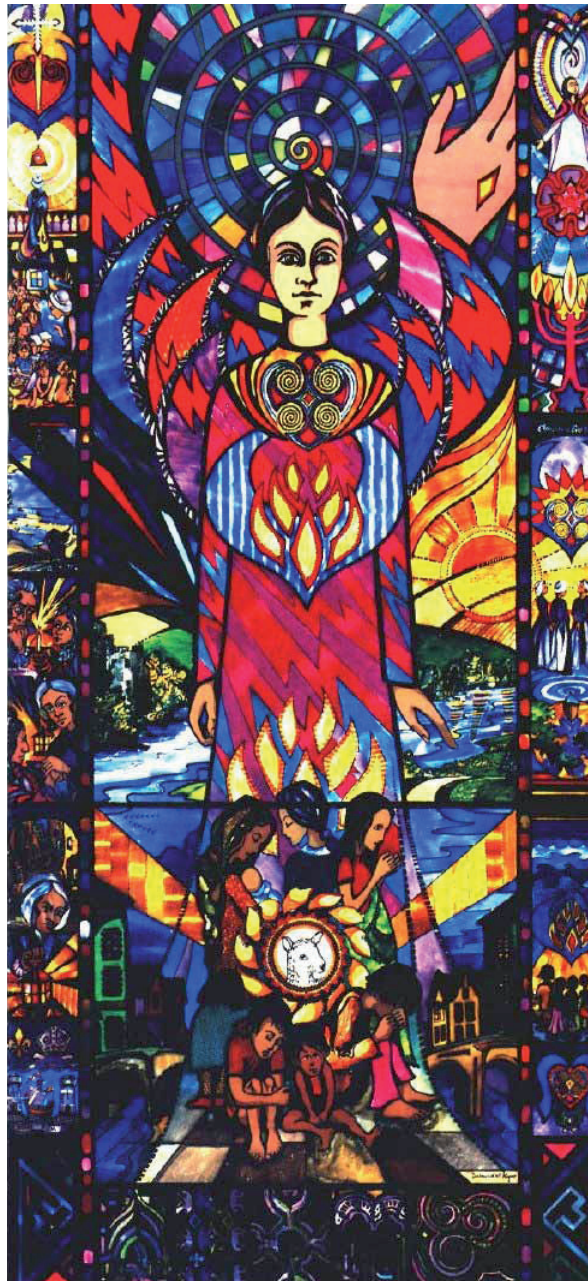




Icon Explanation

The following is a synopsis of the symbolic story of the Icon of Nano Nagle by Desmond Kyne.

"From the earliest times Icons have been used to establish and to reinforce spiritual links with the Godhead, their purpose is to act as a window or doorway to the eternal present and bear witness to the invisible world of the spirit which surrounds us – a world to which we bear much closer relationship than we sometimes care to acknowledge. The Icon uses symbols to engage the mind and to help the imagination penetrate those invisible barriers that exist between the world of the spirit and the natural order.

In the Icon of Nano Nagle, the artist attempts, by the use of symbols, to explore a series of relationships and to establish areas for contemplation. Of course, each person will respond to symbols in his or her own way, that is the essence of symbolism. But I should remark that a little time and patience is required to familiarize oneself with the language; what matters is to remain open and alive to its possibilities. In short, the Icon is not to be rushed; it is better to tread softly on the approach roads to mystery.

Nano is represented in the Icon as being eternally young and she is shown in the context of the eternal present - where the past and the present, and the future, are united in one timeless vision. It is not to do with death, distance or departure or anything melancholy. It is about spiritual vitality and joy, that is why it is filled with life, energy, movement and richness... This Icon is a celebration in symbols of one of the really great and truly magnificent women of Ireland. After careful study of the few portraits of Nano that exist, and which were made two centuries ago, the artist created one image of Nano which is close to how she would have appeared as a young woman in the early days of her Apostolate.

The way she stands is significant without pose or affectation, in a particular attitude of readiness and receptivity; yet, there is about her a controlled tension that suggests how, like Mary, she permits the powerful energies of God to flow through her . . .

Nano's head is in close relationship to a multi-splendoured spiral that dominates the upper part of the Icon. The spiral, ancient symbol of divinity, here stands for God the Father. The arm of Christ sweeps downwards in a great embrace, as it were, gathering all created things towards the Omega point. His sleeve is patterned with a symbol for spiritual energy, a symbol which I have repeated, though in slightly different form, on Nano's gown.

Proceeding from the Father and the Son, it is a tumult of wings, around and about Nano, which signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit, eventually to appear as a birdlike shape which passes downwards to the children, bearing the seven flames - the seven gifts.

A new symbol for the heart of Christ appears embroidered upon the broad shoulder collar of Nano's gown. This symbol is given a place of special prominence because it represents the source from which she drew her power and inspiration.

Behind her, in the middle distance are the nature symbols, here expressed in the Nagle Mountains, and Ballygriffin, the valley of the River Blackwater where Nano's soul was first kindled to its beauty. On the left are symbols of darkness and oppression, but the eye cannot dwell here, and continues downwards to the children of Cork City. We see them huddled together entirely oblivious of the Paschal Mystery which flames amongst them like a wheel of fire. Nano has brought the fire from heaven down into her world, and its light spreads outwards to encompass both sides of the city . . . and beyond. It will never be quenched.

High over old South Gate Bridge the wild geese fly away, reminding us of the difficulties facing those who choose to stay and to immerse themselves in Ireland's problems. As we gaze upon these children we might reflect that however desolate their plight, they were nevertheless, heirs to a proud tradition as signified by the grouped symbols along the base of the Icon, which referred to the Golden Age of Irish Art and Spirituality.

And so it is that this story of one of the greatest women in Ireland's history unfolds in symbols that continue in narrative sequence down the side panels of the Icon.

We can contemplate Nano at prayer, at work and consider the widespread continuing influence of her inspiration. There is, in particular, a new and fresh appraisal of the Presentation of Mary... Mary of the Dawn . . . with symbols evoking the Mosaic Law and its important role in the history of Salvation. And much more besides, which time and space will not permit me to bring into this synopsis."

That brief extract by the Artist gives a taste of the riches to be found within the symbolism of this Icon. From NANO NAGLE AND THE PRESENTATION SISTERS by T. J. Walsh p. 5 .