

**In the Footsteps of Mary Ward:  
The Constitutional Legacy of Teresa Ball IBVM  
Founder in Ireland of Mary Ward's  
Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

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*“Weak as is the little shoot which He is going to plant, when watered by the graces and blessing of our good God, it will not fail to spring up and flourish”<sup>1</sup>*

Bishop Daniel Murray wrote these words to a scared Teresa Ball shortly before she began her momentous founding task.<sup>2</sup> As we step into her shoes for this particular week in this Bicentenary time, let us remember her apprehension and anxiety in the face of a task which must have seemed overwhelming. Armed with her formation and training in the Bar Convent, copies of those documents which seemed important for the new filiation, and above all, her trust and belief in a Provident God, Teresa Ball stepped out in the footsteps of Mary Ward in August 1821 to bring “this same Institute” to Ireland. Teresa Ball was most certainly “reaching out and beyond.”<sup>3</sup>

The annual celebration of Mary Ward Week provides us, her followers, with the opportunity to reflect again, on the wonder of our charism and heritage. How fortunate we are to have such visionary, charismatic women as our founders, women who, though 2 centuries apart, are as vibrant and alive for us today as each was to her little band of faithful companions so long ago. The theme of the 2022 celebration: “*Celebrating the Teresa Ball Bicentenary: Reaching Out and Beyond*” provides us with a unique opportunity to celebrate our two founding mothers together. Let us, for this time together, reach out to two different

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<sup>1</sup>See Letter, Archbishop Daniel Murray to M. Teresa Ball on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1821, in General Archives.

<sup>2</sup> The Annals of York, Volume 15, tell us that M. Teresa Ball told the sisters in York that such was her love for York that she “would never have left it had God not willed otherwise.”

<sup>3</sup> The writer of the York Annals, Volume 18, visited Rathfarnham in 1830. M. Teresa told her that her highest ambition on earth, if such were God’s will, was to “found.” This was 3 years before she made the first foundation from Rathfarnham.

historical eras, to two different women who lived 200 years apart and yet, whose combined heritage we, the present members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have the privilege to share and who are called, at this moment in time, to “reach out and beyond.”

The evolving identity of Mary Ward’s Institute has been very well documented by our former General Leader, Mary Wright IBVM.<sup>4</sup> The renowned Irish historian, Dr Deirdre Raftery, University College Dublin, in her forthcoming biography, shows how M. Teresa Ball influenced not only the growth and development of Mary Ward’s Institute in Ireland but in all those places to which her Institute went, not only in M. Teresa Ball’s time but in that of all who followed her since.<sup>5</sup> She shows, too, how the vision and values of the foundations made from Rathfarnham and the particular approach to the education of girls, has influenced the development of society not only in Ireland but all over the world.

My purpose, therefore, is not to reiterate the findings of these renowned authors, but rather to focus on one aspect which has both challenged and brought great consolation to the present followers of two great women, Mary Ward (1585-1645) and her loyal daughter Frances Teresa Ball (1794-1861). This is particularly appropriate now as the Irish Branch of Mary Ward’s Institute discerns the future with the founding Institute, the Congregation of Jesus. A further goal is to perhaps offer another interpretation for the writing of our 1861 Constitutions, one which sees Teresa Ball in the light of the creative genius of our Venerable Mary Ward, rather than to interpret that action as one which brought the Institute in a very different direction, as believed by the founder in Australia.<sup>6</sup> The celebration of the Bicentenary of the Foundation in Ireland, provides a welcome opportunity to reflect on and to appreciate anew, the outstanding contribution made by M. Teresa Ball to the development of Mary Ward’s Institute and to recognise once again, its rootedness in what was formed in her in the Bar Convent in York, which in turn, was formed by 2 centuries of

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<sup>4</sup> MARY WRIGHT, *Mary Ward’s Institute: The Struggle for Identity*, Sydney, Crossing Press, 1997

<sup>5</sup> To be published later in 2022.

<sup>6</sup> The growth of the Institute beyond the Dublin Diocese and to the wider world, necessitated an adaptation of the Constitutions. Criticized because in some instances they “bore no resemblance to the spirit of our Rules which are those of St. Ignatius” (Gonzaga Barry IBVM, Founder in Australia), the changes did not, in fact, remove the Irish Institute from Ignatian Spirituality.

affiliation to Mary Ward's charism. My understanding is influenced by my own research into the issue of governance in the Institute undertaken in pursuit of the JCD in Ottawa, CA, 2001-2006.<sup>7</sup>

We know that, thanks to the inspiration of Vatican II, our Institute, as was the case with all other Religious Institutes, took the call of *Perfectae Caritatis* No. 2 to heart: "The up-to-date renewal of the religious life comprises both a constant return to the sources of Christian life in general and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed circumstances of our time."<sup>8</sup> Providentially for the followers of Mary Ward, the impetus towards renewal of our respective Institutes, was driven by two charismatic women, M. Agnes Walsh IBVM, Superior General of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1968-1986<sup>9</sup> and M. Immolata Wetter IBMV (same title but written in Latin: *Institutum Beatae Mariae Virginis*), Superior General 1976-1984. Together they ensured that Mary Ward's Letters of Instruction and other previously untranslated material, were made available to Mary Ward's 3 Institutes (Roman, Irish and North American Branches). In this period, M. Agnes discovered that the Constitutions brought by M. Teresa Ball from York, were in fact copied from the earliest extant version of Mary Ward's Constitutions, the 1707 version. It was this version that she diligently translated from Latin, copied by hand and brought to Ireland as the foundation stone for the new Institute house. This act takes on another significance when we remember that York, influenced by the fact (discovered in 1816) that Mary Ward could not be called founder, had "the Gilbert Constitutions" from 1816, two years after Teresa Ball began her formation journey in York and 5 years before she left the Bar Convent to return to Ireland.

While there is no document from Mary Ward's hand named "constitutions"<sup>10</sup>, *Institutum* 1 claims for the Superior General "with the advice of her associates"

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<sup>7</sup>ELIZABETH M. COTTER, *The General Chapter in a Religious Institute with Particular Reference to IBVM Loreto Branch*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See VATICAN II, 28 October 1965, Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*,

<sup>9</sup> Although our Constitutions at that time, provided for one 6- year term and one possible renewal, M. Agnes Walsh received the required permission of the Holy See following Postulation by the General Chapter of 1980 to do an extra term in order to complete the revision of our Constitutions. This task had been completed in 1985 when M. Agnes collapsed in Casa Loreto, Rome; she remained in a coma until her death in Ireland in 1986.

<sup>10</sup> M. Evangeline Mac Donald, in a talk given at the General Chapter in June 1971, says that Mary Ward's 1612 *Schola Mariae* might be understood as the first Constitutions; her 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt to get approval, the *Ratio Instituti*

the authority to establish “Constitutions leading to the achievement of this end which has been proposed by us.”<sup>11</sup> As we know, various attempts in Augsburg and Munich to do so were refused and eventually, M. Anne Barbara Babthorpe, Superior of the Munich house, requested a Jesuit Father to extract from the Mary Ward Constitutions those Rules which contained the essence of the Rule of St. Ignatius and the spirit of Mary Ward but with no reference to organisation or government. These issues had, up to this point, blocked the approval of the Constitutions. The 81 Rules, as we know, were approved by Pope Clement XI in 1703. Encouraged by this success, M. Agnes Babthorpe drew up a new edition of the Constitutions adapted to “the needs of the times” much of which corresponds to the Jesuit *Constitutions* and the remainder to the needs of the times. These are what we refer as the “1707 *Constitutions*.” M. Agnes Babthorpe’s appeal to Pope Clement XI for approval in 1716, also failed. As a result, the Constitutions copied and brought to Dublin were at that time, not yet officially approved by the Church. Because Archbishop (from 1823) Murray of Dublin, gave his support to the Constitutions brought by M. Teresa Ball to Rathfarnham, we can say with certainty, that the Irish Branch of the Institute, began its constitutional journey with Mary Ward’s founding vision as explained in those 1707 *Constitutions*, even if they had not been formally approved, together with the distillation of some of those principles in the 1703 “81 Rules,” approved by Clement XI, a summary of what was accepted by the Church in relation to the charism of the Institute at that time.

The 81 Rules, remembered by those formed in the Irish Branch of the Institute from the beginning until the early 1970’s, which had been the basis of her own formation in York became the cornerstone of M. Teresa Ball’s formation practices in the new foundation in Rathfarnham. Fr. Robert Knatchbull SJ’s “Exhortations on the 81 Rules” were carefully copied and brought from York, underlying M. Teresa Ball’s understanding of the Institute’s grounding in the Ignatian tradition. However, her great contribution and what makes her stand out, is her devotion to the heritage of the Institute passed down from Mary Ward’s time and continued in each house founded by M. Teresa Ball. Indeed, the 1832 printed version of her handwritten copy of the 1707 *Constitutions* is to

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of 1615 (believed to have been re-written by Jesuit friends in Rome to make it more palatable to the Holy See); Mary Ward’s next attempt was *Institutum* 1 in 1621 which is believed to be the most complete, comprehensive account of Mary Ward’s vision for her Institute.

<sup>11</sup> See *Institutum* 1, No. 2, p. 14 in *IBVM Constitutions* 2009.

be found in, e.g., the English Region Archives, the Toronto Archives, and the Kolkata Archives.<sup>12</sup>

M. Evangeline Mac Donald IBVM, in a talk given to the Commission on Constitutions in January 1971,<sup>13</sup> pointed out that M. Teresa Ball brought, too, to the new filiation, some of the customs of the Bar Convent, notably devotion to Our Lady of Loreto, and the procession in honour of St. Michael on the eve of his feast, to commemorate the saving of the Bar Convent from the hostile Cromwellian forces in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. To this day, the prayer to St. Michael is part of our Institute tradition and his statue is usually to be found near or above the hall door of Institute houses. In addition, we know, from the York Archives, from an entry in the Expenditure Book kept by Mother Rouby, that the children were brought on pilgrimage to the tomb of Mary Ward in Osbaldwick each year. One particular entry refers to the years during which the young Frances Ball was a schoolgirl. I wonder what conversation Frances had with Mary Ward during these visits!

Before looking at the question of M. Teresa Ball's Constitutional Legacy, I want to say a little about "Constitutions." Traditionally in Mary Ward's Institute, we have spoken freely about "the Constitutions" of the Institute. However, this was not a well-defined canonical term or concept in the Church until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when hundreds of Institutes of simple vows were founded. Then, the officials of the Church needed to know how these new groups lived and so looked for their "Constitutions" rather than their "Rule." There is quite a lot of ambiguity in the use of the term until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when "Constitutions" became widely used in the sense in which we understand them now. Indeed, it was only in 1901 that the Church issued norms in their regard with the acknowledgement, for the first time in canon law, of the legitimacy of the new kind of religious institute in the Church, Institutes of Simple Vows.

The first Irish Branch "Constitutions" were entitled "Rules". Indeed, in the Church, what Rule was followed was a matter of greater importance since the

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<sup>12</sup> A letter written by M. Gonzaga Barry IBVM, Australia, on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1904, referred to the fact that a book of the Constitutions was given to all Superiors leaving Rathfarnham for distant missions.

<sup>13</sup> All Religious Congregations were asked to return to their founding charism in the wake of Vatican II. This led to the updating, or in some cases, the re-writing of Constitutions, in accordance with the theology of Vatican II.

Council of Trent [1545-1563] had confirmed the practice in the Church<sup>14</sup> which decreed that religious had to follow one of the 4 Rules accepted by the Church for religious: Augustinian, Basilian, Benedictine or Franciscan. St. Ignatius had been given the “privilege” of instituting a new Rule, described in the *Formula* of the Society, the substance of which is in Mary Ward’s *Institutum I*. The handwritten Constitutions printed in Dublin in 1832 were entitled: *Rules of the Institute of the B.V.M.* A letter written by the Irish Cardinal Cullen and appended to the 1861 *Constitutions*, which were mostly written under M. Teresa Ball’s direction, assisted by Canon Tom Burke OP, a canon lawyer, but completed by her successor, Scholastica Somers IBVM, states that “Constitutions have been added to your Rules,” the implication being that the 1832 printed edition of those Constitutions copied in York, were the “Rules” and what followed in the 1861 *Constitutions* were those principles necessary to live out the Rule in a new time and place, i.e., what Mary Ward had said needed to happen in *Institutum I*. Indeed, the title of the 1861 *Constitutions* was: *The Rules and Constitutions of the Congregation of Nuns of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary Founded in Dublin, 1862*.<sup>15</sup> This title and the contents were inclusive of both the Rule [1707, printed in 1832] and the 1861 Constitutions.

The “Annals of Loretto House” state that M. Teresa Ball had the Constitutions [called the Rule, by Cardinal Cullen above] printed in 1832, with the approval of their ecclesiastical superior, Archbishop Murray of Dublin. This meant that Mary Ward’s Institute in Ireland had Ignatian inspired Constitutions approved by the local Ordinary as the basis for the lives and mission of the members. There is ample evidence to prove that these Constitutions were given to every house founded by M. Teresa Ball. Although founded after Teresa Ball’s death, the founder in Australia, M. Gonzaga Barry IBVM, recognised the copy of the “new Constitutions” given to her by M. Conception Lopez prior to her departure for Australia, as a copy of the one given to M. Benedicta Somers, founder of Loreto Gorey, where M. Gonzaga had attended school, in 1842. We know, therefore, that not only foundations in Ireland, but those beyond our shores, all benefitted from the same Rule and Constitutions.

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<sup>14</sup> The Council of Lyons in 1215, had decreed that the only acceptable forms of religious life were those which followed the Rules of St. Augustine, St. Basil, St. Benedict or St. Francis.

<sup>15</sup> Approved *ad experimentum* in 1861 and 1867 and definitively in 1877, the first Institute Constitutions to be approved formally by the Holy See.

Mother Michael Corcoran, Superior General [1888-1918],<sup>16</sup> in the General Council Minutes of June 1907, referred to “the old Constitutions written by Mother Teresa Ball.” Did this refer to the handwritten Constitutions of 1821 and printed in 1832 or to the 1861 Constitutions? Since Cardinal Cullen had incontrovertibly linked the two in his letter accompanying the 1861 Constitutions, it seems logical to conclude that the two went together, that the latter flowed naturally from the former, providing those details of governance omitted in the original 1707 *Constitutions*. Thus, we can say, that the Irish Branch of Mary Ward’s Institute began its juridical existence validated by the authority of the Church with both an approved Rule and Constitutions. M. Teresa Ball had, therefore, a clarity in both how to live religious life and in how to govern, a clarity denied to Mary Ward because of the particular circumstances of her time and place. In addition, M. Teresa Ball had ecclesiastical approval, also denied to Mary Ward. What a difference 200 years had made!

In those same General Council Minutes referred to above, M. Michael Corcoran writes: “The Rules proposed for the Novitiate have been compiled from various sources; partly from the old books of Constitutions drawn up for Mother Teresa Ball, partly from the *Normae*,<sup>17</sup> and partly from the York Constitutions which were based on our own approved Constitutions” (when York reverted to the original Constitutions in 1888, Rathfarnham was asked for a copy<sup>18</sup>). We know that Fr. Peter Kenny SJ gave M. Teresa Ball great assistance in the area of formation, consolidating the link with Jesuit spirituality which was Mary Ward’s founding intention. A letter to M. Teresa Ball of June 1823 gave detailed guidance for the formation of novices, with details of timetable and religious practices.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, one piece of advice – that each novice should spend half an hour each day reading Rodriguez’ “*Treatise on Christian and Religious Perfection*” – remained the practice in the novitiate in Rathfarnham until the 1960’s.<sup>20</sup> The practice of daily “Exhortation” or “instruction on the religious life”

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<sup>16</sup> M. Michael Corcoran was not permitted to hold the General Chapter in 1906 due, in large measure, to opposition to her work for the Union of Mary Ward’s Institute. A Vicar General was installed by the Holy See. However, at the General Chapter of 1907, she was re-elected unanimously.

<sup>17</sup> LEO XIII, Apostolic Constitution *Conditae a Christo*, 8 December 1900, and its subsequent Norms were promulgated by the Holy See in 1901. This was the first time that Institutes with Simple Vows had juridical approval and Norms underpinning their existence and governance.

<sup>18</sup> See General Archives, AL 2, No. 21, Letter from Archbishop Murray to M. Teresa Ball, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1841.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Coleridge’s *Life of Teresa Ball*; M. Michael Corcoran referred to this in the General Council Minutes of 5<sup>th</sup> August 1907 [General Archives].

<sup>20</sup> See ALPHONSUS RODRIGUEZ SJ, 1538-1616, *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection*, in 3 Volumes

continued into the modern era. These practices, in turn, were brought to all “missions” founded from Rathfarnham.

The centralised model of governance proposed by Mary Ward and adopted by M. Teresa Ball, emphasised the role of the Superior General and thanks to the Apostolic Constitution *Quamvis iusto*, issued by Pope Benedict XIV in 1749 in response to a dispute between the Bishop of Augsburg, Germany and the Institute in Bavaria, we have a clear understanding of what that meant: the Superior General [chief superior] was authorised to make visitation (and to give a report to the bishop afterwards), to supervise the education of the children, to transfer members from one house to another, all with due subordination to the jurisdiction of the local ordinary. In addition, because the vows were simple not solemn ones, the authority to receive them could be delegated to a woman. The unity of the Institute was recognised in *Quamvis iusto* also with the Munich and St. Pölten Superiors acknowledged as the Superior of those houses founded by them. However, *Quamvis iusto* forbade the members to call Mary Ward “founder.”

Thanks to Mother Coyney of York, we have an idea of the difficulties the practice of central governance entailed. In her petition to Rome to regularise the canonical situation of the York Community in 1816, she had indicated the practical difficulties encountered with central governance:

- 1° “Their distance from Munich is a serious inconvenience, and the expense of correspondence by letter with the Superioress by no means small
- 2° In time of war such correspondence becomes impossible to the great detriment of their community
- 3° Rarely, if ever, is there anyone of their number who knows German, while on the other hand, the above-mentioned Superioress knows no English
- 4° It is by no means certain that the House at Munich is any longer in existence.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, “the 100 Years War” on mainland Europe, had cut York off from its Mother House in Munich. As a result, the York community did not know of the

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in M. Evangeline Mac Donald, “The Unifying of the Irish Branch of the IBVM,” December 1973.



existence of *Quamvis iusto* until peace in Europe was established after the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Since the Munich house had been suppressed, York had no canonical status, hence the Superior, Mother Coyney, took action to place the community under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District [in England], the name for the emerging new diocesan structure. With the prohibition to call Mary Ward founder and the Mother House suppressed, this action gave legal viability to the Community in York.

While *Quamvis iusto* made it clear that the “English Ladies”<sup>22</sup> were not “religious” in the sense accepted at that time and taking 3 (simple) vows did not change that status, it is equally clear that they were not quite “lay” either. History has provided evidence of the gradual acceptance of such groups as religious in the Church from the time of Mary Ward on. Thus, by the time the Institute came to Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a greater clarity as to what constituted a “religious” woman, even though the Church did not officially acknowledge in law nor actually produce a description of such women until 1901, with the promulgation of *Conditae a Christo* and its subsequent Norms.<sup>23</sup> Both the IBVM Institute Archives and those of the Dublin Archdiocese speak of the new foundation in Rathfarnham as made by “religious” who were both invited and welcomed by the Archbishop of Dublin. Thus, M. Teresa Ball, unlike Mary Ward, began with both a recognition of her religious status and an acknowledgement of her right to live in accordance with that status. This, we must remember, occurred in an Ireland where the Penal Laws against religion, were still on the statute books. Indeed, M. Teresa Ball had to deal with the bigotry and contempt with which Catholics were treated in 19<sup>th</sup> century pre - Catholic Emancipation Dublin on an on-going basis.

A Rescript<sup>24</sup> obtained from the Holy See by Dr Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, dated 5<sup>th</sup> August 1821, i.e, just before M. Teresa Ball returned to Ireland from York, stated that “the communities of the above-named Institute which shall hereafter be established in Ireland, shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop or Bishop in whose Diocese they shall be situated.” This might look

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<sup>22</sup> Even today, the name above the gate of the CJ Convent in Vicenza, Italy, is also “English Ladies.”

<sup>23</sup> It was not until the promulgation of the revised Canon Law, *CIC* 1983, that the Church recognised the essential equality of the vows whether solemn or simple in cc. 1191, 1192.

<sup>24</sup> This Rescript also gave permission to shorten the period of novitiate and number of years one had to be professed in order to become a Superior in order to help the new foundation. The Rescript was given to Dr Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1821, by *Propaganda Fide*.

as if it were compromising the idea of central government but that was not the case as all houses in the Dublin Archdiocese were under the jurisdiction of M. Teresa Ball and the 1861 *Constitutions* gave canonical legality to that fact by permitting any house founded in by Rathfarnham to be under the jurisdiction of its superior.<sup>25</sup>

The Bar Convent in York while undoubtedly cherishing the memory of the connection with Mary Ward's Institute in Munich, nonetheless, because of wars and difficulties in communication did not experience the fruits of "central government" at the time of M. Teresa Ball's formation. So how was it that M. Teresa Ball brought this strong belief into her leadership and governance practices? We can only presume that, by living faithfully the charism of Mary Ward, understanding the Ignatian principles on which the Institute was founded, York's superiors and formators communicated such a strong belief in this way of living, that even when York adopted the Gilbert *Constitutions*, M. Teresa Ball held on firmly to those principles which she lived and in which she was formed to that point. This view is supported by the York Annals' accounts of the fervent, devout Teresa Ball who lived the Rule to the best of her considerable ability.

In addition, M. Teresa Ball had 10 years of experience in governing Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham which by the time of her death in 1861 resembled a small village with its growing population, farm, and schools. In these years, she grew in confidence in relation to governance and her personal task of forming a new generation of members, gave her a strong understanding of and belief in the values passed on from York during her years in the Bar Convent. We know that her guide in setting up the house in Rathfarnham and in particular the establishment of the Novitiate, was one Fr. Peter Kenny SJ – the same Fr. Kenny SJ who had re-established the Jesuits in Ireland in 1814.<sup>26</sup> With Fr. Knatchbull SJ's notes and Fr. Kenny SJ's practical assistance, the new foundation most assuredly had a connection with and reliance on the Society of Jesus, together

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<sup>25</sup> Canon 678 of *CIC* 1983 clarified in law, the status of the bishop in relation to Religious Institutes: he has jurisdiction over the pastoral care of the diocese and specifically in relation to the care of souls, the public exercise of divine worship and other works of the apostolate. He has no jurisdiction over the internal autonomy of religious institutes, cf., c. 586.

<sup>26</sup> Fr. Kenny SJ remained a close friend and confidant of M. Teresa Ball until he went to the Jesuit Community in the Gésu in Rome in 1840, where he died on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1841

with practical guidance in living Ignatian Spirituality which remained features of what would become a new Branch of Mary Ward's Institute.

M. Teresa Ball's tenure in office was, unlike for some Institute superiors in Europe, a time of peace and stability. The British Empire of which Ireland was then a part, was extending its presence and rule throughout the known world. In Ireland, there was growing acceptance among the ruling classes that the Penal Laws against Catholics and minority Protestant faiths, were no longer tenable. Consequently, the Catholic Relief Bill was passed in 1829. The great cholera epidemic of 1832 did not affect the members and their charges in Rathfarnham but the 'flu epidemic of 1833 did. The Great Famine of the late 1840's which brought unspeakable suffering and death to large portions of the population, did not produce political agitation in its immediate aftermath. As a result, M. Teresa Ball's governance was in a period of peace and political stability despite the many incidences of religious bigotry, great poverty and suffering all around her. She was therefore able to focus on mission, the *raison d'être* of the followers of Mary Ward and St. Ignatius. Little irritants, e.g., having to obtain a licence from the Protestant minister of the Rathfarnham Parish before opening the school in Rathfarnham, were borne with great equanimity.<sup>27</sup> Of course, there remained many incidences of religious bigotry which M. Teresa Ball encountered, e.g., in her efforts to establish a house in Dublin City for a Day School – she quickly learned that despite the relaxation of some anti-Catholic rules, property could only be purchased by a Protestant. That did not deter her! That this anti-Catholic sentiment was a common experience for those new religious groups in the city, is evident in directions given by the founder of the Mercy Sisters in Dublin, M. Catherine Mc Auley, in 1832 “[that] our outdoor costume might exhibit no remarkable difference from that of secular persons of respectability who did not enter into the vanities of the world and above all things that the cross and beads be concealed.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The licence, dated 16<sup>th</sup> June 1823, is preserved in the Institute Archives; it named the competence of Mrs. Frances Ball, Mrs. Anne Therry and Mrs Frances Ellen Arthur “to keep school.” Certificates of the Oath of Allegiance to the King, taken on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1822 by M. Teresa Ball and M. Baptist Therry, are also in the Archives.

<sup>28</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the growth and development of many religious congregations of women in Ireland, most notably, the Irish (now “Religious”) Sisters of Charity, founded by Mary Aikenhead (also trained in York), the Presentation Sisters founded by Nano Nagle and the Mercy Sisters, founded by Catherine Mc Auley.

As happened with Mary Ward, M. Teresa Ball's new foundation attracted vocations from the beginning – two past pupils of York arrived almost immediately, then on 21 November 1822, Catherine Corballis from Dundrum, Dublin and on 21 January 1823, Bernard Blake from Galway; in August 1823, Maria Mc Carthy (Sr. Aloysia, the only one of the early companions to survive her), and Marianne Finn (Sr. Paul) who founded Navan. M. Teresa Ball personally trained and formed the new entrants.

The early years in Rathfarnham were a time of consolidation of the religious lives of the members of the new foundation, living the principles and values learned in York, ensuring good formation practices, building to accommodate the growing population, organising the farm so that the school community, workers and members had good nourishment, establishing the schools, boarding, day and for the poor and tending to local needs. By 1833, the Institute family consisted of 80, including 10 novices. Space became an issue and with Archbishop Murray's consent, M. Teresa Ball looked to establish a "filiation" in the city. In the same year, the Parish Priest of Navan in the Diocese of Meath, offered her a house free of charge. This was a great relief to her as we know from a letter to M. Teresa Dease in Canada in 1853 that: "I like founding wherever I am asked. I never had the courage to borrow money, being uncertain how our foundations would turn out."<sup>29</sup> M. Teresa's visit to check out the proposed foundation in Navan was the first time she had left Rathfarnham in 11 years. The Archives show that despite the fact that Navan was in another diocese, there was constant communication between Navan and Rathfarnham but at the wish of the bishop [of Meath] this informal jurisdiction was eventually terminated.

The attitude to mission was indeed remarkable. When M. Xaveria Mc Carthy, one of the early companions, was dying in 1835, she said: "I would rather live and labour 10 years to establish day schools. Every second year I would gladly go to a new foundation. As I have been so zealous on earth for the extension of our houses, I will do all I can for them in heaven." Blessed with new members, especially from 1835 when 14 postulants were received and 12 novices professed, M. Teresa Ball ensured they received the formation necessary to live

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<sup>29</sup> Letter of 10<sup>th</sup> September 1853 to M. Teresa Dease, founder of the Institute in Canada.

the charism. There are many accounts of her efforts to ensure that obedience, our characteristic identification, was firmly embedded and lived. Many prospective members were refused when it became clear they did not have the capacity to live radical obedience. Indeed, the difficulties caused by the “Green Schism” was a conflict which resulted from a lack of obedience in a member in relation to mission.<sup>30</sup> This conflict and the subsequent disunion, were a source of great pain to M. Teresa Ball until the day she died. In her formation practices, M. Teresa Ball did her best to ensure that the Ignatian principles proposed in the Spiritual Exercises and Constitutions, and which Mary Ward had given her life to hand on to us, were deeply embedded in new members. Indeed, the York Annals tell us: “Be it our privilege and happiness to record that the true religious spirit of love of rule and of strict observance imbibed in this House [York] by the holy Foundress [Teresa Ball], were taught by her to all her spiritual daughters; so wonderfully and constantly has God blessed her labours, that the convent she founded at Rathfarnham, and all that have filiated from it, have been renowned for regularity, for strict observance of Rule, for the true spirit of their state and deep love for the dear holy Institute of which they are bright ornaments.”<sup>31</sup>

The story of M. Teresa Ball’s response to the request to go to India, is part of our Institute lore. Initially hesitant, once she realised that God was calling her in a new direction, she embraced that direction wholeheartedly. Indeed, the response of the community to the request for volunteers, proves how those women, grounded in Ignatian spirituality, understood the call to mission, the call to something new, the call “to move across boundaries” as Call 5 of GC’14 phrased it. Other instances of the desire to respond to the needs of the times can be illustrated by the response to requests from Canada, Mauritius, Gibraltar, Manchester and Spain. She opened a second house in the city of Dublin in 1836 by circumventing the opposition and bigotry prevalent in society at the time. This house took in little boys, a first for the Irish Branch of the Institute. This house was also the venue for the first organised retreat for lay people in Ireland and became, in addition to a boarding and day school, a home for elderly ladies, the last of whom still lived in 43 Nth. Gt. George’s St. when the present author

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<sup>30</sup> This conflict resulted from the refusal of a member of the Community in Loreto St. Stephen’s Green, to transfer, at the request of M. Teresa. This resulted in a “schism”, i.e., a break away from the authority of the religious superior and removing the community from her jurisdiction. The schism eventually healed but the memory continued to cause great pain in the Institute.

<sup>31</sup> York Annals, Volume 18.

was a student!<sup>32</sup> It is evident that M. Teresa Ball's formation in the Bar Convent had indeed opened her to mission in whatever times, places and circumstances and to whatever need presented itself.

Just as Mary Ward's vision to "take the same of the Society" had inbuilt the proviso "in so far as the norms are applicable to women," thus indicating that there had to be, of necessity, some adjustment in applying the vision of Ignatius to women, so too, with M. Teresa Ball, we find a similar openness to possible adjustment necessitated by the places, times and circumstances in which she lived. Consequently, when the limits of the 1707 *Constitutions* became evident in the practical living out of the vision of central government, M. Teresa Ball did not hesitate to make the necessary adjustments. Since the *Constitutions* as brought from York did not give much direction in relation to the governance of houses founded from a "Mother House," she provided for this *lacuna*. Initially, M. Teresa Ball did what she observed and experienced from York: she wrote many letters, providing assistance, personnel and guidance to her foundations, thus creating a sort of informal oversight. The *Annals* record her contacts with India and we have a series of letters from her to M. Austin Hearne in Mauritius, to M. Teresa Dease in Canada, to M. Alphonsa Ellis in Manchester. When we remember that the Church herself had no canonical provision for such foundations, it is easier to understand that women like M. Teresa Ball had to improvise and in a modern phrase, "make the path by walking it." Mistakes were made – the "Green Schism" caused M. Teresa Ball great pain but bit by bit, this great woman found a way to implement the vision provided by Mary Ward to the Institute in the practical situation in which she found herself in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, a way derived from her solid formation in the Bar Convent.

While *Quamvis iusto* had recognised the role of "Chief Superior," it was short on the detail of how this actually worked out in practice. Consequently, the 1861 *Constitutions* provide more detailed guidance on the exercise of authority at both local and wider levels. There is clarity as to the authority of the "chief superior" to govern the Congregation, as well as the authority of local superiors

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<sup>32</sup> This lady was a niece of M. Michael Corcoran, Superior General 1888-1918; deafness halted her medical studies and she lived out her life in Nth. Gt. Georges Street subsequently.

and those whose roles give them authority, e.g., the bursar, the mistress of house, the sister in charge of food and supplies, the novice mistress, etc.<sup>33</sup>

It is in this spirit, I believe, that M. Teresa Ball undertook the writing of the 1861 *Constitutions*. The 1877 definitively approved version, also contained all significant Institute documents, e.g., petitions for confirmation of the Rule of the Institute from 1699 onwards. The evidence suggests that Teresa Ball faithfully brought the founding charism to Ireland and that she both cherished and passed on the new foundation's connections with its origins and history.<sup>34</sup> It is not reasonable, therefore to suggest that her intention was to write a different Constitution in 1861.

During the celebration of this Bicentenary Jubilee, the missionary dimension of the Irish Branch of the Institute is a particular focus: when all the members of the community volunteered for the mission to India, they had learned their zeal for souls from M. Teresa Ball. The extraordinary missionary activity carried out by M. Teresa Ball became a distinguishing mark of the new foundation.<sup>35</sup> She sent members to 37 houses across the world from Ireland to India, Canada, Gibraltar, Mauritius, Manchester and Spain. The example of how M. Teresa Ball provided canonical legal underpinning for the governance of daughter houses on the island of Ireland, provided a blueprint for the extension of that same jurisdiction to the houses abroad. While not canonically affiliated to the central governance model until the Rescript of 1881, all the missionary houses founded from Rathfarnham were in constant communication with Rathfarnham, seeking and receiving guidance about diverse issues. We can say, therefore, with some confidence, that there was a solid informal central governance which received

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<sup>33</sup> See IBVM General Archives, Dublin, W1, for copies of the 1861 *Constitutions*; The definitive approval was given by the Holy See, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1877 [ARCHIVES, W2] and they were printed in 1878. The 1877 Irish Branch *Constitutions* contains some amendments to the 1861 version, together with significant Institute documents, e.g., petitions for Confirmation of the Rule from 1699 onwards; Decree of Pius IX confirming the Institute, etc., and Customs and Observances practiced in Rathfarnham, thus indicating the connection and continuity with our Institute origins. On 15th February 1877, the Holy See recognised the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

<sup>34</sup> The biographer of M. Xaveria Fallon, 1832-1888, 3<sup>rd</sup> Superior General, devotes the beginning chapters of her work to explaining the Institute's origins in Mary Ward and how the Rathfarnham foundation came from it. See Katherine Tynan, *A Nun, Her Friends and Her Order*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London, Kegan Paul et al, 1892.

<sup>35</sup> By the 1970's Irish Loreto missionary sisters outnumbered those in "mission" lands from the "Missionary Institutes," e.g., Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary, Medical Missionaries of Mary, etc.

canonical status when, thanks to the initiative from India, the Church caught up with the activities of our Institute in the Rescript of 1881.

M. Teresa Ball's Constitutional Legacy, therefore, begins with the fact that she was faithful to the founding vision of our founder Mary Ward, a fidelity continued by her successors in office, notably M. Michael Corcoran, M. Agnes Walsh, Mary Wright and Marian Moriarty, who promulgated subsequent Constitutions.<sup>36</sup> In the Providence of God, she brought to the new Irish foundation, the Rule and Constitutions which provided St. Ignatius' vision from the Formula of the Society and repeated in *Institutum I*, which Mary Ward brought 400 years ago to Pope Gregory XV on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1621, together with those provisions which would enable the followers to live it faithfully. Recognised as a "religious" from the beginning, supported and guided by ecclesiastical authority, she was able to introduce a stable form of governance which reached beyond even the boundaries of Ireland, forming the members with a strong emphasis on solid formation which was rooted in obedience and openness to mission. M. Teresa Ball's recognition that the Constitutions did not provide legislative guidance in relation to new foundations beyond the Diocese of the founding house in Rathfarnham, led her to close that loophole in the 1861 *Constitutions* and in so doing, she provided a blueprint for the extension of that jurisdiction to the houses founded by the Institute abroad, in India, England, Mauritius, Canada and Gibraltar, a relationship which was formalised in the 1881 Rescript. The printed version of 1832, incorporated into the 1861 *Constitutions*, received official approval and confirmation from the ecclesiastical authorities in 1862 for 5 years and in 1867 for 10 years *ad experimentum*. M. Teresa Ball was dead when the Institute received definitive approval from the Holy See at the request of the Institute in 1877 (the first Institute Constitutions to be so approved). However, we can recognise that this momentous step was reached because of her actions and at a time when the Church herself did not have clear canonical norms to guide Institutes of Simple Vows.

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<sup>36</sup> M. Michael Corcoran undertook the revision of the 1877 *Constitutions* necessitated by the new 1901 Norms for Institutes of Simple Vows and the newly published Code of Canon Law in 1917 which led ultimately to the 1936 *Constitutions*. M. Agnes Walsh oversaw the revision necessitated by Vatican II and the adoption of the Ignatian Constitutions, 1986. Mary Wright and Marian Moriarty enabled that revision and renewal which resulted in the 2009 *Constitutions* after Re-Union with the North American Branch.



Mary Ward's vision of unity, as we know, has taken centuries to effect. It was only in 1953 that our "Mother Institute" was able to unite in one legal entity those separate Generalates in Germany, Austria and Hungary. M. Teresa Ball, walking in the footsteps of Mary Ward, was able to achieve a unity not possible for the "Mother Institute" until modern times. Her Constitutional Legacy provided that continuity with our origins and that openness to change, to the "new" or the "more," which are hallmarks of our Ignatian spirituality.

In an interesting, providential echo of our Venerable Mary Ward's last recorded words, M. Teresa Ball's last recorded words to her friend, Canon Tom Burke OP, the canon lawyer who helped her frame the 1861 *Constitutions*, were repeated by him on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1862, the feast day of her successor, M. Scholastica Somers. M. Teresa had said: "Father, promise me that they shall all be one." Fr. Burke OP added that "her dearest wish has been fulfilled. Her children possess the blessing for which she prayed to her latest breath. The [Church], the Mother whose power is over all the nations of the earth, has laid her hand on this house and sealed it with her seal. Unity of jurisdiction has been given to it and it remains for you, my sisters, to perfect and maintain this priceless union [...]. That for which she laboured and prayed, for which the weak, dying voice went up in supplication to God, has been accomplished."<sup>37</sup> The 1861 *Constitutions* had been sanctioned and approved by Cardinal Cullen and presented to the Holy See for its approval; unity of jurisdiction achieved.

Today, we, the present followers of Mary Ward and her faithful daughter M. Teresa Ball, have been called to hear again the call to "perfect and maintain this priceless union" in our times in the consideration of a further step: the final coming together of all communities which claim Mary Ward as founder, in whatever shape that coming together or union might be. We owe it to those who have gone before us to listen to the voice of the Spirit as Mary Ward and Teresa Ball did. Can we do less than these courageous women, our mothers in faith, than to take the call to discernment of our future any less seriously than Mary Ward discerned the "Take the Same of the Society" and Teresa Ball the call to bring "this same Institute" to Ireland and then to India and beyond? Let us ask earnestly for the spirit of Mary Ward and the faith of Teresa Ball that we, too, may be open to God's will in our regard so that we, also, may "sing of the

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<sup>37</sup> See *Joyful Mother*, Mother Frances Mary Teresa Ball by a Loreto Sister, Dublin, Gill and Son, 1961, pp. 275-276.

mercies of the Lord forever” in whatever may emerge from the present discernment.

And so, we return to the footsteps: if we do not know our history, i.e., where we have come from, we cannot know where God is calling us to go now; that “finger of Divine Providence” connects who we are today with whom we were called to be in our origins and to where we are called on the journey. And so, I would like to conclude with the question: Are we willing to walk in the footsteps of Mary Ward and her loyal daughter, Teresa Ball? To enable the Constitutional Legacy we have inherited to continue to develop to meet today’s needs and circumstances? To “reach out and go beyond” the limits of our present vision? In this Bicentenary Year in Mary Ward Week 2022, when we are called to consider a Teresa Ball who “reached out and beyond” have we, the present generation of followers the courage and faith to discern where that call might be taking us now? To respond to that call to union of minds and hearts which enabled those who have gone before us, often walking new paths in their efforts to “reach out and beyond,” in the footsteps of these great women who have gone before us? Let us help one another to be open to wherever the discernment brings us, so that we, too, can “set the world on fire with divine love” as Teresa Ball exhorted all who had the courage, with her, to “reach out and go beyond.” Privileged to follow in her footsteps which in turn followed in the footsteps of Mary Ward, today, we are called to consider, in God’s time, the final act of union.

Elizabeth Cotter IBVM  
Irish Province  
26<sup>th</sup> January 2022