

THE PENSIONNAT ASSOMPTION: RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN A FRANCO-ALBERTAN BOARDING SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, 1926-1960

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Universal, compulsory schooling in the Western world has generally been equated with the good of society and has been acclaimed as an important milestone in civilization's long march to progress. Until recently, the extension of schooling opportunities to women, especially at the post-primary level, was indisputably held to have contributed to their emancipation. It was believed that their admission to the educational structure which had favoured men for centuries served to redefine the image and the role of women and weakened the conventional barriers to career and economic opportunities.

Recent historical and sociological studies on women and education have pointed out, however, a more complex relationship between schooling and the status of women.¹ While formal schooling has undoubtedly contributed to the independence of some women and expanded career opportunities for others, just as frequently it has limited women's expectations by reinforcing traditional values and the status quo. In fact, one of the constants in the education of women until recently was the necessity to mould them to fit socially ascriptive roles based on culturally defined, supposedly natural "feminine" values. In turn, the different and usually inferior education given women was justified by claims that they were being prepared to fulfil a designated role that was naturally theirs because, first of all, it was biologically determined, and secondly, it was embedded in the cultural heritage of a society. A case in point was the education of girls in a private Franco-Albertan convent school, the Pensionnat Assomption, during the years 1926-1960. This paper will attempt to illuminate the ways in which the school prepared young women to accept their "proper place" in society and how it assured the allocation of traditional gender roles.

The study begins with the creation of the school and ends in 1960, a year marked by expansion and change for the Pensionnat Assomption. Renovations to the building increased the enrolment capacity from approximately 160 students to more than 400. To ensure maximum attendance, the school began accepting an increasing number of English-speaking girls of French Canadian origin. Although this bilingual educational experiment was short-lived, it served to accelerate the integration of the private francophone school into the predominantly English separate school system, a process that was complete by 1966. These developments greatly modified the nationalist and religious education that had characterized the school during its first thirty-four years.²

Before proceeding to the elaboration of the ideological structure and content of the girls' education, it is necessary to outline briefly the political, social, and religious factors that spurred the foundation of the school. The analysis neces-

sarily has to reach back to the period of the ascendancy of clerico-nationalism in Quebec, for the emphasis on schooling as a primary agent in the maintenance of the Catholic and French Canadian identity was consequent on the political, social, and economic reorganizations of mid-nineteenth-century Quebec. The belief in the invaluable function of the school to assure *la survivance* subsequently accompanied the development of the school system in the prairie West.

The convergence of a series of circumstances and events in mid-nineteenth-century Quebec allowed the Catholic church to gain ascendancy over many sectors of society. The political reorganization following the 1841 Act of Union, the creation of the dual educational system, and the conservative reaction of French Canadians to the threat of assimilation set the stage for the clerical offensive. A number of other factors such as the depressed economic situation of rural areas and the social problems associated with an accelerated rate of urbanization also contributed to the church's accession to power. Continually invigorated by new members, this strong church energetically promoted its control of education and social welfare. In schools, churches, and through the press, the clergy persistently argued that as guardian of the faith, the direction of these services was a natural extension of the Catholic church's duties and responsibilities.

In Quebec, the church had always advocated a central role for religion in the lives of the people, but only in the nineteenth century did it extend the association of religion and nation to claim that the very existence of the race depended on the survival of the Catholic faith. As Marta Danylewycz writes in *Taking the Veil in Montreal*, the church appropriated the nationalism of the Patriotes, "purged it of its liberal and democratic components and grafted it to the clergy's view of French Canadian Catholicism."⁴ Working from this perspective, the church hierarchy set up an elaborate programme to counteract English Canadian and American influences and to guarantee *la survivance*.

The clerico-nationalist ideology and strategies for the survival of the French Canadian nation underwent few modifications for this period of more than a century—from 1840 to 1960. Both the clerical and lay elite expounded an ideology based on the glorification of the past, a time when French Canadians were masters in their land. And especially valued were those cultural particularities considered to have prevented assimilation. The clerico-nationalists advocated the return to a rural life based on agriculture, the preservation of the large family, the maintenance and purification of the French language, and the re-adoption of religious values and morals attributed to the pioneers and heroes of New France.⁵

Women figured prominently in this ideological construct. This naturally followed from the assumption that the family, especially the rural family, constituted the base upon which the nation was built and upon which rested the survival of French Canada. The central role of women as wives and mothers and as the preservers of religious values and cultural traditions had been greatly praised by ultramontane thinkers. These qualities, combined with women's

fertility which assured the physical continuance of the race, were held in such esteem as to confer upon maternity and motherhood quasi-mystical characteristics. Abbé Laffèche first outlined the role of women in nationalism in his 1866 publication on the family, church, and state, *Quelques considérations sur les rapports de la société civile avec la religion et la famille*. He derived his conception from the ultramontane doctrine on the family. The family, church, and nation were divinely ordered patriarchies following natural principles of authority. Just as the Pope had authority over the king and the king over man, so did man have authority over woman. Man's duties and responsibilities as head of the family, however, could not be fulfilled without the support of the spouse. She was thus called upon to maintain the hierarchical construct by acting as her husband's partner. As the educator of their children, she also supported the hierarchy by guaranteeing the reproduction of religious and moral values from generation to generation.⁶

To these traditional ultramontane precepts, Laffèche added nationalist elements. Women's role in the survival of the nation was central as a result of the pivotal nature of her role in the family. And those same female characteristics of devotion, selflessness, and renunciation that served to maintain the natural social order allowed women to be particularly successful in the propagation of the race and in the preservation of language and culture. For the next century nationalists repeated a similar conception of the role of women in French Canada.⁷

This ideal of woman was carried to the western frontier by the francophone clergy and settlers as they established communities in the Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, and Saint Albert areas. By 1885, French Canadians constituted the majority (60%) of the non-Indian population of the region.⁸ Their presence was recognized in the North-West Territories Act of 1875. This legislation contained provisions for the establishment of separate schools in keeping with section 94 of the British North America Act.⁹ An amendment in 1877 made French and English official languages of the courts and territorial council. Religious and language rights were further strengthened by the school ordinance of 1884. Resembling the Manitoba School Act, this ordinance granted the North-West a dual school system on the Quebec model. The board of education consisted of twelve members divided between a Catholic and a Protestant section, each responsible for the management and inspection of its own schools, for licensing its teachers, and for the selection of textbooks.

By 1891, however, it became apparent that the bilingual promise of the North-West Territories Act could not be fulfilled as an influx of immigrants of various linguistic and cultural heritages to the area changed the status of the French-speaking population to that of a minority.¹⁰ The precarious linguistic and religious situation of the community was well understood by the church hierarchy. Bishop Grandin of Saint Albert sent impassioned pleas to the Quebec church asking the clergy to encourage emigration to the West to fortify the ranks so that "none would think of enacting extraordinary laws" potentially dangerous to

French Catholics.¹¹ The Quebec hierarchy, although sympathetic to the plight of western French Canadians, failed to respond appropriately to the requests. The church in Quebec discouraged emigration altogether. Any decline in the population, the hierarchy believed, threatened the survival of the French Canadian homeland itself.¹² Minorities outside were encouraged and expected to take action on their own behalf—resourcefulness and a high birth rate were the proffered solutions.¹³

An increase in the birth rate could not equal or stem the tide of non-French-speaking immigrants to the North-West. Nor could it prevent the backlash of English Protestant resentment and fear at what seemed to be a renewed French Canadian nationalism. Following the Riel Rebellion and the Jesuit Estates Act of 1888, the alliance between the ultramontane church hierarchy and John A. Macdonald's Conservative government that had thus far guarded French Catholic interests, proved unable to prevent the move by both Manitoba and the North-West to restrict the use of French.¹⁴ In 1892, the territorial assembly abolished the use of the language in the legislative chamber and as a language of instruction in both the public and the separate school systems. Subsequently, French was allowed to be taught only as a "primary course" for the first two or three years of schooling to children whose mother tongue was French.¹⁵

Between 1892 and 1905, a series of ordinances also placed numerous restrictions on separate schools. In 1892, education was centralized with the creation of a Council of Public Instruction replacing the denominational Board of Education. Teacher examination, certification, and school inspection became the responsibility of the Board as did curriculum planning and textbook selection. This legislation and the 1901 creation of the Department of Education were reaffirmed by the Autonomy Act of 1905 when the federal government granted Alberta and Saskatchewan provincial status.¹⁶ The influence of the clergy in educational matters was thus effectively curtailed. As a result, survival for French Canadian communities became dependent not so much on the political process as on the establishment and maintenance of organizations and institutions that promoted Catholicism, the French language, and French Canadian culture. The clergy encouraged the organization of associations that would foster unity and awaken nationalist sentiments in French Canadians. Among the earliest associations established was an Edmonton branch of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, as well as Alliance Nationale, Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-française, Le Cercle "Jeanne d'Arc," Le Club National, and Union Française de l'Alberta.¹⁷ In 1925, the Association Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta was created to represent the interests of the entire French-speaking population of the province.¹⁸ These groups were further supported by a number of French-Catholic newspapers, the most important of which was *La Survivance*.¹⁹

Although these organizations were necessary to reinforce the sense of national solidarity, they were not nearly as vital to the survival of language and religion as were schools. Until 1964, when legislation allowed the use of French

as a language of instruction from grades one to nine, French in schools had been restricted to one hour of instruction per day.²⁰ In separate schools, however, French-language instruction had continued surreptitiously or at least without government intervention during the first decade of the century.²¹ This flexibility came to an end shortly after 1910 with the appointment of McNally as Bishop of Calgary.²² The ascendancy of the English-speaking hierarchy signalled the beginning of the decline of the position of the French-speaking Catholic hierarchy in the West as well as a decrease in the number of French-speaking clergy in the schools and parishes of the area.²³ For the English-speaking clergy, French was a subject to be taught in schools, not a language of instruction. Thereafter, a complete education in French could only be obtained in private schools.

Established before World War I, these schools trained a new Franco-Albertan elite. In 1910, the Oblate order founded the Juniorat Saint-Jean and in 1913, the Jesuits opened the Collège d'Edmonton. Both institutions offered a classical education modelled on the Quebec system.²⁴ For girls, a decided lack of secondary schools existed until 1926 when, at the invitation of the French Canadian community, the sisters of the order of the Assomption de la Sainte Vierge of Nicolet, Quebec, established a boarding school in the city.²⁵ It was a teaching order already well known in Alberta. In 1894, three sisters had journeyed to Hobbema to run a boarding and day school for Indian children.²⁶ During the same period, the order had also founded a number of mission schools across the prairie provinces: in Alberta at Saint-Paul des Métis (1899) and Wetaskiwin (1912), in Saskatchewan at Onion Lake (1891), Battleford (1893), and Delmas (1901).²⁷ The order had originated in Quebec in 1853. It had been founded by Abbé Jean Harper and four young postulants expressly to answer the educational needs of a small rural parish in the diocese of Nicolet.²⁸ By the turn of the century, the order had 750 teachers in 83 schools across the province.²⁹

The avowed dedication of the Soeurs de L'Assomption to western Catholic minority groups, Indians, Métis, and francophones in predominantly Protestant environments influenced the French-speaking community's request for their services. The nuns made French a priority in their many educational endeavours, and were well prepared to fulfil the mandate set by the community.³⁰ In the first year of operation, sixty students registered and attended the Couvent de l'Assomption d'Edmonton, as the pensionnat was formally called. Approximately half of these students came from outlying French-speaking communities and were boarders at the school. The others resided in the city and attended as day students. Four teaching sisters looked after the educational needs of these scholars of grades one to ten. During the next decade, the higher grades 10, 11, and 12 were taught intermittently according to the demands dictated by student enrolment. After 1935, all grades were consistently offered.³¹ By 1960, the final year of the study, the school had a student population of 164 and employed eight teachers. Members of the teaching staff were mainly nuns belonging to the order. The school employed few lay teachers. One was hired in 1926 and others came on staff in 1939-40 and 1955-56.³² As a rule, a lay teacher was employed only

when the order could not find a qualified nun to fill the position and was released as soon as one was found.³³

It is important to note, at this point, the relatively small number of girls attending the pensionnat and the selective, limited character of the institution. The *1936 Census of the Prairie Provinces*, the most appropriate population data for the early years of the study, indicates that in 1936 there were 32,192 French-speaking Albertans, 5,077 of whom were school-age girls between the ages of five and nineteen years.³⁴ Given that the number of students at the school was less than 80 in 1936, it is possible to estimate the rate of enrolment as approximately 1.6% of the total number of Franco-Albertan school-age girls.³⁵ The figures for 1960, the closing year of the study, show a similar proportion: students of the pensionnat accounted for only 1.2% of the eligible female population.³⁶ The expense of tuition and boarding fees certainly deterred many parents from sending their daughters to the school. In 1926, externals were charged four dollars a month for tuition; boarders paid twenty dollars boarding and tuition fees. A better indication of the costs borne by parents are the 1961 rates. Externals and boarders paid a yearly admission fee of fifteen dollars and tuition fees of \$150. Boarding fees were an additional \$350 per month.³⁷ While attending the school was relatively inexpensive for externals, the costs were prohibitive for boarders. Francophone parents in Edmonton would not have been discouraged by the expense of sending a daughter to the pensionnat, but only daughters of the wealthier families living outside the capital city could have afforded to attend.

All girls at the pensionnat, whether urban or rural, rich or poor, had to adapt to life at the convent school and comply with the demands of the programme of studies, a programme which remained relatively unchanged during the period 1926-1960. The boarding school had been created as a response to the needs of the community—these varied slightly over the years—and had been given a clear mandate. The school was to equip young girls with the necessary intellectual and language skills in preparation for their future vocation as teachers in French-speaking communities. A circular requesting financial support from parishioners stated these explicit goals of the school. "De cette institution devront sortir les jeunes personnes formées et préparées à aller elles-mêmes enseigner dans nos paroisses de langue française et dans les groupes canadiens éloignés ou isolés."³⁸

To accomplish this objective, the girls, first of all, had to gain entrance and graduate from one of Alberta's normal schools. The pensionnat, therefore had to offer a curriculum which fulfilled the exigencies of the province's Department of Education while providing at the same time the pedagogical direction and the cultural environment that would promote the use and enhance the knowledge of the French language.

Drawing from years of educational experience in Quebec and from the already well-established links between the order and Laval University, the directors of the pensionnat sought to affiliate the school's programme of studies with the Quebec university.³⁹ Permission was obtained during the first year of

the school's operation and the university was thus allowed to "cover with its authority the programs of studies, improve these programs [and] co-ordinate plans and methods."⁴⁰ As in Quebec convent schools, the course of study offered was the *cours universitaire primaire-supérieur*, leading to the completion of the first cycle of the classical education program. The affiliation would not only assure "a good pedagogical orientation and a sound intellectual and moral formation," the certificate granted would allow the student entrance to Quebec normal schools, to the advanced classical education offered in a number of convent schools, and, during the 1950s, to the universities.⁴¹

A number of innovative practices were required from the students and staff of the pensionnat to satisfy the pedagogical and curriculum requirements of both the Alberta Department of Education and the Quebec university. Although only one hour of French per day was allowed according to the educational provisions of 1925, the school offered all instruction in French. As reported by a sister superior in 1966, "à l'exception de l'anglais, toutes les matières s'enseignaient en français."⁴² This fact, of course, was concealed from government officials. Inspectors' reports made reference to only two half-hour periods of French per day, from nine to ten o'clock each morning.⁴³ Even the version presented in the French-language press did not reveal the full extent of the subterfuge. It described the school as bilingual, yet claimed that what was taught was "du half and half."⁴⁴

The discrepancies in the programme as a result of the use of French as a language of instruction did not go unnoticed by the inspectors. The first to visit in 1928 declared that students were weak in English composition. The comment was again repeated in the 1930 report.⁴⁵ Over the years, a few inspectors expressed their dissatisfaction with the extent of French spoken in the school.⁴⁶ Overall, however, their praise far outweighed their critical comments and reports were usually complimentary. They rated the facilities available to the students as especially good. Laboratory supplies were reported to be "particularly extensive and well chosen," and the school made "excellent provision in the way of materials for the classes in Biology."⁴⁷ The home economics department was also considered to be "excellently furnished."⁴⁸

In later years, the reports of the inspectors were no less laudatory. They often praised the quality of instruction as well as the equipment and programme of studies. Most of the teachers, by 1962, held Alberta teaching certificates. Instruction, the inspectors noted, was "always reasonably good and frequently better than average."⁴⁹ They rated the "achievement of pupils in English language and reading [as] at least up to the average in outside schools," despite the fact that a few teachers had "not yet mastered the English accent in so far as pronunciation [was] concerned."⁵⁰ They advised these teachers to "take special pains with their accents" and to "familiarize themselves with the Alberta curriculum."⁵¹ Although critical at times of the pervasive influence of French in the programme, the inspectors' reports show that they were generally well disposed toward the school. They recognized the school's excellence and their comments

reflected their approval. The school's record as a superior educational institution, in turn, probably prevented the Department of Education from interfering in its management.

Combining the Alberta curriculum, described by one of the sisters as based on the study of the sciences, with the classical education of Quebec, grounded in religion and literature, required as much skill as did maintaining good relations with officials and bureaucrats from the Department of Education.⁵² The amalgamation produced a unique programme of study. Mathematics; algebra, geometry, and the sciences; chemistry, physics, and biology including botany, zoology, and agriculture were taught according to the guidelines provided by the Alberta Department of Education and corresponded to the subjects offered in other Alberta high schools. These courses satisfied the scientific requirements of the Quebec cours universitaires and equivalent credits were granted by Laval University.⁵³ The teachers of the pensionnat used the recommended English texts supplemented by French-language material endorsed by the Quebec institution. Often unable to find textbooks covering all of the prescribed curriculum, the nuns had to draft suitable French manuals themselves.

A 1927-28 timetable for the higher grades reveals that much of the school day was devoted to the study of the French language, literature, and culture using the traditional methodologies of classical education.⁵⁴ The study of philosophy, ancient history, Latin, and the literary classics served as a framework for all forms of higher knowledge. Philosophy, ethics, logic and apologetics, the history of the church, religion and catechism, French grammar, composition, the study of literary precepts and of the masters of French and French-Canadian literature were the essential components of the programme. A teacher summarized it thus: "nous poursuivons dans toute la profondeur possible l'étude de la religion, philosophie et littérature."⁵⁵ To this was added the history of France, of Quebec and Canada, geography and civics. Physiology, hygiene, and physical training were also part of the curriculum. And domestic education classes were included from the very first year of the school's operation: students were given training in the skills of cooking, housekeeping, sewing, and knitting. The arts—drawing, singing, and music—formed another important component of the programme. Singing was incorporated in many classtime and extracurricular activities. The school choir participated in both French and English festivals such as the Kiwanis and gained a reputation of excellence in the city. In 1964, the 140-voice choir accompanied the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra in a musical production based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁵⁶ The majority of students took either private voice or piano lessons and sat for the University of Alberta and Ontario Music Conservatory examinations. To these programmes, as the years progressed, the school added a three-year commercial course with typewriting and stenography.⁵⁷ Within this syllabus was woven an elaborate programme of religious and nationalist education to prepare young girls for their future role in society.

The Soeurs de l'Assomption clearly articulated their conception of the role of women in society. They perceived women as primarily wives and mothers. Ninety percent of their students, they estimated, would marry. As the girls' mentors, the nuns had a responsibility to ensure that their charges were well prepared for their future functions as homemakers. "Quoi de plus essentiel pour la jeune fille," they wrote, "que de l'initier aux travaux de cuisine, de couture, à la bonne tenue d'une maison."⁵⁸ This training conformed to the parents' expectations: they also perceived housekeeping skills as a necessary and essential component of the complete female education. One parent expressed his gratitude to the nuns for his daughters' education: "Dans cette institution vous avez préparé nos filles pour une vie complète plutôt que de préparer ces élèves à gagner leur vie comme il se rencontre dans presque toutes les écoles publiques en Alberta."⁵⁹ A good education did not necessarily prepare a girl to enter the labour force. For her, life held a different promise.

And no instruction, the nuns affirmed, was more important to their charges' future well-being than a solid training in the domestic sciences. Initiation in the skills of cooking, sewing, and the proper care of the house, and the careful nurturing of the attendant qualities of cleanliness, thrift, resourcefulness, and self-sacrifice they advocated as the key to happiness for the prospective "gardienne du foyer."

Propreté, économie, débrouillardise, don généreux de soi: autant de vertus exigées par les humbles besognes matérielles du foyer, mais qui relève déjà de l'esprit et du coeur. Nos pensionnats se font un devoir de les donner à leurs élèves pour le bonheur futur de ses jeunes filles—car la femme qui les possède à déjà gagné...la confiance et l'admiration de son mari.⁶⁰

The girls echoed their teachers' understanding of a woman's happiness as being directly related to the husband's approval of her housekeeping functions. In a short article in the school newsletter *Assumpta* a grade nine student inadvertently explained the need for domestic education.⁶¹ She declared that domestic science, which taught students to embroider, knit, prepare interesting meals, and undertake the general upkeep of a house, was an appropriate subject for all young girls. In a few years, she added, the husband of an ex-student might thank the home economics teacher for the meticulous attention she gave to "comment faire une tarte." The link between the acquisition of housekeeping skills, pleasing a husband, and a woman's happiness had been clearly understood.

Nevertheless, it was still necessary to glorify "les humbles besognes matérielles du foyer" to make these menial tasks attractive to the girls.⁶² To accomplish this, the nuns invoked images from the past. During the weekly Avant-Garde meetings, a province-wide youth organization affiliated to Association Canadienne Française de l'Alberta, the students learned about the female heroines of New France. Although most of the noteworthy women of the period

were remembered for their purity and devotion to religious life, some, like Marie Rollet, were said to have been excellent cooks. Following their presentation on the life of this courageous pioneer, the students prepared dishes that Marie Rollet herself might have cooked.⁶³ By reproducing the work of their foremothers, the girls thus reassured themselves that their housekeeping duties could have heroic dimensions.

The traditional domestic tools of the housewife were romanticized to fit this grandiose image of housework. A report of a demonstration using an old iron heated on top of the stove described this appliance as "le vieux fer, vieillot et lourd,...passe comme une caresse...sur le voile des communiantes."⁶⁴ And in a song of the Cercle Jeanne L' Archevêque-Duguay, a literary club comprising the oldest students of the school, the girls expressed the desire to become skilled in the domestic arts of their ancestors. Again there was a romantic attachment to housework and to the ancient skills of the housewives of New France.

La main agile
Sachons conduire le métier
Et le rouet qui chante et file
La blanche laine à plein panier.⁶⁵

In this song, a prayer dedicated to Mary, Mother of God, the students also implored her to help them carry out their domestic burdens with a smile:

O douce image
Rayon béni sous notre toit
La tâche obscure du ménage
Devient facile auprès de toi.

Sachons sourire
Au plus modestes des travaux
Tenons gaiement la poêle à frire
Balais, plumeaux, crochets, ciseaux!⁶⁶

As the verses indicate, there was a recognition of the modest nature of housework and of the often unsung or ignored contributions of the housewife. But acceptance of their duties and fidelity to the past, the song continued, would confer glory upon women and bring honor to the nation.

Pour notre gloire,
Et pour l'honneur de ce pays
Suivons l'exemple méritoire
Des saintes mères de jadis.⁶⁷

Girls who later chose to marry could best fulfil their responsibilities to their church and nation and demonstrate their allegiance to the past through motherhood. The students were presented with the ideal of the large family.⁶⁸ There was no happier destiny for women than to have a house full of children, "la maison...embellie par de joyeux essais d'enfants."⁶⁹ The call for a high birth rate reflected the Catholic church's doctrine on the sanctity of the family and its condemnation of any form of birth control. There was, however, an unquestionably nationalist element to the insistence on large families in the Franco-Albertan community. Several articles in *La Survivance* expressed the views of the elite. One author deplored "le suicide d'une race" as a result of divorce and the use of birth-control methods.⁷⁰ Another praised large families and rejected the contention that geniuses and saints—and by the same token, leaders—were more likely to issue from smaller families that could provide better conditions for the growth and development of children. The author affirmed that the qualities of a hero could not develop in an environment suffused by the selfishness that drove parents to limit family size. "Peut-on affirmer qu'il sorte du fruit de l'égoïsme un génie intellectuel ou une volonté capable d'héroïsme."⁷¹

This statement reflected the preoccupation of clerico-nationalists and of the French-speaking collectivity for the creation of *des chefs*, an elite that would, in moments of crisis, save the nation and allow it to reach full cultural greatness and immortality.⁷² Women could not become *des chefs*; their different nature denied them leadership roles. In an article written to commemorate the pensionnat's twenty-fifth anniversary, the nuns quoted Thomas Aquinas to explain why women's nature prescribed for them a different mission. God, he had said, did not create Eve from the head of Adam for the very reason that he did not want her to become a leader: "il ne voulait pas qu'elle soit chef."⁷³ Her role, rather, was to be helpmate to her husband and to the leaders of *la patrie*.

This ideal was embodied in the heroic women of New France. They had been the strength, the inspiration, the discrete influence behind the valiant men who had founded and courageously defended this great nation.⁷⁴ A student recording a debate on the superiority of French-Canadian women in history eloquently described the admirable and supportive role played by women.

Combien de fois n'a-t-on pas dit: dans toute oeuvre de bien la prière et le sacrifice sont de première nécessité. Je crois fermement que sans les prières et les sacrifices de nos Jeanne LeBer, de nos Catherine de Saint-Augustin, de nos Jeanne Mance, de toutes nos religieuses, de toutes nos mamans, les hauts exploits de nos hommes n'auraient été qu'un feu de paille. On nous répète souvent aussi sur tous les tons—la part la plus importante dans une oeuvre, c'est celle qui se joue dans l'ombre, dans les coulisses—l'oeuvre cachée donc!...Vraiment qui a soutenu le courage de nos colons, de nos explorateurs, nos militaires si ce n'est nos femmes avec leurs délicates attentions, leurs bons mots, leurs sublimes conseils!⁷⁵

The strength of women lay in their greater religious fervour, in their ability to pray for others, to care for them and to counsel them. Their foremothers were not remembered for their accomplishments but for the unheralded support they freely granted others. In turn, the glorification of women's supportive historical role encouraged young girls to subordinate their talents to sustain the achievement of others—to support, in particular, male endeavours.

Strength and wilfulness were male characteristics and the necessary attributes of a leader. Love and compassion, "the qualities of the heart," on the other hand, enabled women to fulfil their supportive roles. The students understood the distinction and their special mission of supplying the nation with "des hommes de caractère, des femmes de cœur."⁷⁶ In an issue of the school newsletter, a grade eleven student exhorted her colleagues to accept their responsibilities as women and to prepare themselves for future action. "Savoir que nous sommes fortes ne suffit pas. Il faut agir. Refuserons-nous à notre pays des hommes, des citoyens forts, courageux, chrétiens? L'avenir dépend de nous, jeunes filles....Nous sommes les gardiennes de l'âme du Canada!"⁷⁷

It is not possible within the scope of this study to determine how well these particular students actually fulfilled their obligations. How many of them married? Did they bear children at an earlier age than other women? Did they produce large families? General statistics on the ethnic minority groups of the Prairie provinces may provide partial answers to some of these queries. A population study taken from the 1961 Census reveals interesting data on the fertility of western French-Canadian women. Based on a 20% population sample, the table charts the number of children born per thousand married women by age and ethnic group.⁷⁸ According to the data, French-Canadian women had more children than women of either English or Irish ethnic extraction. For example, at the time of the census, French-speaking women in the 20-24 year age group, the contemporaries of the last girls to graduate from the pensionnat for the period of concern in this study, had 1,588 children per 1000 women as compared to the 1,354 and the 1,444 children respectively of the women of English and Irish ethnic extraction.

The difference in fertility is more pronounced as the age of the women surveyed increases. French-Canadian women in the 35 to 39 year age group, the cohort of the graduates of 1941 to 1946, had 3,962 children compared to 2,904 children for the English and 3,067 for the Irish-Canadian women. Women in the oldest age group, the 50 to 54 year-olds and the contemporaries of the first graduates of the pensionnat, had 4,657 children as compared to 2,600 for women of British extraction and 2,646 for the women of Irish background. For every age group, differences were more pronounced in rural areas than in urban centres. The data not only indicate that the French-Canadian women of the Prairies had more children than western English-speaking women but that they also had more offspring than another predominantly Catholic group, the Irish. The figures also suggest that the French-Canadian birth rate was decreasing with each passing

generation but programmes such as that of the pensionnat did not reflect the trend. Perhaps it is not as important to measure empirically the effects of one small school as to see it as part of a vigorous rearguard defence of a vanishing world.

Child-bearing, while certainly the most natural and important female function, constituted but one facet of a woman's mission. Once a mother, she had the responsibility to educate her children and education, like maternity, was held to be within the natural scope of a woman's activities. A student repeated the words of Albert Tessier to express this notion of women's intuitive skills with children. "Une excellence propre à la femme, c'est la diffusion de la lumière! L'éducation apparaît comme son domaine naturel; elle s'y meut à l'aise et trouve d'instinct les formules de clarté et de persuasion."⁷⁹ And the training given the girls, the nuns asserted, would sharpen these natural predispositions. The feminine education appropriate for the mother and educator that stressed comprehending the essence of people and things rather than a detailed understanding of the subject matter, befitted all women.⁸⁰ It mattered little what vocation a woman chose, for in fact, all women had to become *des femmes de coeur*.

The nuns proposed to cultivate these "virtues of the heart" by teaching the girls the value of affection, tenderness, the ability to console and to understand, the patience to listen and to wait, and the courage to endure hardships. Young girls, they insisted, must be given responsibilities that required devotion and self-sacrifice, and demanded an heroic self-abnegation.⁸¹ They assured the girls that they would find happiness only by consecrating their lives to the welfare of others. "Vivez en vous dépendant pour le prochain, c'est à ce prix que vous récolterez le bonheur."⁸²

To help them live up to this ideal, the girls were presented with another model to emulate, that of the Virgin Mary. The pensionnat had been dedicated to the Vierge de l'Assomption, and the school celebrated all the religious feast days associated with Mary.⁸³ These festivities were numerous. In September, a typical month, the religious celebrations included the Nativité de Marie, Notre-Dame des Sept-Douleurs, Notre-Dame de la Salette, and Notre-Dame de la Merci.⁸⁴ Throughout the year, these were punctuated with *semaines mariales* and Mois de Marie, and even particular years such as 1957 were consecrated to Mary.⁸⁵ Through various activities such as the preparation of albums, posters, songs, the decoration of statues of Mary, processions, prayers, and meditation, the girls professed their dedication to the Virgin Mother.

Beginning in 1926, all girls at the pensionnat were officially consecrated as members of the Enfants de Marie.⁸⁶ This organization was similar in structure and purpose to other women's Marian societies that had been born as a result of the Quebec devotional revolution of the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁷ A catalyst of this revolution had been the promulgation in 1854 of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The proclamation of the miracle of the virgin conception strengthened the faith of Catholics in miracles and in the power of devotional exercises, so that the resolution of personal and social problems was frequently attributed to saintly intercession as a result of prayers or devotions to holy objects.

The devotional revolution was subsequently invigorated by the arrival of the Oblate order from France. Part of the fathers' mandate had been to extend and intensify the devotion to Mary and they proceeded to do this by founding Marian societies. A number of affiliated groups, the Enfants de Marie, soon made their appearance in convent schools. Members were urged to scorn modern forms of entertainment such as dancing, were encouraged to read only approved literature, and were expected to be pure, humble, serious, and hard-working. In summary, they were to pattern themselves after their model, Mary the Immaculate Conception.⁸⁸

What was the image of women represented by the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception? Marta Danylewycz in her study of Quebec religious orders provides a description of this ideal.⁸⁹ She claims that by the middle of the last century, in an effort to re-establish the influence of the church over a modernistic, secular world, the Catholic hierarchy was inclined to discount the fullness of Mary's humanity. Characteristics that in the past had been attributed to her, such as force, strength, love, warmth, and compassion, were ignored and instead the clergy focussed on her absence of sin, her passivity, and her obedience. Danylewycz adds that the image of Mary represented, supported, and fortified nineteenth-century ideas on women. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception, she continues, "cast women in the role of helpmate and sought to protect society from ideological currents and political movements challenging existing social divisions." Furthermore, it "elevated the role of social guardians and purifiers to unprecedented heights, while denying women the right to self-autonomy and equality."⁹⁰

At a special mass, the Enfants de Marie of the pensionnat consecrated their services to Mary, their patron. For the ceremony, they wore white as a sign of their purity. Once members, they had to observe the marian code that required them to declare their faith in the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception, the Divine Maternity, and the Glorious Assumption.⁹¹ Their membership also required them to fulfil certain other obligations such as reciting special prayers and wearing a miraculous medal of the Holy Mother and a scapular.⁹² During the weeks dedicated to Mary, the religious activities were multiplied and it was not uncommon for them to spend evenings in prayer and to recite "ave nombreux en montant aux salles de classes."⁹³

The girls were to pattern their lives on the virtues attributed to Mary. A student recording her thoughts following a consecration ceremony expressed the desire to attain the perfection of the woman incarnate, "que nos vies soient marquées de l'effigie d'une pureté angélique, d'une humilité profonde, et d'une charité incomparable."⁹⁴ On several occasions, visiting clergy reminded the girls of the importance of the cult of Mary and of women's role. In *La Voix de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge*, one of the school's many newsletters throughout the years, a student wrote of how the chaplain of the school, an Oblate priest, stressed the importance of the devotion to Mary and encouraged the girls to copy her virtues, especially her purity.⁹⁵ Another Oblate, at a graduating ceremony, spoke of the greatest contribution of women, prayer. "Finissantes,"

he said, "rappelez-vous que la femme n'est grande qu'à genoux...."⁹⁶ He was suggesting that the natural attitude of women was one of submission as well as one of adoration. A student unintentionally made the connection when describing the scene she imagined took place when the angel from heaven came to announce to Mary her divine mission as Mother of God. "C'est à genoux qu'elle reçut l'appel de sa sublime vocation; attitude de soumission adorante; mais c'est debout qu'elle en accomplit la grande immolation: attitude de vaillance, d'indicible courage, jusqu'au bout!"⁹⁷ There rested the ideal woman. She was one who dutifully accepted her fate and yet had the strength to sacrifice herself in the name of her mission.

By teaching the girls to deny themselves for the good of others, self-sacrifice being the fundamental virtue upon which a woman's mission depended, the nuns reinforced the traditional secondary and supportive role of women. They effectively were ensuring that in spite of their solid education, the girls never lost their "femininity." A woman's place was definitely in the home and the nuns constantly reaffirmed the primacy of the family in the lives of their students. To press upon them their future responsibilities as not only "la gardienne du foyer," but of its heart and soul, they exposed their students to conferences and lectures on the psychology of women and children and on child-rearing practices.⁹⁸ In addition, the nuns felt it necessary to permeate the pensionnat with a familial atmosphere. They referred to the complement of student and staff as *une famille étudiante*.⁹⁹ Similarly, the periodic evenings of entertainment at the school, consisting of skits, songs, and games, were known as *soirées familiales*.¹⁰⁰

Very little of the instruction a girl received was intended for her own specific ends. Even her physical and intellectual training was geared to mould her to fulfil the needs of husband, children, nation, and church. A well-educated woman, the nuns asserted, would be a better spouse and mother. By being able to follow "the intellectual pathways of her husband's mind," a wife became a more interesting and attractive companion.¹⁰¹ Her intelligence and knowledge she used to help direct her children's studies, to create a soothing environment and a comfortable home for the family. She held in her hands the emotional and physical well-being of husband and children so that she herself had to be in perfect health to look after their needs. To keep a healthy mind in a healthy body, the girls were given physical education training. According to the nuns, these exercises taught a young woman good posture and gave her an effortless grace that along with modesty enchanted those dear to her. And through their happiness, she would find her own joy and satisfaction.¹⁰²

Even singing, an activity the girls might have participated in for the sheer joy of it, was given a somewhat utilitarian purpose by the nuns. Singing, they said, was to firm up the mouth, improve pronunciation, and sharpen appreciation for the beautiful and the refined. Songs also ennobled the soul and fostered the development of a young and pure personality, for after all, they reasoned, to sing well, was it not necessary to be pure, to have a clear conscience, a good head, and a generous heart? In turn, singing enlivened one's labour, granted steadfast-

ness and courage in the face of difficulties, gave faith in the future, and strengthened one's patriotism.¹⁰³

It is evident that the convent girls were not being prepared primarily to enter the professions nor to find a place in the labour force. Actually, few career opportunities were available to the students upon graduation despite the nuns' frequent assertions that the bilingual and doubly-accredited programme of studies would open doors closed to their English counterparts. There is no evidence to indicate that a substantial number of students later attended a classical college or a university. On the contrary, few seemed to have enrolled. In 1950, a student from Laval University and an alumna of the pensionnat visited her alma mater and urged the girls to register at the university in greater numbers. At the time, she claimed to have been the only French-speaking female student from the West attending.¹⁰⁴ Since the programme of the pensionnat was affiliated to Laval University it is possible but not probable that girls would have chosen to attend other Quebec institutions.¹⁰⁵ More would have enrolled at the University of Alberta; yet even there, few would have attended since a university training was not necessary for the vocations that "attracted" young women: teaching, nursing, taking the veil, and secretarial work.¹⁰⁶

The restricted choice was sadly even if amusingly illustrated by the following anecdote reported in an article that appeared in *La Survivance*. Several guests were invited to the school to speak at a forum on career education. These included a teacher, a nurse, a lab technician, a librarian, a secretary, a housewife, and a woman who was to speak about a career in psychiatry. The final comment of this woman representing her husband's profession, the recorder noted, was "mais si vous voulez une vie remplie d'intérêt, vous n'avez qu'à épouser un psychiatre!"¹⁰⁷ As late as 1960, the girls were led to envisage participating only indirectly in that profession.

Their options were limited to work which, in fact, only served to extend their motherhood and educative role to the community. Even women who were not biological mothers were expected to perform the role of spiritual mothers of the community. This especially was required of nuns and teachers, but was, nonetheless, part of the mission of all women. The choice of a career simply meant that women could devote their lives to others through various causes. While the nurse primarily looked after the physical needs of her patients, she could bring them spiritual solace as well. And the secretary could do her part by setting an example. Her piety and the faultless fulfilment of her national duties would inspire others to follow in her footsteps.¹⁰⁸ That the career itself was not the vocation, and devotion to others was, is illustrated by the comment that "le célibat est une vocation aux oeuvres sociales, et les vieilles filles sont dignes de notre admiration."¹⁰⁹

All women were also expected to be committed to the work of the church, whether as lay apostles or as members of religious communities. The clergy frequently sent impassioned pleas to the students to comply with the needs of the church. During a 1951 visit to the pensionnat, MacDonald, Archbishop of

Edmonton, informed students that their duties embraced studying the most pressing problems of the church, one of which he identified as the need for religious vocations. He subsequently entreated them to contribute to the solutions.¹¹⁰ And as the mother superior explained during an educational week devoted to religious vocations, answering the call of the church also took care of the multitude of needy souls who relied on the services of the nun, "les malades, les vieillards et les orphelins, les pauvres, les enfants, tous désirent le dévouement de la religieuse."¹¹¹ By their work, especially with children in the schools, nuns laid the foundation of Christian life in the home, and therefore over all society.¹¹² They thus strengthened the ties between religion and education and through their other services made themselves indispensable adjuncts of every family.¹¹³

But whether or not the young students chose to take the veil, they had to be taught to live their faith fervently, for the church felt threatened by the secularization of the period before, during, and after World War II, and insisted on the need for a greater commitment and participation by its lay members. This period also saw the beginning of a dramatic decrease in the number of new religious vocations in Alberta.¹¹⁴ To fill the void, the church appealed to lay apostles. "Nous avons besoin d'institutrices catholiques, surtout des institutrices bilingues, d'apôtres de la presse catholique, d'apôtres de nos écoles catholiques, d'apôtres qui aideront nos prêtres, surtout dans les petites missions, dans l'oeuvre divine de la préparation des enfants pour la digne réception des sacrements."¹¹⁵

In 1935, the *Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique* was established at the pensionnat to answer the appeal for "des chrétiennes convaincues, vivant intégralement leur catholicisme."¹¹⁶ Through various activities, the students were to assume their responsibilities as Catholic women and learn to participate fully in the redemption of the world.¹¹⁶ The J.E.C., like its parent *Action Catholique*, was part of the church's extensive programme of Catholic action which aimed to defend the place of religion in a modern, industrial, and secular world and offered religious and moral solutions to resolve social problems. As educated women, the girls would be expected to participate in benevolent religious organizations and act as intermediaries between their less educated counterparts and the clerical and secular elite. "L'on distingue toujours, dans nos paroisses, la femme instruite; c'est celle qui est la plus influente, on la veut présidente des associations et des comités. Souvent aussi, elle doit se faire l'interprète des autres auprès des autorités religieuses et scolaires. Elle devient ainsi, en quelque sorte le pivot de la société."¹¹⁷ As the go-between, women played a pivotal role in the community, for not only did they reduce conflict by interceding on behalf of the less fortunate segments of society, they also acted as the conscience of the more powerful by reminding them of their responsibilities.

In summary, the education that the students received at the pensionnat was a carefully crafted instrument that would mould the girls to fit the design of church and nation. It had little to do with their own personal needs and plans. They were trained, first of all, to become competent housewives, personable companions to their husbands, and educators of their children. Secondly, they were expected to

foster the interests of the church and, simultaneously, the interests of the French-speaking community. To ensure that women could fulfil all of the demands placed upon them, they had to become sensitive to the needs of others while at the same time learn to deny their own. The girls therefore were presented with the ideal woman, a woman who essentially lived only through the accomplishments, the happiness, the lives of others. In turn, the validity of the ideal was supported by the traditional role women had played in the history of French Canada and the supposed nature of women.

NOTES

1. Alison Prentice, "Towards a Feminist History of Women and Education," in *Approaches to Educational History*, ed. David Jones, Nancy Sheehan (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1981).
2. Evidence for any incipient nun/lay woman feminist activity along the line of the relationships described by Marta Danylewycz in her work on the Montreal convents would likely have been noted in this later period, if any such activity did in fact occur. In the period preceding 1960, however, neither the writings of the nuns nor the students suggest any feminist tendencies. See Marta Danylewycz, "Taking the Veil, 1842-1920: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1981), 216-54.
3. *Ibid.*, 35-52.
4. *Ibid.*, 48.
5. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *The Dream of Nation* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 115-30.
6. Abbé Laflèche, *Quelques considérations sur les rapports de la société civile avec la religion et la famille* (Montréal: Eusèbe Sénécal, 1866), 86,99.
7. *Ibid.*, 47.
8. Donald B. Smith, "A History of French-Speaking Albertans," in *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity*, ed. Howard and Tamara Palmer (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 88. Out of a total population of 2,599, there were 582 Whites and 940 Métis.
9. Manoly R. Lupul, *The Roman Catholic Church and the North-West School Question 1875-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 3.
10. Population estimates vary. Lupul's figures indicate that by 1901 there were 7000 settlers of French origin out of a total population of 30,070. *Ibid.*, 7. Huel, on the other hand, writes that in 1891, there were only 1,543 French Catholics out of a population of 66,799. Raymond J.A. Huel, "Gestae Dei Per Francos: The French Canadian Experience in Western Canada," in *Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies*, ed. Benjamin G. Smillie (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), 44.
11. Lupul, *The Roman Catholic Church*, 57.
12. The hierarchy could not, however, prevent the movement of people out of the province. There simply was not enough agricultural land to satisfy the demands of a rapidly expanding population. Rather than seeing French Canadians flock to the factory towns of New England in search of employment, the clergy advised those determined to emigrate

- to go West. There, at least, French Canadians could practise their true vocation of tilling the land while at the same time they could carry out their evangelical mission. Dean R. Lauder and Eric Waddell, eds., *Du Continent Perdu à l'archipel retrouvé—Le Québec et l'Amérique française (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1983)*, 83.
13. Lupul, *The Roman Catholic Church*, 57; A.I. Silver, *The French-Canadian Idea of Confederation 1864-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 104.
 14. Silver, *The French-Canadian Idea*, 180; Mason Wade, *The French Canadians 1760-1967* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), 1:424.
 15. Smith, "History of French-Speaking Albertans," 90.
 16. Lupul, *The Roman Catholic Church*, 79.
 17. E.J. Hart, "The Emergence and Role of the Elite in the Franco-Albertan Community to 1914," in *Essays on Western History*, ed. Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), 168-69.
 18. Huel, "Gestae Dei," 45.
 19. Some other notable ones were *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* (1905-1916), *Le Progrès* (1909-1913), and *L'Union* (1917-1929). *La Survivance* was published between the years 1928 and 1967 and was followed by *Le Franco-Albertain*.
 20. Smith, "History of French-Speaking Albertans," 104. On September 1, 1925, the government of Alberta put into effect an educational bill that authorized the teaching of French in schools one hour per day. Hart, "Role of the Elite," 195.
 21. Stephen T. Rusak, "Relations in Education between Bishop Legal and the Alberta Liberal Government, 1905-1920" (M.Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1966), 106.
 22. The appointment of Bishop McNally was officially announced April 14, 1913. M.B. Venini Byrne, *From the Buffalo to the Cross* (Calgary: Archives and Historical Publishers, 1973), 108.
 23. Huel, "Gestae Dei," 48.
 24. Hart, "Role of the Elite," 117.
 25. Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge (SASV), Private Collection (PC), doc.1, untitled, n.d.
 26. Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Collection des Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge (SASV)/15, 73.80, "Decreets/Visites," box 8, item 16, 13 août 1894.
 27. PAA, SASV, "Chroniques," box 4, item 1, paper giving the history of the mission, titled "Mission de Delmas," 28 jan. 1960 and SASV/13/51, 73.489, Chroniques 1899-1921.
 28. Germain Lesage, *Les Origines des Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge* (Nicolet: Editions des Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge, 1957), 239.
 29. Marjorie Keith, "A Brief History of Teaching Orders of Women in Quebec" (M.Ed. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1948), 102.
 30. PAA, SASV, box 14, item 50/2, Shannon file, letter from Provincial Superior to Mary Laframboise, 23 mai 1962. The letter to Laframboise stated that "knowledge of both French and English [was] one of the necessary conditions for a young girl to be admitted to [the] Order." In reality, however, only the knowledge of French was a prerequisite.
 31. A lack of space forced the nuns to restrict enrolment to grades 4 to 12 during a five-year period prior to the expansion of 1960-61. SASV, PC, "Liste du Personnel Enseignant Depuis 1926," unclassified.
 32. SASV, PC, "Pensionnat d'Edmonton, nombres d'élèves par grades depuis 1948," unclassified.
 33. The order's practice of not hiring lay teachers, quite apart from the ideological conflict these might have posed, was financially motivated. The school, although exempted from

taxation, did not receive either government or school board subsidies. The only source of revenues came from the students' room, board, and tuition fees and from private music lessons given at the school. With this money, the nuns paid their custodial staff but they themselves did not receive salaries. Lay teachers, on the other hand, had to be paid; the added costs discouraged the nuns from hiring them even when they were short-staffed. SASV, PC, "Historique de l'Académie," 1963, p.2, unclassified.

34. *Census of the Prairie Provinces*, 1936, Vol. I, "Population and Agriculture," Table 57.

35. SASV, PC, "Report of Inspectors of Schools," 1946-47, unclassified. The report gives the number of students as 84.

36. The 1961 *Census of Canada* does not provide data on the number of school-age Franco-Albertan females. But given that there were 83,319 French-speaking Albertans and assuming that half were women and one-third of these females were children between the ages of 5 and 19, the number of girls attending the pensionnat totalled approximately 1.2% of school-age women in Alberta.

37. For younger students, tuition fees were \$100 yearly and boarding fees \$300 monthly. Interview with Sr. Anne-Marie Mireault, former student, teacher, and principal of the pensionnat, August 22, 1987.

38. PAA, SASV/50/1, 73.80, box 13, Shannon file, "Fondation du Couvent Canadien-Français d'Edmonton, Alberta," n.d.

39. The post-primary education provided by the order in Quebec had been under the aegis of Laval University since 1914. SASV, PC, "Affiliation à l'Université Laval," unclassified, n.d.

40. *Ibid.*, my translation.

41. *Ibid.* After 1944, the cours universitaire primaire-supérieur underwent a number of modifications, including a name change. They became known as cours lettres-sciences.

42. SASV, PC, doc. 10, "1926-1966, Quarante ans au service de la population franco-albertaine," 1966. The fact that French was the language of instruction was frequently repeated in writings about the school.

43. SASV, PC, Report of Inspectors, 1946-47.

44. *La Survivance*, 31 jan. 1929; SASV, PC, doc. 4, Flore Houde, "Les Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge à Edmonton," paper presented to Le salon d'histoire de la francophonie albertaine, n.d.

45. SASV, PC, Historique de l'Académie file, "Edmonton," p.2, n.d. It is interesting to note an incident that demonstrates how the students, with teacher encouragement, proposed to improve their English-language skills. In 1946, students formed an English literature club for just such a purpose. They began publishing a newsletter called "Le Jaseur." As the name implies, it was to be written in French. The students justified their choice of language by claiming that improving their ability to write in French would also ameliorate their English composition skills. SASV, PC, Binder entitled "Associations, Cercles, etc. et Annuaire du Pensionnat et de l'Académie 1926 à 1972," "Le Jaseur," Pâques, 1946.

46. SASV, PC, Report of Inspectors, 1966. I have taken the liberty of using material dated after 1960 and the end of this study. These later reports serve to illustrate the thinking of government officials and are in no way inconsistent with earlier reports.

47. *Ibid.*, 1948-49, 1949-50.

48. *Ibid.*, 1948-49.

49. *Ibid.*, 1962.

50. *Ibid.*, 1962 and 1963.

51. Ibid., 1963.
52. PAA, SASV/50/1, 73.80, box 13, Shannon file, letter from Directrice de l'école normale de Nicolet to Sr. Marie-du-Crucifix, 12 nov. 1926.
53. SASV, PC, doc. 3, untitled, n.d.
54. PAA, SASV/50/1, 73.80, box 13, Shannon file, "Horaire 1927-28."
55. SASV, PC, doc. 3, untitled, n.d.
56. SASV, PC, "Festivals—Musique" file, 1960-65. This information from after 1960 illustrates the musical accomplishments of the students and corresponds to their pre-1960 achievements.
57. SASV, PC, Report of Inspectors, 1946-47.
58. SASV, PC, Binder entitled "Associations, Cercles, etc. et Annuaire du Pensionnat et de l'Académie 1926-1972," "Annuaire Souvenir Jubilé d'Argent du Pensionnat de l'Assomption, Edmonton, 1926-52," p. 13.
59. Ibid., "Voix A.S.V.," mai 1957.
60. Ibid., "Annuaire," p. 13.
61. Ibid., "Assumpta," Pâques, 1948.
62. Ibid., "Annuaire," p. 13.
63. SASV, PC, "Minutes de l'Avant-Garde," 27 avril 1934.
64. Ibid., 27 mars 1936.
65. SASV, PC, "Minutes du cercle Jeanne L'Archevêque-Duguay," "Chant du cercle," 1949.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. SASV, PC, Binder entitled "Associations," "Voix A.S.V.," juin 1954.
69. SASV, PC, "Minutes du cercle L'Archevêque-Duguay," "Chant du cercle," 1949.
70. *La Survivance*, 7 fév. 1945 and 23 avril 1947.
71. Ibid., 24 jan. 1940.
72. Lionel Groulx, *La Canadienne Française (Nicolet: Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge, 1950)*, 24.
73. SASV, PC, Binder, "Annuaire," p. 12.
74. PAA, SASV/50/1, 73.80, box 13, Shannon file, letter from Sr. Saint-Casimir, Nicolet to Sr. Marie du Crucifix, Edmonton, 10 déc. 1927.
75. SASV, PC, Binder, "Le Jaseur," Pâques 1946.
76. SASV, PC, Binder, "Annuaire," p. 13. The passage reads: "Au travers de toute cette atmosphère anglicisante, il faut rendre nos jeunes filles fières de leur origine et de leur caractère national, les rendre aptes à garder à notre peuple l'héroïsme qui leur fut légué, les saines et saintes traditions du terroir, prêtes à lui donner des hommes de caractère, des femmes de coeur."
77. SASV, PC, Binder, "Voix de A.S.V.," Pâques 1950.
78. *Census of Canada*, 1961, Vol. IV, Part I, Population Sample, Income, Migration and Fertility.
79. SASV, PC, Binder, juin 1955. Albert Tessier was a prominent Quebec clerico-nationalist. He founded and directed the domestic education schools, the Instituts Familiaux, which he euphemistically called Ecoles du Bonheur; see Sherene H. Brookwell, "The Instituts Familiaux of Quebec: Religious Nationalism and the Education of Girls for Domestic Life, 1900-1970 (M.A. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1980), 75.
80. SASV, PC, Binder, "Annuaire," p.13. "Ce qu'elle a besoin de savoir pour sa mission de mère et d'éducatrice...c'est moins le détail des choses que la moelle des choses."

81. Ibid. The passage reads: "Dans sa formation, il faudra surtout cultiver les vertus du coeur, c'est-à-dire, l'affection et la tendresse, le don de consoler et de deviner, la patience d'écouter, la charité de supporter et le courage d'attendre." Il faudra surtout lui confier des responsabilités où s'exercera le dévouement poussé jusqu'au renoncement héroïque et constant."
82. Ibid., newspaper clipping from *La Survivance*, 1954.
83. Ibid., "Voix de A.S.V.," juin 1954.
84. Ibid., Noël 1950.
85. Ibid., "Année Mariale au Pensionnat," mai 1957.
86. Ibid., "Annuaire," "Miettes d'Histoire," pp. 26-27. The records show that the society was still extant in 1954.
87. For a discussion of the devotional revolution and the significance of the Marian societies see Danylewycz, "Taking the Veil," 53-64.
88. Ibid., 65.
89. Ibid., 61-64.
90. Ibid., 64.
91. SASV, PC, Binder, "Annuaire," "Enfants de Marie," p. 19.
92. Ibid., "Voix A.S.V.," sept.-déc. 1954.
93. Ibid., "Echos," 8 mars 1950.
94. Ibid., "Voix A.S.V.," mai 1956.
95. Ibid., sept.-déc. 1955.
96. Ibid., mai 1956.
97. Ibid., "Annuaire," p. 5.
98. Ibid., p.14.
99. Ibid., 15 juin 1949.
100. Ibid., "Assumpta," Noël 1945.
101. Ibid., p. 13.
102. Ibid., "Annuaire," p. 25.
103. Ibid., "Voix de A.S.V.," 20 sept. 1950.
104. Further evidence to support this contention is the fact that according to Antonine Gagnon, "Le collège classique Notre-Dame de l'Assomption de Nicolet 1937-1968" (Thèse de D.E.S., Université Laval, 1972), 97, no student from Alberta enrolled in the classical education programme provided by the Soeurs de l'Assomption at their college Notre-Dame de l'Assomption in Nicolet. Of the 325 students who attended between the years 1937-1968, only eight came from outside Quebec, and none were from Alberta.
105. SASV, PC, Binder, "Echos," 1950-51. See *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1970), 59 for occupational segregation by sex.
106. SASV, PC, folder titled "Festivals-Musique (résultats), Programmes chants et musique, 1960-65." The year of the clipping is identified as 1960 but the exact date is not specified.
107. SASV, PC, Binder, "Voix A.S.V.," juin 1954.
108. Ibid., "Echos," 24 nov. 1948.
109. Ibid., 11 avril 1951.
110. Ibid., 25 avril 1951.
111. Ibid., "Echos", 11 avril 1951.
112. Trofimenkoff, *Dream of Nation*, 123.
113. PAA, SASV/13, 73.80, box 11, item 3, "Matricule." This record book contains a list of girls who entered the order's noviciate in Saint-Paul, Alberta, between 1955-1962. Of

a total of 40 novices, half chose to leave and return to a secular life. The crisis in religious vocations peaked between 1960 and 1970 with a 95% decrease. Micheline D'Allaire, *Vingt ans de crise chez les religieuses du Québec 1960-1980* (Montréal: Editions Bergeron, 1983), 509.

114. SASV, PC, Binder, "Annuaire," p. 3.

115. Ibid., pp. 16, 26-27.

116. Ibid., p. 16.

117. SASV, P.C., Binder, juin 1953.

