

## Mary Ward an Ignatian Exemplar

### Opening Prayer

“A woman of great prudence and of extraordinary courage and powers of mind, but, what is much more ... a holy and great servant of God,” thus was Mary Ward described by Pope Urban VIII, the same pontiff who suppressed her Institute by the Papal Bull of 1631 which described her communities as “weeds” which were to be “rooted out” of “the field of the Church militant”. What was it about this woman that inspired such a reverence for her person even when her work was so thoroughly disparaged? In the twentieth century how could Pope Pius XII speak of her as: “that incomparable woman, given to the Church by Catholic England in her darkest and bloodiest hour”. And in 1985 on the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth why would Pope John Paul II say of her “this great woman who knew so well how to harmonize the demands of her life as a faithful member of the church with the new requirements of the age in which she lived”?

The answer to these questions lies in some measure in the understanding of Mary Ward as an Ignatian Exemplar the theme we are exploring this evening. What I intend to say falls roughly into five parts. The first part focuses on Ignatius Loyola the author of the Spiritual Exercises and the writer of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus both of which so influenced Mary Ward. The second is primarily contextual, England of Mary Ward’s time and a brief biographical sketch. The third focuses on her growing discernment of what God willed in her regard. And lastly we shall explore something of Mary’s relationship with the Church. Throughout I hope to draw out some theological implications.

### The Constitutions

“Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord

alone and the Church, His spouse, under the Roman pontiff, the vicar of Christ on earth, should, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience, keep what follows in mind. He is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine by the ministry of the word, by spiritual exercises and works of charity and specifically by the education of children and the unlettered.”<sup>1</sup> Thus states the Formula of the Institute in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, and with one change of pronoun thus also states the Constitutions of my own Congregation.

So are we considering a dry 16<sup>th</sup> century legal document which we now share in common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is that what I mean by Mary Ward as an Ignatian exemplar? No it is much more, we are looking at the lived reality of two lives that of Mary Ward and Ignatius and the experience of their relationship with God which makes of the Constitutions a dynamic series of guide-lines orienting the lives and work of thousands of men and women throughout the world. And if you doubt the significance of this, even now as I speak, outside Rome an extraordinary General Congregation of one branch of Mary Ward’s daughters is deliberating the way in which they will continue to live out the reality of these Constitutions in future years. [Sr Evanne has just returned early from that meeting and is with us tonight].

### The Spiritual Exercises

Dynamic, determinative and durable might well characterize the impact of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola from its original formulation in the sixteenth century. This *petit livre* has been of extraordinary significance in the lives of men and women for over 400 years. The impact is dynamic, because the effect on individuals has been a schooling in discernment and a growth in freedom and spiritual maturity with a concomitant effect upon society. In the sixteenth century such an effect had radical and determinative implications for the development of the Society of Jesus and the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church. The durability of the *Spiritual Exercises* is evident in the

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<sup>1</sup> ed. John Padberg SJ The Formula of the Institute [1], in The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms, [St Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources 1996] Second reading. Constitutions of the Congregatio Jesu.

way in which they have bestowed life-giving spiritual formation on countless individuals and communities until the present day.

Within the *Spiritual Exercises*, the Church is more than merely a context within which the human person comes to experience God. The very relationship between Christ and the Church becomes the paradigm for the individual's relationship with Christ and the embodiment within which that relationship is realized. "In a very real way, the Church realizes again its relationship to Christ in the retreatant's relationship to Christ; in a very real way, the one making the Exercises comes to participate in the mission and the fundamental experience of the Church."<sup>2</sup>

It is in the light of the Church that the individual comes to experience the intimacy and intensity of the love of Christ and to become aware of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in life. It is in the light of the Church also that the individual comes to understand and appreciate the election by which there may be a participation in serving Christ's kingdom, which stands against all that is antihuman. Finally, there is within the *Spiritual Exercises* a mysticism of service within the Church, united with Christ in the struggle. This is inextricably linked with a mysticism of loving union with the Trinity, in and through Christ.

Accordingly, at the heart of the Ignatian charism are five fundamental and theological principles. Firstly a Christological perspective, Ignatius encourages an intimate relationship with Christ through contemplation and apostolate. In and through this intimacy a Trinitarian awareness develops. Overflowing from this relationship and awareness there is a concomitant theological anthropology – an understanding of the graced human person. This leads to a basic presupposition in relation to others that seeks to distinguish the good in the other. It is a discerning love that gives vitality to such a perspective that same love which fuels an ecclesial disposition of love for the Church which Ignatius affirmed as configured to Christ. These elements also we perceive in the life and writings of Mary Ward.

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<sup>2</sup> Buckley, "Ecclesial Mysticism."

## Context

Mary Ward was born in 1585 in Yorkshire England “that restless border facing Scotland which has always shown individuality”<sup>3</sup> as one biographer termed it. She was the eldest daughter of a devout Catholic family. It was the worst of times for Catholics in Protestant England. The Elizabethan Church Settlement of 1559 had embedded the framework of the Church of England within the culture of the time and the sheer longevity of Elizabeth’s reign enabled it to take root as a national institution. Interestingly, despite changes in the intervening years, the 1559 settlement still informs the Church of England today. For Catholics in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century persecution was at its height and in the North of England the Earl of Huntingdon had promised Queen Elizabeth that he would stamp out the old faith. Fines were heavy for refusal to go to the Protestant Church, 40 or 50 times a skilled worker’s wage for a month. The celebration of mass or arranging for it to be said carried the death penalty. It was now treason also to be reconciled to Rome. In the year of Mary Ward’s birth a new statute made it treason for a Catholic priest ordained abroad to enter the country and treason for any person to give him aide or shelter. This climate of persecution was MW’s inheritance.

Such measures tested the commitment of families and individuals to Catholicism. Loyalty to their faith was dangerous, a matter of life and death. At the very least fines and imprisonment were the inevitable result of adhering to Catholic practice. We know of the long years of imprisonment which Mary Ward’s own grandmother suffered. Indeed prisons were full of Catholics and much pastoral work was accomplished there even the giving of the Spiritual Exercises. Outside prison, Catholicism survived in the houses of Catholic gentry where Catholic servants and tenants also gathered. After 1585 when new priests arrived in England most of them passed through a Jesuit network of safe-houses to become household chaplains to Catholic families. In this atmosphere of danger and persecution Mary Ward came to the earliest understanding of her faith realizing that she belonged to a Church that was humiliated and vilified.

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<sup>3</sup> Henrietta Peters

### Inspiring Examples

There were inspiring examples of strong women like her grandmother and St Margaret Clitheroe martyred in York shortly before her birth who would have influenced Mary Ward. But amidst these more familiar figures other inspiring examples during these formative years were Jesuits. I would mention two of them briefly. St Edmund Campion was martyred in 1581 only 4 years before her birth. His famous ‘apologia’ disparagingly named ‘Campion’s Brag’ was a document treasured within the Catholic community. It is perhaps the earliest defense of the faith to appear in English in the Reformation. I would like to read a little of it for you. What Campion does in this document is to refute the charge of political conspiracy and treason which was leveled against Jesuits. More than this he indicates the passionate commitment of young seminarians trained abroad to give their lives in the service of the Catholic community in England. [Philip Neri]

A similar passion can be traced in the life and work of another Jesuit Priest Robert Southwell martyred in 1595 when Mary Ward was at the impressionable age of 10. What I would like to draw your attention to here is the motivation that fuelled these martyrs enabling them with courage to embrace the inevitability of death with a serenity that impressed all those who saw them. Such courage and serenity was rooted in the intimacy of their own relationship with God, and a desire to assist their fellow Catholics to a similar intimacy. I would like to read one wee piece of A Child My Choice which gives both an insight into Southwell’s relationship with Christ and also his Trinitarian understanding. This poem was one that Mary would have read herself as it circulated amongst the Catholic community.

I praise him most, I love him best, all praise and love is his  
While him I love, in him I live, and cannot live amiss.

Love’s sweetest mark, lauds’ highest theme, man’s most desired light:  
To love him, life: to leave him, death: to live in him, delight.

He mine by gift: I his, by debt: thus each to other due:  
First friend he was: best friend he is: all times will try him true.

His knowledge rules: his strength defends: his love doth cherish all:  
 His birth our joy: his life our light: his death our end of thrall.

Almighty babe whose tender arms can force all foes to fly:  
 Correct my faults, protect my life, direct me when I die.<sup>4</sup>

The intimacy between Southwell and the Christ child informs his faith; inspires his life and impels his actions. The clear note of joy and serenity that radiates from such poems was the inspiration also for those to whom he ministered over the years whether in prison, amidst the houses of the gentry or on the many journeys he made round the English countryside. The Recusant Church in England during this time may have been greatly diminished in numbers, but with the work of Campion and Southwell and those like them it was inspired and refined into an authentic body that would maintain the faith over generations.

### Jesus

This slide I think illustrates more than anything else – not just her first word but the sense of the intimacy with Christ that was a feature of MW’s life – and that we can trace in terms of her growing development. This concentration on the holy name of Jesus is very important to her through her life – so much so that she desired the name of Jesus to be in the name of the institute that she founded – we know too that in her later years she concluded her letters often with ‘May Jesus have you in His keeping’ – this is indicative of her constant companionship with Christ even to the last word she uttered on her deathbed.

It is important for us to recall that the spiritual formation she received was mostly at the hands of members of the Society of Jesus often resident in the houses where she stayed for some considerable time. The Jesuits took the formation of the young very seriously even

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<sup>4</sup> Poems 13, cited Ibid 75

in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Of particular importance in regard to her formation was Fr Richard Holtby who worked in the north of England between 1593 and 1606. In the Jesuits she encountered Mary saw the life of an active apostolate – the practice of contemplation in action and the great service that was offered to the church by their ministry, and I would suggest to you these things became imprinted on her heart.

From her early teenage years, she resolved to enter religious life. This was problematic at the time since her parents thought that she would do more for the Catholic cause to marry well and provide another safe haven for Catholics within the country. The Catholic community were conscious of trying to preserve the faith for future generations. Mary Ward rejected some very eligible suitors including the Catholic Earl of Westmorland whom her father and her confessor particularly urged her to marry to assist the Catholic cause in the north. Eventually, her confessor Fr Holtby was reconciled to Mary's vocation and her father finally gave his consent.

In the early years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to enter religious life meant going abroad because the reformation had ensured the closure of all religious houses in Britain. To enter religious life was to leave the country of her birth and to remain for the rest of her days devoted to praying for the church and the world behind closed doors – a hidden life. In 1606 she left England for the Netherlands armed with a letter of introduction to the Jesuit Fathers in St Omer. Initially she saw her call to be a Poor Clare – because it was the most austere contemplative order of that time. By a misdirection of one of the Jesuits she became an out sister of the Poor Clares, begging for the community each day in the town. This vocation of an extern was one for which she was utterly unsuited, by character and education, but she embraced it as she had been told by the Jesuit father who received her at St Omer that it was the will of God that she should do so. Obedience to the will of God was for her centrally important – even at this early stage of her religious vocation.

By another dispensation, she eventually became a choir sister in the Poor Clares and then was inspired to found another convent of Poor Clares for English women nearby at Gravelines. As a member of this community in the quiet life of prayer – in austerity and

seclusion – MW was happy. Here at last was the contemplative life she had so long desired. Always at heart she was a contemplative and this was the way she saw her vocation being fulfilled. The Lord, however, had other plans. After only a few months in this foundation, on the feast of St Athanasius – while prayerfully sewing, Mary experienced a divine illumination and realised “that I was not to be of the order of St Clare, some other thing I was to do, what or what nature I did not see nor could I guess, only that it was to be a good thing and what God willed.”

Mary Ward left the convent and returned to London. She became involved in pastoral activity among Catholics who were sick or in prison or requiring any form of assistance in that city. Alongside this she began to consider whether God was calling her to another form of contemplative life as a Carmelite. Mary mixed in a society to which her birth gave access but with a missionary spirit that sought through the ministry of spiritual conversation to attract others to a deeper interior life. And the fruit of her efforts we know already involved a substantial number of religious vocations. And it was at this point while she was helping other Catholics to develop their interior life that she experienced what we know as the Glory illumination

#### Image of the Glory Vision

“I was abstracted out of my whole being and it was shown to me with clearness and inexpressible certainty that I was not to be of the Order of St Teresa but that some other thing was determined for me, without more comparison more to the glory of God than my entrance into that holy religion would be. I did not see what the assured good thing would be but the glory of God that was to come through it showed itself inexplicably and so abundantly as to fill my soul in such a way that I remained for minutes without feeling or hearing anything but the sound: Glory, Glory, Glory.”

#### Discernment

I would just like to recall Mary Ward’s history for a moment. As a young teenager she had discerned her vocation was not to marriage but to religious life. She had embraced the contemplative life of the Poor Clares. In the illumination on St Athanasius’ day Mary

realised she wasn't to be a Poor Clare but was called to 'something else that was good'. In this Glory illumination she says – 'some good thing more to the glory of God' than it would be to be a Carmelite. There is a clear sense of a process of discernment here. There is a clear sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit of God within her. Each time she articulates what she heard, there is no sense of confusion. At each stage she builds on previous discernment. This is a very Ignatian way of proceeding. Mary was totally transported by the Glory illumination coming as it did after what she describes as a cold meditation. We observe here also the gentle spirit of God, leading her graciously with consolation even in the uncertainty of finding her way.

Sensitivity to the Spirit of God and a discerning love for the will of God was the foundation for her activity. There was something more that God was calling her to. It is clear that this as yet unspecified task became the object of her desire – capturing both her imagination and her heart. What we observe here is the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises work with the raw material of our desires and build on those desires to strengthen deeper desires which then become the matter for further prayer.

Mary Ward had developed a contemplative spirit that was able to recognise on St Athanasius day that she was not to be a Poor Clare – but some other good the Lord desires for her. So she begins to desire and pray for that good. In London she has this other illumination of glory. Now she knows that this good, whatever it is, will be more to the glory of God. So this then becomes her desire – she prays on this good that is more to the glory of God. In 1611 she receives a further illumination this good that is more to the glory of God is to found an order of women who will have an active apostolate similar to that of the Society of Jesus.

The key principle underlying Mary Ward's practice of discernment consisted of a deep trust in God's providential care. While she understood that discernment concerns the free sincere and loving human response to God, she believed that it is God's faithfulness which gives discernment its truth. This was clearly in accord with Ignatius' own understanding of discernment. The aim of discernment is to distinguish the true good –

the doing of God's will – from all illusory forms of good. The true good is always in conformity with the teaching and example of Christ in whom we find the expression of the most perfect choice of the true good. Discernment requires a harmony of will, understanding and affectivity with the will of God. And discernment is related to action – what is to be done or not done.

Intimacy with Christ – leads to Trinitarian awareness

Mary's understanding of discerning the will of God was rooted in her own relationship with Christ and how she understood that relationship with Christ leading her into her understanding of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So it is a very personal reality.

Mary Ward's experience of making the Spiritual Exercises gave her a great reverence for the humanity of Christ and a desire to pray often on the Incarnation.

Image of MW – God the Father – the world – Nativity scene – Christ mature.

The Incarnation is one of the most striking meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It encapsulates the Ignatian understanding of the universe, the Trinity and Christ himself. It is a microcosm of Ignatius' theological understanding. It begins the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*. In this meditation the retreatant is asked to imagine the Trinity in conversation, as it were, discussing the salvation of the world. The three persons are looking down at the world with all the messy business of life going on. People being born, laughing, crying, hurting, joyful, dying etc. and into this great 'muddle' of life God decides to be present and part of human reality. Ignatius does not sweeten or falsify painful realities. Rather he begins with them exactly as they are -- poverty, forced displacement, violence between people, abandonment, structural injustice, sin.<sup>5</sup> Against this background, Ignatius asks us to consider the great desire in God for human salvation and reconciliation. The Second Person of the Trinity eagerly desires to be one with human persons.<sup>6</sup> In Christ God's love becomes present in our midst -- Emmanuel -- God with us.

Ignatius then asks us to shift in our imagination to the annunciation scene with which we are more familiar. Here he calls us to ponder the meeting between Mary and the Angel Gabriel. In

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<sup>5</sup> GC 35, Decree 2: A fire that kindles other fires, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Wisdom 15, one of the readings in the Divine Office in the weeks prior to Christmas, gives this same impression of eagerness in the second person of the Trinity.

Our Lady we see the fullness of a human response to God in her willingness to become the mother of Jesus -- the one who saves his people from their sins.

### Essential intimacy with the Lord

The grace asked for throughout the whole of this meditation on the Incarnation and throughout the whole of the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* is that of “an intimate knowledge of our Lord who has become a human person for me, that I may love him more and follow him more closely”<sup>7</sup>. This intimate knowledge is crucial. It is a knowledge that is not merely knowledge of the intellect, acquired through study -- epistemological -- though it is this also. Neither is it merely an understanding arrived at through our experience -- an existential knowledge -- though it includes this too. Rather it is fundamentally an apprehension at the level of our very being -- an ontological knowledge -- of God’s passionate commitment to each one of us. This is the primordial reality that Ignatius is concerned that we should understand. This is the reality that Mary Ward understood and in which she trained her sisters.

And as John Paul II stated, “Christ did not fail Mary Ward. No matter how great were the difficulties which she had to undergo - ill-health; dangerous journeys; imprisonment; above all, being misunderstood even by important people within the Church - in all of this she never lost her trust and good humour. And look how fruitful her life has been, all because she built her whole life on the friendship of Jesus! [She was a] pilgrim of hope whose abiding treasure was *the life of grace within her*, from which she draw energies for a task which because of its dynamism and enterprising spirit seemed unusual and inexplicable to many of her contemporaries.”<sup>8</sup>

And what was so inexplicable? Why that a woman should ask to take the Constitutions and follow the way of life of members of the Society of Jesus. To live an active apostolic

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<sup>7</sup> George E. Ganss SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1992, [104]

<sup>8</sup> To the members of the Institutes which have as their Foundress this “incomparable woman” - as Pope Pius XII called her - I wish to express my greetings and appreciation. *The whole Church admires the work that you do in the formation of the young and in other forms of apostolate* in various parts of the world. As members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Loreto and of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Toronto, you find in the charism of your Foundress the wisdom and insights needed to persevere in the mission which Christ has entrusted to you. John Paul II Address to the Young People of the Mary Ward Schools 5<sup>th</sup> October 1985.

life, without enclosure and with government by a woman General Superior this was her desire. In 1611 she ‘heard distinctly, not by sound of voice, but intellectually understood, these words: TAKE THE SAME OF THE SOCIETY – so understood as that we were to take the same both in matter and manner, that only excepted which God, by diversity of sex, hath prohibited.’”

Canon law at this period of history insisted on any new Order adopting the rule of an already approved existing order. For women, however, the only existent orders were enclosed religious. Mary Ward’s conviction was that she was to take a rule that would enable the possibility of secret apostolic work amongst the persecuted Catholics in England in the manner in which she had already been working. This required the freedom of non-enclosure, to assume differing modes of dress if necessary both to avoid detection and to be able to mix with all classes of society.

In addition Mary and her companions would need permission to live amongst heretics and schismatics as and when necessary. With regard to observance of the divine office, Mary asked for the same dispensation as that granted to the Jesuits. If women were to lead an active apostolic life, they would not be able to sing the regular hours of the office in choir. Only the *Constitutions* of St Ignatius would enable this manner of life. It is important to note that in the years following her illumination of 1611 with its decisive ‘Take the Same of the Society,’ no matter what pressure was brought to bear upon her, Mary Ward continued to insist that this is what God was asking of her. Moreover, she also requested that the governance of the order should be by a woman superior general. Again, such a suggestion was unheard of in the first half of the seventeenth century. It was another hundred years before Pope Clement XI would give leave for women to govern women.

In 1618 Mary wrote to her spiritual director about the illumination of 1611 with a passionate commitment despite all the hardships she had endured in the intervening years. “Take the Same of the Society. These are the words whose worth cannot be valued, nor the good they contain too dearly bought. These gave sight when there was none,

made known what God would have done, gave strength to suffer what since hath happened, assurance of what is wished for in time to come. And if I ever be worthy to do anything about this Institute, hither I must come to draw.”

Mary Ward’s request provoked a furore in the Church and impelled a feminine dimension into the activities of those involved in the English mission. Indeed, the Archbishop of Canterbury hearing of Mary Ward’s missionary activities in London said she did more harm than six or seven Jesuits! This graced vision so long awaited, and so carefully discerned over time gave clear indication of the way ahead, and fresh energy and encouragement to suffer the consequences of such a radical proposal.

The distinctive nature of this vocation for those who would join the institute was shown to Mary Ward in 1615 as a particular personal interior disposition in which a certain graced freedom had priority. This freedom has a 3-fold dimension: freedom *from* attachment to earthly values and things; freedom *for* any kind of good works; freedom *to* refer all to God. Mary Ward saw freedom as a graced gift so integral to human beings that real freedom is a return of oneself and one’s choices to God both in a disposition and a way of life. Freedom for her was a dimension of love, primarily God’s redemptive love through Christ which liberates human beings and enables them to respond in love to God and others and be open to all that is good and true. Referring all to God was akin to Ignatius’ finding God in all things. Mary’s own lived spirituality embodied the freedom of which she spoke.

#### Ecclesial Disposition

It is really difficult today to imagine the shock and horror that greeted MW’s request for this novel service by women in the church. It is vital to keep in mind the context of her time. She appeared to be claiming divine inspiration to found an order of women where women might do what until then men had only done be active apostles in God’s service. Impossible! was the verdict of the 17th century. Mary Ward was eventually arrested and imprisoned as a ‘heretic, schismatic and rebel of Holy Church’, though later released by direct intervention of the Pope. She was slandered from all sides, she was caught in the hostility that was growing between the

secular clergy and the Jesuits in England. She was surrounded by spies and informers and left in ignorance about decisions that were made about her and against her. Nevertheless it is too simplistic to dismiss the reaction to her as merely a response of patriarchy. More complex issues were involved. Religion and politics were inextricably intertwined. Bishops and Cardinals were also political rulers of states and principalities. The trauma of the Reformation was still being felt as the reformers tended to be better educated – certainly in terms of scripture – highly articulate in terms of a mobilised group and very convincing for people in contrast with the prevailing situation in the Catholic Church in Europe.

Like Ignatius, Mary Ward contributed to the reform of the Church from within. Through the work of her sisters on the English mission and in schools she helped young women to grow in a relationship of intimacy with Christ. She encouraged the development of their spiritual lives and educated them to be actively involved in the life and mission of the Church.

In the face of severe persecution she was enabled to live without bitterness or resentment. The reason for this can be traced to an illumination in 1625 when “she received from our Lord so much light and knowledge regarding the forgiveness of enemies, that henceforth she cherished a tender affection for all who wronged her, and was in the habit of calling them friends”. In this ability to forgive Mary clearly evinces the intimacy of her relationship with Christ. She is also exemplary of Ignatius’ own practice when he recommended his brother Jesuits in the Const. [101] to welcome “contempt, lies and injuries and to be accounted and looked upon as fools because they desire to resemble and imitate in some degree our Lord Jesus Christ who is the true way that leads to life. Those familiar with the Exercises may also recognise an echo of the triple colloquy of the Two Standards.

She wrote what she thought was to be her last apologia in which she stated that she never had nor to gain a million lives would she do think or say the least that might be contrary to the Catholic church – but contrary-wise – from her earliest years she had employed her life and labours in the service of holy church.

In MW we encounter the feminine manner of living out the essential ecclesial disposition of Ignatius Loyola. Light years ahead of her own time MW endeavoured to carry out the task she believed God had called her to undertake. She strove to bring before the church the reasons why this new way of life was a gift to the church and would be of great service to the church. At all

times she conducted herself as a faithful daughter of the church. She attracted companions who were prepared like herself to offer obedience and service to the church primarily for the education of girls – and to comfort and support Catholics in those lands – notably England – where they suffered persecution.

The Society of Jesus was formed in order to be at the service of the Church. It did not come into existence for its own progress and development. Rather the Society was focused towards “the glory of God and the good of the universal Church.”<sup>9</sup> Ignatius was concerned to promote what he called ‘*sentire cum ecclesia*’ with a creative fidelity. The Institute that Mary Ward founded came into being also not for its own progress and development but for the glory of God and the good of the universal Church. In every continent sisters today serve in a variety of ministries of the word: in education, spiritual ministries, advocacy, and so much more. So as we celebrate the 400 years of the life of her Institute and the endurance of her spirit over that time, it is important to reflect on Mary Ward’s own courage and quiet confidence in the work of God within her and the truth of the institute she founded. Her example can teach us a good deal about how to respond to challenges in our own time remembering that “we must await ... God’s time and leisure, for we must follow and not go before him.” Like Ignatius, Mary Ward believed that “the truth of the Lord endures forever – note that it is not the truth of men nor the truth of women – but the truth of God. And that divine truth is shared equally by men and women.”

In that truth Mary Ward stands as a singular exemplar of the Ignatian charism

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<sup>9</sup> Constitutions 136