

Preacher's Pen points

“...On the fast track to sainthood”



A recent Associated Press article describes how Mother Teresa is “on the fast track to sainthood”. In Roman Catholic teaching “sainthood” is bestowed by the church on select individuals who have lived unusually virtuous lives. The canonization by the Roman Catholic church of one as a saint is the result of an involved process.

Beatification

Before Mother Teresa can be “canonized” as a saint she must be “beatified” by the church. The term “beatification” (don’t confuse this term with the word “beautification” meaning to make beautiful) is related to the Latin word from which we get the word “beatitude” meaning “blessing”. It involves the declaration by the church that the departed person is “blessed” with eternal life and worthy of local or limited veneration. Such a declaration depends upon the gathering of information through interviews that supports the virtue of the departed church member.

Canonization

In order to be canonized as a saint, the church must confirm that God has performed at least two miracles on earth as the result of intercession by Mother Teresa. Moreover a formal declaration of universal veneration must be declared by the Vatican. Already one confirmed “miracle” has already been approved by the Pope, leaving the possibility of her canonization in the near future, a thing which Pope John Paul II eagerly seeks before his death.

A Biblical Evaluation

Though I would not disparage at all whatever good Mother Teresa accomplished in life, I affirm that this whole process of beatification and can-

onization by the Roman Catholic church stands in sharp contrast to the teaching of the NT. The apostles of Jesus clearly affirmed that one becomes a “saint” the moment he puts on Christ in baptism. Consider the address and declaration of Paul concerning the Corinthians who had answered the call of salvation through the gospel: *“to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2).*

This single verse twice refers to all the Corinthians, and all who in a similar fashion call upon the name of the Lord, as “saints”. In it we can see that the word “saint” itself does not mean a “super-Christian”; but instead is a designation of those who by means of the blood of Christ have been consecrated to God. The Corinthians, though possessing only a hint of the holiness implied by that word, were acknowledged to be saints by God’s decree. Likewise, the expression “sanctified” (another form of the word translated “saint”) in Christ Jesus” refers to the process of becoming a saint. Thus Paul reveals that all who are “baptized into Christ” (Gal. 3:27) are consecrated to God in the one body of Jesus Christ, the church.

You can be a saint now!

Sainthood is not bestowed by some official posthumous declaration of the church. Instead it is bestowed by God’s declaration on all who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ in life! The term is a reminder of the kind of person God has called us to be—holy and consecrated to the will of God!

—Johnny Felker