

Let your speech be, “Yes, yes,” “No, no”; whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37) • November 2007
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Limbo...in “Limbo”

The Problems with the International Theological Commission Document on Limbo

The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized is the title of the report on limbo drafted by the International Theological Commission (ITC), which was instituted by Pope Paul VI with the mission of helping the Holy See and principally the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the examination of doctrinal questions of great importance. The President of the Commission is the Cardinal Prefect ‘*pro tempore*’ of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹

The report is thus the fruit of a consultative body bereft of magisterial authority, and Cardinal Levada approved its publication in his capacity as President of the ITC and not as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The oral “approbation” given for its publication by Benedict XVI at the audience of January 19, 2007, does not engage papal authority and does not oblige the consciences of the faithful.²

The Principal Objections Advanced by the ITC against the Traditional Doctrine on Limbo

First Objection

The ITC writes:

It is clear that the traditional teaching on this topic has concentrated on the theory of Limbo, understood as a state [and place; but for the “new theology” and for Pope John Paul II, even hell is not a place] which includes the souls of infants who die subject to original sin and without baptism and who therefore neither merit the beatific vision nor yet are subjected to any punishment because they are not guilty of any [actual] personal sin. This theory, elaborated by theologians *beginning in the Middle Ages, never entered into the dogmatic definitions of the Magisterium* even if that

same Magisterium did at times mention the theory in its ordinary teaching *up until* the Second Vatican Council. It remains therefore a *possible theological hypothesis*.³

Response: The assertion that limbo is “a theory elaborated by theologians beginning in the Middle Ages” is not true. The same holds for the assertion that the doctrine of limbo “never entered into the dogmatic definitions of the Magisterium,” which Magisterium would have limited itself to mentioning it “in its ordinary teaching” (whether ordinary, universal and constant, or simply authentic, is not specified in the text.)

In reality, it was not long before Tradition (the Greek and Latin Fathers) and the Magisterium began to expound, with a deepening understanding, the import of the Gospel passages that affirm the necessity of the means of holy baptism (Jn. 3:5; Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16).⁴ Not only did the Greek Fathers affirm in unison with the Latin Fathers the exclusion of unbaptized infants from the beatific vision of God, but they were the first, in particular St. Gregory of Nazianzen⁵ and St. Gregory of Nyssa,⁶ to deduce from this truth of faith (necessity of means of baptism) and from a truth of reason (the justice of God) that children who die without baptism have a destiny very different from that of the damned in hell, expressing this “theory,” which the ITC tells us was elaborated “beginning in the Middle Ages,” with great exactitude.

In the West, it was the Pelagian heresy that provided the Magisterium (and the Latin Fathers, in particular St. Augustine) occasion to pronounce on the fate of infants who die without baptism. We refer the reader to the exposition given in the issue of *Si Si No No* referred to above. Here we must clarify that in the traditional doctrine on limbo, three points need to be distinguished (which the ITC did not do):

Point 1: Baptism, at least in desire, is a necessity of *means* for a soul to be cleansed from original sin, and consequently whoever dies in original sin is excluded from the beatific vision, which is the case of children who die without baptism before reaching the age of reason, and who are thus incapable of such a desire. This truth has been the object of dogmatic affirmations several times. Pope Innocent I, on January 27, 417, in his Letter 182 to the primate Silvanus and to all the bishops of the Council of Milevum, teaches that “It is the height of folly (*perfatuum est*) to affirm that children can obtain the reward of eternal life even without the grace of baptism” (Ch.5). Fr. Attilio Carpin, O.P., writes that these words have “a dogmatic character insofar as they constitute an intervention by the Sovereign Pontiff on a matter of faith.”⁷ The Council of Florence reiterated the teaching of the Council of Carthage when it affirmed that for children without the use of reason “no help can be brought to them by another remedy than through the sacrament of baptism” (Dz. 712). The Council of Trent teaches that it is not possible to pass from the state of sin to the state of grace *without baptism or [at least] the desire for it* (Dz. 791), and in the wake of the same Council of Carthage, it reaffirms that “by reason of this rule of faith...even infants...are truly baptized for the remission of sins” (Dz. 791).

Clearly, these statements are not mere “mentions” made by the Magisterium “in its teaching”; the exclusion from the beatific vision of those who die with original sin only, as is the case of unbaptized infants, is a defined truth of divine and Catholic faith.⁸

Point 2: The damned and children who die unbaptized suffer different fates. This truth, too, is not just “mentioned” by the Magisterium, but has been the object of repeated dogmatic declarations. Pope Innocent III: “The punishment of original sin [in which unbaptized children die] is the privation of the vision of God, whereas the punishment of actual [personal] sin is the torment of everlasting hell.” The Council of Lyons: “The souls of those who die in mortal sin or with original sin only, however, immediately descend to hell, yet to be punished with different punishments” (Dz. 464, Profession of faith imposed on the Emperor Michael Paleologus). The Council of Florence incorporates this text verbatim in its “Decree for the Greeks” (Dz. 693).

Point 3: The difference between the punishments resides in this: those who die with original sin alone (unbaptized infants) are not subject to sensible torments as the damned are, and they suffer no sadness from the privation of the beatific vision. To the contrary, the children who die without baptism even enjoy a natural happiness. This is the most common teaching and the most likely.⁹ *This teaching (and not the existence of limbo) has not yet been made the object of dogmatic affirmations by the Magisterium.* It would have been defined by Vatican I, had the Council not been interrupted by the taking of

Rome (the revised and corrected schema on the state of souls in limbo still exists), and it would probably have been defined by Vatican II at the request of certain Fathers had the Council not been hijacked by the neo-modernist wing, enemy of the dogma of original sin and thus of the traditional teaching on limbo.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the doctrine on limbo, based upon passages from Sacred Scripture and, at least as regards the first two points set forth above, incorporated into dogmatic statements of the Magisterium (from the Council of Carthage to the Council of Trent) is at a minimum a “theological conclusion,” and, as such, is a part of “Catholic truths” or “Church teachings,”¹⁰ and cannot be lowered (as the ITC does) to the rank of a simple “possible theological hypothesis.” Indeed, these hypotheses or *theological opinions* are free judgments in matters of faith and morals which are neither directly supported by Revelation nor decided by the Magisterium. But the existence of limbo—as we have seen—is based upon both Revelation and the affirmations of the Magisterium. Pius XII spoke of it as recently as October 29, 1951: “...there is no other way to communicate that [supernatural] life to the child who has not attained the use of reason.”

All of Catholic theology prior to Vatican II (even by the ITC’s own admission) attests Catholic doctrine on limbo. For instance, Albert Michel writes that the teaching on limbo is “a teaching proximate to Faith and susceptible of a dogmatic definition.”¹¹ The *Civiltà Cattolica*¹² quotes St. Augustine on limbo: “If you wish to be Catholic, do not believe, do not say, and do not teach that children who die without baptism can obtain the remission of original sin,”¹³ and the Jesuit review, an official organ of the Holy See, comments: “He does not say: if you do not wish to be temerarious, but ‘if you wish to be Catholic.’”¹⁴ Thus *La Civiltà Cattolica* considers it to be a matter of definable faith.

In *La volontà salvifica sur les petits enfants*,¹⁵ Cardinal Journet writes that the Magisterium had made a pronouncement on the subject in a manner that was not only canonical or prudential or practical, but also speculative and dogmatic, apt to “define the revealed deposit....These pronouncements require of us an assent of faith in a divinely revealed truth” (p.137). Cardinal Journet recalls that formerly the Church, at the Councils of Milevum and Carthage (416–418) “defined the necessity of infant baptism” (pp.145–46) in terms later adopted by the Council of Trent, and that the practice of infant baptism is “of apostolic origin” (p.147). It is “a doctrine belonging to the divine Faith of the Church” that there can be no hope of supernatural salvation for unbaptized children [who die before reaching the age of reason]; this is not “a doctrine that would merely constitute the common teaching of theologians” (p.152).

In 1971, Msgr. Pier Carlo Landucci wrote that the existence of limbo “is a solid theological deduction, corroborated by Tradition and the Magisterium,”

and, against present-day modernism, he recalled that “beyond the definitions, often incidental, there is the solid theological teaching determined by the ensemble of the Fathers and theologians, and by the ordinary Magisterium of the Church, which, when it is universal, is infallible.” He concluded: “Limbo will always be a reminder of the supreme transcendence and the gratuity of supernatural life.”¹⁶

To conclude, it will suffice to say that the existence of limbo must be held for certain (*eius existentia certo tenenda est*),¹⁷ and this is not a simple theological opinion. Unless, of course, one should wish to say, as has already been said about hell, that “limbo exists, but it is empty.”

Second Objection

The idea of Limbo, which the Church has used for many centuries to designate the destiny of infants who die without baptism, has *no clear foundation* in revelation even though it has *long been used* in traditional theological teaching. Moreover, the notion that infants who die without baptism are deprived of the beatific vision, which has for so long been regarded as the common doctrine of the Church, gives rise to numerous pastoral problems.¹⁸

Response: The foundation of the traditional doctrine on limbo is found in Revelation (Sacred Scripture and Tradition), and this foundation is clear. **Sacred Scripture:** “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). “Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved” (Mark 16:15-16). **Tradition:** The Greek and Latin Fathers, as we have seen, are unanimous in their teaching of the exclusion from the beatific vision of infants who die unbaptized, and it is in this sense that, in regard to these infants, they speak of “*damnatio*” (privation of the vision of God). They differ only in their conception of the condition reserved to these children (neither the pain of the senses nor the pain of loss), milder in the thinking of the Greek Fathers, and more severe in the thinking of many of the Latin Fathers under the influence of anti-Pelagian polemics.

Finally, if the doctrine of limbo “gives rise to numerous pastoral problems,” this is often due to the imprecise and incomplete manner in which it is taught, and that is why it would have been truly opportune for Vatican II, which claimed to be principally pastoral, not to elude the question of the bishops who asked for the definition of Point 3 of the traditional teaching about limbo. In any case, the purported “pastoral problems” cannot be construed as an authorization to alter a truth taught by our Lord (Jn. 3:5) and constantly proposed by the Church to the faith of Catholics: “No one, unless he is born of the water and the spirit, can see the kingdom of heaven,” that is to say, as the Church has clarified in her teaching against the schisms of the Pelagians, eternal life and thus the beatific vision.

Third Objection

“...[P]eople find it increasingly difficult to accept that God is just and merciful if he excludes infants [who die unbaptized], ...from eternal happiness” (§2). Amongst these people, the members of the ITC must necessarily be counted, since they judge the doctrine of limbo as “an unduly restrictive view of salvation...that ultimately calls into question the very omnipotence of God and his mercy” (§2).

Response: Since the doctrine adjudged by the ITC to be “unduly restrictive” is a truth attested by Holy Writ and professed and taught uninterruptedly in the Church (Fathers and Doctors of the Church, Councils, Magisterium), as we saw in Point 1, we must conclude that, for the ITC, those who “call into question the very omnipotence of God and his mercy” are Sacred Scripture, the Fathers and Doctors, the Councils, and the ordinary and extraordinary Magisterium of the Church—a statement that, for an organ of study such as the ITC, is not without a certain effrontery.

Complete and perfect natural happiness, however, is due. According to the common and most probable teaching (which still awaits a dogmatic definition; see Point 3 above), God accords this natural happiness to unbaptized infants who die without personal sins, but, because of original sin, lack sanctifying grace and are thus incapable of acting supernaturally (“*agere sequitur esse*”) and of seeing God “face to face as He is,” in His essence. God commits no injustice when He leaves the baptism of newborns to the general play of secondary causes, which can ultimately deprive some souls of the free gift of supernatural happiness. God desires, with a universal will, that all be saved, including infants, and He instituted the general means of salvation for all, even for infants, but He is not bound to guarantee by continual miracles or by a series of miracles that all infants be baptized when the secondary causes (parents, family, society, the State) oppose it.

In the doctrine on limbo, there is thus no “unduly restrictive view of salvation.” On the contrary, those who deny it or call it in question display the same pretension to the supernatural and to grace as things due to man that St. Pius X condemned in the modernists (*Pascendi*) and Pius XII in the neo-modernists (*Humani Generis*):

Others destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.¹⁹

Fourth Objection

Reflecting on the question of the destiny of infants who die without baptism, the *ecclesial community* must keep in mind the fact that God is more properly *the subject than the*

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Fifth Objection

object of theology. The first task of theology is therefore *to listen to the word of God*...However, with regard to the salvation of those who die without baptism, the word of God says little or nothing. (§4)

Response: This objection could have been written by a Protestant: they speak of the “ecclesial community,” which “reflects” on the theme of infants dying without baptism; they speak of “the word of God,” but not one word about the Church’s Magisterium. Yet God has not only given His Church Sacred Scripture and Tradition, but, as Pius XII reminded the modernists:

For, together with the sources of positive theology God has given to His Church a living Teaching Authority to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith only obscurely and implicitly. This deposit of faith our Divine Redeemer has given for authentic interpretation *not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians*, but only to the Teaching Authority of the Church.²⁰

This Teaching Authority or Magisterium, to which has been entrusted by Christ our Lord the whole deposit of faith and which must be “in matters of faith and morals...the proximate and universal criterion of truth for all theologians”²¹ is “sometimes as little known” by the ITC “as if it did not exist.”²² Or rather, it is contradicted, for against the constant teaching of the Church, the ITC document dares to affirm that “with regard to the salvation of those who die without baptism, the word of God says little or nothing,” while in reality, the Word of God says of those who die without baptism that they are not saved, and the Church, in its authentic interpretation, explains that this holds true in particular for all infants who, without the use of reason, cannot have, unlike adults, the desire for baptism, with the consequence that they have no other way to be saved than by water baptism or to be killed for Christ like the Holy Innocents.

And what does it mean to say that “God is more properly the subject than the object of theology”? This thesis is essentially modernist; it leads to subjectivism and to philosophico-theological relativism. For the “material” object of theology is principally God, and secondarily created things as they are ordered to God, who is their end and their efficient cause.²³ Whereas the “formal” object of supernatural theology is God knowable by faith through Revelation, that of natural theology or “theodicy” is God (His existence, and certain attributes of His essence) known from creatures by means of natural reason.²⁴ To assert that God is more the subject than the object of theology is to fall into nihilism or theological agnosticism, also called “apophatism” (God is totally unknowable), to which the ITC explicitly refers (see note 30 below).

There has even been an important liturgical development through the introduction of funerals for infants who died without baptism....The *Roman Missal of 1970* introduced a funeral Mass for unbaptized infants.... (§5)

Before Vatican II, in the Latin Church there was no Christian funeral rite for unbaptized infants, and such infants were buried in unconsecrated ground....Thanks to the liturgical reform after the Council, the Roman Missal now has a funeral Mass for a child who died before baptism. (§100)

Response: By the ITC’s own admission, this change does not constitute a true, homogeneous “liturgical development,” but rather a liturgical corruption because it is heterogeneous, that is to say, in contradiction with the 2,000-year-old doctrine and practice of the Church. If the Church never allowed a Mass for infants who die without baptism until 1969, it is certainly and infallibly true (by the practice of the Church, which is a dogmatic fact) that these souls do not benefit from the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass insofar as they lack the capacity or potency for the supernatural order. The ITC’s objection can be turned against it, in that a new practice originating a mere 30 years ago cannot supplant the contrary ancient and traditional practice of apostolic origin that has always subsisted peacefully in the Church: If a new practice contradicts an ancient one, it is certainly erroneous by reason of the principle of identity and non-contradiction, and it is to the ancient practice that it is necessary to hold fast, as the Church has always taught.²⁵

In reality, by changing the “*lex orandi*” with the introduction of a Mass (which had never existed) for unbaptized infants, they sought to change the “*lex credendi*,” effacing the existence of limbo. This was done gradually but resolutely: In 1970, Pope Paul VI *implicitly* introduced the negation of limbo in the *Novus Ordo* by inserting in it, contrary to 2,000 years of practice, a funeral Mass for unbaptized infants. In 1984, Joseph Ratzinger, while Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, affirmed *explicitly* that limbo is only a “theological opinion.” In 1992, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (No. 1261) included the teaching that the Church entrusts the children who have died without baptism to the mercy of God “as she does in her funeral rites for them” (introduced only after Vatican II by Paul VI). Finally, in 1994, the ITC, presided by Cardinal Ratzinger, began its studies on limbo, which issued last April in the current “novelty,” which gives a blow to the traditional teaching of the Church.

Sixth Objection

So, while knowing that the *normal way* to achieve salvation in Christ is by baptism *in re*, the Church [?] *hopes* [*si*] that there may be other ways to achieve the same end.

Because by his incarnation the Son of God ‘in a certain way united himself’ with every human being.... (§6)

What we may ask and are asking is whether infants who die without baptism *necessarily* die in original sin, without a divine remedy.... We may perhaps compare this to God’s unmerited gift to Mary at her Immaculate Conception. (§§83, 87)

Response: This is the crux of the matter. Since baptism is the normal way and normally necessary to take away original sin, normally the infants who die without baptism do not enjoy the beatific vision (*de fide*); exceptionally or miraculously, God can sanctify someone (St. John the Baptist) in his mother’s womb, but the exception always remains the exception and cannot become a rule. And since it would involve an exception to a universal law established by Christ and ratified by the Church, “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5), any derogation that is not revealed by God Himself, as in the case of St. John the Baptist or the Blessed Virgin Mary is inadmissible. The exceptions to a general law, Cardinal Journet reiterates in agreement with all Catholic theology, cannot be presumed, but must be proved.²⁶ The ITC, on the contrary, not only presumes the exception, but it makes of it a rule without demonstration.

In reality, it is not true that, as the ITC writes, “the Church hopes that there may be other ways to achieve” salvation for the children who die unbaptized. To the contrary, the Church has always denied the existence of these “other ways” from the first Council of Carthage until the Holy Office’s Monitum of February 18, 1958. It is thus that Cardinal Journet, after examining the texts of the Magisterium, could write that “in response to the question of whether children who die without baptism, before attaining the use of reason, have some other way of salvation..., all the indications of the Magisterium converge towards one response: No”²⁷; and he considers this truth to be a truth of faith.

In reality, the ITC bases itself not upon the constant teaching of the Church (of which, as we have shown, it takes no account), but on the following sophism: **A.** It is of faith that without grace (with original sin) one cannot enter heaven; **B.** Baptism, however, is not the *only* way to efface original sin; **C.** Therefore, even for infants who die without baptism, there can be another way to go to heaven. But the minor premise is obviously ambiguous and erroneous, for baptism is the ordinary or normal way to efface the stain of original sin: it is not a question of establishing what God can or could have done, but what He did do.

Of course, God in His omnipotence and His freedom can communicate grace even in a purely spiritual way. He was not obliged to institute the sacraments.²⁸ However, since man is not a pure spirit, but is composed of a soul and a body, Christ instituted the sacraments (outward signs that produce grace) as ways to give us supernatural life. Now, in this state of things, baptism, by a positive divine disposition, is a

necessary means of salvation, even if there are exceptions in a few extraordinary cases. The Council of Trent defined that “this translation after the promulgation of the Gospel cannot be effected except through the laver of regeneration, or a desire for it” (Dz. 796, cf. Canon 5 on baptism). Now, since it is formally and directly revealed that without baptism, or at least the desire for it, one cannot have grace, and without grace one cannot have glory, it is *at least* strictly connected to the “*per se revelatum*” that infants, since they are incapable of baptism of desire, can only obtain grace and thus glory by water baptism or by martyrdom, if they are killed out of hatred for Christ as were the Holy Innocents, to whom the ITC alludes incorrectly in its report.

The “hope” expressed by the ITC that there may be “other ways” for children who die without baptism to be saved is thus a hope that is opposed by the general principle established by Christ Himself and ratified by His Church, according to which *no one* can be saved unless he is born again by baptism (or at least the desire for it). But there it is: the “new theology” encourages “hopes” that have no basis in the Faith and, just as its proponents “hope” that hell is empty, likewise they “hope” that limbo is empty, too. But what is a “hope” without a foundation in the Faith? It is pure sentimentalism or illusion, if not this “ideological romanticism” of which Msgr. Ugo Lattanzi (+1969) spoke, which seeks to introduce errors into Catholic doctrine and the minds of the faithful by means of “lyricism or poetry” (for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar).

The comparison with the Immaculate Conception, which has its foundation in the Divine maternity, leads one to think of this immaculate conception of man, the fundamental principle of naturalism and liberalism, and adopted in turn by the anthropocentrism and the cult of man specific to the “new theology,” which, despite Pius XII’s condemnation of it (*Humani Generis*, 1950) just twelve years removed, exerted such tremendous influence on Vatican II.

Seventh Objection

It can be asked whether the infant who dies without baptism but for whom the Church in its prayer expresses the desire for salvation can be deprived of the vision of God even without his or her cooperation. (§7)

Response: Original sin is the privation of sanctifying grace, which is the seed of glory in potency. Consequently, whoever is deprived of grace in act is also deprived of glory in potency. Without “his or her cooperation,” that is to say without personal sin, the infant cannot be punished by hell, but without grace, neither can it obtain glory, since it is impossible to pass

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into act from nothing; at least the potency is necessary: *Ex nihilo nihil fit. Ens in potentia non reducitur ad actum nisi per ens in actu.* Now, since infants ordinarily obtain the life of grace only by water baptism, normally (without miraculous exceptions certified by God: the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist) the infant who dies without baptism is deprived of grace and glory.

The ITC Is Not Ignorant of the Traditional Doctrine

Is the ITC ignorant of the traditional teaching on limbo that we have just presented? Not at all! It knows it very well. The Commission cites the Greek Fathers, then the Latin Fathers, especially St. Augustine; it does not fail to cite the Gospel (Jn. 3:5) (even though it denies that the doctrine on limbo has any foundation in Sacred Scripture); it speaks of Church praxis (which is an infallible norm of truth), which accorded baptism to “newborns in danger of death... to assure their entrance into the kingdom of heaven” (§16). It cites the Magisterium with the Council of Carthage (418), and skips directly to the Scholastics (St. Anselm of Canterbury, Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Abelard)...It returns to the Magisterium (Council of Lyons, John XXII, the Council of Florence, taken up in turn by the Council of Trent), and explains that with the Schoolmen and the medieval Magisterium, the Church reached a “common view” (§23) (they continue to downplay the dogmatic value of the doctrine on limbo) that these unbaptized children go to limbo, where they suffer no pain and even enjoy a full natural happiness, feeling no regret of their lack of the beatific vision, which is essentially supernatural, since they are without habitual grace and do not know what Revelation teaches about heaven. The ITC even quotes St. Thomas Aquinas, for whom

faith alone allows us to know that the supernatural end of human life consists in the glory of the saints, that is, in participation in the life of the triune God through the beatific vision. Since this supernatural end transcends natural human knowledge and since unbaptized children lack the sacrament that would have given them the seed of such supernatural knowledge, Aquinas concluded that infants who die without baptism do not know what they are deprived of and hence do not suffer from the privation of the beatific vision. (§23)

Still, the ITC insists that the ordinary way of baptism does not exclude other extraordinary avenues by which the power and the mercy of God can, if He wills, raise to the supernatural order even those who are not baptized and die before attaining the use of reason (§66).

The ITC does not hide the fact, either, that Pius VI condemned as “false, rash, injurious to the Catholic schools” the Jansenist proposition that denies the

doctrine on the limbo of children, but it affirms that this doctrine is *not of faith*; it would merely be “the common Catholic teaching until the mid-20th century” (§26). In short, the members of the ITC show that they know perfectly well the Catholic doctrine on limbo, but they reduce it to the rank of “common teaching” under the pretext of the lack of a dogmatic definition, forgetting that, in the words of Msgr. Landucci quoted above,

Beyond the definitions, often incidental, there is the solid theological teaching determined by the ensemble of the Fathers and theologians, and by the ordinary Magisterium of the Church, which, when it is universal, is infallible.

How the ITC Circumvents the Traditional Teaching

The ITC tells us, among other inexactitudes over which we cannot tarry, that during Vatican II the “issue” of limbo “did not enter into the Council’s deliberations and was left *open* for further investigation.” In reality, Pius XII, in 1950, condemned the “new theology” according to which the supernatural order is something due to human nature and thus is not gratuitous. It would have been risky to change the doctrine on limbo diametrically between 1962 and 1965, scarcely a dozen years after such a severe condemnation, and only four to six years after the Holy Office’s *Monitum* (February 18, 1958), which reaffirmed the traditional doctrine and condemned as vain and bereft of any foundation the “novelties” that were popping up here and there about the destiny of children who die without baptism. So they let some time elapse and introduced the change gradually. However, Vatican Council II, in particular in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) §22, had introduced a very ambiguous phrase that would subsequently allow the “novelties” on limbo to slide by: “By his Incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in some way (*quodammodo*), with *every* human being.”

Indeed, the ITC refers to GS §22 to affirm: “Although the Council did not expressly apply this teaching to children who die without baptism, these passages open a way to account for hope in their favor” (§31)... “In theological research, the perception of the divine will to save as ‘quantitatively’ universal is relatively recent” (§33). It follows that “humanity’s solidarity with Christ (or, more properly, Christ’s solidarity with all of humanity) must have priority over the solidarity of human beings with Adam” (§91). Now, “a major weakness of the traditional view of Limbo is that it is unclear whether the souls there have any relationship to Christ” (§90), whence it can be said that, if it is of faith that the privation of the beatific vision is the punishment of original sin, baptism is not the only way to remove the obstacle (privation of grace) to the vision of God. The children who die without baptism are not necessarily deprived of sanctifying grace and hence of the vision of God (§37). The traditional

teaching itself does not oblige us “to think that these infants necessarily die with original sin, so that there would be no way of salvation for them” (§37). The doctrine of limbo is thus the “common doctrine” but is not *de fide*: it remains a possible theological hypothesis,²⁹ today outstripped by the recent conciliar teaching. They even resort to invoking “the apophatic perspective of the Greek fathers” for resolving the problem of limbo, which is “a limit case as regards theological inquiry.”³⁰

Response: Firstly, it is ridiculous to define limbo as “a limit case as regards theological inquiry” when it has been tranquilly taught by the Catechism of Saint Pius X and tranquilly learned by the children who prepare for their First Holy Communion. As for the universal salvific will of God (§52), it is divided into (a) the antecedent and conditioned will that offers all men sufficient grace for salvation on condition that they desire to be saved; and (b) the consequent and absolute will that desires the salvation of those who accept it, but not of those who refuse it.

In theology, the term “quantitatively universal” (§33) does not exist. It is a term forged by the ITC to express in a new, foggy way an ancient and obscure heresy: *apocatastasis* or pantheism or the “Cosmic Christ” (which is essentially the same thing).

The relation of man with Adam is that of one who, descending from him, does not inherit habitual grace, which was given by God to Adam in the garden of Eden. Our first parent lost it by his fault and cannot transmit it to his children, who are necessarily born deprived of sanctifying grace, and thus with the stain of original sin. On the contrary, in the relation of man with Christ, if there is on the part of Christ a redemptive and universally salvific will, on every man’s part there must be free cooperation in the work of redemption. Hence “all men” are not necessarily in union with Christ (as *GS* §22 wrongly asserts), because they can refuse Christ’s salvation. *In potency*, every man is in relation with Christ, but *in act* he is not necessarily united to Him by sanctifying grace, while he is in *actual* relation with Adam, and he necessarily is born deprived of grace—that is to say, with original sin. It follows that the “solidarity” of man with Christ does not have, in general, priority over his solidarity with Adam; it is even the reverse.

Conclusion: According to the ITC, the principal weakness of the traditional doctrine on limbo is that it is not sufficiently clear about the relation each soul has with Christ. But the “new” doctrine on limbo conceives the relation of each soul with Christ in a heretical way, by referring to *GS* §22: “By his Incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in some way (*quodammodo*), with every human being.” This sentence was interpreted by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis*: “God...in him draws near again to humanity, to each human being, giving him the thrice holy Spirit of truth” (§9). Moreover: “the dignity that each human being has reached and can continually reach in Christ [is] the

dignity of both the grace of divine adoption and the inner truth of humanity” (§11). John Paul II explains, so that no doubt can remain, that

What is in question here is man in all his truth, in his full magnitude. We are not dealing with the “abstract” man, but the real, “concrete”, “historical” man. We are dealing with “each” man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself *for ever*. (§13)

And he adds: “Man—every man without any exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man—with each man without any exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it” (§14). And this “from the moment he is conceived beneath the heart of his mother” (§13). This is the “counter-definition” of the immaculate conception of every man, and this is why the children who die without baptism go to heaven, while limbo goes...to limbo (and hell goes...to hell).

In the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, John Paul II extends the pantheist theme of pan-Christism beyond man:

The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is “flesh”: the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension....[God] is not only close to this world but present in it, and in a sense immanent, penetrating it and giving it life from within. (§50, 54)

He specifies that:

The “first-born of all creation,” becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also “flesh”—and in this reality with all “flesh,” with the whole of creation. (§50)

In its report, the ITC is simply applying this “cosmic dimension” of Redemption.


Clearly, what is happening is the clash of two “races,” “cities,” “standards,” doctrines, and faiths diametrically opposed, one of which is the contradiction of the other. It follows that limbo exists or not depending upon one’s “faith”: the faith of God who became Man to save the man who cooperates with God, or the faith of the man who pretends to be God by the mere fact of existing because his nature requires grace.

The negation of the doctrine of limbo is of enormous gravity because the principles from which it proceeds are utterly false (naturalism, pantheism, “the Cosmic Christ”). All of its underlying erroneous principles have been refuted and condemned previously, but the International Theological Commission repropose them today. What is even

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more serious is that even the simple faithful have been disturbed by this report because, in general, only theologians are capable of grasping its other, subtler errors. Still, it is obvious to all (and not only the learned) that this undermining of belief in the existence of limbo also strikes at the tranquil possession of a certain doctrine that is learned by all the faithful, even by children, and taught by the Roman Catechism (Part II, Chap.2, No.32). This “passive scandal” (endured by the faithful) presupposes the “active scandal” committed by the pastors. In the Gospel Jesus said: “He that shall scandalize on of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt. 18:6); the ones scandalized are the “simple, uneducated children.”³¹ Scandal that is given publicly must be publicly repaired. This is what we demand. 

¹ Pontifical Annuary, historical notes.
² International Theological Commission, *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized* (January 19, 2007). It is the report (with 103 sections and 135 notes) of the ITC, which met in plenary session at Rome in December 2005 and October 2006.
³ *Ibid.*, introduction.
⁴ Cf. “Teachings of the Church Fathers on Limbo,” *Si Si No No*, September 2007, pp.1-4.
⁵ *In Sanctum Baptisma*, No. 23, PG, Vol. 36, col. 390.
⁶ *De Infantibus qui Proemature Moriuntur*, PG, Vol. 46, col. 177, 180.
⁷ A. Carpin, *Augustine and the Problem of Children Who die Without Baptism* [Italian] (Bologna: ESD, 2005), p. 17.
⁸ Cf. *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* (Madrid: BAC), II, 1004.
⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, II, 1009 ff.
¹⁰ The Church’s Magisterium has as its first and direct object to faithfully guard and infallibly interpret natural and infallibly revealed truths (Dz. 1800). Nevertheless, the infallibility of the Magisterium also extends to all those truths and facts which are either a deduction from revealed doctrine (theological conclusions) or its presuppositions. This is the secondary and indirect object of the Magisterium. For these truths and facts, while not immediately and directly revealed, are so linked to Revelation that to deny them is tantamount to compromising Revelation itself: in the case that concerns us here, the

negation of limbo would compromise the divinely revealed and defined truth of the absolute necessity of baptism, at least of desire.
¹¹ *Children Who Die Without Baptism* [French] (Paris: Tequi, 1954), p. 17.
¹² June 12, 1968, pp. 709-720.
¹³ *De anima et eius origine*, Bk. III, Ch. 9.
¹⁴ *La Civiltà Cattolica*, June 12, 1968, p. 715.
¹⁵ Desclée, 1958. Page numbers in parentheses refer to this volume.
¹⁶ Msgr. Pier Carlo Landucci, “Limbo for Unbaptized Children” [Italian], *Palestra del Clero*, No. 18, September 15, 1971, pp. 1092, 1097.
¹⁷ *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, IV, 150.
¹⁸ ITC, *The Hope of Salvation*, §3.
¹⁹ *Humani Generis*, §26.
²⁰ *Ibid.*, §21.
²¹ *Ibid.*, §18.
²² *Ibid.*
²³ *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.1, Art.1, ad 2.
²⁴ *Ibid.*,
²⁵ Cf. St. Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitories*.
²⁶ Cf. Cardinal Journet, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, s.v. “Baptism,” and *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, IV, 150.
²⁷ Journet, *La volonté divine salvifique sur les petits enfants*.
²⁸ *Summa Theologica*, III, Q.72, Art.6, ad 1.
²⁹ *Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die...*, Introduction.
³⁰ *Ibid.*, §41.
³¹ Roberti-Palazzini, *Dictionary of Moral Theology* [Italian] (Rome: Studium, 1968).

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