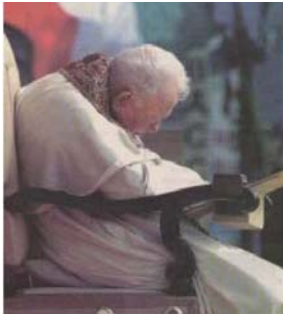




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Ailing Pope seeks to perpetuate his influence on earth and gain a little favour in heaven



The life of this present pope draws to a close. Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn has said that he is nearing “the last days and months of his life.” The Pope’s recent actions may be seen as his seeking to influence the choice of his successor and also gain a little influence in heaven. He has just named 31 new cardinals. They will be involved in the choosing of the next pope. He also has pressed ahead with the beatification of “Mother” Teresa of Calcutta. It usually takes fifty years for a Roman Catholic to reach this state, which is one step short of sainthood.

The appointment of the 31 cardinals came months earlier than expected. These additions will strengthen the ‘conservative’ leaning of the College of Cardinals. Pope John Paul has appointed all but five of the cardinals who are eligible to vote for the next pope. The men will receive their red hats at a ceremony on Oct. 21 - the date for the weeklong celebrations marking John Paul’s 25th anniversary as pope.

Several names mentioned in the Italian media as possible new cardinals weren’t on the pope’s list. Among those missing was that of Archbishop Sean O’Malley, who took over the Boston archdiocese to clean up the mess following the sex abuse scandal that rocked the American church. Meanwhile, the beatification of “Mother” Teresa went ahead on October 19th, even though a doctor who treated the woman who was supposed to be cured of cancer by a visitation from the dead nun, has denied that there was anything miraculous about the woman’s recovery. He has dismissed the event as nonsense.

Just days before the beatification ceremony for the ‘angel of Calcutta’ by Pope John Paul II, the doctor in West Bengal said there is no evidence to support the belief that Monica Besra was miraculously cured.

Besra, from the village of Dhulinakod, 450 miles from Calcutta, was dying of a stomach tumour five years ago when nuns from the Missionaries of Charity, on the first anniversary of Mother Teresa’s death, tied an oval-shaped silver medallion bearing her picture to Besra’s stomach. Her subsequent cure, which happened almost immediately, was hailed as a miracle. It is this alleged act of divine intervention that underpins Mother Teresa’s beatification on October 19th and forms the cornerstone of the claim being made for her sainthood.

Her full canonisation could follow within a year or two, bestowing upon her the Catholic Church’s highest honour. However, a second miracle will be needed for sainthood to be declared. “Mother” Teresa was tormented by a crisis of belief for 50 years, her writings have revealed. Her letters and diaries present a completely different picture of the nun from her public image as a woman



“Mother” Teresa



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confident of her faith. It is being said in Rome that biographies will have to be rewritten to take the revelation into account. She wrote in 1958: "My smile is a great cloak that hides a multitude of pains." Because she was "forever smiling", people thought "my faith, my hope and my love are overflowing and that my intimacy with God and union with his will fill my heart. If only they knew."

She said in another letter: "The damned of hell suffer eternal punishment because they experiment with the loss of God. In my own soul, I feel the terrible pain of this loss. I feel that God does not want me, that God is not God and that he does not really exist."