

Catholic officials to investigate claims of second Newman miracle

LONDON – Catholic officials are investigating claims that a severely deformed baby was born in a perfectly normal condition after the child's mother prayed to Cardinal John Henry Newman for a miracle.

Andrea Ambrosi, the Vatican lawyer in charge of Cardinal Newman's cause for canonization, has revealed in a BBC program to be broadcast Sept. 18 that he hopes the inexplicable healing may be the miracle needed to canonize Cardinal Newman as Britain's next saint.

Pope Benedict XVI will beatify Cardinal Newman at a huge open-air Mass in Birmingham's Cofton Park Sept. 19, the last day of his four-day visit to England and Scotland. However, a second miracle is needed to name the 19th-century cardinal as a saint.

"I am about to leave for Mexico City precisely because that could be the miracle for his canonization," Ambrosi said in the documentary – "Newman: Saint or Sinner?" – excerpts of which were released by the BBC Sept. 9.

"We are in a very preliminary phase," he added. "I cannot say anything yet, but this shows how the cardinal answers these prayers."

Former British government minister Ann Widdecombe – who, like Cardinal Newman, was Anglican before becoming Catholic – will present the television program. She told Catholic News Service Sept. 13 that the alleged healing occurred after prenatal scans revealed that the unborn baby was "severely deformed."

The doctors, she said, were convinced they could do nothing to help the fetus, but the mother, a devout Catholic, insisted on going through with the pregnancy.

"The child was born perfect following the mother praying to Newman, and scientists can't explain it," said Widdecombe.

Father Richard Duffield, provost of the Birmingham Oratory, confirmed in an e-mail to CNS that "an investigative tribunal into a further miracle ... is about to open in the Archdiocese of Mexico City."

"The reported miracle took place after the formal announcement of Newman's beatification (in July 2009)," he said. "This means that if it is found to be genuine it would be eligible for consideration as the second miracle necessary for Newman's canonization. It is expected that witness statements from those concerned and from the medical teams will be ready to send to Rome in early 2011."

"The process of investigation needs to be very thorough, and we should be cautious," he said. "But it is always exciting to hear reports of Newman's intercession and the evident devotion there is to him all over the world."

U.S. Deacon Jack Sullivan of Marshfield, Mass., whose healing from a crippling spinal condition in August 2001 was the miracle that allowed for Cardinal Newman's beatification, will read the Gospel during the beatification Mass.

Pope Benedict has waived his own rules to preside over the ceremony rather than sending a Vatican delegate to conduct the ceremony.

Cardinal Newman was an Anglican theologian who became a Catholic after first founding the Oxford Movement to try to return the Church of England to its Catholic roots.