

ROBERT MICKENS AND ELENA CURTI

History in the making

A papal visit to Britain, the creation of a handful of new cardinals, the canonisation of Australia's first saint and the beatification of Cardinal Newman as well as other likely events will make this year a highly significant one for the Catholic Church worldwide

It may be weeks or even months before Rome makes a formal announcement, but it is practically certain that Pope Benedict will visit England and Scotland this autumn.

The Pope's trip will be the highlight of what promises to be a significant year for Britain's Catholics. While in England, he will beatify Cardinal John Henry Newman – now on track to become the first non-martyr English saint since the Reformation. In a few weeks' time the bishops of England and Wales, closely followed by those of Scotland, will be going to Rome to brief Pope Benedict about the state of Catholicism in Britain.

It is an important year for Catholicism internationally too, with the likelihood of a huge ceremony in St Peter's Square to beatify the now Venerable John Paul II. There will also be a Vatican-based Synod on the Middle East, a crop of new cardinals, and the Turin Shroud will go on public display for the first time in a decade.

The Pope's visit to Britain will be the last of four foreign journeys he will make this year, all of them in Europe. He is expected to arrive in England on 16 September and travel to Scotland on 19 September before returning to Rome. The trip will, according to the Government, have "the status of a state visit". As such, it would normally involve meeting the Queen, although for now Buckingham Palace is staying silent on the matter.

Most of the talking so far has been done by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy, a Catholic, who told *The Tablet* in December 2009 that the visit is "a unique



Pope Benedict XVI: his visit to the UK will have the status of a state visit, but without many of the formal trappings. Photo: CNS

constitutional arrangement" as the Pope is head of a faith as well as a head of state. Mr Murphy explained that Pope Benedict would eschew the normal trappings of a state visit including "banquets and gold carriages".

In truth, a journey in the state coach along The Mall in London, as normally befits a visiting head of state, was never on the cards given that the Pope's visit coincides with the Queen's traditional holiday at Balmoral. For this reason, the "state" element of the visit is likely to be in Scotland. It is possible that Her Majesty will travel to Edinburgh to host the Pope at her official residence in Scotland, the Palace of Holyroodhouse, a place important in Catholic history as the home of Mary Queen of Scots and briefly the headquarters of Bonnie Prince Charlie during the uprising of 1745. It has also been suggested by Cardinal Keith O'Brien that Pope Benedict could deliver an address to the Scottish Parliament, an idea enthusiastically taken up by Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, who has written to the Pope expressing the hope that he will take up the invitation to visit Scotland.

But given the brevity of the visit and the Pope's age – he will be 83 by then – there are limits on how much he can do. The centrepiece of the trip will be the beatification of Cardinal Newman and it looks as though this will take place at Coventry Airport. One or two football stadiums, including Aston Villa and Wembley, were approached but are not available. The liturgy for the beatification and other ceremonies is being planned in conjunction with the Pope's

Master of Ceremonies, Mgr Guido Marini.

The Scottish bishops very much want the Pope to attend a pastoral event north of the border too, but realise that may be difficult if he has to meet the Queen. The general secretary of the bishops' conference of Scotland, Fr Paul Conroy, told *The Tablet* that the Pope would spend a total of nine hours in Scotland and would need three hours' rest in the middle of the day.

"It is a very restricted programme. A meeting with the Queen cuts things back quite considerably and we are led to believe there could be other things. The Holy Father likes to celebrate Mass in the morning but that may not be possible," said Fr Conroy. "He would certainly want to ensure there are certain aspects of the visit, like meeting people and having a sense of encounter with the local Church. The pomp and circumstance that might be associated with a state visit from other heads of state is not something that happens with the Pope. At the same time, he would be very gracious in responding to what the Queen might suggest."

The visit will doubtless be on Pope Benedict's mind when he meets individually with the bishops of England and Wales later this month and in the first week of February when it will be the turn of Scotland's bishops. These meetings are part of the *ad limina* visits that all bishops make every five years to report on the current state of their dioceses. Among the matters likely to be discussed will be the setting up of an ordinariate that will accommodate those disaffected Anglicans who want to become Catholics but retain their "Anglican patrimony".

Pope Benedict's other foreign journeys will not take him too far from Rome. The first will take place during 17-18 April in Malta to mark the 1,950th anniversary of St Paul's shipwreck on the island. There will be a second island visit – tentatively scheduled for 4-6 June – this time to Cyprus to unveil symbolically the working paper for a Synod on the Middle East to be held in October at the Vatican. Before that, Pope Benedict will go to Portugal on 11-14 May. That visit includes stops in Porto, Lisbon and the Marian shrine of Fátima.

At some point in the year, probably in the autumn, Pope Benedict is planning to canonise Mary MacKillop (1842-1909), making her Australia's first saint. But the ceremony is



A worker hangs a portrait of Blessed Mary MacKillop inside St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, Australia. The Australian nun is due to be canonised this year. Photo: CNS

likely to be overshadowed by the expected record-breakingly fast beatification of the late Pope John Paul II (1920-2005). Pope Benedict only recently declared his immediate predecessor "venerable" and now only needs proof that a miracle has been worked through the intercession of the Polish pontiff before he can beatify him.

The number of cardinals under the age of 80 is dwindling, so Pope Benedict will have to distribute more red hats to reach the special number of 120 – the number eligible to vote in a conclave to elect a new pope. He could create as many as 20 new cardinals this year. There are once again more archbishops in posts that customarily come with a red hat than there are slots available. Shoo-ins for the red hat include Archbishop Angelo Amato SDB, head of the Congregation for Saints, and Archbishop Raymond Burke, prefect of the Apostolic Segnatura, the Church's highest court.

In the course of 2010, Pope Benedict will also have to make some difficult decisions regarding a number of controversial disciplinary and doctrinal issues. Foremost among them is the scandal of the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests in different parts of the world and accusations that bishops tried to cover up the crimes. The scandal is currently centred on Ireland and the Pope is expected to write a pastoral letter soon to Catholics in the country explaining measures that need to be taken to resolve the situation. This could lead Catholics in other countries where sexual abuse by clergy has been made public to request similar papal action.

People will also be watching for developments in the recently begun discussions between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Lefebvrist Society of St Pius X, or SSPX. Pope Benedict, who early last year lifted the excommunication of the four SSPX bishops, seems intent on bringing them and their followers back into full communion with Rome. But the Lefebvrists have criticised certain doctrinal developments that were elaborated at the Second Vatican Council. It will eventually fall to the Pope to determine whether those criticisms are enough to keep the SSPX separated from Rome.

Finally, at some point in the coming months, three Vatican-mandated investigations into various religious orders will have been concluded – one into the conservative worldwide men's order, the Legionaries of Christ, and two into women's groups in the United States.

The first investigation, centring on the sexual and financial scandals of the Legionaries' founder, the late Fr Marcial Maciel, will eventually end up on Pope Benedict's desk. He will have to decide whether or not there are enough good elements in the large and financially powerful order and its burgeoning lay association that have been untainted by the corruptive influences of the founder, or whether the enterprise should be suppressed. This is likely to be the most difficult decision Pope Benedict XVI will have to face in 2010.

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