

Does God really exist? The agony of Teresa
By Bruce Johnston and Brigid Delaney - London Sunday Telegraph
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Mother Teresa, put on the fast-track to sainthood by the Pope after her death five years ago, was tormented by a crisis of belief for 50 years, her writings reveal.

Her letters and diaries present a completely different picture of the nun and Nobel peace laureate from her public image as a woman confident of her faith.

It is being said in Rome that biographies will have to be rewritten to take the revelation into account.

The previously unpublished material is to be brought out as a volume in Italy. It was collected by Roman Catholic authorities in Calcutta after her death, aged 87.

Mother Teresa, who worked among the poor of Calcutta, wrote in 1958: "My smile is a great cloak that hides a multitude of pains." Because she was "forever smiling", people thought "my faith, my hope and my love are overflowing and that my intimacy with God and union with his will fill my heart. If only they knew".

Mother Teresa said in another letter: "The damned of hell suffer eternal punishment because they experiment with the loss of God. In my own soul, I feel the terrible pain of this loss. I feel that God does not want me, that God is not God and that he does not really exist."

Rome's daily newspaper Il Messaggero said: "The real Mother Teresa was one who for one year had visions and who for the next 50 had doubts - until her death."

Her years of doubt coincided with the period when, after the visions, she decided to leave her teaching post at a privileged Calcutta school to help India's poor.

After her death, the Pope waived the Vatican rule that prohibits investigation of the cause for beatification until five years after the subject's death.

Australian church leaders say Mother Teresa's period of doubt only strengthens the case for her beatification.

Francesco Canalini, the Pope's representative in Australia, said: "Many saints throughout history had times of trouble. The message from God is that many holy people have had to face difficulties, but they have fought them despite the darkness."

Sydney Columban priest Cyril Hally describes Mother Teresa's doubts as the "dark night of the soul". "It is a purification process. Doubt is part of the growth of holiness," he said, adding that it is also a part of sainthood.

Il Segreto di Madre Teresa (Mother Teresa's Secret) will be published in December

