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Halo for John XXIII the 'last act' of Vatican II

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NCR Today

Rome — In reply to the question of why Pope Francis approved sainthood for John XXIII without waiting for the customary second miracle, one of Italy's leading Catholic journalists on Monday offered a striking historical answer: Because it was the last unfulfilled request of the Second Vatican Council, the watershed assembly which "Good Pope John" convened.

The Vatican announced July 5 that Francis had approved a decree certifying a second miracle for Pope John Paul II, clearing the way for his canonization, and at the same time had agreed to move forward with John XXIII without a second miracle.

A consistory of cardinals will meet in September to formally approve the canonizations and to set a date for the ceremony, which could occur later this year.

Writing Monday in *Avvenire*, the official newspaper of the Italian bishops, journalist Stefania Falasca noted that the famed French Dominican theologian Yves Congar* recorded in his diary from Vatican II (1962-65) that Belgian Cardinal Lèon Joseph Suenens at one stage planned to close a speech on the council floor with a request for the immediate canonization of Pope John XXIII "by acclamation."

It was a request, Falasca says, that was shared by many participants in the council and by "a multitude of the faithful." (Falasca is editor of the prestigious journal *30 Giorni*.)

Reflecting the popular groundswell at the time, she quotes an article from the Italian paper *Gazzetta del Popolo* the day after Pope John's death on June 3, 1963:

One day soon, if God wants it, we'll stop referring to John XXIII as 'His Holiness' and speak instead of his holiness, including in an official and canonical way. We hope no one will feel the

need to demand from him one of the ritual miracles necessary for canonization.

A miracle involving the healing of an Italian nun from severe internal hemorrhages was attributed to John XXIII at the time of his beatification in 2000. Falasca lays out two reasons the decision to bypass the second miracle usually required for sainthood is not a matter of "shortcuts, simplifications or arbitrary decisions."

She notes there's precedent, citing John Paul II's waiver of the requirement for individual miracles when he decided to canonize 120 Chinese martyrs together on Oct. 1, 2000, as part of the Great Jubilee year.

In the case of John XXIII, Falasca argues, the Vatican has already conceded permission in so many different parts of the world to celebrate the feast of his beatification that he's already *de facto* regarded as a saint of the universal church.

Moreover, she suggests, the lack of a formal miracle certified by Vatican overseers is more or less a technicality, given what she calls the "growing fame of signs and miracles that accompanies the memory" of John XXIII.

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"After his beatification on Sept. 3, 2000, numerous reports have arrived at the direction of his sainthood cause from all over the world of graces and favors obtained from his intercession," she writes, "often accompanied by medical documentation."

Falasca says there are 20 among the "most interesting" of these reports.

"Quite a few underwent a preliminary medical review with an eye towards a possible process, even if none of them for the moment have been through the canonical process for recognition," she writes.

Second, Falasca argues, the logic for setting aside the miracle requirement is that the desire that John XXIII be made a saint was expressly articulated within an ecumenical council, representing the will of what's usually considered the most important teaching authority of the church.

"No other candidate for canonization can actually claim such an exceptional status," she writes.

"On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II," she writes, "the desire expressed by that ecclesial assembly, which wanted John XXIII to be named a saint, will finally be embraced, carrying their hopes to fruition."

"Indeed," Falasca writes, "the request for canonization of Pope Roncalli was the only request formulated by the council fathers that hasn't yet been carried out, given that the publication of a universal catechism for the church has already happened."

**An earlier version of this story misspelled Yves Congar's name.*

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