

MARY WARD SYMPOSIUM ADDRESS - GEMMA SIMMONDS CJ
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Dear Sisters and friends of Mary Ward from all over the globe,

What a wonderful thing it is for us to be gathered here in Rome to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Mary Ward's Institute. All over the world this year, in every continent, we have gathered as sisters, as friends and fellow-workers, as past pupils and family in her name. We have come to honour the past, to celebrate the present and to dream for the future. I have been fortunate enough to witness some of the worldwide celebrations in honour of this great woman who, even here in Rome, would not take no for an answer. But we are not only celebrating the gift to history and to the church of this pioneer and pilgrim. We are remembering a woman who, with her vision of equal participation and opportunity, opened a new chapter in the history of women worldwide.

Mary Ward belongs to us, her own family, in a special way. Her portrait and painted life hang in our communities and workplaces, her statue stands in serenity or strides out with purpose across our courtyards, and above all her words inspire us with the same resolute courage, cheerfulness and commitment to truth and justice, the same love of God above all things. As we come to the high point in all our celebrations I want to dwell not so much on her achievements, great though they were, and through us continue to be, but on the vision that she offers us for the women of today and tomorrow. Whether we come from countries with centuries of the Mary Ward tradition, or only a few years, whether we are vowed sisters, co-workers or just fellow pilgrims, inspired by 'that incomparable woman', we carry with us a heritage which offers, in the context of today, a powerful response to the situation of women worldwide and an urgent call to action.

At the opening Mass for the Mary Ward celebrations in England in York Minster, I spoke of the boat and the open circle of first companions as the great icons which dominate our lives as Mary Ward's followers: they represent community and mission. The courage to step out into the unknown is made possible by loving bonds of solidarity across time and space. The seeds of this solidarity and courage were sown early on in Mary's own development. English Catholics of Mary Ward's time were forcibly separated from the mainstream of socio-economic, political and cultural life. Catholic women suffered a double separation, removed from the mainstream not only by their faith but by their gender. Mary herself was born far from the national centre of influence and was obliged to live a life of relative obscurity. I have often found myself wondering how a girl from such a background, who described herself as being painfully shy and socially backward, found within herself as an adult such iron resolution, such courage of her convictions and such bold speech. As I have pondered this question my attention has been drawn to the Glory Vision, the Vision of the Just Soul and Mary's own writing about love, fear and freedom. It

seems to me that in these texts we have both a key to her pioneering vocation and a vision that we can share today.

There is, of course, no single recognizable generic category of 'women', as such. The experience and needs of a wealthy, educated, white, professional European have little in common with those of an illiterate peasant living in a refugee camp, even though both are female. In that respect neither Mary Ward in her time nor we in ours can speak in globalizing terms of women and women's experience. But the 2008 United Nations Development Fund for Women, or UNIFEM report on *The Progress of the World's Women* reminds us of the situation in which many women find themselves four hundred years on from Mary Ward's founding vision. I am indebted to this report, based on surveys conducted worldwide, for the data I quote when looking at aspects of women's lives within contemporary society.¹

The Millennium in 2000 celebrated the entry of the Incarnate Son of God into our human reality. Though many ignored this religious origin of the worldwide celebrations, there were some achievements within the secular sphere which strongly echoed elements of Gospel-based social teaching. The Millennium Development Goals agreed to by the United Nations in 2000 are one example. They contain a commitment to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. In many countries, even where the law prohibits it, women's rights continue to go unfulfilled. Women's disadvantage is based on their subordinate status in relation to men as decision-makers and power-holders. In many contexts women's voices and choices are silenced by the assumption that male needs and preferences are the norm, so that the way women experience the world, and their desires and choices are ignored, their ability to assert or exercise their rights restricted. Women may be denied educational opportunities, access to public services, political representation and rights in work and in law. Their claim to land or financial independence may be disputed by authoritative men within or outside their household. Women who have been victims of violence often encounter a judicial system which is effectively more sympathetic to the perpetrator than the victim.

Although it is frequently ignored by the world's legislators, it has long been part of Catholic social teaching, as well as of secular ethics, that there is a critical link between human rights, the eradication of poverty and sustainable development. The Millennium Goals echo implicitly the church's recognition of the importance played by women's rights in achieving poverty reduction, conflict prevention, economic growth and environmental protection. But gender biases and the exclusion of women in public affairs often follow unconscious cultural patterns within secular legislation and even, dare I say it, within the church. When silent women find their voice, it not only makes for better social equality, but for a richer experience of human society. This is what Mary Ward came to understand, and it is part of her legacy to the church and to the world.

¹ <http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/publication.html> referred to *passim* within this address

The obstacles faced by women in gaining equal access to public services are generally obvious. Because of the way in which society is organized in many parts of the world women may not have the time, money, education or mobility needed. The most obvious way in which services matter to women is that they support their rights to health, education and a decent life. Since many poor women have no other options, if services are designed and delivered with men rather than women in mind, it reinforces their dependence on men and limits their opportunities. If they have to pay for health or education, poor girls and women lose out, as poor households commonly reserve the available money for medical care and schooling for men and boys. It was part of Mary Ward's genius to understand that investing in the care and education of women is an investment in the future of an entire nation. Behind her struggle to find a place within the church which reflected women's vocation and women's experience, behind her determination to offer education to girls across Europe, her enthusiasm for Latin and for drama as an appropriate medium for female education, despite the prejudices she encountered, lies a conviction that if women are to do great things, they must be given the tools to realize their potential.

Economic globalisation - the rapid liberalisation of world finance and trade - combined with the credit crises of recent years, has had a notable effect on women. Women may get paid less than men for the same work, with employers feeling no obligation aside from paying their wages or be denying them access to better paid jobs because of the continuing assumption that men are the main breadwinners and need to earn more. This is not only true in economically deprived areas, but in the City of London itself, where last month it was revealed that within the banking sector, women earn 47% less than men, and gain 80% less in bonuses.² They may not be able to compete equally with their male colleagues because they cannot invest an equal amount of time in work when they remain responsible for the greatest share of household and childrearing tasks. To give an example, if households have no water in or near the premises, it is women's job to do the time-consuming work of fetching and carrying it. Research in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that women spend some 40 billion hours a year collecting water—that is the equivalent of a year's worth of labour by the entire workforce in France. Mary Ward pioneered a form of religious life for women in the church which in turn became the blueprint for many subsequent congregations. These groups of women, in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, often spearheaded social and educational movements which enabled women to take a fuller and more equal part in public and private life.

Mary Ward was not unique in advocating the education of girls, but in 400 years her followers have indeed done 'great things' in terms of promoting freedom and progress for women through education. Today, better-educated and informed women enter industry

² <http://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/pm/articles/2009/09/city-women-earn-80-per-cent-less-in-bonuses-than-men.htm>

not just because of poverty, but also for the prospect of improving their family's standard of living, sending their children to school and safeguarding family health. They have also become increasingly visible in collective actions in support of their rights, which have linked local and global movements through consumer campaigns.

Almost 100 million of the world's migrants are women, and women now dominate the categories of migrants with a tertiary education. This represents a feminised 'brain drain', as qualified women seek better conditions away from home. Ironically, one result of successful education of women world-wide can be the depletion of the pool of potential female leaders within affected countries. This is likely also to have an impact on vocations to religious orders, as women with educational and leadership qualities are less inclined to look at a life of service in the kingdom of God when there is pressure on them within their families to migrate in search of economic improvement. For some women, migration offers the chance of economic independence and empowerment. But for many, migration can involve abusive employment and the violation of fundamental rights. It would surely make Mary Ward's heart rejoice to see women religious organizing themselves internationally in defence of women and children being trafficked into the sex industry.

Mary Ward founded an international network of schools for girls and it was, initially, as educators that we survived as a group of women within the church. The global net enrolment rate of females in education has increased worldwide by almost 10% in the last decade. The gender gap in enrolment and literacy is also narrowing. Our work over four centuries has had an effect! Still, much remains to be done to ensure that girls finish primary and secondary school, to eliminate violence and sexual oppression against girls in school, and to bring more non-enrolled girls into the educational system. 72 million primary-age children were estimated not to be in school in 2005. The majority of these were girls. Post-primary education is known to have the greatest impact on women's empowerment, but girls' enrolment in secondary schools has not increase at the same rate as in primary education. In fact, gender gaps are widening in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Middle East and South Asia. Where women are educated, their rights are more respected and their voice becomes a power for challenge and change. Our work is by no means finished...

Some of us work in the field of health, and see from that perspective that the position of women remains precarious. Globally, over half a million women every year die during pregnancy or childbirth. We are witnessing the feminization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with 3 out of every 5 adults living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa being women. Others among us work in advocacy and social welfare provision. It is a tragedy that a massive *impasse* has developed between the church's teaching on sexual ethics and secular campaigns for women's rights. In their insistence on women's 'reproductive rights' and on individual choice it has become virtually impossible for many secular agencies to hear or interpret with an open mind the church's insistence on the sacredness of human life from conception to death. On the other hand it has become increasingly difficult for Catholic

theologians and providers of health services to represent the real experience and urgent needs of women, or to enter into respectful dialogue on these questions without being reprimanded for perceived infidelity to the Magisterium. Pope Benedict XVI's recent encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, reminds us of the necessary 'link between life ethics and social ethics', pointing to the inherent contradiction in societies where, on the one hand, the dignity of the person is upheld while 'ways in which human life is devalued and violated' are tolerated. (*Caritas in Veritate*, 15). There are, however, many ways in which the life of women and girls is devalued and violated worldwide, and many of them perceive the church as being unwilling or unable to offer a realistic answer to their difficulties.

In judicial systems and law enforcement around the world, there are regular failures in the protection of women from physical and sexual violence. Despite significant legal advances at the national level with regard to domestic violence and at the international level in the recognition of systematic rape as a crime against humanity and, in certain circumstances, an element of genocide, violence against women and girls has become endemic. In Liberia and Darfur levels of sexual violence in refugee camps have been so high that almost 80 per cent of women and girls were reported as subject to attack. Justice for women has been long in emerging at the heart of the international rule of law, and this can only be because their experience of violence was not considered to be a priority. Mary Ward's insistence on the intrinsic equality of women and men offers us a moral starting point from which violence and abuse can never be tolerated because of the victim's gender.

Within the political domain, the growing number of women candidates in all continents are addressing cultural practices harmful to women, improving female access to education and promoting women's participation in decision-making. Where women's rights and violence against women and children are on the political agenda it is generally because the women in politics have put it there. At grass-roots level women are using their votes to promote social change. Women's movements have challenged authoritarian regimes and built pressure for peace across continents; they have led contemporary protests around the world at high commodity prices, pressed for changes to laws oppressive of women and promoted rights in marriage and inheritance law. In pioneering women's education and a theological understanding of the equality of women and men before God, Mary Ward was an important part of the historical momentum which has led to these changes. She urged her sisters to love and live in 'verity' - the truth of God which is not determined by concepts of gender difference. Her understanding of the equal, yet complementary status of women is the key to her pioneering vision whose fruits within church and society are so visible today.

It was against a mindset convinced of women's inferiority that Mary Ward fought so hard in the church and society of her time. One of the more enlightening, if also depressing, fruits of Sister Ursula Dirmeier's scholarly edition of the Mary Ward resources is the collection of all the accusations against her. Many of them form an unhappy catalogue of general male fantasies about independent women. What made Mary so remarkable was

her understanding, so far in advance of her time, of the essential equality of men and women created in God's image and likeness, beyond any category imposed by society and tradition. There were so many voices in her time which spoke of women in derogatory terms, reminding them of their mental, physical and moral inferiority. Women were considered, and often considered themselves, to be in an utterly different social and even anthropological category from men. Mary questioned the very basis of these definitions. She was not afraid to contest them, even when apparently legitimized by theology and ecclesial authority,

'I confess wives are to be subject to their husbands, men are head of the church, women are not to administer sacraments, nor to preach in public churches, but in all other things wherein are we so inferior to other creatures, that they should term us but women [...] as if we were in all things inferior to some other creature which I suppose to be man, which I dare be bold to say is a lie, and with respect to the good father, may say it is an error'.³

Mary refused to accept a situation in which reality was defined and described through the dominance of male experience and perceptions. Then and now, such an understanding of reality not only excludes the concerns specific to women, but also fails to take seriously their experience as a category for interpreting reality itself. Four hundred years later, this silencing of women and women's experience continues to be a form of disempowerment with which women struggle in many contexts. For Mary Ward the power to speak was linked with the power to demand justice in terms of self determination. Her conviction that women are called to 'do great things' for God, to be educators and educated, to be apostles and communicators of faith, was a revolution not just in terms of the church but in terms of an entire culture. She understood that the exclusion of women's voices and women's experience from public discourse lay at the heart of their oppression within society, and was contrary to the mind of God.

The Glory Vision reminds us of both the distinctiveness and the dignity of the particularity of women - a dignity which too many women today are denied. Jody Williams, the Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1997 wrote that in oppressive social relations, those who hold power are able to close off even the very thought of alternatives, so that the *status quo* seems inevitable and impossible to change. The great power of women's movements within history has been their ability to challenge the assumptions behind their subordination in society. They argue not only that things must change, but also that things can change. She claimed that women have always drawn on the power of collective action to change the world. Women's struggles for gender equality and justice have led to revolutions in social relations, but the revolution is unfinished.⁴ Mary Ward knew the power of women in solidarity. This was her genius for her generation and for ours. She never

³ See Ursula Dirmeier, *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung: die Quellentexte bis 1645*, 1, (Münster, Aschendorff, 2007), pp.364-5 [spelling modernized]

⁴ <http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/publication.html>, p.51

doubted for a moment that from the open circle she and her sisters could step out and walk on the stormy waters of religious, social and cultural change.

Over four hundred years we have offered a substantial challenge to injustice in social relations by sharing in Mary Ward's vision. But how can we articulate this vision to the women of today and tomorrow? Here are a few suggestions. We live in an era in which identity is dominated and even determined by manipulative advertising media. To millions of women mirrors are both an addiction and a torment. A powerful and pervasive fashion industry holds up a mirror to us in which we see our selves and our bodies simultaneously as objects of what Mary Ward called 'vain fear and inordinate love'. Any of us who have worked among young and adolescent girls, or whose memories stretch sufficiently far to remember that period in our own lives, will know what I mean when I say that it is never a simple matter when a woman looks into a mirror. But the mirror in the famous painting of the Glory Vision is not one in which Mary Ward stares in despair at her blemishes or is tempted to worship the goddess Beauty.⁵ It is a mirror in which she sees and hears a profound truth about herself and about 'women in time to come'. This vision was primarily an insight given to Mary about the way in which she was called to serve God after two failed attempts to follow the traditional path of the enclosed monastic life. God's will, for her and for religious of the future, lay in 'some other thing', as yet unknown and untried. But there is a wider interpretation of this scene, enhanced by the painting, which I believe speaks not only to us but to women in a global sense.

The glory of God, says St. Irenaeus, is a human being fully alive. Within the mirror, as she looks at her own reflection, Mary sees what she also hears - the glory of God, shining through her human weakness. It is the glory that will be given by God to women of the future who will fulfill all that God created them capable of being. It is the glory of God in women who overcome, through education in its broadest sense, all the human, social and spiritual impoverishment imposed on them by the forces of patriarchy. It is the glory of God which comes from the *shekinah*, the divine indwelling, which Mary would later recognize when she felt Jesus little by little entering her heart. This is the 'glory vision' which we can share with and offer to the women of our world. This vision begins, at its most primitive level, with the discovery that each person, however poverty-stricken or degraded, is made in the image and likeness of God. Whether we work among wealthy or poor, in universities or bush schools, parishes or prisons, in cities or in jungles, we hold up before the women of the world the mirror of God in which they can see their own reflection, made beautiful and glorious by the grace of creation given to each one.

In Mary Ward's own writings we find frequent reference to the effects on the female psyche of love, fear and freedom. She came from a network of Catholic women in England, living under persecution, who knew a great deal about fear and the struggle for freedom. Their experience of faith under oppression and her own spiritual growth and development in this context are what led her to make generalized claims for the female sex

⁵ Painted Life 21

as a whole. In her autobiographical writings she prays that her readers might be blessed with a spirit of truth, enabling them to 'discern things as they are in themselves, the difference between trifles and matters of importance'.⁶ She herself, without knowing how, learned to trust her deepest instincts, and also to trust her ability to be distinguish between truth and false image.

Much of the male polemic in history against women and women's judgment refers to the alleged female tendency to act and judge while dominated by unreliable feelings. This has been opposed to the calmer, more rational male mind, which makes decisions based on fact and reason. It has the effect, for many women, of undermining their respect for their own context, their experience and their perceptions. While fully aware of the possibility of self-deception, Mary learned that her experience was valid as a category to be taken seriously when making moral, spiritual and practical judgments.⁷ She learned to overcome her fear of sin, depending with a humble and trusting confidence on God's guidance and her capacity to seek and find God's will within her own heart.⁸ In this way she found a trustworthy voice, an ability to make faith-filled choices amid the fluctuations of consolation and desolation. She called this capacity for discernment a 'happy begun freedom, the beginning of all my good, and more worth to me [...] than the whole world besides'.⁹ With this 'happy begun freedom', but with little other guidance, she was able, even when young, to overcome the fear born of scruples with a serene understanding that God is best served in liberty rather than in anxiety.

As a young woman she had not entirely avoided absorbing the judgment, common within the church of her time, that 'women did not know how to do good except to themselves', though she resented even then this negative assessment of women's capabilities.¹⁰ It would take the disappointment of her early dreams in St. Omer and the apostolic experiences of her life in London before she learned to trust her instincts unreservedly and to believe that women could indeed do great things. We find in her writings one generalized criticism of her own gender, 'vain fear and inordinate love are the bane of the female sex'.¹¹ She warns repeatedly in her instructions against a female inclination to 'be full of fears and of affections [so that] we shall fear that which is not to be feared, and [...] love and adhere to that which is not worthy of love'.¹² Yet even here she comes to see this as a human, rather than a gender-determined weakness. She is aware of the temptation to rely too heavily on emotional responses born of our own neediness, so that the gift becomes the focus rather than the Giver.¹³ Throughout her

⁶ Ibid, p.12 (spelling and text modernized).

⁷ Ibid, p. 23.

⁸ Ibid, p. 346.

⁹ Gillian Orchard, *Till God Will: Mary Ward through her Writings*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), p.9.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.9.

¹¹ Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary ed., *The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, (Wheatthampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1985), p. 71.

¹² Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, 1, p. 364 (spelling modernized).

¹³ Ibid, p. 162

lifetime she herself put to good use that inner freedom learned as a girl to 'do [...] things with love and freedom or leave them alone'.¹⁴

In Mary Ward's instructions to her sisters the capacity to do good comes not from any human talent but from God's unmerited grace. The 'will to do well' and the capacity to act effectively for good is not a matter of gender or natural aptitude. In that respect, 'there is no such difference between men and women'.¹⁵ The tendency to fall into error and sin is not gender-related either. Women are not naturally weak any more than men are naturally strong. In her view the enemy of fervour is not gender but the pervasive human attraction to idolatry and false goods. Even education and knowledge themselves can become idols, if sought for their own sake rather than for the end of all knowledge, which is God.¹⁶ This perception is echoed by Pope Benedict XVI's recent encyclical, 'Truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as a gift. Their ultimate source is not, and cannot be, mankind, but only God, who is himself Truth and Love.' (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2). If Mary Ward warns against false emotions, it is based on her resistance to making an idol out of consolation rather than on the conviction that such idolatry is characteristic of her gender.¹⁷ In contradiction to a belief of her time that God was principally to be found in extraordinary graces and experiences, she valued the ordinary and the domestic as a proper context for growth in holiness and human fulfilment.¹⁸

This is an important aspect of her relevance for today's struggles for the advancement of women. As spiritual companions in the formal or informal sense, we are called to encourage women to value and trust their own experience, and the human and social context in which they live their faith. Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara, writing about women & spirituality, speaks of the way in which the daily domestic life of many women has been dismissed and disregarded, as if it could never be the context for spiritual reflection.¹⁹ But the millions of women who live this 'little' life know its worth, as did Mary Ward, who reminded us that the heart of our vocation and of our encounter with the incarnate God lies in doing ordinary things well. Fear and a lack of confidence engendered by the trivialization of women's perspective and experience leads many to consider that they count for little. In passing on our 400 year old heritage, we contribute to the empowerment of women by eradicating within ourselves and others both pointless fear and misplaced love.

I am aware that some of you may be wondering if I am ever going to say anything nice about men at all! The empowerment of women has incalculable effects on the wellbeing of men. Sexism and patriarchy heap intolerable burdens on many men, forcing

¹⁴ Orchard, *Till God Will*, p 10.

¹⁵ Dirmeier 1, p. 364.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 363-4

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 358-9.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 359.

¹⁹ Ivone Gebara, 'Women and Spirituality: a Latin American Perspective' in *The Way*, 38, 1988, pp. 240-251.

them into oppressive relationships in which they also, ironically, become victims. UNIFEM's report on the progress of the world's women states that female empowerment 'is not a stand-alone goal. It is the driver of efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, reduce child and maternal mortality, and fight against major diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria. Women's empowerment is also a driver of sound environmental management and is, finally, essential for ensuring that development aid reaches the poorest'.²⁰ A more balanced and mutually respectful and responsible relationship between the genders ultimately benefits men as much as women. It has the potential to create domestic and social solidarity and prosperity and to liberate both genders from roles that are toxic and demeaning. Mary Ward has a powerful positive message for men as well...

This brings me, finally, to the Vision of the Just Soul. Once again, this has a particular interpretation, within our tradition, but also one which I believe extends beyond our story as a religious family. Mary writes in 1615 to Father Roger Lee of an insight received during her retreat. She sees the state of soul both necessary for and attainable by someone living according to our particular vocation. The 'Just Soul' is characterized by a 'singular freedom' from the idolatries and addictions of this world. It is a freedom which renders us apt for 'all good works', so that we do not limit encounter with God to some special and 'holy' sphere, but experience God precisely in the ordinariness of our human existence. The just soul is characterized by a confidence and transparency which makes it possible for us to 'be such as we appear, and appear such as we are', without fear or disguise. Mary sees this state as a return to humanity's original justice, sincerity and innocence. She understands it as particularly given to her sisters as women, since they have been deprived, by reason of gender, of the opportunities for learning and wisdom given to the Fathers of the Society. Through this freedom, justice and sincerity, 'we should gain at God's hand true wisdom and [the] ability to perform all such other things as the perfection of this Institute exacts of us'.²¹

A vital element of the Christian vision of human flourishing consists in the rediscovery of God's original plan for what it is to be human. Union with God and the vocation to human flourishing are not about becoming superhuman but about entering more fully into what being human means. This lies at the heart of the Incarnation. Although she experienced and interpreted it in terms appropriate to her own era, Mary Ward's vision of the Just Soul contains a remarkably modern view of the integration of humanity and all nature. It offers us a blueprint for what we live, teach and share in various ways about the goal of our human vocation. It links the rediscovery of graced creation with a whole and grace-filled human living. It is an integrated and holistic vision which speaks powerfully to many women who are, by reason of the role they play in society, particularly close to nature itself. The empowerment of women has close connections with a respectful

²⁰ <http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/publication.html>, p. 117.

²¹ Dirmeier 1, pp. 290-291 (spelling modernized).

attitude towards the environment, 'that we be such as we appear and appear such as we are', not greedy and tyrannical oppressors of creation but stewards, living in harmony with the rest of the God-given, natural world. The impact of environmental degradation and climate change is falling increasingly heavily on poor women, as the unsustainable lifestyles of the affluent undermine the supply and quality of natural resources. The vision of the Just Soul has an answer to this drama of our times.

The very title of Pope Benedict's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* or Charity in Truth is reminiscent of the Just Soul vision. In it he states that, 'the book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development.' He adds, 'the vocation to development on the part of individuals and peoples is not based simply on human choice, but is an intrinsic part of a plan that is prior to us and constitutes for all of us a duty to be freely accepted. That which is prior to us and constitutes us – subsistent Love and Truth – shows us what goodness is, and in what our true happiness consists.' (*Caritas in Veritate*, 51-52). The 'singular freedom' and 'entire application and apt disposition to all good works' seen by Mary Ward are the graces offered to us for a life where we are restored to our original nature as lovers of truth and workers of justice.

Mary Ward's past pupil, Benedict XVI has contrasted her feminism with a feminism he considers destructive of human solidarity. There is a danger in attempting to hijack her in favour of our contemporary agendas of various sorts. But we cannot keep her in a museum, either. If her prophetic stance eventually brought about important changes, there remains much to be done within both church and society. I have enumerated a number of ways in which the vision of Mary Ward continues to contribute to the empowerment and flourishing of women. Within our church community, despite our discourse of service, the fact remains that decision-making and power-holding remain largely tied to ministerial priesthood. An ecclesial reality defined and described through the dominance of male perceptions, however benign, can adversely affect the concerns specific to women and fail to take seriously their experience and aspirations.

Mary Ward's Glory Vision reminds us that God's glory is found in human beings, male and female, fully alive and open to service in new and untried ways. Her Vision of the Just Soul describes the harmony between humanity and nature in which each of us is called to a life of justice, transparency and right relationship. Finally her writings on love, fear and freedom remind us of the need within each human soul to let go of all that could make us adhere to earthly things, including the structures of power and dominance. As a resource for society and for the church, after 400 years they still have a lot to offer.