveniat Regnum Tuum.
1940?, ink and wash, commissioned by the Pont Viau Mission.

Figure 48.

Cor Jesu.
1936, oil on canvas, lost, lithographed.

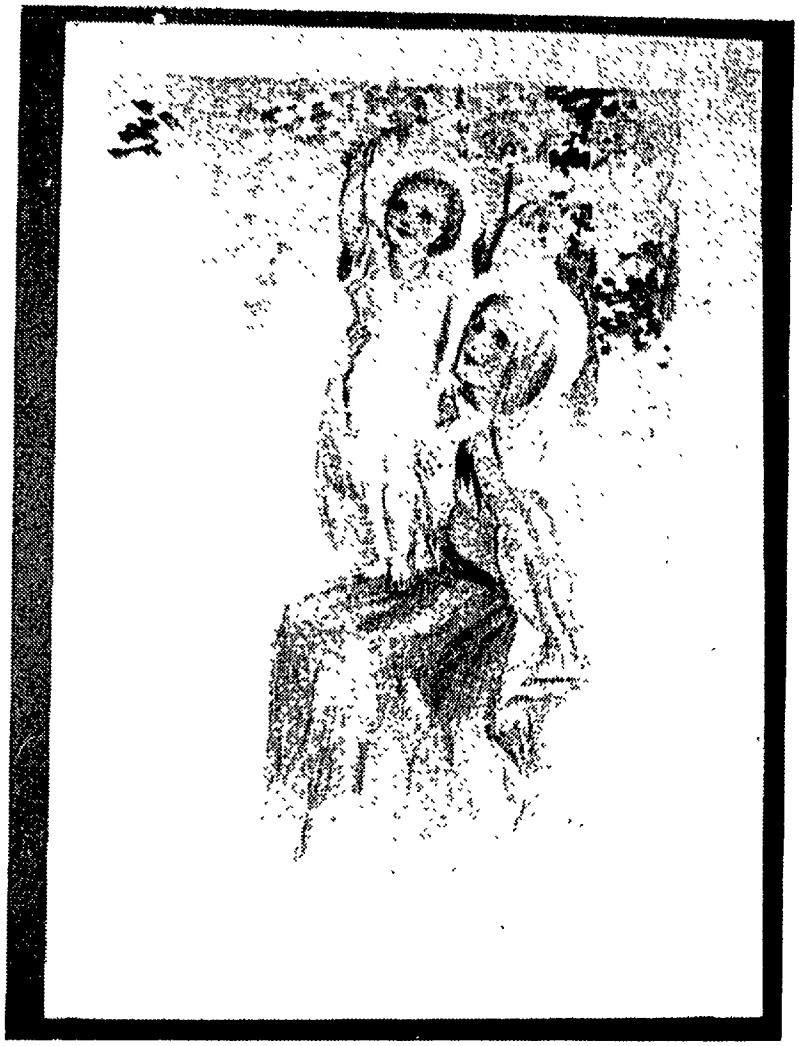


Figure 49.

Mary with Child Jesus Picking Maple Leaves.
watercolour study, 8" X 13", Montreal.

Figure 50.

Children Picking Flowers for Shrine in Sault Garden.
watercolour on paper. Montreal

Figure 51.

Bridge at the Sault.
July 17, 1934, 8" X 11", watercolour, Montreal.

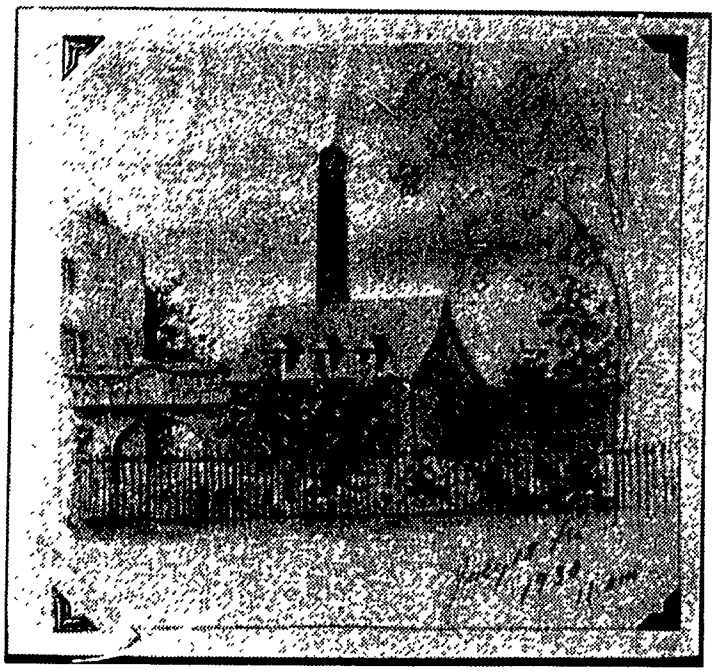


Figure 52.

Sault Buildings.
July 18, Fri - 1930, 11 AM. 8" X 8", Montreal.

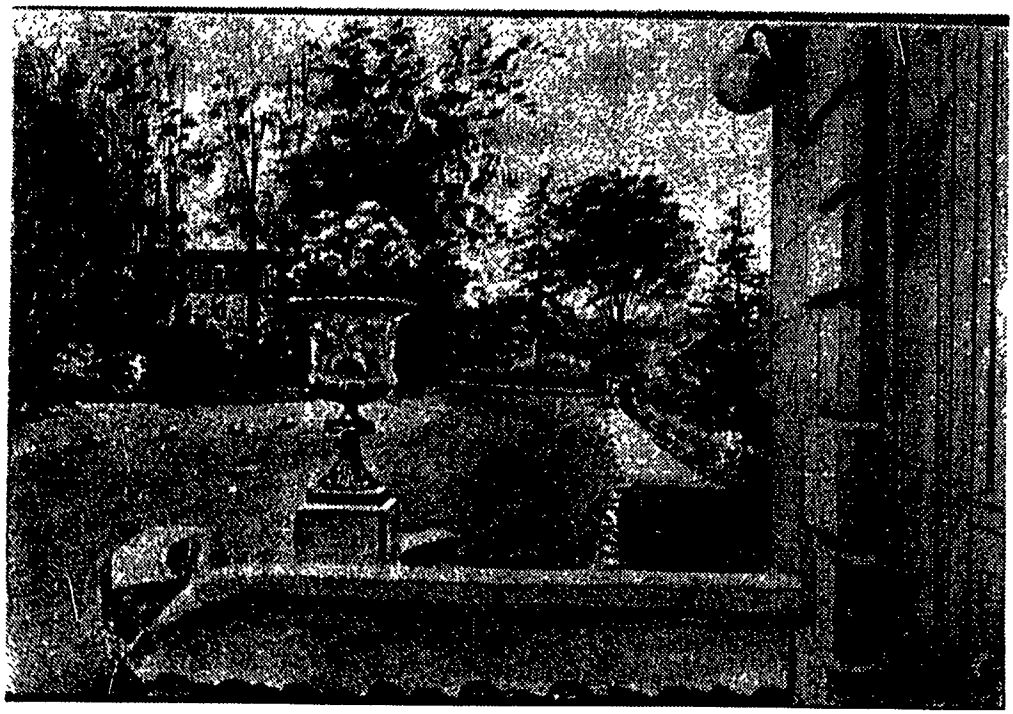


Figure 53.

The Sault Entrance.
July 25, 1937, watercolour, 14" x 10", Montreal.

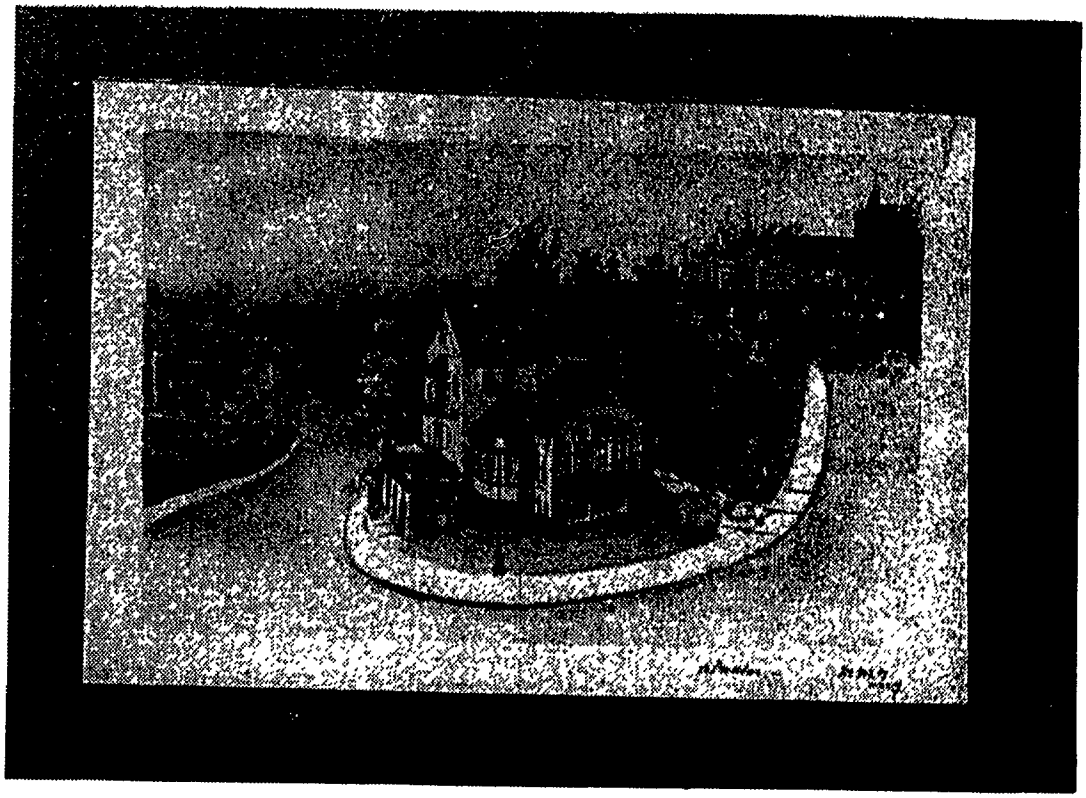


Figure 54.

<u>View from the Atwater Avenue Convent</u>.
signed, undated, watercolour, 10" X 7", Montreal.

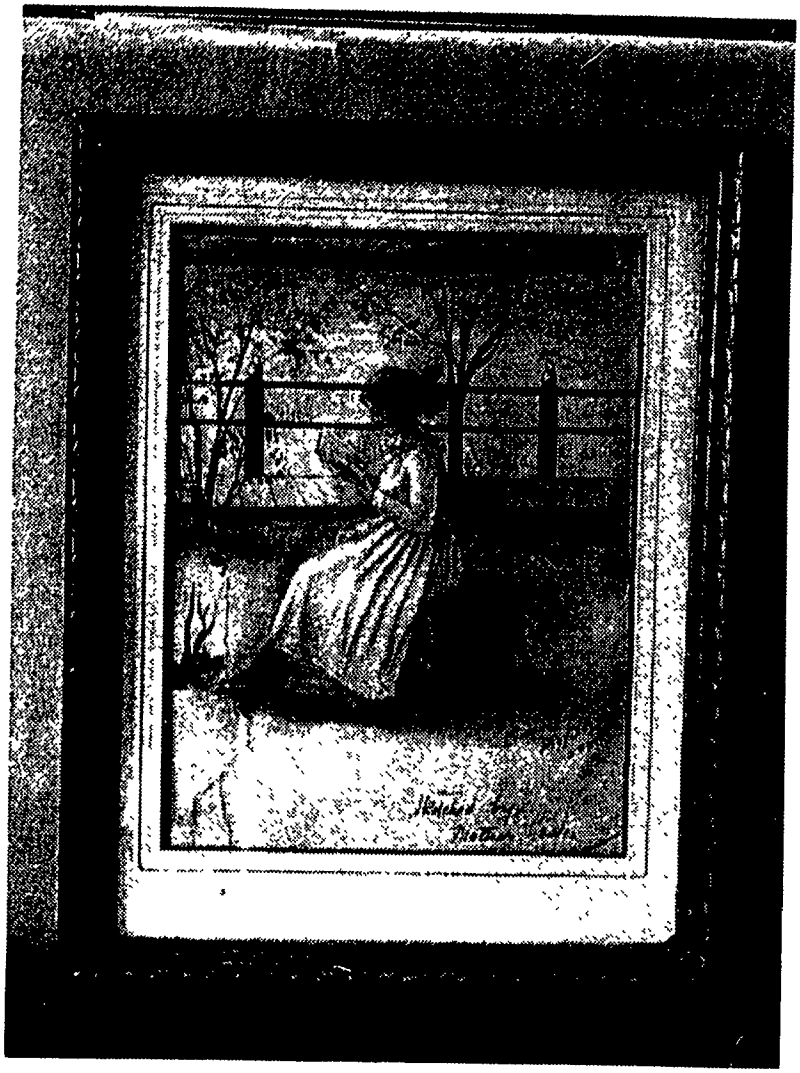


Figure 55.

Evelyn.
May 25, 1909, 3PM. 'Sketched by Mother Nealis.'
watercolour, 7" X 10". damaged, framed, Montreal.

Figure 56a.

The Canadian Martyrs.
1924, oil on canvas, 14' X 20', Altarpiece,
many versions produced, Midland, Ontario, lithographed.

Figure 56b.

The Canadian Martyrs.
view of Altarpiece, Midland, Ontario.

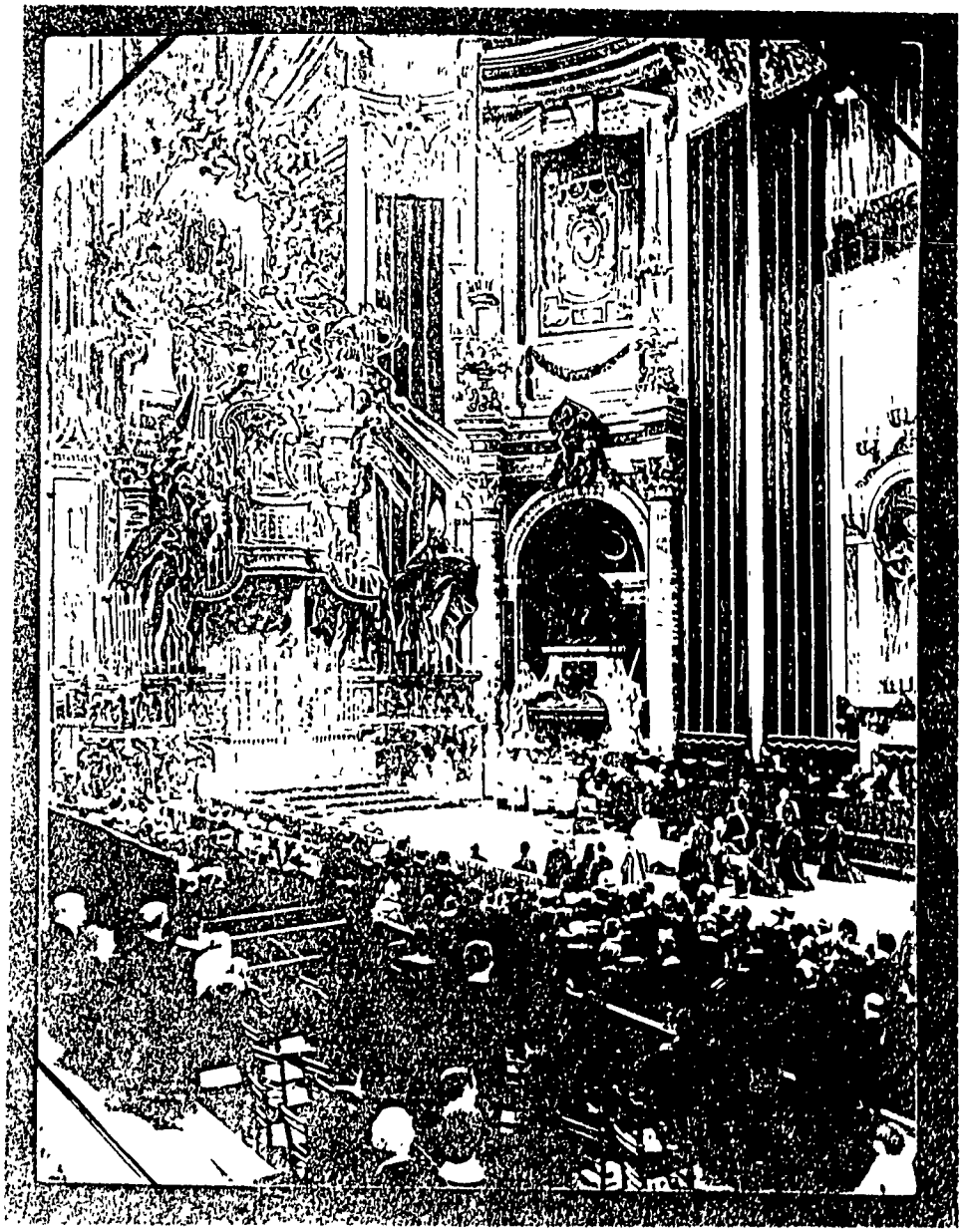


Figure 57.

'The canonization ceremony for the Canadian Martyrs in St. Peter's Basilica', Rome, 1930. Photograph, Massive painting barely visible above the altar. Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

Figure 58.

America's First Jesuit Martyrs: 1556-71.
1941, Copy of triptych, oil, lost.

"GIVE ME BACK MY MOTHER"

Figure 59.

Give Me Back My Mother.
drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939,
used as book illustration.

Figure 60.

A Prophetic Dream.
drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939,
used as book illustration.

"SHE TURNED TO ME SMILING."

Figure 61.

She Turned to me Smiling.
drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939,
used as book illustration.

Figure 62.

Dom Claude OSB Writes to His Mother.
drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939,
used as book illustration.

Figure 63.

Marie de l'Incarnation à l'ombre du vieux frêne.
drawing for Ursulines of Quebec, 1939,
not used and now lost.

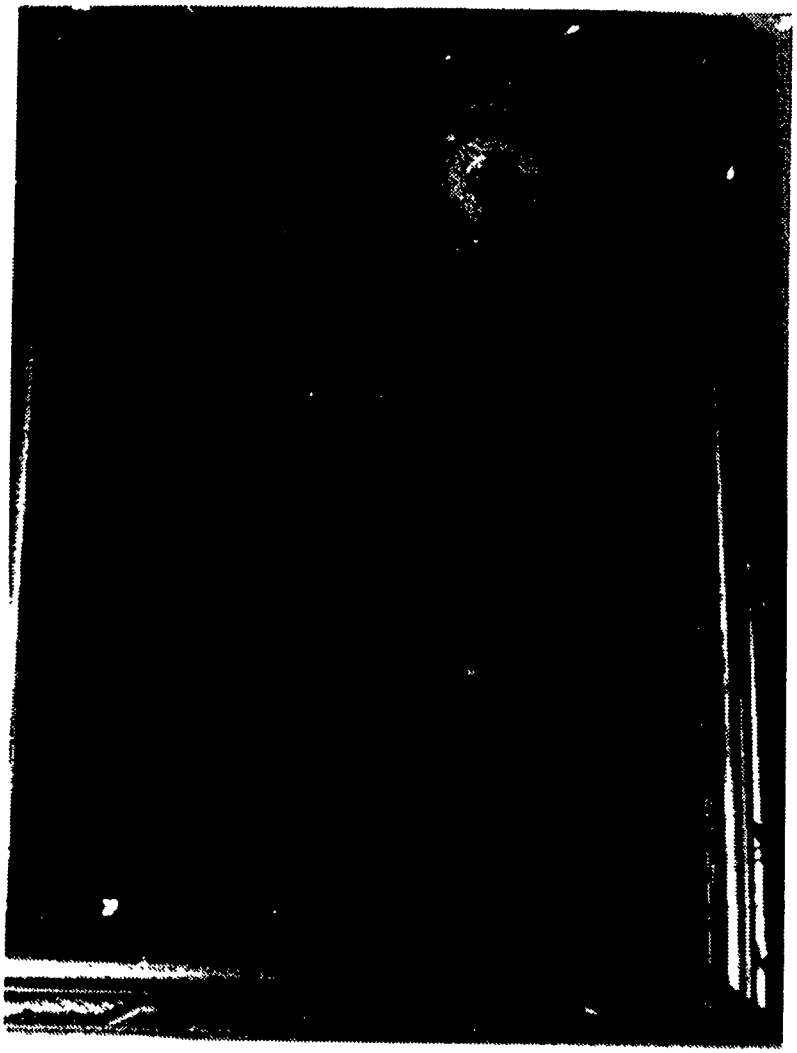


Figure 64.

Stella Maris.
1939, oil on canvas, 25" X 38", Halifax. Commissioned by the Montreal Sailors' Club of Bonsecours Church.

Figure 65.

Ave Maria.
1917, oil, lost lithographed.

Figure 66.

Regina Pacis.
1912, oil on canvas, unsigned copy,
original lost, Montreal, lithographed.

Figure 67.

Sister Josepha,
undated, unsigned, oil on board, 7" X 9", Halifax.

Figure 68a.

Philippine Duchèsne Aboard the 'Rebecca'.
undated, oil on panel, 13" X 28", Halifax.

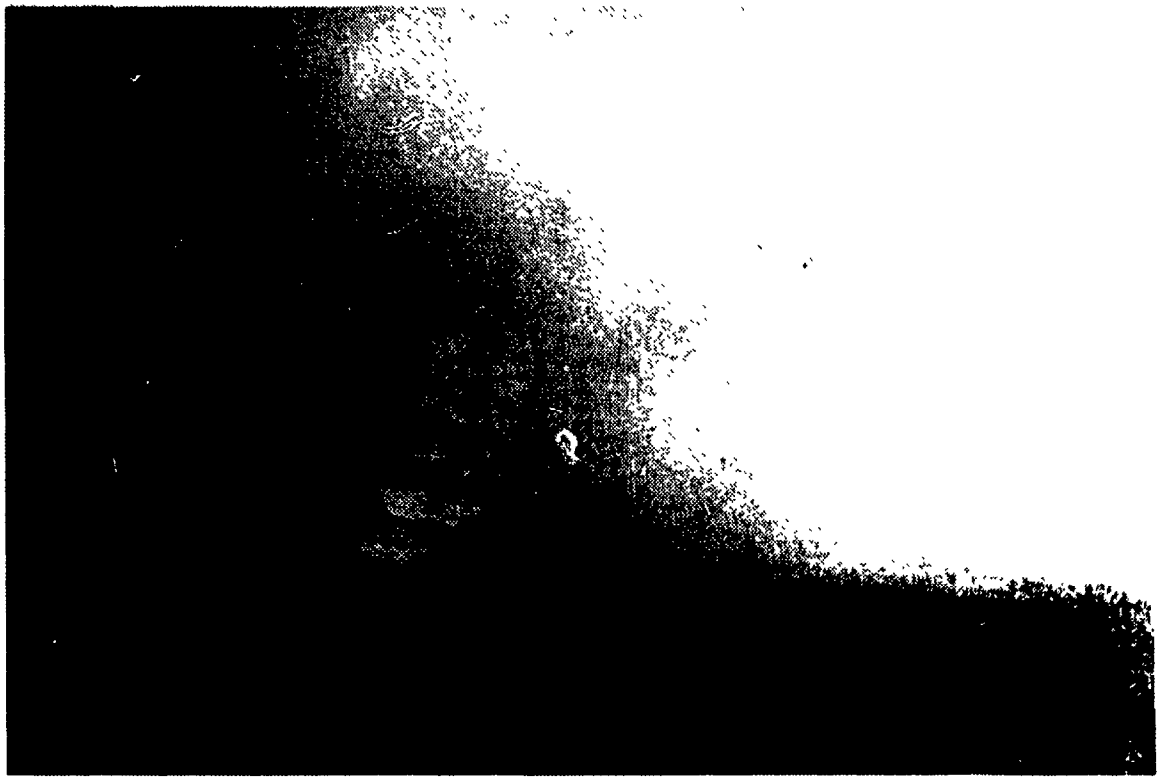


Figure 68b. detail.

Figure 69.

St. Madeleine Sophie.
1951, oil on cardboard, 9" X 15", Halifax.

Figure 70a.

Mater Admirabilis.

Mother Nealis painted her first 'Mater' at the age of fifteen in St. John. Altogether, she must have painted 12 to 15 during her lifetime. Each Sacred Heart School has one. The original, in fresco, was painted in Rome by Pauline Perdrau RSCJ in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Generally large in size: 40" X 54". Accounted for two in Montreal, two in Halifax, one in Winnipeg; documentation exists for a 'Mater' in Paris with a bolt of cloth, Mother Nealis painted for Mère de Fontainbert in 1935., oil on canvas.

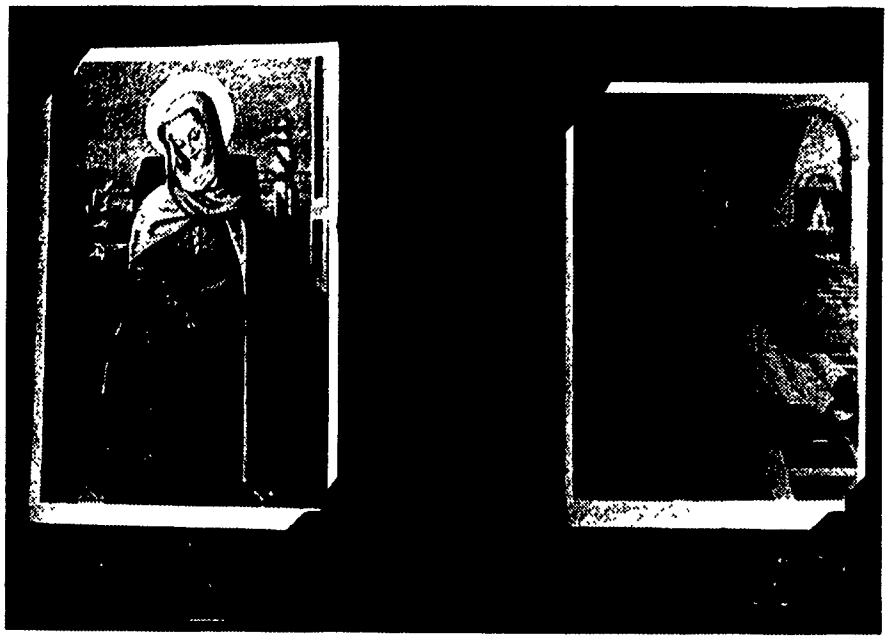


Figure 70b.

Black and white photographs from Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

Figure 71a.

Our Lady of La Salette,
1946, oil on canvas, 10" x 12", Montreal.

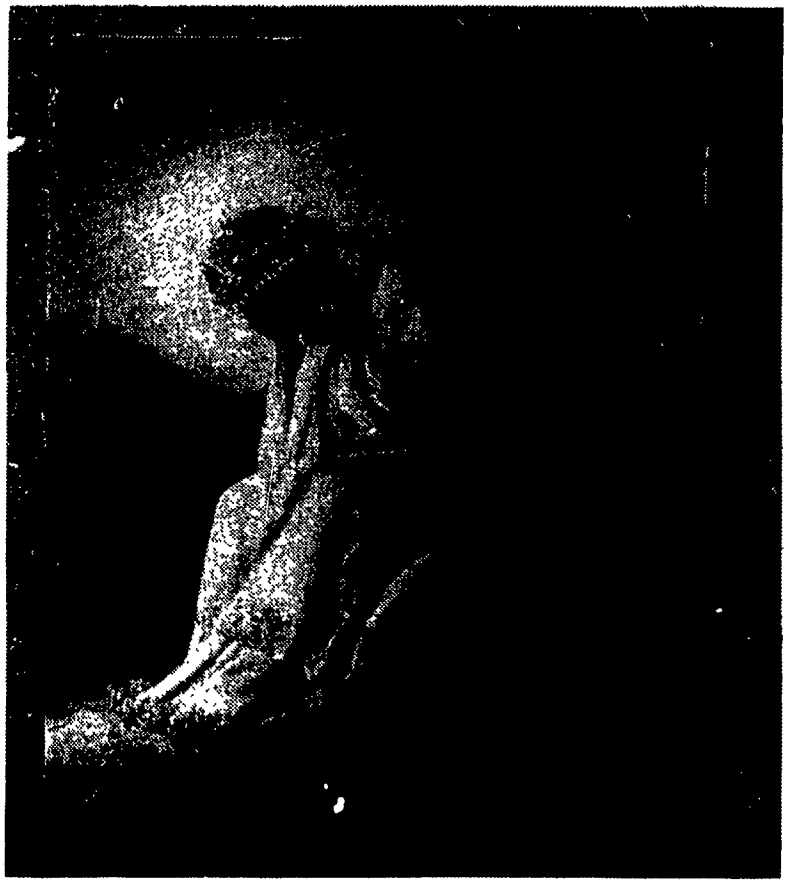


Figure 71b.

watercolour study, 1946, Montreal.

Figure 71c

Photograph of a study for the official Madonna of the Atonement, painted for the Society of the Atonement, Graymoor, Garrison, New york. Mother Nealis's album, Montreal.

Figure 71d.

Unofficial Our Lady of the Atonement. 1944, now lost.

Figure 72.

Janet Stuart RSCJ, 1857 - 1914,
Portrait. 1942, oil on canvas, 24" X 30", Montreal.

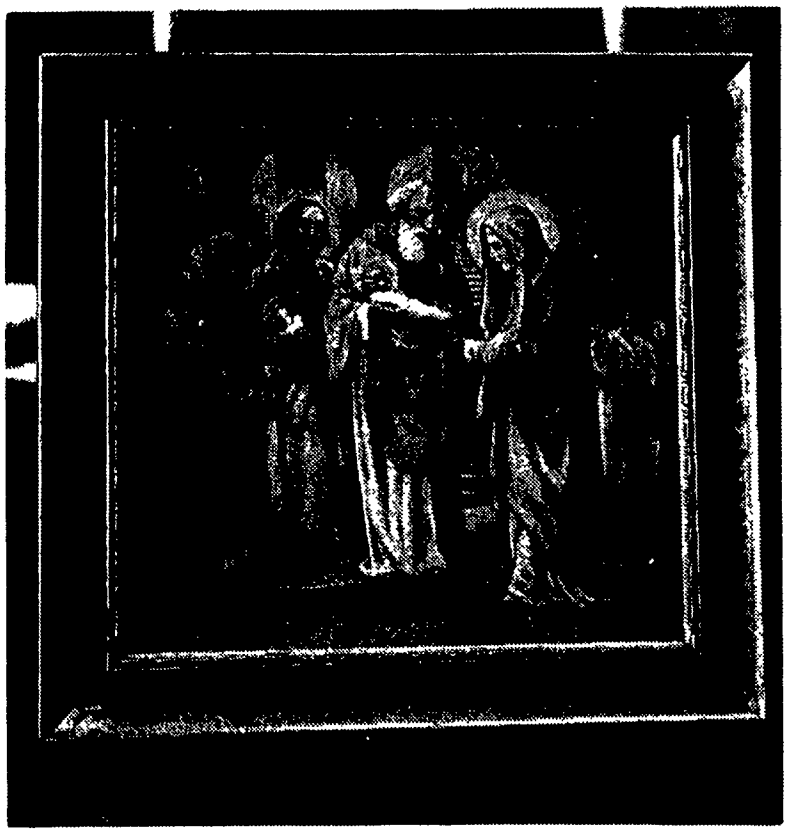


Figure 73.

The Presentation.
undated, oil on board, 14" x 13", Montreal.

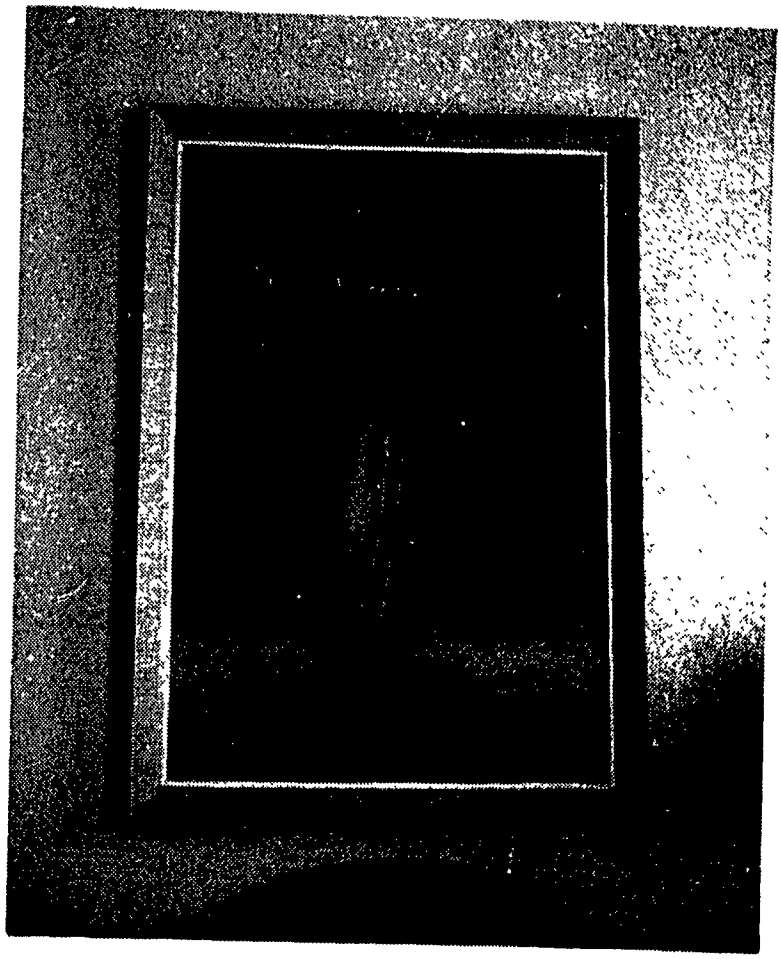


Figure 74.

Sacred Heart of Montmartre.
unsigned, undated, oil on board, 36' X 42", Montreal.

Figure 75.

Angel with Seated Woman.
undated, unsigned, oil on paper, Montreal.

Figure 76.

St. Madeleine Sophie.
undated, unsigned, oil on canvas, 24" X 48",
after Gagliardi, Montreal.

Figure 77.

Bienheureuse P. Duchèsne.
oil on canvas, lost?

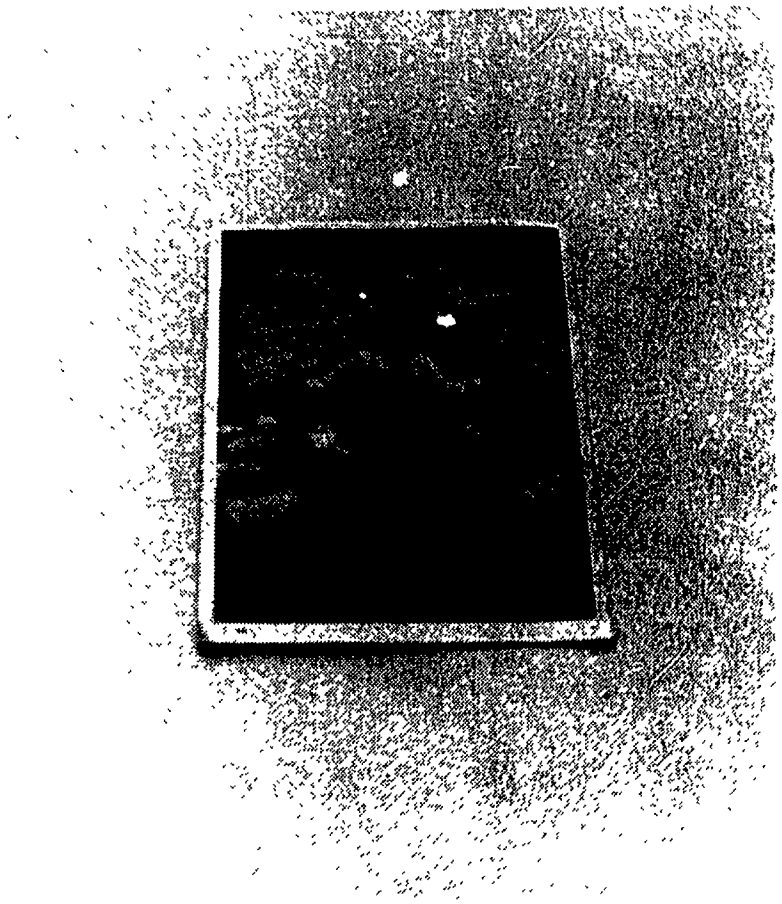


Figure 78.

Jacinta of Fatima,
1944, oil, lost, lithographed.

Figure 79.

The Holy Family.
1913, oil on canvas, very large, painted by Mother Nealis's pupils, burnt in the Sault fire in 1929.

Figure 80.

St. Jean de Dieu.
1935, painted for Br. Matthias at Notre Dame de la Merci, Bordeaux, Quebec.

Figure 81.

St. Francis of Assisi.
1935, oil, lost.

Figure 82.

Notre Dame du Cap.
1947 oil, lost, lithographed.

Figure 83.

Passio Christi.
1933, lost, lithographed.

Figure 84.

Man with Boy and Girl,
(Max Talbot). 1937, lost.

Figure 85.

Presentation.(Audi Filia),
1938, oil, lost.

Figure 86.

Brother André.
undated, unsigned, lost study.

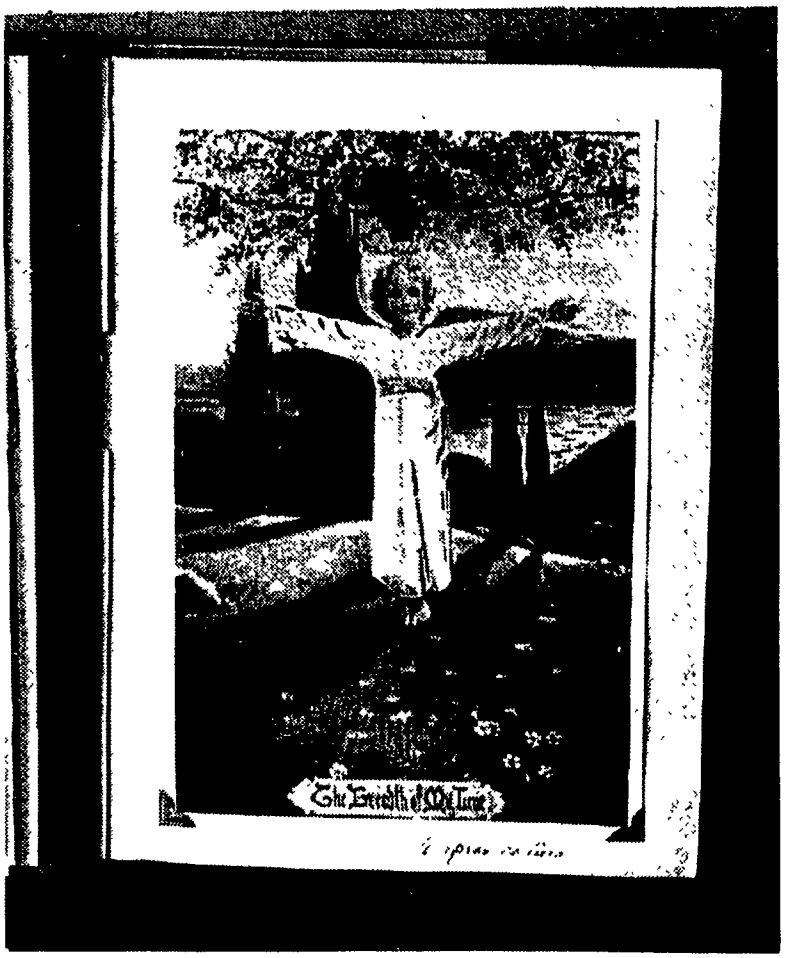


Figure 87.

The Breadth of my Love.
1905, study in watercolour after Collins.

Figure 88.

Priest with Monstrance.
oil, lost.

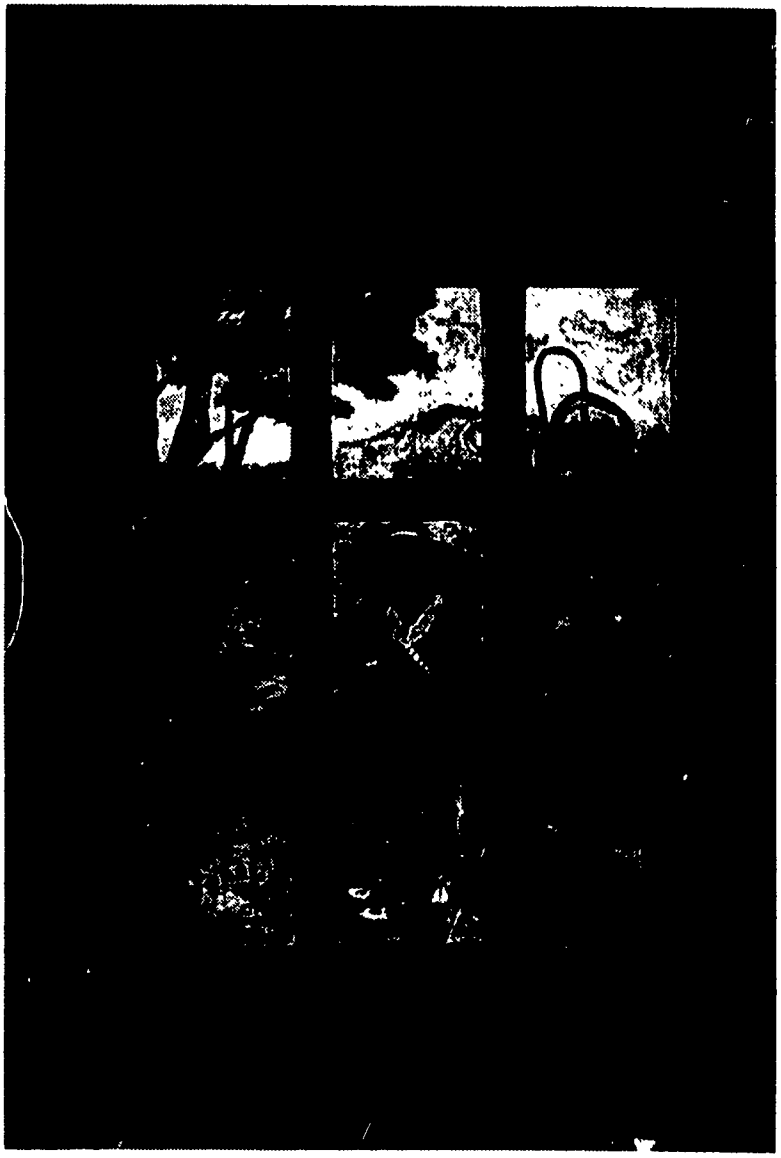


Figure 89a.

Little Bo-Peep.

Illustrations from nursery rhymes, painted by Mother Nealis on the glass of the refectory door. Atwater Ave., Montreal, ruined by 'restoration' in the seventies.

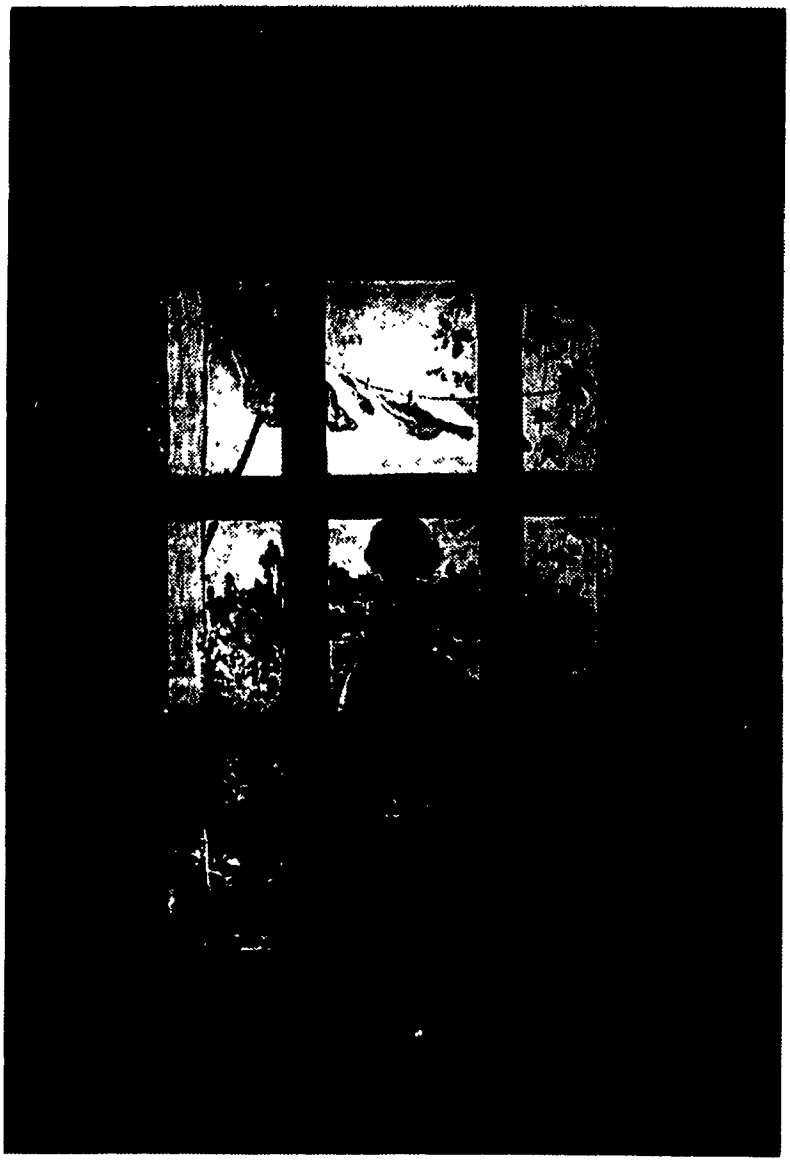


Figure 89b.

refectory door.

Figure 90.

Let the Little Children Come to Me.
watercolour study, as part of a series illustrating a book by 'Robin' (Catherine Blood RSCJ).

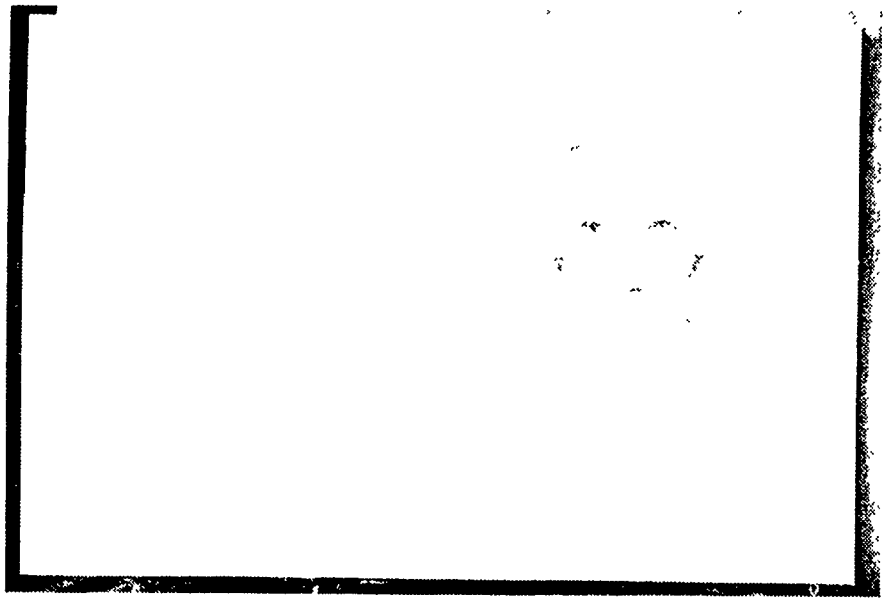


Figure 91.

Micheline.
15 Janvier, 1940, pencil sketch, unsigned.

Figure 92.

The Parish Church of Ste. Madeleine Sophie.
(Gouin Blvd.) signed, undated, Montreal.

Figure 93.

<u>Angel</u>.
unsigned undated, watercolour study, 9" X 15", Montreal.

Figure 94.

Jeanne Jougon.
1938, watercolour, Montreal.

Figure 95.

The Mackintosh Madonna.
Raphael, oil, National Gallery, London.

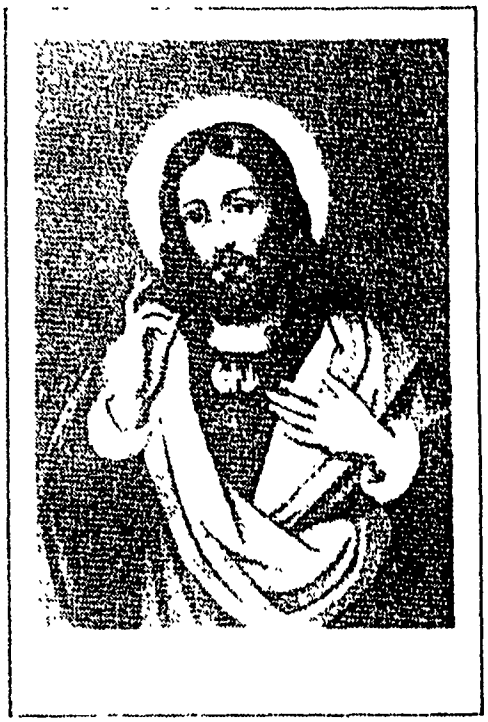
Figure 96.

Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints.
detail, Fra Angelico, fresco, San Marco, Florence.

Figure 97.

Pieta.
Fra Angelico, fresco, Cloister of San Marco, Florence.

29. *Aimé soit partout le Sacré Cœur de Jésus* (recto)
Polychrome, 7 × 11 cm, vers 1915, Paris, France
« Promesses de N.-S. J.-C. à la B. Marguerite-Marie en faveur des personnes dévouées à son divin Cœur » (verso).



28. *Le sacré cœur de Jésus* (recto)
Polychrome, 6,5 × 9,8 cm, vers 1910, Italie

Figure 98.

Deux images dévotes du Sacré Coeur. Lessard, P. Les petites images dévotes, U. de Laval, 1981. p.68.

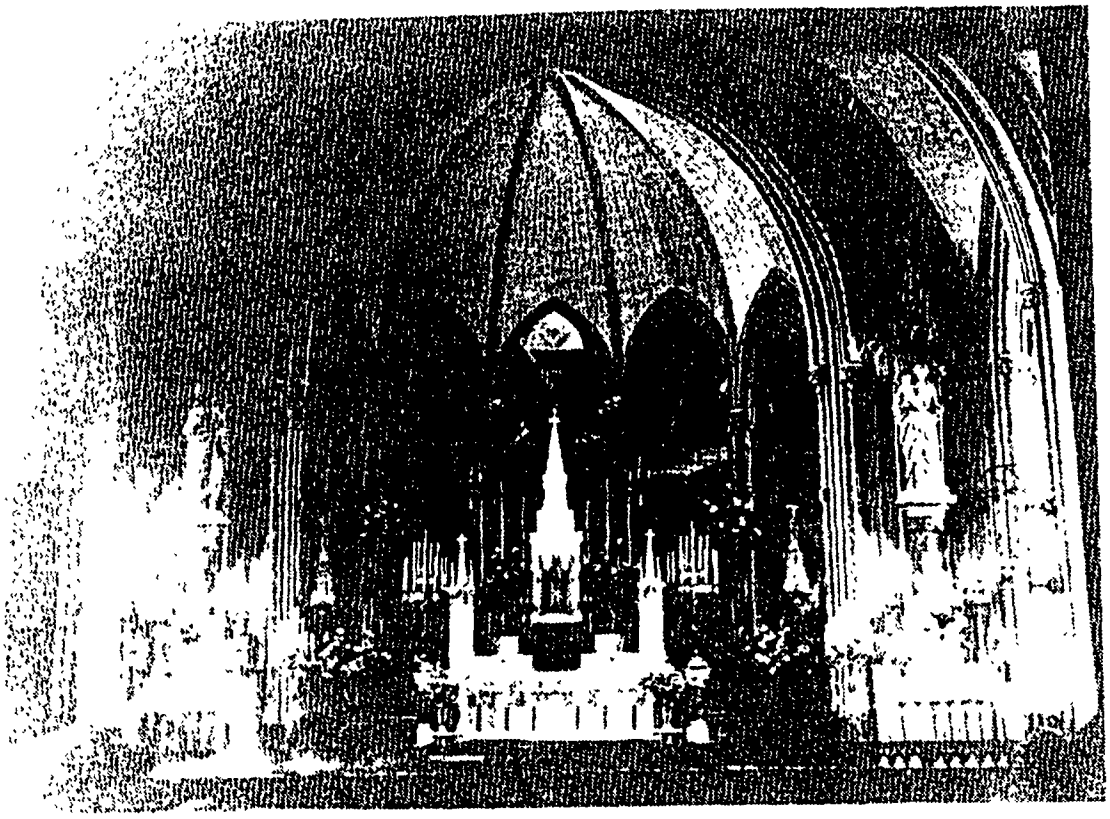


Figure 99.

The Sacred Heart Chapel in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as decorated by Ozias Leduc in 1904, photograph, Halifax.

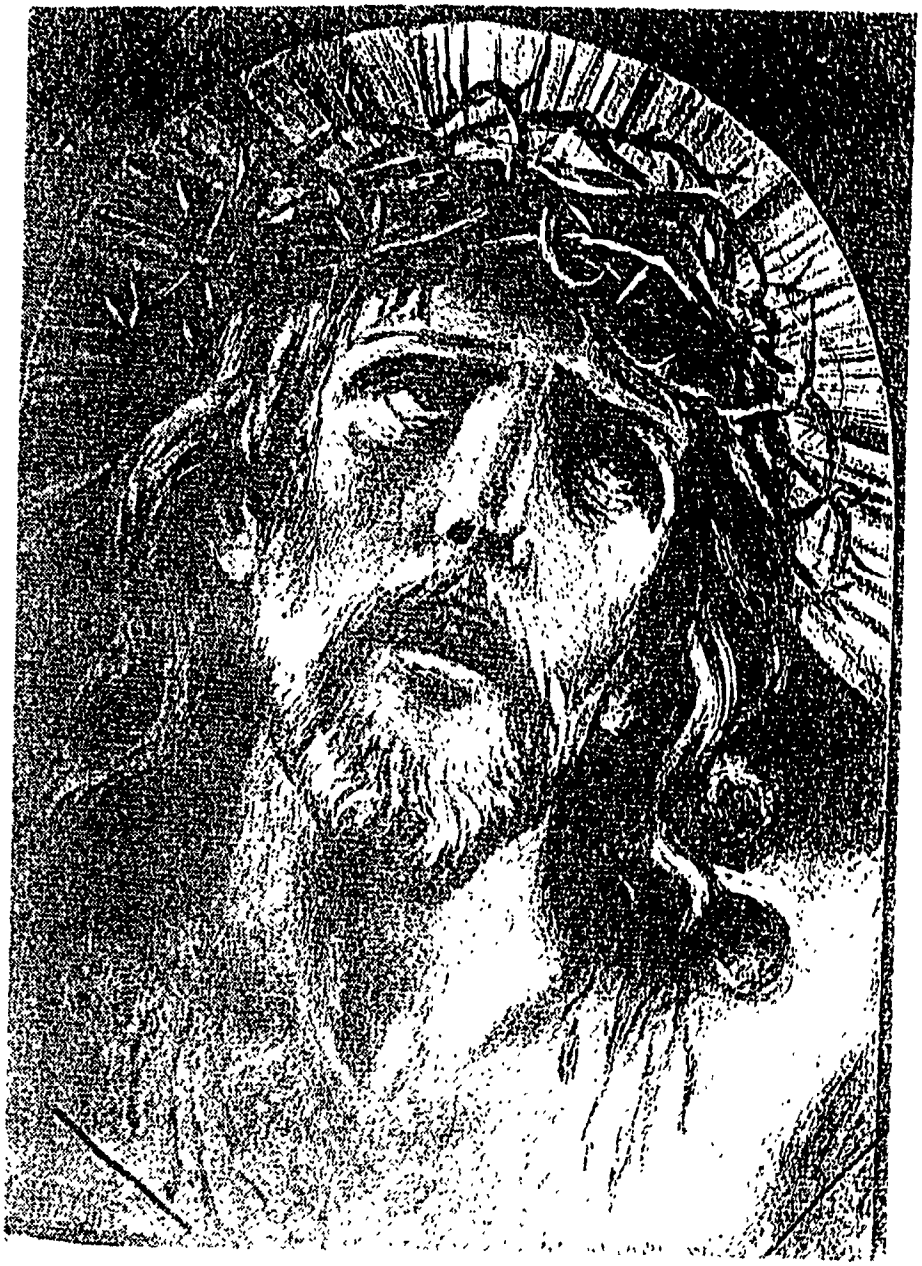


Figure 100.

Faith.
1929, oil on canvas, lost.

Figure 101.

The Assumption.
1939, oil, lost.

Figure 102.

The Sacred Heart.
1939, watercolour, lost.

Figure 103.

St. Veronica.
1916, oil, copied from Jansenius, lost.

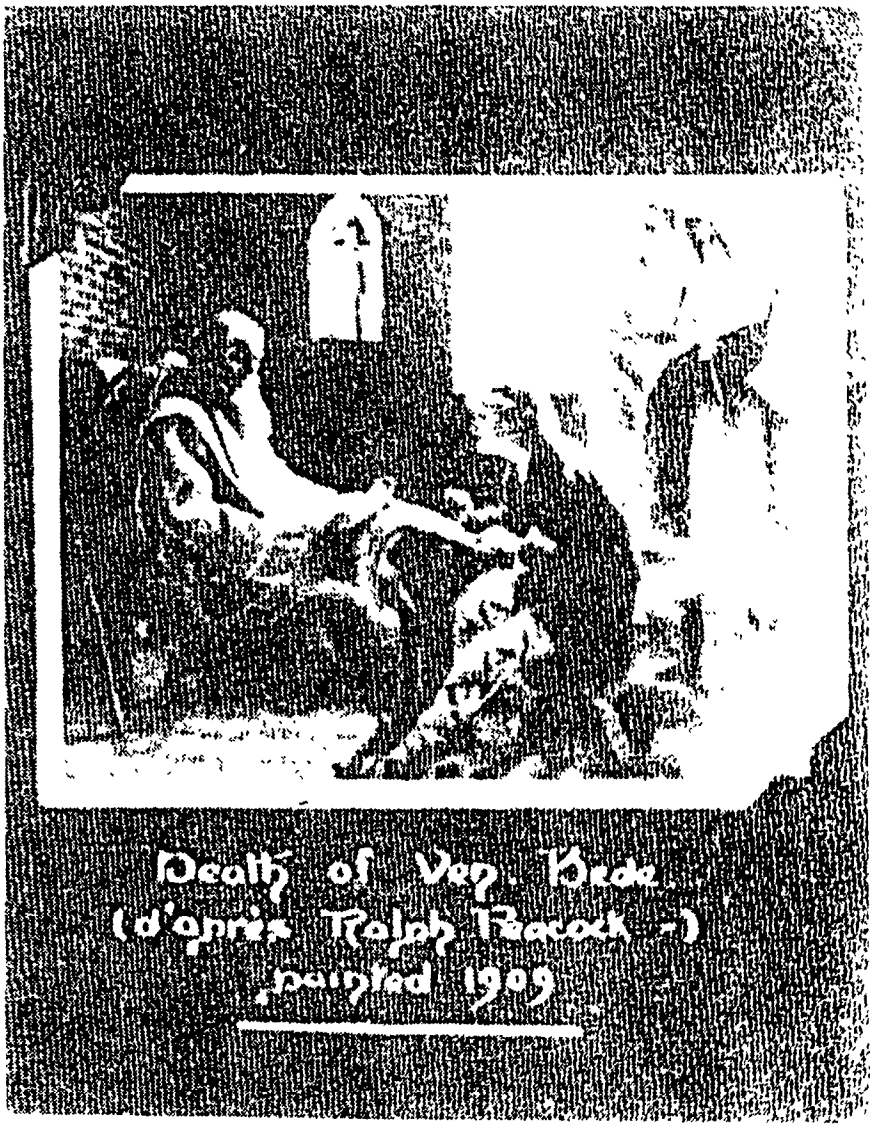


Figure 104.

Death of the Venerable Bede.
1909, oil, after Peacock, lost.

Figure 105.

Queen of the Rosary.
Late 1940s, oil on canvas, original lost, lithographed.

CHRONOLOGY

1876, December 9th.	Margaret Mary Nealis is born in Fredericton, New Brunswick and educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart and Mount Pleasant Academy in New Brunswick.
1897, October 18th.	Pronounces simple religious vows.
1898-1902	At the Saced Heart Convent, in Halifax, Nova Scotia.
1903, March 4th.	Arrives in Paris for Probation.
1903, July 22nd.	Pronounces Solemn Religious Vows at the Motherhouse in Paris.
1903, August.	Arrives at the Sault-au-Récollet Convent on the North Shore of Montreal Island.
1919	Begins work on L'Apparition du Sacré Coeur à Ste. Marguerite-Marie, commisioned by the Order of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial, France.
1924	Paints altarpiece of the Canadian Martyrs for their cannonization in Rome.
1927	Paints the image of Kateri Tekakwitha.
1929, June 23rd.	Fire destroys most of the Sault Convent and the School.
1932,	Paints Vita Mundi, the first painting to be lithographed for public distribution by J.F. Topp.
1953,	Celebrates Golden Jubilee.

1957, November. Hospitalised as a result of a broken hip.

1957, December 17th. Mother Nealis dies at age 81 in Sacré Coeur Hospital, Montreal

APPENDIX 1.

En 1893, quand Mère Pauline Perdreau achevait sa dernière "Mater", une élève du Sacré Coeur de New Brunswick peignait sa première copie de cette image. La jeune artiste prenait des leçons de peinture de Mère Blunt, ancienne élève de la Mère Perdreau. Le peintre de Mater Admirabilis fut ainsi lié à Mère Nealis, l'artiste de l'Enfant Jésus.

Margaret Mary NEALIS, la septième enfant de M. et Mme Nealis, naquit le 9 décembre 1876, à Fredericton et fut baptisée le 17, en la cathédrale. "Mon père, a-t-elle écrit, était le plus jeune d'une nombreuse famille irlandaise qui émigra en Amérique vers 1845. Ma mère, Jean Wilkinson, fille d'un ingénieur civil, fut élevée sévèrement dans la religion anglicane, mais Dieu lui fit le don de la foi accompagné de celui de force pour supporter l'opposition de sa famille. Trois ans après ma naissance, mes parents allèrent habiter St Jean, New Brunswick. Voulant procurer une éducation catholique à ses enfants, mon père envoya mes frères au Collège Notre-Dame. Mary et moi étions pensionnaires au Sacré Coeur; nous y fîmes notre 1ère Communion. En 1890, le Sacré Coeur fut formé. nous continuâmes nos études à "Mount Pleasant" au milieu d'un paysage féerique, mais le vieux couvent nous manquait toujours.""La charmante personnalité de Margaret Mary, note une contemporaine, lui attirait de nombreuses amies. Son talent fut bientôt reconnu: elle peignit un grand tableau du Sacré Coeur qui fut placé au-dessus de l'autel."

En juillet 1895, un mois après sa sortie du pensionnat, Mère Nealis entra au noviciat à Montréal, où Mère Plamondon était maîtresse des novices. Une élève de ce temps écrit à ce propos:"Lorsque j'arrivai au pensionnat à l'âge de dix ans, les novices attiraient beaucoup mon attention; Mère Nealis me paraissait des plus ferventes et depuis ce temps je l'eus toujours en grande estime. Toujours la même, souriante, aimable, pleine d'humour devant les difficultés et les situations parfois pénibles, elle gardait toujours son sang-froid, et un fin sourire montrait bien qu'elle comprenait ce qui n'était pas de notre goût; mais elle remettait tout en ordre par sa douceur surnaturelle. Jamais elle n'aurait blessé ou blâmé personne. Pendant les récréations, sur un morceau de carton ou un bout de papier, de vrais petits chefs-d'oeuvre surgissaient sous ses doigts habiles. Sa douceur inaltérable même avec les enfants indisciplinées, sa bonté indulgente à leur endroit lorsqu'il s'agissait de leurs notes de semaine, firent plus de bien, je n'en doute pas, qu'une stricte régularité, car tout procédait d'un coeur si surnaturel et si semblable à celui de son Epoux doux et humble."

Mais n'anticipons pas. Reprenons les notes de Mère Nealis:"Pendant mon noviciat, notre aumônier fut M. l'abbé Lamarche, futur évêque de Chicoutimi. Un jour qu'il nous demandait nos noms, il répéta"Nealis,"nihilis"...cela veut dire:moins que rien, n'est-ce pas?"Cette interprétation m'allait bien et me plut. Après mes 1ers Voeux, le 18 octobre 1897, j'enseignai le dessin et la peinture. J'avais 22 ans, deux années de plus que mes élèves. En 1898, je continuai mon aspirat à Halifax. En septembre 1902, notre Mère Digby vint, avec la Mère Stuart et ma Soeur Richardson et m'apprit que j'irai à Paris pour ma probation. Quittant Halifax en 1902, je fis un séjour de quelques mois à Kenwood, où je pris des leçons de peinture, puis à Montréal. De là, huit probanistes partirent pour la Maison Mère. Nous arrivâmes à Paris le 4 mars. Une fenêtre intérieure de ma cellule donnait sur la"chapelle du Crucifix", près du sanctuaire où S. Madeleine Sophie priait pendant des heures. Durant ma retraite de trente jours, je fis une esquisse détaillée de ma chambre et de plusieurs autres endroits. La R.M. du Chélas me dit d'en faire le plus possible parce que cette chère Maison Mère devait bientôt nous être enlevée. Le cardinal Richard présida la cérémonie de Profession, le 22 juillet 1903, puis je partis pour le Sault-au-Récollet."

Pendant vingt ans, employée à d'autres travaux que le dessin et la peinture, Mère Nealis n'eut pas encore de réputation artistique; la plupart de ses oeuvres étaient inspirées par des circonstances imprévues. Mais peu à peu, son talent se révéla et dès lors le nombre de tableaux qui sortirent de ses doigts est incalculable. Son pinceau était à la disposition de toutes; elle trouvait le temps d'enluminer la page d'un nouveau missel ou de transformer en fleur une tache d'encre sur la lettre de fête d'une petite fille à sa maman. En tout elle montrait une entière impersonnalité et une déconcertante humilité. N'importe qui pouvait la conseiller ou la critiquer; même les élèves pouvaient exprimer leur opinion et avoir la satisfaction de la voir y condescendre. Durant ces années, elle exerça à la communauté et au pensionnat un apostolat d'autant plus fructueux qu'il était caché et impersonnel. La simplicité unie à la prudence et à la discrétion , une égalité constante révélaient son intime union avec Notre-Seigneur. D'innombrables actes de charité émaillaient ses journées."L'abnégation semblait lui être si naturelle, écrit une Supérieure, que ce n'est que rétrospectivement que nous pouvons en apprécier

l'étendue. Son travail artistique était continuellement interrompu par l'appel des cloches; des visiteurs, des enfants et de la communauté, sans qu'elle montrât le moindre signe d'impatience."

Mère Nealis fut avant tout une religieuse aimant la vie de communauté, égayant nos récréations d'innombrables incidents, fruits de ses expériences personnelles, ou de ses lectures dans de nombreuses revues que lui adressaient ses amis les Missionnaires.

En. 1919, elle commença à travailler à ce qui devait une de ses peintures préférées et des plus répandues dans le monde: l'apparition du Sacré Coeur à Ste Marguerite-Marie. Une première esquisse fut soumise à l'approbation des religieuses de Paray-le-Monial, et assez sévèrement critiquée. Mère Nealis ne se découragea pas et reprit son travail, jusqu'à ce que les religieuses de Paray en fussent satisfaites au point de l'adopter comme modèle des images qui furent distribuées par millions, lors de la canonisation de Ste Marguerite-Marie. L'artiste elle-même refit au moins six fois ce tableau, non seulement pour nos couvents mais aussi pour plusieurs monastères de la Visitation.

Quand on s'occupa de préparer la cérémonie de canonisation des martyrs jésuites de l' Amérique du Nord, on demanda à Mère Nealis de peindre le tableau qui devait être dévoilé à St Pierre de Rome; il est maintenant au-dessus du maître-autel du sanctuaire des Martyrs Canadiens, à Midland, Ontario. Le 22 juin 1925, le Postulateur de la Cause lui écrivait:"Si vous aviez été à S. Pierre hier, vous auriez été fière de constater l'admiration de la multitude qui remplissait la Basilique, quand apparurent les huit martyrs tels que vous les aviez groupés sur l'immense toile,qui fut ensuite exposée aux 40 000 pèlerins réunis sur la place S. Pierre; votre labeur en aurait été récompensé. Aujourd'hui, cette image est distribuée à Rome. Ces petits détails peuvent vous faire plaisir. Vous méritez certainement de grandes faveurs de ces anciens héros que votre pinceau a rendu si populaires." Toutefois, cette image n'a pas échappé à la critique, parce qu'elle témoigne, chez Mère Nealis, d'une forte tendance à adoucir l'expression de ses personnages. Ainsi l'atmosphère de cette peinture n'est, dit-on, que de gloire et de triomphe, et sur le visage des huit héros groupés au centre, on ne voit aucune trace des souffrances qui leur ont mérité les palmes et les couronnes que les anges leur apportent! Mais, au bas du tableau, plusieurs petites scènes, habilement placées sur un fond de forêt du nord, rappellent de façon authentique, mais sans réalisme, le martyre individuel de ces Saints; et c'est à dessein que rien n'assombrit le visage de ces Bienheureux, maintenant dans la gloire.

Un ancien Provincial de la Compagnie écrit en apprenant sa mort:"Son humilité était remarquable, elle écoutait avec reconnaissance toute suggestion, et y accédait aimablement." Sa pureté d'intention fut aussi manifeste quand elle reçut la charge de portière qu'elle devait exercer pendant trente ans. Une jeune professe écrit:" Je vis Mère Nealis pour la première fois lorsqu'elle m'ouvrit la porte du Sault. Son accueil bienveillant, son aimable sourire, ses manières simples, m'impressionnèrent, témoignant de la joie et de la paix du cloître. Je vécus avec elle plus tard comme aspirante; je vis alors qu'elle etait en vérité une vraie religieuse" au seul regard."Son accueil ne variait jamais, parce qu'elle saluait Jésus en toute rencontre. Elle avait une prédilection pour les pauvres et les secourait maternellement, essayant de satisfaire les désirs de chacun. Pardonnant tout, elle

rendait à ses protégés le sens de leur dignité en les traitant avec une exquise politesse.

Après l'incendie du Sault en 1929, Mère Nealis reprit ses emplois dans des conditions beaucoup plus difficiles. Ses oeuvres commençaient alors à être mises en circulation, sous forme d'images pieuses. A l'occasion d'une réception au pensionnat, le Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la province de Québec visita la maison. Au studio, il fut très frappé par un tableau de l'Enfant Jésus regardant un oiseau perché sur son index gauche, tandis que de la main droite, il tient un bouquet de marguerites, symbole dont la Mère se servait souvent pour signer ses oeuvres. Voyant son admiration, on lui en offrit une copie qu'il accepta avec reconnaissance. Il insista pour que l'image fût popularisée. Grâce à l'intervention d'un lithographe émérite, Mr Topp, les oeuvres de Mère Nealis furent alors vulgarisées et répandues par millions dans le monde entier. De nombreux missionnaires disent le bien que ces simples images font à leurs néophytes.

Notre T.R. Mère de Lescure les distribuait dans ses voyages. De la Maison Mère, on écrivait à Mère Nealis: "Notre Mère a donné tant d'images du Sacré Coeur que la provision envoyée dernièrement est presque épuisée. Aussi vous serait-elle très reconnaissante de bien vouloir lui faire un nouvel envoi de ces images, car elle les aime beaucoup. Elles parlent tellement aux yeux et sont si prenantes pour l'âme qu'elle les répand le plus possible. Là où elles pénètrent, c'est le Coeur de Jésus qui entre et qui est plus aimé. Quelle n'a pas été la consolation de Notre Mère d'apprendre, ces jours-ci, qu'une famille de domestiques protestants, de Woldingham, à qui elle a donné à son passage une image du Sacré Coeur, s'est sentie, en la regardant, tellement attirée par la grâce, qu'actuellement le père et la mère se font instruire de la religion catholique, et ils ont déjà fait baptiser leur petite fille. Combien de grâces le Coeur de Jésus n'aura-t-il pas répandues par vos images, inspirées par l'amour!" L'amour, il fut assurément l'inspirateur de cette longue vie de dévouement. Le jubilé d'or de Mère Nealis, célébré en 1953, fut pour sa famille religieuse et ses amis, l'occasion de lui témoigner leur admiration et leur gratitude. Nous ne rappellerons pas tous les détails de ces fêtes jubilaires. Résumons plutôt les témoignages reçus sur les vertus de la jubilaire.

Artiste, elle l'était dans l'âme, et cela à la manière d'un "self-made-man". Elle avait eu peu de maîtres pour la former, ou la "déformer". Elle apercevait en tout le reflet de Dieu, puis "peignait avec son âme, plus qu'avec son pinceau", comme l'a dit d'elle notre Mère de Lescure. Or les qualités de son âme n'étaient pas minimes.

La note dominante de sa vertu était indubitablement la charité; et de là son égalité de caractère son oubli de soi, son extraordinaire adaptation aux lieux, aux choses, aussi bien qu'aux personnes qui entraient en contact avec elle. Tandis qu'elle-même était toujours prête à se déranger pour obliger tous ceux qui avaient recours à son inépuisable complaisance, elle semblait ne pas s'apercevoir des manques d'égards envers elle, ni même du sans-gêne avec lequel de petites étourdies manipulaient ses fournitures de bureau ou de peinture.

Son inlassable complaisance était si universellement mise à contribution, qu'il fallait se munir d'une autorisation "supérieure" pour que Mère Nealis ait, en conscience, la permission de rendre le service demandé.

Sa souplesse devant les circonstances extérieures étonne encore, quand on sait comment furent peintes plusieurs de ses compositions: c'était au milieu des conti-

nuelles interruptions inhérentes à son emploi de portière, dans une lumière souvent défectueuse, sur des morceaux de carton ou de toile de fortune.

Il était entendu qu'au Studio de peinture , l'ordre et le silence étaient un peu mitigés, mais le ton et les manières des plus étourdies s'adoucissaient, au contact de cette Mère que nulle n'eut voulu contrister et que toutes regardaient comme une sainte. Elle rayonnait vraiment Celui qu'elle avait si souvent tenté de reproduire dans ses peintures. On aimerait suivre le développement de la vie intérieure de cette parfaite religieuse; mais elle, qui gardait précieusement les moindres bouts de crayon, de papier, etc., ne laissa que deux petits carnets de notes spirituelles: résumés de retraites, fragments de poésies, extraits de lectures. Par le témoignage de sa vie, nous voyons que ce ne sont pas tant les lumières, qu'une grande fidelité, qui conduit à l'intimité avec Notre-Seigneur. Il est évident, par quelques notes éparses, que sa sérénité et son parfait oubli d'elle même étaient le fruit d'une longue abnégation.

En vraie artiste, elle était portée à la tristesse, et ressentait particulièrement l'affection ou la moindre froideur. Sur une image représentant un prêtre à l'élévation, on lit ces mots tracés par la R. Mère du Chélas: "Je vous ai tout offert". C'est ainsi qu'une amoureuse adhésion à la volonté de Dieu dans les détails de la vie commune, rendit Mère Nealis "hostia cum Hostia".

Quelques années avant son jubilé d'or, Mère Nealis se fractura le col du fémur. Elle se remit assez pour reprendre son emploi de portière, mais en novembre 1957 elle fit une seconde chute, et fut transportée d'urgence à la clinique où des tentatives chirurgicales ne firent qu'aggraver le mal; au milieu des souffrances et séparée de sa chère communauté, Mère Nealis ne perdit jamais sa sérénité, son oubli d'elle même, son humour, ne songeant qu'à adoucir la peine de ceux qui l'entouraient. Les médecins et les gardes malades ne purent la soulager, mais s'édifièrent de la parfaite sérénité qu'elle conserva jusqu'au dernier moment. Elle s'éteignit doucement le 17 décembre 1957, 81ème anniversaire de son baptême. Notre-Seigneur a dû se présenter à elle avec ce visage serein et joyeux, tel qu'elle l'avait si souvent représenté.

Restant unies à celles qui nous ont quittées pour un monde meilleur, nous ne pouvons que dire avec elles: "Que rendrons-nous au Seigneur pour les bienfaits dont Il nous a comblées?"

Nous sollicitons la bénédiction de Notre Mère pour nous aider à payer notre dette de reconnaissance.

Nombre des élèves : 180
Retraitantes : 273

APPENDIX 2.

Le Sault-au-Récollet, le 21 avril 1940

Révérende Mère Néalis,
des Religieuses du Sacré-Coeur,
Sault-au-Récollet.

Très Révérende Mère,

Permettrez-vous à l'un des petits frères de St-Gabriel, - vos voisins du Sault-au-Récollet - de vous adresser quelques mots?

Permettrez-vous à un humble mais bien sincère admirateur de vos magnifiques réalisations artistiques de vous dire combien il envie le bien que vous faites aux âmes de ceux qui ont le bonheur de prier, de méditer devant le tableau "Vita mundi", devant la mystique "Mater mea", devant "Propter nos".... "Propter nos", ce chef-d'oeuvre de Gabriel où se trouve peint en traits inégalables le total... le divin abandon de l'adorable Marie se livrant en victime "Propter nos" à la miséricorieuse Justice de son Père.

Je ne mentionne pas les autres...votre "Jésus adolescent" qu'il ne faut point comparer à celui d'Hoffman puisque deux idéals tout à-fait différents les ont fait réaliser; et,....si bellement réaliser! la délicieuse scène de la "Mère cassée" réussissant à centrer l'intérêt d'un tableau ravissant sur un aussi humble objet; et, cela, sans froisser le moins du monde. Loin de là!

Je m'arrête, Très Révérende Mère, pour vous déclarer l'objet de ma lettre. Je suis le frère recruteur des Frères de St-Gabriel, frère visiteur qui passe de classe en classe dire aux enfants: "Pensez à votre avenir; priez le bon Dieu de vous dire à chacun sur quelle route de la vie il vous attend; priez-le de vous faire connaître votre vocation!" Ton mesure transmis, je pars. Mais, si je ne laisse rien, mes paroles ne passeront-elles pas avec moi? Je l'ai cru et pour tenter d'obvier à cet inconvénient, j'ai semé les images les plus suggestives que j'aie pu trouver: j'ai semé des "Jésus adolescent" par milliers. Et, je rêvais pour l'un prochain d'un "Petit Jésus frappant à la porte." Vous connaissez, sans aucun doute l'image française que je vous envoie. Le "Christ frappant à la porte" est très bien mais outre qu'il est introuvable en couleurs, il n'intéresse pas autant les enfants que le ferait un "Jésus Adolescent frappant à la porte". La seconde image est de fabrication italienne...figure sans caractères. Alors que n'ai-je une de vos productions

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