

DENIGRATION OF THE *LIMBUS PUERORUM*

Modern studies on the question of the limbo of children indulge conjecture at the expense of principle. This is one of the features of thinking that accompanies the philosophical error of subjectivism.¹

This intellectual weakness marks the report of the International Theological Commission entitled *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die without Being Baptized* which Pope Benedict XVI saw fit to endorse in 2007.² Among the flaws in the Commission's approach is reliance, as if these expressed sound theological principle, on the *ipse dixit* of the bishops of the Second Vatican Council. Thus its authors say in the preamble:

"The treatment of this theme must be placed within the historical development of the faith.

According to *Dei Verbum* 8 the factors that contribute to this development are the reflection and the study of the faithful, the experience of spiritual things, and the teaching of the Magisterium."

But *Dei Verbum* n. 8 is defective as a statement of the Church's sacred tradition which was canonised by the *Council of Trent* in April, 1546 and its terms confirmed by the Council that followed it, the *Vatican Council*, in April, 1870. [Cf. Dz. nn. 783, 1787]

It is false to assert, as Vatican II's bishops asserted, that tradition progresses in the Church; it is false to assert that tradition is something living. There is no historical development of the faith save in the grasp of its elements, as St Vincent of Lérins said, "in the same teaching, with the same sense, and the same understanding" (*eodem sensu, eademque sententia*) *Commonitorium*, 23, 3. Neither "the reflection of the faithful", nor "the study of the faithful", nor "the experience of spiritual things" (whatever that may mean) can operate to affect the Church's tradition. *Dei Verbum* n. 8 was not an expression of Catholic truth but an attempt to contradict that truth under the impetus of the modernist heresy.

Recently commentator Don Pietro Leone remarked on the debilitating effects of that heresy and its cognate philosophy on the utterances of Vatican II:

"[T]he Council's sceptical lack of absolute certainties together with the consequent ascendancy of sentimentality, gives the conciliar texts as a whole the appearance of the befuddled after-dinner ramblings of an Anglican Vicar."³

The Commission theologians proceeded as if the long history of the Church's teaching had to be revised in the Council's jaundiced light and indeed its report resembles the Council's documents in its longwinded-ness and repetitiveness. Let the reader contrast its 18,000 odd words (excluding footnotes) and 28 odd pages, with the succinct expressions of the theological thesis of the *limbus puerorum* by the popes and its defence by St Thomas Aquinas that follow.

¹ We have detailed an instance in the discipline of Australia's recent history in the paper available at this site: https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/truth-canberra-hudson-disaster.pdf

² Published April 27th, 2007.

³ February 2023, "The Council and the Eclipse of God", Ch. 7, at <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2023/02/the-council-and-eclipse-of-god-by-don.html#more>

In his ruling on the effect and character of baptism in 1206 Pope Innocent III taught this—
“We say that a distinction must be made that sin is twofold: namely, original and actual; original which is contracted without consent; and actual, which is committed with consent. Original sin, therefore, which is contracted without consent, is remitted without consent through the power of the sacrament; but actual, which is committed with consent, is not mitigated in the slightest without consent... The punishment of original sin is deprivation of the vision of God, but the punishment of actual sin is the torments of everlasting hell.” [Dz. 410]

Here we see a development of doctrine in line with St Vincent’s principle ameliorating the harshness of the views of earlier theologians on the fate of unbaptised children.

The Pope’s teaching was endorsed by the Church’s greatest mind, St Thomas Aquinas:

“The abodes of souls are distinguished according to the soul’s various states. The soul united to a mortal body is in the state of meriting, while the soul separated from the body is in the state of receiving good or evil for its merits; so that after death it is either in the state of receiving its final reward or... of being hindered from receiving it. If it is in the state of receiving its final retribution, this happens in two ways: either in the respect of good, and then it is paradise; or in respect of evil, and thus as regards actual sin it is hell, and as regards original sin it is the limbo of children...”⁴

In 1794 in his bull *Auctorem fidei* Pope Pius VI addressed assertions of the 1786 pseudo-Synod of Pistoia including that heretical gathering’s views on the *limbus puerorum* which he condemned as follows:

n. 26 [Their] doctrine which rejects as a Pelagian fable that place of the lower regions (which the faithful generally designate by the name of the limbo of children) in which the souls of those departing with the sole guilt of original sin are punished with the punishment of the condemned, exclusive of the punishment of fire... —*false, rash, injurious to Catholic schools*. [Dz. 1526:DS. 2626]

The popes who followed down to the ‘enlightened’ popes of the late twentieth century, saw no difficulty with the distinction the Church had maintained for the best part of 750 years.

An arrogance typical of modernism marks two further sentences of the report’s preamble—

“When the question of infants who die without baptism was first taken up in the history of Christian thought, it is possible that the doctrinal nature of the question or its implications were not fully understood. Only when seen in light of the historical development of theology over the course of time until Vatican II does this specific question find its proper context within Catholic doctrine.”

This is the type of comment that, had it been uttered by Pistoia’s heterodox synod, Pius VI might have condemned as he condemned (in n. 78) its attack on the discipline established and approved by the Church “as if the Church which is ruled by the Spirit of God could have established a discipline... useless and burdensome”. The assertion that the issue that gave rise to the hypothesis of the *limbus puerorum* might not have been fully understood is, I suggest, similarly offensive to the Church and to the Holy Spirit.

The Commission’s members seem to think that exclusion from the beatific vision involves injustice. There is no injustice. The beatific vision is a gift of God. Moreover, their assertion

⁴ *Summa Theologiae* Suppl. q. 69, a. 7, resp.

that one can ‘merit’ the beatific vision is misleading in the absence of careful theological distinction. The applicable principle is taught by Our Lord in the parable of the householder who hired labourers (*Matt.* 20: 15), “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will?”

They appeal to the principle *lex orandi lex credendi* in contending that unbaptised children should not be excluded from the beatific vision,⁵ citing the introduction into the liturgy, via Pope Paul VI’s ‘Roman Missal’ of 1970, of the novelty of a funeral rite for infants who die without baptism. But this document contradicted the Church’s liturgical tradition when it purported to abandon the Roman rite of Mass, essentially unchanged since Gregory the Great (540 - 604), which was codified by Pius V in the bull *Quo primum* (July 14th, 1570). This bull had been followed by the popes for 400 years and the *Council of Trent*, and Pius V himself, had issued anathemas against anyone attempting to alter the rite. This did not stop Paul VI. He offered the faithful—but critically omitted to promulgate—a replacement rite, the *novus ordo*. The ‘lex orandi’ his ‘Roman Missal’ purports to proclaim is false, and the ‘lex credendi’ it teaches is not that of the Catholic Church but of a counterfeit. Accordingly, appeal to the liturgical principle provides no valid argument in favour of qualifying the theological thesis.

The Commission’s members’ express concern over the burgeoning number of infants dying without baptism, as well they might. They say:

“The conclusion of this study is that there are theological and liturgical reasons to hope that infants who die without baptism may be saved and brought into eternal happiness, even if there is not an explicit teaching on this question found in revelation. However, none of the considerations proposed in this text to motivate a new approach to the question may be used to negate the necessity of baptism nor to delay the conferral of this sacrament...”

There are no reasons, whether theological or liturgical, for the hope expressed. What Almighty God may do in the absolute exercise of His power is no more than conjecture and no study, no matter how comprehensive, can raise it beyond the level of conjecture.

Vatican II’s cavalier approach to dogmatic principle reflected its abandonment of the Church’s philosophy, that of the Church’s Angelic Doctor, in favour of the facile thinking of the Enlightenment of which Pope Pius XII had warned in *Humani Generis*.⁶ Embrace of ‘modern’ philosophy is an essential protocol of modernism from which it takes its name.⁷ Its followers are insouciant about adherence to the supreme principle of reality and logic, the *Principle of Non-contradiction*, a philosophical debility whose influence was amply demonstrated in *Dignitatis Humanae*. But modern philosophy abandons much more. It abandons essential distinctions such as those—

between potency and act;
between matter and form;
between the subjective and the objective;
between quantity and quality; and
between the ontological and the temporal.

⁵ *Lex orandi statuit legem credendi*; the law of prayer establishes the law of belief.

⁶ 12.8.1950. He had earlier characterised the teaching to which it gave rise as *la nouvelle théologie*.

⁷ Cf. Pius X in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (8.9.1907)a

Caught up as they are in the errors of Vatican II few modern theologians seem able to grasp the truth that any use of a vaccine, medicine or preparation whose formulation relies on cells stolen from an aborted infant is not only morally illicit but abominable. This incompetence was demonstrated by the permission given (in 2020) by the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* for use in certain circumstances of vaccines so compromised to address the SARS-CoV-2 virus on the ground that such conduct involved only remote material cooperation in the murder of the infant involved.⁸ There were three errors in this permission.

First, it is *impossible* to cooperate with a past evil, and since the abortion of the infant involved is past the question of cooperation with that evil act does not arise. But this is not the end of the matter. For there remains a present, and continuing, evil in the use of the infant's cells, and one may cooperate in *this* evil by profiting from their use. For this involves willed acceptance of the degradation of an end, an hypostasis, the human person substantially united to his body, to the level of *a means* to serve the good of the one benefiting.

Thirdly, such use involves endorsement of the act of theft involved, a breach of the seventh and tenth commandments, and offensive to God Who gives life and existence to every human being who will live forever once he is conceived. The sin is not lessened because the person from whom the cells were stolen is dead.

Arrival at involvement in this evil is only the final step in a series that developed from negligences committed by those sworn to press society to reject immorality in all its forms, the bishops of the Catholic Church.

The rot began with divorce and their failure to insist that marriage derives from man's nature not from some posited human law, and that the State's function is limited to regulation of the institution for the common good. The State has no right to claim authority over it as, for instance, the Federal Government does in Australia under the Commonwealth Constitution.⁹ Marriage is of God not of man as Christ taught clearly.

Next occurred their ambivalence over contraception as a result of the osmotic influence of Protestantism at Vatican II. The Catholic position was made clear, and entrenched, when Pius IX moved with haste to reject the poison of the permission given by the Anglican Lambeth Conference of August 1930 to engage in contraception, in the encyclical *Casti connubii* (31.12.1930). The disorder that characterised the Vatican's ersatz Council, where a minority of bishops were able to override the orthodoxy of the majority, taught the dissident among the Catholic faithful that they could imitate them in flouting the doctrinal solidity of Christ's

⁸ Cf. *Note on the Morality of using some Covid 19 Vaccines* and the previous texts cited by the Congregation at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_no-ta-vaccini-anticovid_en.html

⁹ It was the failure of the bishops to trumpet this aberration in modern laws and the thinking that facilitated the mindset that one could change by legislation, that is, by the exercise of human will, what is of nature; that the natural may be subjected to the voluntary.

Church when the issue rose for papal ruling on the advance in chemical measures to interfere with human reproduction. It is no accident that the standard they advanced against the Church's teaching was the Protestant claim of superiority of conscience.

The effeteness of the episcopacy, and indeed of Pope Paul himself, over the rebellion against the Church's teaching was a milestone in the world's descent into moral degradation.¹⁰

Given the bishops' demonstrated incapacity it was in a sense inevitable they would offer little resistance to demands for acceptance of induced abortion—for what is abortion but a fallback for failed contraception? Their silence over the abuse of artificially fertilised human ova in IVF procedures (where the unborn were first treated as means to an end) followed. True, the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* had issued an instruction on the topic (in February 1987), *Donum Vitae*, but it was neither promoted nor defended by the bishops, no doubt a consequence of Vatican II's pressure for the episcopacy to accommodate itself to the world. Such inaction led to further evil when pharmaceutical and other industries found uses for cells removed from the bodies of murdered infants, particularly their unique stem cells.

The permission given by the CDF for use of vaccines so compromised marks the nadir of this episcopal negligence. Those innocent of any objective wrongdoing were thereby excused their guilt over proximate material cooperation in the ongoing evil.

The Commission's contention that the teaching of Catholic schools on the *limbus puerorum* "remains... a possible theological hypothesis" is offensive. It is the *only* rational theological hypothesis. The Catholic Church is not a human invention whose teachings are to be settled by a vote of theologians, let alone a vote of the faithful.¹¹ It is a divine thing in the midst of the mundane, "the one thing in this world," as Belloc said, "which is different from all other". Why should it not be said that the Commission's diminution, not to say denigration, of the theological thesis of the *limbus puerorum*, to which the Church had adhered for more than 750 years, ought be condemned in the terms Pius VI used of those who attended the false Synod of Pistoia, as "injurious to the Church and to the Spirit of God by whom it is guided"?

Vatican II and its aftermath of emasculation of the Catholic episcopacy is, I suggest, the context in which to view the drive to lend theological authority to what can never be anything more than conjecture. The practical effect of the Commission's report is that Catholics will use the text—and its endorsement by Benedict XVI—as a salve for their consciences over the serial failures to stand up for natural, and Catholic, principle in the secular world.

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March 7th, 2023—*St Thomas Aquinas*

¹⁰ As to Pope Paul, in his conduct over the Washington case. Cf. George Weigel, *The Courage to be Catholic*, New York, 2002, pp. 68-72 and elsewhere in the text.

¹¹ Which is the rock upon which the modernist obsession with 'synodality' founders.