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John Paul II: 'Santo, ma non subito'

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NCR Today

The highly regarded Italian Vatican affairs writer Andrea Tornielli has a piece in today's *Il Giornale* reporting on behind-the-scenes debates within the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, concerning the beatification process for the late Pope John Paul II.

When John Paul died four years ago, crowds in St. Peter's Square chanted 'Santo Subito!', meaning 'Sainthood Now!', but to hear Tornielli tell it, the reality may be more like 'santo, ma non subito.' According to the report, the congregation met on May 13 to discuss John Paul's cause, and there was considerable criticism – not of John Paul's worthiness, but of the quality of the work done so far, the speed with which the cause is moving, and the lack of clarity on certain points from the pope's life.

Among other things, Tornielli notes that two key witnesses, Cardinals Angelo Sodano (John Paul's Secretary of State) and Leonardo Sandri (who was the substitute, or number two official in the Secretariat of State) have so far refused to testify.

Sodano has voiced concern that John Paul's cause is moving so quickly while the cases of three other popes (Pius XII, Paul VI, and John Paul I) are still pending. Tornielli adds, however, that long-standing tensions between Sodano and Polish Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, the late pope's personal secretary, may also be involved. According to Tornielli, another witness, retired Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini of Milan, voiced ambivalence about some aspects of John Paul's papacy – especially his vast media exposure driven by 104 international trips, which, Tornielli quotes Martini as claiming, weakened the local church.

Among points yet to be clarified, according to Tornielli, is John Paul's famous 'kiss' of the Qur'an during an audience with Iraqi Muslims on May 14, 1999. Photos from that event appear to clearly show the pope kissing the Islamic holy book, but Dziwisz has insisted that it never happened.

Other points include the Vatican Bank scandal, financial support for the Solidarity movement in Poland, and the appointment of some bishops of 'dubious morality.' In the end, Tornielli speculates that these points could slow down John Paul's candidacy, even if a beatification is still not out of the question for 2010, which would be the fifth anniversary of the late pope's death. For those who read Italian, Tornielli's report can be found here:

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