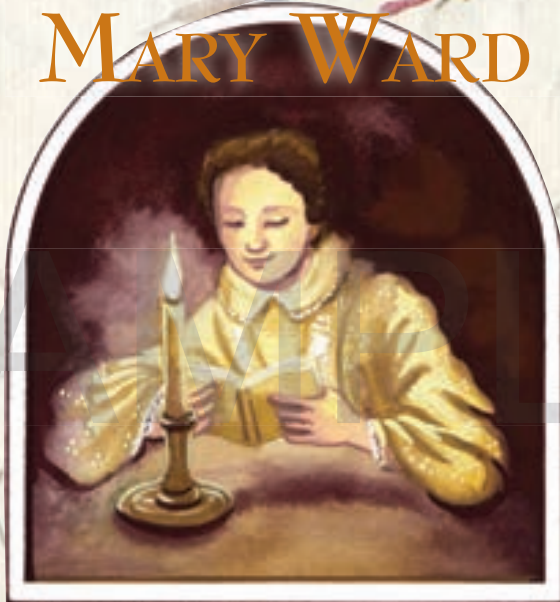


THE GIFT OF MARY WARD



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I
Hope

IT WILL BE SEEN
THAT

WOMEN

IN TIME TO COME

WILL DO
MUCH.

MW

INTRODUCTION



Mary Ward is not a household name, even among Catholics. In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI granted the title “Venerable” to this woman who lived from 1585–1645. In Church pronouncements, Venerable means that the Church recognises the “heroic virtue” of a person, and agrees that canonisation is a possibility. Does this title mean anything in an era when Pontiffs have named so many to full sainthood?

In 1631, Mary Ward—who had sought a new form of religious life for women—was imprisoned by Church authorities; that same year Pope Urban VIII condemned and dissolved her Institute. The news of Mary Ward’s death in 1645 in York in England must have allowed the Inquisition officials to breathe a sigh of relief. This woman had claimed women could be trusted

to be both religious sisters and active in the world. Across Europe, she had set up schools for girls, teaching them to read, write, learn other languages and be confident in public speaking. She and her companions had taught them the faith. She had sent young women back into England, where to be

IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION,
WHEN A GROUP OF MEN OR WOMEN
WANT TO FORM A COMMUNITY OF
RELIGIOUS LIFE UNDER THE GUIDANCE
OF A RELIGIOUS LEADER, MAKING
VOWS E.G. POVERTY, CHASTITY
AND OBEDIENCE OR STABILITY,
THEY REQUIRE CHURCH APPROVAL.
THIS LINKS THEM INTO THE WIDER
CHURCH AND ENSURES THEIR BASIC
RULE RESPECTS THE RIGHTS OF THE
MEMBERS, AND THE GROUP DOES NOT
BECOME A SECT. THEIR ORGANISATIONS
ARE CALLED CONGREGATIONS,
INSTITUTES, OR ORDERS.

Catholic was to be a traitor, and urged them to explain the faith in such a way as to help men and women to hold fast to their beliefs.

The officials in Rome knew that such works were, as the Papal Bull of Suppression of the Institute had claimed in 1631, "...most unsuited to their weak sex and character, to female modesty and particularly to maidenly reserve..." and that she and her followers "...arrogantly and obstinately disobey our paternal and salutary warning as to the grave disadvantage of their own souls and the disgust of all good people."

But sparks of the Holy Spirit are not easily quenched, and women can be determined fire carriers. In 1749, after some failed former attempts, the women who looked

back to Mary Ward as their founder received papal recognition as a religious Institute—but the condition was that they did not claim any link with her. The smouldering ember of her story was carried in secret. In 1909 the sisters of her Institute were permitted by a decree of Pope Pius X to call her their founder. In 1952 Pius XII described her as “...that incomparable woman, given to the church by Catholic England in her darkest and bloodiest hour.” Given this history, with Pope Benedict XVI naming her Venerable, Mary’s story can become an encouraging beacon for those who struggle with new ideas today.

What had this woman done to incur almost 300 years of disapproval? How could the Institute she began continue for so long under such a cloud? What has she to say to our Church today?

Mary Ward lived in turbulent times. She made choices which upset her parents, her spiritual guides, the government of her country and the government of her Church. Yet in all these situations she tried to be open to God: a God of love who kept calling her into these choices. She eventually clarified a vision which claimed that women could share in God’s work of bringing people to faith. Her efforts to convince Church leaders that this was appropriate work for women who wanted to vow their lives to God led to her condemnation and the suppression of her company of women. All congregations of active

women religious which run hospitals, schools, universities, and are involved in spiritual direction or social and pastoral work, can look back to her with gratitude as the one who fought for their right to exist.

But beyond this gift to the Church and world, Mary's life continues to offer some wisdom and hope to people from all walks of life who question their place in a Church which seems reluctant to find new ways of approaching new situations. Her life always points beyond her story to the example of Jesus whose footsteps she sought to follow. She speaks eloquently to those seeking direction in complex periods of life. She is a mystic, yet eminently practical—an attractive mix in an era when people are reawakening to the call of an inner journey which will not be satisfied by such external distractions as money, progress or success. Above all she shows the strength that can come from a deep and loving relationship with God.

Mary Ward was not a lone ranger. Her companions walked with her and her followers carried her vision forward through long years of disapproval. Those women who carried the fire of her story deserve recognition for their perseverance and depth of faith. This book's Further Reading lists fuller accounts of her life and spirituality. This outline of her life, works and spiritual legacy may whet the appetite to discover more about the gift offered today by this woman of deep faith.



Many religious congregations which began schools or hospitals were founded in the 19th Century with the specific aim of addressing poverty. From the beginning their focus was on alleviating the suffering that had mounted through the impact of the Industrial revolution and through colonial oppression. These congregations drew on powerful Gospel insights which showed Jesus healing, inviting, and lifting up the poor and outcast.

Mary Ward began her Institute in the early 17th century; this was her context. In post-Reformation times, the clear need was to support people's faith: to deepen their spirituality so that they could draw strength from a personal relationship with Jesus to sustain them in their daily life. Mary and her company of friends offered young women an education which grounded them in Verity, or Truth, and engaged them creatively with the learning of their time. But they also worked pastorally with those confused by changes in their religious surroundings, and dared to propose a role for women that confounded male leaders of the Church, although women in England and in other parts of Europe were already indicating in practice their aptitude for such "good works". Her experience and conviction led her to urge a great respect for the poor, and to educate and support them, but their material welfare was not the founding focus of her Institute. It was, in her words, "the

defence and propagation of the faith... by whatever means are congruous to the times.” Her vision was to share with others the gift and joy of being “wholly God’s”, in freedom, justice and integrity. She believed this would lead them to be “apt for all good works”.

Today, her continuing “circle of friends” in forty-four different countries is witness to the ongoing relevance of her message. Actions speak louder than words: in schools, villages, in advocacy centres, in tertiary and theological colleges, they work with others to change unjust structures, to deepen faith and spirituality, to support and network across boundaries. Co-workers, who continue to widen her circle, uncover new depths in her story and her vision for women and men today.

Sources

How do we know her story? Despite wars, dispersal across Europe, and obedient burning of books about her, a number of original letters, retreat notes, autobiographical fragments and an early biography by her closest friends have been preserved. Vatican and Jesuit archives show the arguments

of her enemies. These sources, in their original languages, have recently been gathered into four volumes edited in German. The quaint ‘Olde Englishe’ helps place her in an era well before our time—clearly before the standardisation of spelling! I have not used Olde Englishe in this text as readers sometimes find it difficult to recognise familiar words in an antique spelling.

THROUGHOUT THE TEXT
SUPERSCRIPIT NUMBERS WILL
APPEAR THAT RELATE
TO SOME OF THE PAINTED
LIFE SERIES, LISTED AS
ENDNOTES.

THE PAINTINGS AND THEIR
COMMENTARY IN ENGLISH
CAN BE VIEWED ON LINE:
[HTTP://WWW.LORETONH.
NSW.EDU.AU/FAITH/
OURHERITAGE/
PAINTEDLIFE.HTML](http://www.loretonh.nsw.edu.au/faith/ourheritage/paintedlife.html)

A series of fifty large paintings, commissioned soon after Mary’s death, recorded aspects of her life story at a time when books about her were forbidden. These paintings, referred to as the Painted Life, provide a parallel account of major moments in her spiritual journey. They currently hang in the Mary Ward Hall at the Congregatio Jesu school in Augsburg. Many quotations in this text are from her retreat notes and instructions in the period 1615–1620, because these sources have survived.

RIGHT: 1 MOUNT GRACE PRIORY, 2 FOUNTAINS ABBEY, 3 RIPLEY CASTLE,
4 HAREWELL FARM, 5 BATHORPE FARM, OSGODBY



Timeline of Mary's Life

- 1585 Born Mulwith, Yorkshire, England to Ursula and Marmaduke Ward.
- 1590–95 Lives with grandparents, Ursula and Robert Wright.
- 1595–97 Returns to family.
- 1597–1605 Lives mainly with Babthorpes in Osgodby.
- 1605 St Omer, Poor Clare convent.
- 1607–09 Founding and joining English Poor Clare convent.
- 1609 Returns to England. “Glory Vision”.
- 1610 Back to St Omer, with companions. They begin a school, pray for guidance.
- 1611 “Take the same of the Society”.
- 1615 “The Just Soul”; Mary applies to Rome for recognition.
- 1617 Three talks in response to a comment “They are but women...”
- 1614–19 Journeys back and forth to London. Imprisoned by government, released after friends pay a fine. Division within the community in St Omer and Liège. School opened in Cologne.
- 1621 Mary and three companions travel to Rome to seek approval.

- 1622–27 Negotiations with the Pope, Cardinals, Jesuit General etc. Houses and schools established in Rome, Naples and Perugia.
All closed by order of the Curia.
- 1627–29 Schools opened in Munich, Vienna, Pressburg.
- 1629 Visits the Pope asking for approval again.
- 1630 Sends a letter warning communities that orders about suppression are not binding because not from the Pope.
- 1631 Institute suppressed. Houses closed. Arrested and imprisoned on charges of heresy. Released after 3 months.
- 1632 Travels to Rome on summons from Inquisition. Cleared of heresy, but still under surveillance.
- 1633 Small group reassembles in Rome.
- 1637 Permitted to return to England.
- 1641 Civil war. Group moves to York.
- 1645 Mary Ward dies and is buried in Osbaldwick.
- 1749 Institute approved on condition they make no link to Mary Ward.
- 1909 Recognised as founder by Pius X.
- 2009 Declared “Venerable” by Benedict XVI.

Women may be perfect
as well as men if
they love verity and
seek true knowledge:
I mean not learning,
though learning is a
great help, and how
much I esteem learning.

shall hereafter be seen,
yet it is not learning
I commend unto you,
but knowledge,
true knowledge which
you all may have,
if you love and
seek it.