

*Did you know . . .*

## **INFANTS WHO DIE WITHOUT BEING BAPTIZED**

The number of unbaptized babies “has grown considerably and therefore the reflection on the possibility of salvation for these infants has become urgent.” Traditional teaching has concentrated on the theory of *limbo*, a state which includes the souls of infants who die with original sin and without baptism. The idea of limbo began in the Middle Ages but it is not mentioned in the liturgy nor in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC §1261) nor in Sacred Scripture.

In Oct. 2004, Pope John Paul II assigned the International Theological Commission (ITC) to study this question. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger headed the Commission, made up of theologians, and its work continued even after he was elected Pope Benedict XVI (April 2005). He approved their final report on January 19, 2007. The ITC’s conclusion mirrored what is said in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: that without minimizing the importance of baptism, in any way, there is nonetheless hope of salvation for infants who die without benefit of that sacrament. The information provided here is based on the ITC, but it cannot be done justice in this small space.

Therefore, I will summarize some important points:

- Because infants themselves cannot make the Profession of Faith that is necessary for baptism, they are baptized in the faith of their parents; parents therefore must be practicing their faith. .
- We listen to the Word of God expressed in the Scriptures to provide us wisdom. However, with regard to the salvation of those who die without baptism, the Word of God says little or nothing.
- The conclusion of the ITC is that the many factors that have been considered “give serious theological and liturgical grounds for hope that unbaptized infants who die will be saved and enjoy the beatific vision. We emphasize that these are reasons for prayerful hope, rather than grounds for sure knowledge. There is much that simply has not been revealed to us (cf. Jn 16:12). We live by faith and hope in the God of mercy and love who has been revealed to us in Christ, and the Spirit moves us to pray in constant thankfulness and joy (cf. 1 Thes 5:18).”
- “What has been revealed to us is that the ordinary way of salvation is by the sacrament of baptism. None of the above considerations should be taken as qualifying the necessity of baptism or justifying delay in administering the sacrament. Rather, as we want to reaffirm in conclusion, they provide strong grounds for hope that God will save infants when we have not been able to do for them what we would have wished to do, namely, to baptize them into the faith and life of the church.

*[NOTE: These past 3 bulletin pieces were written regarding a topic requested by a priest with opinions obtained from other priests; I am grateful for their interest and assistance.]*

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