

Press Statement

THE VENERABLE MARY WARD



On 19th December 2009 Pope Benedict XVI formally published a Decree recognising the 'heroic virtue' demonstrated by Mary Ward and thereby conferring on her the title 'Venerable'. Her cause will now go forward to the next stage in the process towards beatification and eventual canonization.

Mary Ward (1585-1645) was a Catholic Yorkshire woman, related to several of the Gunpowder Plotters, who felt called by God to found a congregation of apostolic, non-enclosed religious sisters along the model of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). She spent many years in Rome petitioning the Pope to recognise her new congregation, but in 1631 her order was suppressed and Mary Ward herself accused of being a 'heretic [...] and rebel to holy church'. No charges were ever brought but she remained under the shadow of the Inquisition in Rome and her congregation was disbanded. Mary Ward's ideal of an active, self-governing congregation of religious women serving the needs of the Church was too advanced for her time. She suffered at the hands of authorities who in different circumstances might have recognised the need for such a congregation. Only in 1877 was her congregation recognised by the Church and only in 1909 was Mary Ward allowed to be named as foundress.

The cause for Mary Ward's canonization was opened in 1929. The historical research was accepted by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 1995. The theologians completed their investigation in May 2009 and recommended unanimously that Mary Ward demonstrated 'heroic virtue' and that her cause should go forward. This was confirmed by the commission of Cardinals and Bishops in November 2009 and subsequently by the Pope.

Mary Ward's foundation exists today worldwide under the names Congregation of Jesus and Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters) with about 3,000 members. The sisters are in forty-four countries across five continents. Sisters worldwide are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the founding of their order this year, and 2,000 people attended a special Mass in January 2009 at York Minster. In England Mary Ward sisters live and work in Cambridge and London, and in Yorkshire at the Bar Convent, York, founded in 1686, St. Bede's Pastoral Centre, York, and St. Stephen's, Greatfield, Hull.

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Websites:

<http://www.cjengland.org>

<http://www.bar-convent.org.uk>

<http://www.stbedes.org.uk>

<http://www.ststephen.org.uk/st-stephens-cj>

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