

# Drawing Aside the Purple Curtain

## *The Papal System Today: an Analysis of the News*

### Babies Left in *Limbo*?

## Not Anymore, Says the Pope of Rome

by Shaun Willcock

In early October 2006, the Roman pope cast aside centuries of Roman Catholic belief by formally abolishing the concept of “limbo”.

What exactly is “limbo”, in Roman Catholic teaching? There are two aspects to it. There is *limbus infantium*, the place where the souls of unbaptised children supposedly go; and *limbus patrum*, the place where the souls of the righteous who died before Christ came in the flesh supposedly went. The Bible makes it clear that there are only two places where souls go at death: the saved go to heaven, the lost to hell. Roman Catholicism, however, has spoken officially of three: heaven, hell, purgatory – and (unofficially) of a fourth: limbo. The word itself is derived from the Latin word *limbus*, meaning literally “hem” or “border” or “edge”, for limbo was supposed to be a place on the border or fringe of heaven and hell.<sup>1</sup> It was supposedly a place of peace and happiness for infants who died unbaptised, but not a place of *perfect* happiness, for God was not there. Only heaven is such a place, and only those who are baptised could go there, it was taught. Babies, it was claimed, were incapable of committing a sin that would merit hell or require reparation in purgatory; but at the same time, because of the stain of original sin, they could not go to heaven and enjoy full communion with God. Limbo was Rome’s solution to this dilemma: a place that was not hell, yet also not quite heaven.

The old Roman Catholic catechism defined limbo as a place where those who are in it “do not have the joy of God but neither do they suffer... they do not deserve Paradise, but neither do they deserve Hell or Purgatory.”

Please note that what Rome calls “baptism” is *not* biblical baptism at all, for that is the full immersion of adult believers and nothing else; but hereafter in this article, the word will be applied to the Roman Catholic sacrament of what *it* calls “baptism”, without constant qualification, to avoid tedious repetition. The reader must understand that this is the only reason we are using the word in this sense.

The doctrine was adopted in the Middle Ages, but was never *officially* defined by the “Church”. And for some time now, the Roman Catholic institution has been uncomfortable with the teaching, and has been examining the possibility of changing it. Back in 2004 the Roman pontiff, John Paul II, said that what the “Church” of Rome believes about the fate of babies who die without being baptised was not an “isolated theological problem”, but one that touched belief about original sin, the importance of baptism, and God’s (supposed) desire to save all people.<sup>2</sup> An international Vatican commission was appointed to look into the question of the fate of unbaptised infants who die; and the president of the commission was a cardinal named Joseph Ratzinger – who would become, not long afterwards, the present pope, Benedict XVI. Even before becoming pope, he was not in favour of the concept. He said back in 1985, “Limbo was never a defined truth of faith. Personally... I would abandon it, since it was only a theological hypothesis. It formed part of a secondary thesis in support of a truth which is absolutely of first significance for faith, namely, the importance of baptism.”<sup>3</sup> However,

“theological hypothesis” though it was, it was nevertheless taught to Roman Catholics worldwide for centuries, and believed.

And now this international Vatican commission of theologians has concluded that *all* children who die do so in the expectation of “the universal salvation of God” and the “mediation of Christ”, whether baptised or not. These “findings” were approved by Benedict XVI. The commission declared that God wished all souls to be saved, and that the souls of unbaptised children were entrusted to a “merciful God” whose ways of ensuring salvation could not be known. “In effect, this means that all children who die go to heaven,” one source said.<sup>4</sup>

But where does this leave Rome’s heretical doctrine of “baptismal regeneration”? For if, as Benedict XVI said back in 1985, “[The concept of limbo] formed part of a secondary thesis in support of a truth which is absolutely of first significance for faith, namely, the importance of baptism”,<sup>5</sup> then it must be asked: what importance does baptism now have, according to Rome? For baptism is believed by Rome to wash away sin, and make one a child of God, fit for heaven! It is one of the seven sacraments of Rome, and as such is believed to be *essential for salvation!* This is the official doctrine of Rome: “Baptism...is *necessary for salvation*”,<sup>6</sup> “By the grace of the Holy Spirit *received in baptism* these [children] are made children of God”,<sup>7</sup> “If anyone denies that *the guilt of original sin is remitted by the grace... given in baptism*, let him be anathema”,<sup>8</sup> “*If anyone says that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema*”.<sup>9</sup> And the Trent Catechism stated: “Infants, unless *regenerated unto God through the grace of baptism... are born to eternal misery and perdition*.”<sup>10</sup>

Benedict himself stated that limbo had been used “to justify the necessity of baptising infants as early as possible” to ensure that they had the “sanctifying grace” needed to wash away the effects of original sin.<sup>11</sup> Well, just *how early* have children been baptised? As early as *when the baby is still in its mother’s womb!* Yes, in the past, if it appeared likely that a child in the womb would die before being born, exact instructions were given for baptising the baby while still in the womb – and *instruments were actually provided* for performing this!<sup>12</sup> A “*baptismal syringe*” was used to *squirt* the child in the womb with the “holy water” of baptism; and the opening of the nozzle of some varieties of the instrument was made in the form of a cross to add “sanctity” to its use!

So now, if Rome has decided that all children who die go straight to heaven anyway – why bother to baptise them? In the words of a nun, Sara Butler, who was a member of the Vatican commission set up to examine the concept of limbo: “If you are too positive and say, ‘God is so good, he saves everyone,’ then you are saying you don’t need baptism.”<sup>13</sup> And priest Tony Kelly, another member of the commission, said, “We all smiled a bit when we were presented with this question, but then we saw how many important questions it opened.” For example, questions about the existence of original sin and the need for baptism.<sup>14</sup>

How, then, did the commission sort this out? Priest Kelly’s answer is telling: “Pastorally and catechetically, the matter had been solved” with an affirmation that somehow, God in his great love and mercy would ensure unbaptised babies enjoyed eternal life with him in heaven; “*but,*” he added, “*we had to backtrack and do the theology.*”<sup>15</sup>

Rome’s motto has always been, “Always the same.” It claims that it never changes. It claims that it teaches the truth which the apostles taught. And yet here we are, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Rome is *backtracking* on what it permitted its blinded devotees to believe for many, many centuries! Literally millions of Roman Catholics have lived and died in the belief that unbaptised children *cannot* go to heaven, but must spend eternity in a place called limbo, a place that is not hell and not purgatory but also not quite heaven. And now – Rome has “backtracked”! It now simply says, “Oops – there’s really no such place after all. We’ve allowed our priests to teach this concept, for centuries, to the poor grieving parents of babies who die in infancy without being baptised; but, well, ahem, the place really doesn’t exist.”

And this monstrosity is believed by millions to be a Christian church? This lying, deceiving,

wicked institution, with its false and man-made teachings which it can proclaim for centuries and then simply jettison when it no longer suits its purposes to proclaim them? It is *not* a true Christian church and never has been! The Word of the living God, the Bible, never changes. *Its* teachings are always the same. A true church of God teaches what the Bible says. It does not invent doctrines to suit itself, and then later discard them when it deems it necessary to do so. The Bible speaks of heaven, and of hell, and this is all, then, that true Christian churches proclaim. Not so, however, with the heretical “Church” of Rome. It adds to the Word of God whenever it feels like doing so; and then it changes its beliefs whenever it feels like it.

So just how did Rome “backtrack”? Let’s hear the explanation from Benedict XVI himself. When he was still a cardinal, Ratzinger stated that while limbo was allowed to disappear from the scene, the teaching of John Paul II in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, took “a decisive turn.” He stated that John Paul “expressed the simple hope that God is powerful enough to draw to himself all those who were unable to receive the sacrament [of baptism].”<sup>16</sup>

Priest Kelly put it this way: turning away from the concept of limbo was part of “the development of the theological virtue of hope” and reflected “a different sense of God, focusing on his infinite love.”

This again shows how Rome’s theology evolves; it is *not* “always the same”, it develops, it alters things it held before, it changes. If the times demand “a different sense of God”, then this is what Rome gives the people. It owes no allegiance to the unchanging and unchangeable truths of God’s Word. The Great Whore (Rev. 17) sticks her finger into the wind and sees which way it is blowing, and then changes whatever it feels the need to change accordingly. In today’s world, the kind of “God” the people want is a “God” of “infinite love”, not a God of wrath and vengeance against sinners, so this is the kind of “God” the priests of Rome give to their people. This, after all, is the only way for the Vatican to hold on to the people.

Kelly went on to say that the fact that God loves his creatures so much that he sent his Son to die in order to save them means that there exists an “original grace” just as there exists original sin. And although the existence of “original grace” does not justify thinking that everyone will be saved automatically, “it does justify hope beyond hope” that those who die without having had the opportunity to be baptised will be saved.

So *this* is how they have backtracked! They now claim that their hope is that God, being a God of infinite love, who sent his Son to die for all men (or so they believe), will save those who die without having had the opportunity to be baptised. Whether this is biblical truth or not is not something that concerns them (and of course, it’s *not!*).

In actual fact, this “backtracking” was already to be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1994. The following paragraphs sum it up (read carefully!):

“The Lord Himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation (Jn. 3:5). He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptise them. Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptised are ‘reborn of water and the Spirit.’ *God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.*”<sup>17</sup>

“For *catechumens* who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.”<sup>18</sup>

“Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be

supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity.”<sup>19</sup>

“As regards *children who have died without Baptism*, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children which caused him to say: ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them,’ (Mk. 10:14; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4) allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church’s call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.”<sup>20</sup>

From all of this, what then can be deduced?

Rome definitely has changed its doctrine in recent times. It now teaches that although baptism *is necessary for salvation*, it is *only* absolutely necessary for salvation for those to whom the Roman Catholic “gospel” has been proclaimed, and who can ask for it. As for the rest, they say that as God is not bound by his sacraments, salvation could be granted to them without being baptised; and they give various examples, as follows:

If catechumens die before being baptised – i.e. people who are being catechised with the intention of becoming Roman Catholics – they will be saved because their *desire* was to be baptised, even though they died before actually receiving this “sacrament.” As for those who are ignorant of the Roman Catholic “gospel” – members of other religions, etc. – they can be saved by living up to the “light” they have, seeking the truth and doing the will of God in accordance with such “light.” They no doubt would have desired baptism *if* they had known about its necessity, Rome states. And lastly, with regard to children who die before being baptised, the “Church” of Rome no longer speaks of limbo, but merely says such children are entrusted to God’s mercy; and they have hope that a way of salvation is provided for them. But even having said this, they cannot resist yet another statement, at the end of all this, affirming the urgency of baptism.

Thus, in a word, baptism *is* necessary for salvation, for some; and it’s *not* necessary for salvation, for others. It all depends on who you are, what you know, and when you die! If you have heard the Roman Catholic “gospel”, and have had the possibility of asking for baptism, then it *is* necessary for salvation; and presumably, if you fail to seek it, and die unbaptised, you cannot be saved. If you have heard the Roman Catholic “gospel”, and are actively seeking to become a Roman Catholic, but you die before being baptised, then it is *not* necessary for salvation, and your *desire* to have been baptised will be sufficient (along with repentance and charity) for you to be saved. If you are a Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or something else, and have never heard the Roman Catholic “gospel”, but you seek the truth and do God’s will in accordance with such “light” as you have, you can be saved. And lastly, if you are a child who dies before being baptised, the hope is that you will be saved, somehow, some way, through the mercy of God.

But all that really matters is: *what does the Bible say?*

1) It says that *there is a heaven and a hell, but neither purgatory nor limbo*. Those saved by God’s grace through faith in God’s Son go to heaven; and the rest go to hell.

2) It does not teach in any sense that baptism saves, or contributes to one’s salvation in any way. Jn. 3:5 (“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”), which Rome loves to use (as above) to support the heresy of “baptismal regeneration”, is not about baptism at all. The “water” in this verse refers to the “water” of the Word (Eph. 5:26; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23), the instrument which the Spirit uses in regeneration. Baptism is *not* in any sense necessary for one’s salvation. If it was, it would be salvation by *works* – and this is impossible. Salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Eph. 2:8,9). It is not by baptism, nor by supposedly doing God’s will according to one’s understanding of it, nor by any other human work!

3) It says that *only believers should be baptised, not infants*. “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Acts 8:36,37). There is not one example, in all the Bible, of an infant being baptized.

4) And as for the salvation of infants who die in infancy, the Scriptures say almost nothing about this subject, and therefore we must be very careful to affirm no more than what the Scriptures *do* say. This is often a very emotional subject for many, and as a result they do not approach it biblically, but only emotionally. This will inevitably lead to error. It is not what *we* want, but only what the Lord says, that should guide us. The Bible is very clear that infants, like adults, are sinful by nature, for none are excepted from the words of Scripture on this matter (Psa. 51:5; 1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12); and even the fact that infants do die, demonstrates this truth (Rom. 5:12-14; 6:23). The Word of God indicates that at least some infants, dying in infancy, are elect (2 Sam. 12:23; Jn. 3:8); and certainly, with God, all things are possible (Matt. 19:26; Lk. 1:15; Gen. 18:14a; etc.). And elect infants, dying in infancy, are, in precisely the same manner as elect adults, regenerated and saved by Christ through his Spirit (Jn. 3:3,5,6), who works when, and where, and how he pleases (Jn. 3:8). This much we may affirm, and no more; and when an infant dies, believers must trust in the Lord, the Judge of all the earth, to do right; for He always will (Gen. 18:25).

But this whole matter of dropping the concept of limbo is deeper and darker than one may at first suppose. As always with Rome, there are ulterior motives. Let's not for a moment assume that limbo has been abolished simply because the pope of Rome felt generous. No, he did so for shrewd political motives. Infant “baptism” had always forced Roman Catholic parents to commit their children to the “Church” as soon as possible; and the teaching of limbo had frightened parents into making certain of this. It helped to keep Papists in their place and enchained to the feet of the pope. But times have moved on, and the teaching of limbo was being viewed with increasing scepticism by the faithful. It was time to drop it. But also, in addition, *by* dropping it, ironically, a new opening for Roman Catholic “evangelisation” occurred! Limbo had been used to help increase the numbers of Roman Catholics from a very early age; and now the *dropping* of the teaching would do the same thing! Its abolition was nothing less than a *calculated proselytizing gesture*, the purpose being to make Roman Catholicism even more palatable in the developing world.

How so?

Asia and Africa are two parts of the world where Roman Catholicism is working hard to promote itself. But much of this part of the world is greatly influenced today by Islam, Popery's great rival for the hearts and souls of millions in the Third World. And Benedict XVI is very aware of the fact that Muslims believe the souls of stillborn infants go straight to heaven.<sup>21</sup> Plus, the infant mortality rate is extremely high in much of Asia and Africa, and the pope well knows that parents who have lost their infant children only want to hear good news about their souls. Islam, then, would be more attractive to them than Popery, if Popery continued to claim that those who die in infancy, unbaptised, go to a place called limbo. Far better, from Rome's point of view, to alter the doctrine now, so that the message can go out that the vast numbers of babies of Roman Catholic mothers who die in infancy in Third World countries will be saved by God's mercy, even though not baptised! Here indeed is a huge field of influence and opportunity. Such a doctrine will promote Roman Catholic proselytism, and enable Rome to hold on to the devotees it already has in the Third World, far more than continuing to use the teaching of limbo to encourage “baptism” in First World countries where it was no longer really accepted anyway, and where births are not occurring in such numbers as in the Third World. The Roman pope well knows that Roman Catholicism is growing at a phenomenal rate in much of the Third World, whereas it is being rejected by large numbers in much of the First World. The fields are white to harvest in Africa and Asia, as far as the Vatican is concerned!

Everything possible must be done to spur the growth of Romanism in these parts of the world. It's all about power, and influence, and defeating the rivals.

But limbo was also taught, within Roman Catholicism, to be “a place of rest where the souls of the just who died before Christ were detained”,<sup>22</sup> as stated in the Penny Catechism, approved by the Roman Catholic bishops of England and Wales. In other words, it is the place (according to Rome) where believers went who died in the centuries before the coming of Christ into the world. Of course, the Bible teaches no such thing: those Old Testament believers were saved by grace through faith, in precisely the same way as one is saved now; and when they died they went straight to heaven. But Rome teaches otherwise. And in light of these new decisions from Rome, what (supposedly) is the status of those Old Testament believers now? Where are their souls? Are they in limbo, or not?

This is unknown. The Roman pope only abolished *limbus infantium*, the place where the souls of unbaptised infants supposedly went. *Limbus patrum*, on the other hand, the place where believers who died before Christ came in the flesh supposedly went, is a teaching which remains, well... in limbo!

How wonderful to turn from all this nonsense and uncertainty to the pure stream of the written Word of God, and to find all answers there. May many Roman Catholics be given eyes to see the errors, backtrackings, and confusion rampant within their “church”, that they may reject it, forsake it, and by God's grace turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, the *only* Lord and Saviour, to be saved from their sins!

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## **ENDNOTES:**

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