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Mary MacKillop Penola Centre

# THE CANONISATION PROCESS

The Cause of Mother Mary of the Cross MacKillop's Canonisation 'began where all Causes begin, from the people's belief that there had been a saint in their midst.'<sup>1</sup>

**BEATIFICATION** (to be called Blessed) is the first stage in being made a saint.

## SYDNEY

Mary died in Sydney on 8 August 1909. By 1926 a local diocesan tribunal had begun a formal investigation of her life, collecting evidence and examining witnesses.

In 1931 it was suspended for 'technical reasons'. These involved 'missing' documents related to the illegal and slanderous 1883 Adelaide Commission, set up by Bishop Reynolds, that culminated in Mary's expulsion from South Australia.<sup>2</sup>

The tribunal was re-established in 1951 after Cardinal Gilroy unearthed Cardinal Moran's damning report on that Commission, which had been buried in a Roman archive for the intervening twenty years.

Its work was fully completed when the necessary documentation, a Position on *The Introduction of the Cause*, was approved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome.

In February 1973 a decree to this effect was presented and read at the International Eucharistic Congress in Melbourne. Present on this occasion was the cardinal who later became Pope John Paul II.

## ROME

In 1983 reformed laws for canonisation introduced a scholarly, rather than an adversarial approach. At the Vatican level in Rome two very able Jesuits took up the work of those who had already devoted many years of labour to Mary's cause.



**Father Paul Gardiner SJ of Penola, Postulator for Mary's Cause**

Father Peter Gumpel SJ assumed overall responsibility and Melbourne-born Father Paul Gardiner SJ wrote the meticulously researched three-volume Position on the life of *Mary of the Cross MacKillop* during the six years from 1984 to 1989. This was registered early in 1990.

The evidence thus provided was examined and approved by an advisory group of bishops and cardinals. On 13 June 1992 Pope John Paul II approved a Decree declaring that Mary had lived a life of heroic virtue, namely one that had been tested by adversity.<sup>3</sup>

This entitled her to be called Venerable.

The next step was the preparation of a Position on a *Miracle*, that being the cure of a Sydney woman diagnosed with acute myeloblastic leukaemia in 1961.<sup>4</sup>

Based on evidence first gathered in 1971, this case was examined by a medical board, which decided on 5 November 1992 that 'the diagnosis was correct, that the prognosis was totally negative, that the therapy was inadequate, that the recovery was full and permanent, and that there was no explanation in terms of medical science.'<sup>5</sup>

A theological board then studied the medical report and examined the connection between recovery and prayer. It agreed that the woman's cure was effected through Mary's intercession and on 6 July 1993 Pope John Paul II issued a Decree on the Miracle, which meant that she could be beatified.

On 19 January 1995 the Pope came to Sydney to preside personally over Mary's Beatification ceremony.

Her life of exceptional holiness was thereby formally recognised and she has since been publicly honoured in Australia, through prayer and in church liturgy, as BLESSED Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

'Mary of the Cross' is the name she took at her profession as a Sister of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in 1867.

**CANONISATION** (to be called Saint) is the second and final stage in being made a saint.

All that is now required is Vatican acceptance of a second miracle.

Many striking cures have been attributed to Mary's intercession since her beatification. One of these must be thoroughly investigated before being submitted to the scrutiny of a church tribunal in Australia and then in Rome.

It is essential that doctors can describe a cure as inexplicable in the light of their professional knowledge.<sup>6</sup> This is currently proving difficult to achieve.

One day, however, SAINT Mary of the Cross MacKillop will be publicly honoured in the liturgy of Catholic churches throughout the world.

Meanwhile, this exemplary and holy woman is already a 'saint for all Australians'<sup>7</sup> whose feast day is celebrated on 8 August each year.

With hearts full of hope, we shall continue to follow in her footsteps.

**'I am going to Rome, to the feet of the Holy Father, there to implore his sanction for our holy Rule, and I go full of hope...I will not conceal from you the many perils, many crosses and contradictions which will attend this undertaking – many things which might discourage, were it not for a certain sense of God's watchful love which wonderfully strengthens me and which will also, I trust, give you all great courage.'**

Mary MacKillop to her Sisters, Feast of the Annunciation, 1873

<sup>1</sup> Paul Gardiner SJ, 'Beatification and Canonization – The Cause of Mary MacKillop', Rome, 1994

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gardiner SJ, *An Extraordinary Woman: Mary MacKillop*, Sydney, 1993, called it 'Iniquity Unleashed', p283. For example, Mary was unjustly and wrongly accused of intemperance. She had been given small doses of medicinal brandy, under doctor's orders, for dysmenorrhea (debilitating menstrual pain).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gardiner, 'Beatification and Canonization – The Cause of Mary MacKillop', op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> For details of this see *Fatispecies Chronologica*, 'A Chronological Account of the Illness and Recovery from Acute Leukaemia, of X, Sydney, Australia, 1961', Sydney 1992

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gardiner, 'Beatification and Canonization – The Cause of Mary MacKillop', op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Gardiner SJ, 'The Cause of Blessed Mary of the Cross MacKillop', Penola, 25.3.1999

<sup>7</sup> Max Harris, 'A saint for all Australians', *The Advertiser*, 6.4.1998

Text: Margaret Muller, in consultation with Father Paul Gardiner SJ, Mary MacKillop Penola Centre, June 2003