

# MARY WARD AND JESUIT MYTHS

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To love the poor,  
persever in the same  
live, die, and rise with them  
was all the aim  
of Mary Ward who,  
having lived 60 years and 8 days,  
died the 20 of January 1645.<sup>1</sup>

MARY WARD'S TOMBSTONE is massive; its carving is crude and hasty. The religious commitment is left implicit, perhaps because of the need for discretion. Her companions were in Protestant England, near York, a city which had been besieged during the Civil War; for its part church authority had intended 'totally and completely' to 'suppress and extinguish ... subject to perpetual abolition' and 'remove entirely ... from the Holy Church of God ... the pretended Congregation of women or virgins called Jesuitesses'.<sup>2</sup> But the rhythmic turn of phrase, the powerful use of plain English, and indeed the very resolve to have a tombstone at all, show that these women had not been fazed by failure. Something was in them that violent pontification could not touch.

Mary Ward does not appear to have been particularly interested in the personality of St Ignatius. It was something vaguer, 'the same of the Society', a way of doing things, that seems primarily to have given her light, comfort and strength, changing her soul in a way proper only to

<sup>1</sup> For the original (lack of) formatting, spelling and mistakes, compare the frontispiece to this issue. 'Persever' should surely be pronounced on the second syllable.

<sup>2</sup> For the text of the Bull, see M. Immolata Wetter, *Mary Ward under the Shadow of the Inquisition*, translated by Bernadette Ganne and Patricia Harriss (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), 21–18, here 214. The standard source now for Mary Ward's texts is the monumental four-volume collection edited by Ursula Dirmeier, *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung: Die Quellentexte bis 1645* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007). Many of the most important texts are conveniently reproduced in *Mary Ward (1585–1645): A Brief Relation ... with Autobiographical Fragments and a Selection of Letters*, edited by Christina Kenworthy-Browne (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008). Still useful and foundational is Mary Catherine Elizabeth Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward*, 2 volumes (London: Burns and Oates, 1882–1885).

‘him whose wordes are workes’.<sup>3</sup> For her it was ‘noe matter the who, but the what’.<sup>4</sup> Or, to use the words of a later Ignatian founder, ‘it is not in the footsteps of St Ignatius that we walk, but in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ’.<sup>5</sup>

Ignatius himself would surely have approved. After all, he had insisted that Jesus was the only head of his company, and had been most reluctant to provide his followers with the document we now call the *Reminiscences* or *Autobiography*. It was the followers’ need for a foundation-myth, rather than the founder’s personal conviction, that generated the Ignatian biographical traditions we have today. Moreover, only eleven years after Ignatius’ death, this dictated text had been suppressed to leave the way clear for polished biographies and a grander image.<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere in this issue, Brian O’Leary contrasts Mary Ward’s memorial with Ignatius’ funeral monument in the Church of the Gesù in Rome, resplendent with marble, bronze and lapis lazuli—a shrine for a baroque hero. Though it is possible to point to the spiritual affinities between Mary Ward and Ignatius such readings, however fruitful, depend on a modern approach that is rather different from what was common, or even possible, among seventeenth-century Jesuits. These Jesuits were well-connected and successful. Their numbers were large and increasing; they were figures of influence in a Catholic Church that still shaped much of European culture. By contrast, Mary Ward’s group had originated under conditions of recusancy, and was always comparatively small. The closest Jesuit parallel to Mary Ward’s tombstone inscription comes in a text from 1975 that was widely regarded as innovative and revolutionary:

If we have the patience and the humility and the courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we can do to help them .... Through such humble service, we will have the opportunity to help them find, at the heart of their problems and their struggles, Jesus Christ living and acting through the power of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Mary Ward to Antonio Albergati, May/June 1621, in *Mary Ward (1585–1645)*, 146.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Poyntz to Barbara Babthorpe, 3 February 1645, in *Mary Ward (1585–1645)*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Marie Madeleine d’Houët, founder of the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, as quoted in Mary Campion McCarren, ‘In the Footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ’, a 1993 talk available at [http://www.fcjsisters.org/fcj\\_english/spirit/mmv\\_resources.html](http://www.fcjsisters.org/fcj_english/spirit/mmv_resources.html).

<sup>6</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, edited and translated by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin, 1996), 1–8.

<sup>7</sup> General Congregation 32, decree 4, n. 50, in *Jesuit Life and Mission: Today: The Decrees of the 31st – 35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, edited by John W. Padberg (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 310.

Being ‘but women’<sup>8</sup> was merely one element, however important, in the marginality of Mary Ward’s group. Only by stretching a point can one see Ward as foreshadowing contemporary structural feminist critiques of an androcentric Christianity. She accepts that ‘wives are to be subiect to ther husbands’, that ‘men are head of the church’, and that ‘weomen are not to administer sacraments, nor to preach in publike churches’. Her insistence is only that such distinctions are secondary to an equality under grace: a ‘veritie’ that ‘wemen may have as well as men’. This truth involves a ‘fervour’, a ‘will to doe well ... that is a preventing grace of god, and a guift geven graties by god’, and as such ‘a signe of predestination’.<sup>9</sup>

Mary Ward and her companions had to live a contrast between divine grace and worldly success more intensely than most early modern European Jesuits. Their lived experience of prayer, poverty, power and holiness within ‘the same of the Society’ thus anticipates how we are learning to understand the Ignatian heritage today, when Christianity’s dominance of Western culture is only a memory, and Western culture itself is just one factor in a pluralist, if also globalising, world.

### Prayer

We possess retreat notes of Mary Ward’s from 1619 which include the following striking passage:

... he was very near me, and within me, which I neiver perceived him to be before. I was moved to aske him with great confidence and humility ... what he was. I sayd my god what art thou, I saw him emedeatly [immediately], and very clearly goe into my hart, and by little, and little hyd [hide] him self in yt.<sup>10</sup>

Mary tries to speak, or to ask that her heart be better prepared, ‘but he would not let me’. Now, there are obvious parallels to this sort of writing in such texts as Ignatius’s *Spiritual Diary*. But the important point of contrast between Mary Ward and the Jesuit tradition is that the early modern Jesuits tended to suppress such vulnerability in the Ignatian sources. Mary’s experiences, however, were evidently shared among her sisters and taken up into their collective memory and discourse.

<sup>8</sup> Attributed by Dirmeier to Michael Freeman SJ (*Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 1, 360).

<sup>9</sup> For Ward’s three 1517 speeches, see *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 1, 357–366, here 359, 358. Though livelier in tone than Mary Ward’s writings, the texts arise from notes taken by those present, and are sometimes obscure.

<sup>10</sup> *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 1, 471; compare *Till God Will: Mary Ward through her Writings*, edited by Emmanuel Orchard (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 47.

The evidence for this claim comes from the remarkable series of paintings commissioned by Mary Ward's companions in Germany in the latter half of the seventeenth century, known conventionally as the *Painted Life*.<sup>11</sup> Not many years after the paintings were completed, inscriptions were added, which resemble strongly passages from an early biography written by Tobias Lohner SJ, confessor to the Mary Ward sisters in Munich. The inscription for the comparatively undistinguished thirty-fourth canvas shows that Mary's intimate note had been preserved, was known in detail, and was thought fit to be transmitted:

When Mary on 10 October in the year 1619 was in spiritual retreat and at meditation was asking God with the deepest humility and great confidence about what He was, she saw him visibly enter her heart, and received the knowledge as she had wished it from him.<sup>12</sup>

Ignatius' *Spiritual Diary*, by contrast, was simply not available at this period. And if we compare the *Painted Life* with a book of engravings produced in 1609 to popularise the cult of Ignatius,<sup>13</sup> Ignatius's prayer life in this public document appears more heroic than relational. The newly converted Ignatius 'embraces the poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ' and changes his style of dress (n.8). But Christ is nowhere in the picture: instead we have a bemused beggar receiving Ignatius' finery, while our hero clothes himself with 'sacking and a rope-belt'. The nearest the collection comes to Ignatius' 'mystical' life comes in the sixty-eighth engraving, reproduced opposite. The caption is revealing:

Wondrously captured by the sight of the sky, he regularly poured out a flood of tears and exclaimed, ALAS, HOW DIRTY THE EARTH IS WHEN I LOOK AT THE SKY!—and since he was losing his eyes with the tears, he implores God for control over them. And with a new gift, he moderates the gift of tears.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Most conveniently accessible on websites, such as [http://www.congregatiojesu.org/en/maryward\\_painted\\_life.asp](http://www.congregatiojesu.org/en/maryward_painted_life.asp) and <http://www.loretonh.nsw.edu.au/faith/ourheritage/paintedlife.html>. The fullest printed source of background information is the tenth of M. Immolata Wetter's *Letters of Instruction on Mary Ward* (Allahabad: privately published, n.d.), 279–287.

<sup>12</sup> I have translated the *Painted Life* inscriptions from the originals, as reproduced in *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 4, 296–304, which sometimes differ from the received modern German texts on which the received English versions are based. Wetter's commentary (p. 344) oddly denies the connection between the painting and the retreat note.

<sup>13</sup> Available, though currently without the inscriptions, at <http://jesuitinstitute.org/Pages/VitaRubens.htm>. For printed editions and background information, see *The Rubens Engravings of the Life of St Ignatius*, edited by Jan Graffius (Stonyhurst: St Omers, 2005), and P. P. Rubens and Jean Baptiste Barbé, *Vida de San Ignacio de Loyola en imágenes* (Granada: Theology Faculty, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> *Caeli* (both here and later a translator has to opt between 'sky', 'heavens' and 'heaven') *aspectu mirifice captus vim lacrymarum* (a conventional phrase, but the presence of *vis*—force—is surely significant),



God's power here is acknowledged and revered, but it remains invisible, at most signified by the sky. Ignatius's orientation towards this distant God empowers his active control of dirty, earthly reality. His reaction is an acquired virtue, 'regularly' exercised; his tears may be passively received as a gift, but the force with which they are shed is his, a force over which God, paradoxically, nevertheless gives him *imperium*.

A number of factors contribute to this difference of tone and language: gender, the wider audience envisaged for the Ignatian set of pictures, the differences in the need for discretion. But the message of the Rubens engraving is one of holiness primarily expressed through heroic, ascetical control of a hostile world, and an orientation towards a goal beyond. Mary Ward's public image, by contrast, coincides more immediately with something that believers today find more attractive and credible: a person vulnerable and open to a directly touching God.<sup>15</sup>

HEU QUAM SORDET TELLUS, CUM COELUM ASPICIO! *Cumq[ue] prae lacrymis oculos perderet, imperium in illas a Deo impetrat; novoq[ue] dono donum lacrymaru[m] moderatur.*

<sup>15</sup> A guide to Jesuit Rome produced in the 1970s frankly acknowledges that Pozzo's funeral monument for Ignatius is 'over-elaborate', and pleads with potential pilgrims to 'accept it for what it is and tries to be, and I believe you may like it' (*Rome: A Jesuit City Too* [Rome: Gregorian UP, n.d.], 36–37).



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### Poverty

The thirty-eighth canvas in the *Painted Life* shows Mary Ward before an image of the Virgin, receiving enlightenment from the heart of God the Father. On the left-hand side, crowns, books and swords lie in an untidy heap. The inscription here, though not traceable directly to Mary Ward's writings, is eloquent:

On the feast of St Peter in Chains 1625, in Rome, as Mary was very diligently commending the Institute to God, she recognised clearly that its prosperity, progress and security did not consist in wealth, majesty [*hocheit*] and the favour of princes, but in that the members of the same had a free access and an open path [*einen freyen zugang und offenen Paß*] to God, from whom all strength, light and protection must come.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, there are clear continuities here with what is said in the Ignatian *Constitutions*, notably at the outset of the culminating part X: the Society is founded by Christ's omnipotent hand rather than by human means. But the practical thrust of Ignatius' teaching centres on the right

<sup>16</sup> Once again the received English text—with 'depend on' rather than 'consist in'—subtly shifts the tone towards the more distanced, causal Ignatian idiom noted below. Does *Paß* have something of its modern German meaning: 'passport' or 'pass'?

use of acquired virtues and skills, and the rhetoric is encouraging us towards a carefully discriminating use of these gifts. If the ‘supernatural means’ are in place, then,

... the natural means which arrange the instrument of God our Lord with regard to its neighbours will all, without exception [*universalmente*], help ... provided that they are learnt and put into use for the divine service alone—not so as to trust in them but to work together with divine grace, following the pattern of the sovereign providence of God our Lord, who wants to be glorified through what He gives as Creator (the natural) and as author of grace (the supernatural).<sup>17</sup>

Three points are worth making about the contrast here. First, Mary Ward’s overall experience of political authority was negative, and she clearly failed to understand the complexities of the papal court. By contrast, the *Constitutions* presuppose that Jesuits ‘will enjoy the favour of princes or important persons’.<sup>18</sup> Even though Ignatius—notably regarding the appointment of bishops—is well aware that his priorities are not identical with those of Europe’s rulers, he is acutely conscious of his Society’s need to cultivate those whose ‘good or bad will matters greatly for whether the door is opened or shut to the service of God and the good of souls’.<sup>19</sup> He has a courtly training and he uses it. A near-random example from the royal correspondence is when Ignatius wants Simão Rodrigues back in Rome in 1545, and is writing to João III:

... we humbly petition Your Highness, for God’s glory, to give him gracious and loving leave to go ... his coming here ... will turn out for the service of His Divine Majesty and of Your Highness, whose Society this is more than it is ours.<sup>20</sup>

The easy continuity here between eternal and temporal kingship prevents, at least in general, the early Jesuits from being dismissive of royal symbols in the way that the Mary Ward picture encourages.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Constitutions* X.1–3 [813–814], here 3 [814] (my translation).

<sup>18</sup> *Constitutions* VIII. 1. A [656].

<sup>19</sup> *Constitutions* X. 11 [823].

<sup>20</sup> Ignatius to João III, 15 March 1545, translation from Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, edited by Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 119.

<sup>21</sup> An exception that proves the rule comes in an anonymous verse emerging from Jesuit missionaries in Elizabethan England. Its chief note is one of unitive love for the crucified Jesus—

Calvary mount is my delight, a place I love so well.  
Calvary mount, O that I might deserve on thee to dwell.

Secondly, Ignatius' rhetorical and theological elaboration on the need for discernment points towards a religious problem arising from success. He writes as passionately as he does about poverty and the avoidance of ambition because he is all too aware that the need for good repute will pull the Society in the opposite direction. Its civil, institutional mission conducted through colleges normally required a good working relationship with political authority. Mary Ward's movement, by contrast, was founded in exile and its imaginative spur was the situation of Catholics within Protestant England. Ignatius' rhetoric in this context is smooth, belying the problem's intractability. Mary Ward's handling of providence and created agency can be much more pained and raw. In the third of her 1517 speeches, she regards it as 'a pittifull thing that to bring others to truth, wee must speake that which is not veritie'. When she had spoken of building a church through a benefactor's generosity,

... in substance it was a lye, and not verity. For I well knew ... that it was to be compased by god only, and not by the meanes I mentioned. But yet by the meanes of that lye I was faint to bring them to know the truth: it is certaine if I should have spoken truth they would not have understoud it: but would have laughed and sayd: well, well, pray, pray, goe to your prayers: but by this other meanes which in substance was a lye you see they were brought to understand and yeald to truth ....<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly, precisely because the 'natural means' are practically important, Ignatius' language of divine action connotes distance and separation. God founds, preserves, increases and carries forward; but God is not intimate. The creature's 'familiarity with God' is but one quality among a set of virtues and attributes. Theologically, Ignatius and Polanco of course knew better, but the initial suggestion of their language is that agency emerges from the creature, with a suggestion of radical autonomy: *his* charity, *his* familiarity with God, *his* 'pure intention of the divine service'. Perhaps such language is already moving towards the deisms and atheisms common in high and late modernity. There is certainly a difference in tone here from the relational expressions of the *Painted Life*: 'free access and an open path to God, from whom all strength, light and protection must come'.

The corollary is scorn for pursuivants, for the 'crafty catchpole', for 'Calvin's cursèd crew' and finally, rather mutedly, for 'the thirst of tyrants' that will be 'quenched in my blood'. See *Early Modern Catholicism: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, edited by Robert S. Miola (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 175–177.

<sup>22</sup> 'Thre Speches of Our Reverende Mother Cheef Superiour Made at St Omers Having Ben Long Absent', in *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 1, 365.



### ***Obedience and Verity***

Mary Ward's legacy, then, while appropriating 'the same of the Society', presents some subtly different constructions of the relationship between human beings and God, in particular regarding power and agency. The point is further confirmed when we consider how Mary Ward and her companions understood the idea of obedience.

The twenty-second canvas in the *Painted Life* is a diptych. On the left-hand side, six women in fine Elizabethan clothes are sitting in an open semicircle. A small inset shows three of them having a final meal in England with a man, perhaps Marmaduke Ward, Mary's father. On the right hand side, four are in a ship, looking rather wistfully homewards. The caption tells of how in 1609, Mary's 'edifying change [*aufferbaulichen wandel*]'—probably a reference to the glory vision—and 'eager conversation' had enabled her to,

... acquire some noble young ladies for the divine bridegroom. In order to avoid the world's snares, they later travelled with her to St Omer, in order to serve under Mary's direction in that religious state to which they were being led through her example.

Readers sensitive to how Jesuit origins have been reconceived since Vatican II will note some parallels with the so-called *Deliberation of the*

*First Fathers*.<sup>23</sup> As Ignatius' first companions recognised that their being sent on mission would, unless they were proactive, disperse their union, they affirmed prayerfully that it was *God* who had brought them together, that this unity should not be severed, and hence that they should do all they could to strengthen it. It is in this context, and for this purpose, that they opted for a vow of obedience to one of their own number, above and beyond their missionary commitment to the Pope:

Obedience to someone among us is highly advantageous and highly necessary in order to actualise more effectively and exactly our primary desire of fulfilling God's will in all details of life.

Jesuit obedience emerges initially from shared deliberation in the context of missionary engagement.

The Society of Jesus expanded quickly, and with that expansion it developed powerful and wealthy missionary institutions: its network of schools. Perhaps the administrative problems and relational conflicts this expansion entailed led the Jesuits, more or less consciously, to develop a more ascetical rhetoric of obedience, and to move obedience to the centre of their collective self-image. A formidable letter written by Ignatius and his companion and secretary, Juan de Polanco, to the fractious community at Coimbra in 1553 came to be known as the 'Letter on Obedience', exerting a powerful force on the collective Jesuit imagination and indeed on Catholicism at large:

... when it comes to the authenticity and perfection of obedience, with a real deposing our own wills and a denial of personal judgments, my great desire, dear brothers, is that those who have chosen the Society as their way of serving God Our Lord should be outstanding, and I would like this obedience to be the distinctive sign of the Society's legitimate sons.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever we make of such writing,<sup>25</sup> Mary Ward does not to any significant extent echo it. There were certainly conflicts among her

<sup>23</sup> Reproduced in Jules J. Toner, 'The Deliberation that Started the Jesuits', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 6/4 (September 1974), online at <http://www.raggionline.com/saggi/compagnia/deliberation.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Ignatius to the Fathers and Brothers in Portugal, 16 March 1553, in Ignatius, *Personal Writings*, 251–260, here 252.

<sup>25</sup> On the ethical and interpretational questions here see, for example, Karl Rahner, 'A Basic Ignatian Concept', in *Mission and Grace*, translated by Cecily Hastings and others, 3 volumes (London: Constable, 1966), volume 3, 144–175; John Carroll Futrell, *Making an Apostolic Community of Love: The Role of the Superior according to St Ignatius of Loyola* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970); and Philip Endean, "'And It Will Be for the One Being Sent': Mission, Obedience and Discernment from Ledóchowski to Arrupe', *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* (CIS), 73 (Summer 1993), 57–73.

companions; her group was subject to enormous pressures and suffered some hurtful departures; questions of how far hierarchical directives are binding were a constant concern. But the Mary Ward legacy does not contain much explicit reflection specifically on obedience, particularly within the group.

Obedience entered Jesuit rhetoric as a means to an end. 'Our primary desire of fulfilling God's will in all details of life' will not be fulfilled unless we purposefully counteract forces that tend to divert us. For the early Jesuits, this process seems to have involved control, restraint and co-ordination. But the need to distinguish gospel challenge from standard convention led Mary Ward and her companions, as socially marginal women, to develop, not mechanisms of control, but rather a spirituality affirming the truth of their calling in a hostile, or at least uncomprehending, setting. The classic statement of this view is, of course, the first 1617 address on verity and fervour, in reaction to Fr Freeman's offhand phrase, 'but women'. Fervour which is a grace of God (the echoes of technical Thomist language are unmistakable) may indeed often grow cold,

But what is the caus; is it because wee are weomen. No, but because we are unperfect weomen. Ther is no such difference between men and weomen; therefore it is not because we are weomen, but as I said before because we are unperfect weomen and love not veirity, but seeke after lyes. Veritas Domini manet in aeternum; the verity of our Lorde remaneth forever. It is not veritas hominum verity of men nor veritie of weomen but veritas Domini and this veritie wemen may have as well as men, if we fayle it is for want of this verity and not because we are weomen.<sup>26</sup>

The vision of the Just Soul, to which we will come presently, evokes an ideal justice whereby 'we be such, as we appear and appear such as we are'.<sup>27</sup> Granted the text's perspective of gospel and grace, that aspiration is a challenging one. When these women 'appear such as [they] are', conventions are flouted. Mary Ward distinguishes 'learning' and the knowledge it gives from 'knowledge of verity'—a truth which she identifies, quite simply, with God.<sup>28</sup> In this light, another of her retorts,

<sup>26</sup> 'Thre Speches of Our Reverende Mother Cheef Superiour', 358; modernised in Chambers, *Life of Mary Ward*, volume 1, 408–409 and *Till God Will*, 56–57.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Ward to Roger Lee, 1 November 1615, in *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 1, 289–291, here 290. For an accurate modernised version, see Wetter, *Letters of Instruction*, 156–158.

<sup>28</sup> 'Thre Speches of Our Reverende Mother Cheef Superiour', 363: '... now you are to understand how you are to attaine to this perfection. By learning: no ... to attaine perfection knowledg of veritie is

to an unnamed clerical critic, is not merely eloquent in its balancing of respect for due authority with insistence on what she herself has experienced, but also richly theological in its claim:

... with respect to the good father ... I must needs defend this veritie this truth: of which I am assured that fervour must not nessesarily decay because we are weomen yet I entend not to condeme this father notwithstanding this he may have much knowledge and perhaps he hath all other knowledg: and I have only this knowledg: and light of this only veritie: ... I must and will ever stand for this veritie that weomen may be perfect, and that fervor must not necessarily decay: because wee are weomen ....<sup>29</sup>

For the 1553 Ignatian letter, the high point of obedience is not merely external compliance, nor even a willingness to do what one is told, but an agreement at the level of thought or judgment. In his careful moments, Ignatius shows awareness that such agreement may not always be defensible or possible, let alone desirable or mandatory. But the thrust of his thought is clearly moving towards an ideal of total conformity. The Mary Ward tradition offers us another reading of the situation where legitimate authority demands the indefensible. Though authority has to be respected in the external forum, the desires arising from the direct experience of God are not to be denied or repressed.<sup>30</sup> Thus, famously, when close to death in Munich and faced with a priest who would administer the sacraments to her only if she signed a paper to the effect that 'if she had ever sayd or done any thing contrary to Faith or holy Church, she repented her and was sorry for it', Mary Ward's retort was characteristically robust:

God forbid I shou'd to cancell veniall sinnes ... comitt a mortall, and cast so great a blott upon so many innocent and deserving Persons .... No, I will cast myself on the mercyes of Christ, and rather dy without Sacramentes.

Mary Poyntz' comment only reinforces the point:

necessary to love and effect it ... seeke this knowledg not for the content and satisfaction it bringeth, though it be exceeding great ... but for the end it bringeth you unto which is god. Seeke it for him, that is verity the other is a lye.'

<sup>29</sup> 'Thre Speches of Our Reverende Mother Cheef Superiour', 361–362.

<sup>30</sup> The classic exposition of such a view is Jules J. Toner, *Discerning God's Will: Ignatius of Loyola's Teaching on Christian Decision Making* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991); its Ignatian legitimation comes principally from a private letter to Francis Borja, 5 June 1552 (*Personal Writings*, 245–246).

Her adversaries thought her had been a notable proofe of her obstinacy and perverseness, which some weake headed People enclined to interpret so, but wise and prudent People knew the obligation there is for each to stand upon their owne right ...<sup>31</sup>

Such a spirit lies behind the Osbaldwick tombstone; such a spirit enabled her sisters to preserve Mary Ward's memory, amid great difficulties, through such discreet means as the *Painted Life*.<sup>32</sup> When the time came for her story to be written up fully, by Catherine Chambers late in the nineteenth century, the sources had been preserved in such a way as to enable what, for its time, was a remarkable piece of scholarship.

The theology of authority here is both psychologically healthier and morally superior, even if it leaves us with a problem that we can never resolve in advance. Mary Ward (or her scribe) struggles with the point in the first of her 1617 speeches:

I besech you all for gods love to love verity and true dependance and not to adhere to this superior, to this Father or this creature for affection .... If I were in a monastarie wher none kept ther rule should not I keep myne, and note this well that you love true dependance, els heer you will also be far wide following your owne fancies, you must allwaies be dependant but lit [let] it be true dependance you will understand this better hereafter ....<sup>33</sup>

### **Holiness and the Just Soul**

A final and central element in Mary Ward's charism that we need to consider is the vision of the Just Soul, for which our chief source is a letter from Mary to Roger Lee SJ, her spiritual director. She is recounting 'what hath occurred in these two days': something which captivates her love, but which she dare not embrace as good 'till it be approved': a 'certain clear and perfect estate to be had in this life' necessary for the duties of her Institute. It does not fit the categories available to her:

I never read of anie I can compare in lyknes to yt, yt ys not lyke the state of Saints, whos holynes cheefly appeares in that union with God, which maketh them out of them selves, I perceived then an apparante differance, and yeat felte my self drawn to love, and desire

<sup>31</sup> Mary Poyntz, 'The English Vita', in *Mary Ward (1585–1645)*, 51.

<sup>32</sup> For background, see Wetter, *Mary Ward under the Shadow of the Inquisition*, 187–211, and Mary Wright, *Mary Ward's Institute: The Struggle for Identity* (Sydney: Crossing, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> 'Thre Speches of Our Reverende Mother Cheef Superiour', 359.

this estate, more, then all thos favours. The felicity of this estate (for as much, as I can express) was a singular freedome from all that could make one adhear to earthly thinges, with an intyre applycation, and apte dispoion to all good works, somethinge happined also discoveringe the freedom, that such a soule should have had to referr all to god ....<sup>34</sup>

She speculates that this state somehow relativises the effects of the Fall. No longer is there need for holiness ‘out of ourselves’, moving away towards heaven from a sinful world. Original justice and final perfection are somehow realities ‘in this life’, and hence

Yt then occured, and so still continues in my minde, that thos in Paridice, before the first fale [fall] wear in this estate; yt seemed to me then, and that hope remains still, that our lord let me see yt, to invite me that way, and becaus he would give me grace in time to arive to such an estate, at least in some degree .... I have moreover thought upon this occation, that perhapps this cours of ours would continue till the end of the world, becaus yt carne to that, in which we first begone.<sup>35</sup>

The Just Soul is the central theme of two different canvasses of the *Painted Life*. The twenty-fifth is relatively dull, and its caption waters down the theological revisionism of Mary’s text.<sup>36</sup> More interestingly, the twenty-seventh interprets the soul christologically, and sets Mary’s vision against a background surely deriving from the contemplations at the outset of Ignatius’ Second Week (Exx 101–117). Amid a world of men and women working at various occupations and moving towards Hell (Exx 102), Mary Ward beholds a perfect being: Jesus, yes, but also the disciple who knows this reality ‘from inside’, loving and following the Lord newly incarnate (Exx 104).

God visibly showed Mary, when she was meditating, the words ET VOCABIS NOMEN EIUS JESUM, a soul that was just and gifted with great radiance, and gave clearly to understand that all those who lived their vocation appropriately in this institute would attain

<sup>34</sup> Mary Ward to Roger Lee, 1 November 1615, 290.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Ward to Roger Lee, 1 November 1615, 290.

<sup>36</sup> ‘God, at St Omer in the year 1615, showed Mary a just soul of inexpressible beauty, in which all virtues seemed to be a chain—in which it was not only detached from everything earthly, completely taken out of itself, and wholly united with God, but received also true freedom, equanimity [*gleichgiltigkeit*: indifference?] of spirit, heavenly wisdom, and capability for everything that the perfection of the Institute requires.’

such an indescribable beauty of soul, because this state leads them to an inherited [*erblichen*] justice, and makes them conform to Christ the Lord, as a most perfect model of all virtue.<sup>37</sup>

Modern Ignatian readers may readily make connections with ‘finding God in all things’ and ‘contemplation in action’. It is unlikely, however, that such ideas were central to Jesuit self-understanding before some point in the twentieth century; the Official Directory to the Spiritual Exercises, for example, is notably restrained on the Contemplation to Attain Love.<sup>38</sup> When Hugo Rahner published in 1962 an essay entitled ‘The Christology of the Spiritual Exercises’, gently suggesting that the creator–creature relationship needed to be understood at all points as christological, a creation in Christ, he was saying something that had not yet received general acceptance.<sup>39</sup>

This modulation in Jesuit tradition reflects a conviction newly highlighted in the Western theology of the last hundred years, Protestant

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<sup>37</sup> Luke 2: 31: ‘you will call him Jesus’. *Erblich* is obscure: the standard modern German version may be right to use the technical ‘original justice’, but the nuance of inheritance (compare the standard German name for original sin, *Ersünde*) may be worth preserving.

<sup>38</sup> MHSJ Dir 43, 254.

<sup>39</sup> In *Ignatius the Theologian*, translated by Michael Barry (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 53–135, especially 61–93. For further argument, see Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 68–87.

as well as Catholic: the New Testament expresses not primarily a narrative of atonement and repair, but also, and more fundamentally, the divine desire from the beginning. Such ideas were not common in the seventeenth century. Mary Ward is clearly nervous about what she takes to be an innovation. She indeed speculates that her 'state of iustis, and vertue of sincerity' is a special gift from God supplying for her own sisters' *lack* of 'that larning, iudgment, and other parts that men have', on the basis of which the Jesuits can do their business.<sup>40</sup> What now appears to us an intuition of fundamental importance for any version of 'Ignatian spirituality' is for her an exception, to be accounted for in terms of feminine inadequacy regarding 'natural means'.<sup>41</sup>

For whatever reason, there has probably been a shift in our understanding of Ignatius' First Week, and of his theology of sin and forgiveness, over recent decades. The focus on guilt and fear that informs, say, the famous retreat sermon in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has given way to an insistence that sin, however original, cannot healthily or truly be understood except in the context of a yet more original grace. 'Christ alone is the central point of the whole history of sin.'<sup>42</sup>

The early modern Ignatius couches the key petitions of the First Week triple colloquy negatively, in terms of what we learn to abhor:

... first, that I may feel an interior knowledge of my sins, and hatred of them; second, that I may feel the disorder of my actions, so that, hating them, I may correct myself and put myself in order; third, to ask knowledge of the world, in order that, hating it, I may put away from me worldly and vain things (Exx 63).

But Mary Ward, at least in one text, seems to think rather differently. In 1617 she began her own autobiography because she was returning to England, and Roger Lee, her Jesuit guide and supporter, thought that some sort of record needed to be available in the event of her dying or being imprisoned. In this context, she evokes a graced reality that surely grows from the Ignatian First Week, while bringing out, originally, some important connections between different elements in the Ignatian vision of sin.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Ward to Roger Lee, 1 November 1615, 290–291.

<sup>41</sup> Note, however, James Walsh's observations in the introduction to *Till God Will* regarding Mary Ward's evident skills in Latin and rhetoric (xvi–xxiii), taken up by the professional literary scholar David Wallace in his discussion of Mary Ward as a woman writer in *Strong Women: Life, Text and Territory 1347–1645* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 141–145.

<sup>42</sup> Hugo Rahner, 'The Christology of the Spiritual Exercises', 80.

Mary presents her own history in Augustinian and scholastic terms, close both to mainstream ideas about grace and freedom and to the Ignatian interplay between a faithful God and a wayward creature. She contrasts God's grace and goodness with her own negligence and imperfect co-operation. More interestingly and originally, she sets this reality in a context of *the reader's* discernment, and in so doing suggests an important rationale for the First Week.

I beseech all those / (even for our Lord's love)  
 that should read these my faults / and the goodness of God towards me  
 notwithstanding my unworthiness,  
 that they judge not of anything there / according to their own affections,  
 but determine of all as the truth is, / distinguishing the great and true  
 difference  
 between God's preventing graces / His immeasurable goodness / and the  
 means afforded me to be wholly His,  
 and my continual falls, / unspeakable negligences, / and imperfect  
 concurrence with all His favours.  
 As yourselves will judge and witness with me, so shall you do justice,  
 giving God what is His, / and me my deserts.

Mary's only concern is,

that the readers of this would endeavour thenceforward  
 to become lovers of truth and workers of justice.  
 Which petition who granteth / and proceedeth accordingly,  
 Verity will free them from errors, / rectify their judgments,  
 perfect their knowledge, / endue them with true wisdom,  
 make them able to discern things as they are in themselves,  
 the difference between trifles and matters of importance,  
 what is to be done or not to be done in all.<sup>43</sup>

We make comparisons between the truth of God and our small-mindedness (Exx 58–59) not simply as an act of repentance. The First Week is, rather, an indispensable preparation for discernment. The exercise educates the readers beyond their 'own affections' and draws them to what 'the truth is', as revealed in the Christian narrative of

<sup>43</sup> The versification here is based on a suggestion by James Walsh that Mary Ward's writing here draws both on Latin rhetorical figures and a native English pattern of alliterative stress verse (*Till God Will*, xxi). Whatever the truth of Walsh's attractive intuition, this dense text becomes much easier to read if it is presented as loose blank verse, with modernised spelling and punctuation. The version here follows Walsh's strategy, but draws on *Mary Ward (1585–1645)*, 104–105, as opposed to the Chambers edition available to Walsh. Both extant manuscripts appear to be drafts; between the two displayed quotations, the original brief text is obscure.

creaturely waywardness and prevenient grace: a healthy and true way of dealing with the negative in our lives, one that avoids denial, remorse and repression, and simply acknowledges the gracious truth of God at work despite everything. If the readers play their part, then they can trust Truth itself to guide their judgments and enable them to discriminate appropriately when making their life-choices.

### **‘Goe to Him’**

We may read Mary Ward, therefore, as deepening the Ignatian tradition from a position of marginality where she explored and lived out aspects of what we now call ‘Ignatian spirituality’ that were not yet understood. Such a claim helps explain why she met with such resistance in her lifetime. It also suggests a connection between three changes dating from the late nineteenth century: her rehabilitation; a new Ignatian and Jesuit self-understanding drawing on hitherto unpublished sources; and the beginnings of a positive engagement between Catholicism and secularity.

The contrasts in this article may appear too sharply drawn; it is not straightforward to imagine the spiritual culture of past eras without knowledge and resources that we now take for granted. The moving interplay in Mary Ward between personal tentativeness and a God of transforming affirmation surely finds a parallel in ‘mystical’ Jesuits such as Baltasar Alvarez (1533–1580).<sup>44</sup> But within the Society of Jesus, such a spirituality was allowed only by way of exception and concession; and despite the testimony of such figures as Alvarez, it was often said to be incompatible with a life of active ministry. The ‘abnegation’ exemplified in Jesuit heroic hagiography turned on conscious control, on discipline, on exploits: a thrusting subjugation of the unknown and uncontrolled. Mary Ward’s involves allowing unpredictable grace to define personal identity, in and through a vulnerability to forces beyond control. Her model of grace involves a freedom not to move out of ourselves, however unprepossessing those selves may be, but rather to ‘refer all to God’. Perhaps the male Church can hear her only to the extent it is itself ready to acknowledge its vulnerability.

It would be absurd, of course, to understand the contrast as a simple binary. The two approaches are complementary, and perhaps developmentally interdependent. Contemporary Ignatian disciples live

<sup>44</sup> Baltasar Alvarez, ‘Beyond the Train of Ideas’, *The Way Supplement*, 103 (May 2002), 43–54; Philip Endean, “‘The Strange Style of Prayer’: Mercurian, Cordeses and Alvarez”, in *The Mercurian Project*, edited by Thomas M. McCoog (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 2004), 351–397.

both from the impressively important institution of the first Jesuits and from the myth of Ignatius the itinerant pilgrim, jostling chaotically in our imaginations. We live with the conceptual tensions between both, perhaps most vividly in connection with problems of religious authority and of the spirit in which Christianity should engage the wider world. These tensions may indeed be discernible right back to the gospel idea of a Kingdom at once in the world but not of it.

'Live, die and rise with them.' Whether 'them' refers to 'the poor', or to 'the poor Christ and the same of the Society', Mary Ward's followers expressed their understanding of her in terms not of the active ministry but of the paschal mystery, not the Second of Ignatius' Weeks, but rather the Third and Fourth. Perhaps it is the insistence on recording this kind of experience, and giving it a collective setting, that makes the Mary Ward legacy important for the Ignatian family generally. Particularly now, we need spiritual resources that will sustain us as our projects diminish, in a world where Christianity is an option shared only by a minority, and where the Churches no longer shape mainstream culture.

Mary Ward's story may reproduce a pattern we find already in the Gospels. It is from beyond the Twelve, through women who have remained faithful despite the cross, that the message of death and resurrection first gets through. The men, busy about many things and frustrated at their apparent lack of success, cannot believe the report of 'angels who said that he was alive' (Luke 24:23). Even so, the women's commission remains: 'Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you' (Mark 16:7). In this context it may not seem so strange that Mary Ward was enjoined,

... as follows (understood as it is writ without adding, or altering one sillable) Take the same of the Society. Father Generall will never permitt it. Goe to him ....<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mary Ward to John Gerard, April 1619, in *Mary Ward (1585–1645)*, 142.

This article emerges from many years of friendship with members of Mary Ward's communities, and is dedicated to them with love and gratitude. It was also stimulated by a class of young men (mostly Jesuit scholastics) and one intrepid laywoman at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry in the Fall Semester of 2011, with whom I began to think through what a history of Ignatian spirituality needs to look like today. An earlier version of this paper was presented to a conference at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, in May 2012: *Religious Lives: Catholic Culture in the Early Modern World*.