

VATICAN Pope moves John Paul II's canonization case forward

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VATICAN CITY (UCAN) -- Pope Benedict has issued decrees that move two of his well-known predecessors, Pius XII and John Paul II, a step closer to being declared saints.

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Pope John Paul II

He issued a similar decree for Mary Ward, the English-born founder of a women's religious congregation in the 17th century that today has communities in several Asian countries.

The Pope issued a total of 21 decrees on Dec. 19, relating to the sainthood causes of 12 men and nine women. It came as no surprise that John Paul II, who was elected Pope in 1978, was among them.

The late Pope, the first non-Italian pontiff in 455 years, was loved around the world, including in Asia where he visited at least 12 countries. In 1998, he organized the landmark Synod for Asia, a meeting which brought together cardinals, bishops, priests, Religious and laity from across the continent, as well as representatives of the Roman Curia.

The event was a demonstration of the growing importance of the Asian region in the Catholic Church.

Pope John Paul II died on April 2, 2005. During his funeral in St Peter's Square, many shouted for him to be declared a saint immediately.

Pope Benedict dispensed with the Vatican rule which prohibits the opening of the process for canonization until five years after the person's death, and allowed the cause to be opened in June 2005.

He has now formally recognized that Pope John Paul II lived the Christian life and virtues to a heroic degree and declared him "Venerable."

There are different stages in the process of declaring a person a saint. After being declared "Venerable," the next stage is beatification, for which there needs to be a miracle certified as due to the candidate's intercession. The candidate is then called "Blessed." Canonization or declaration of sainthood then requires another miracle on the same condition.

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Pope Pius XII

Already the [Congregation for the Causes of the Saints \(CCS\)](#), the Vatican body that oversees the canonization process, has begun examining one of several alleged miracles attributed to Pope John Paul II's intercession.

If all proceeds as expected, the late Pope could be beatified on Oct. 16, 2010, the 32nd anniversary of his election as Pope.

More controversial was Pope Benedict's decree for Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), who led the Catholic Church during the Second World War.

As Pope, he began the modern reform of the liturgy, promoted biblical study, and started the internationalization of the College of Cardinals. He created the first Chinese cardinal, Cardinal Thomas Tien Keng-hsin, in 1946, and the first Indian cardinal, Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay, in 1953.

However, many Jews claim the Pope turned a blind eye to the Holocaust, even though immediately after the war and on his death in 1958, several prominent Jewish leaders, including Golda Meir, praised him for having saved hundreds of thousands of Jews during the conflict.

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Mary Ward

Jesuit Father Peter Gumpel, the relator for the late Pope's sainthood cause, said there are already a number of alleged miracles attributed to his intercession, including "one quite extraordinary one."

Others named in Pope Benedict's decrees included Mary Ward (1585-1645), an English woman and pioneer of women's apostolic non-cloistered religious life, modeled along the lines of the Jesuit order.

She founded an institute in 1609 which is today divided into the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her nuns

work in 44 countries including Bangladesh, China, India, South Korea, Mongolia, Nepal and Vietnam.

Pope Benedict also approved a miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Mary MacKillop, which opens the door to her canonization as Australia's first saint.

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