

## **Are Unbaptized babies in Limbo?**

In the medieval times, a doctrine developed called the "Limbo" (*limbus infantium*). It was thought to be an intermediate zone between heaven and hell. The mediaeval ages church faced the problem of the salvation of pre-Christians and babies who died before they were baptized or those ancients, holy men and women, who had existed before Christ? One of the mediaeval church fathers, Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) applying more logic than compassion, said that without baptismal grace, they must go to hell. That answer proved too much for the theologians of the Middle Ages, who counter proposed limbo. This doctrine says that babies who died without the benefit of baptism would reside in limbo permanently on account of original sin.

However, since the 1950s this doctrine is not mentioned in any church document and neither is it in the current edition of the Roman Catholic catechism. In fact, the Vatican's Theological Commission and Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 reiterated Cardinal Ratzinger's statement in 1985 that "Limbo was never a defined truth of faith... it was only a theological hypothesis. God is merciful and wants all human beings to be saved. Grace has priority over sin, and the exclusion of innocent babies from heaven does not seem to reflect Christ's special love for the little ones."

In those days, Limbo was also used to describe the place or state of perfect natural happiness for those who though were unevangelized or were non-Christians or led a good life on earth or who led good and holy lives and sought to follow their conscience but who died without baptism (Limbo of the just). It was thought that people in Limbo enjoyed natural happiness but not the "beatific vision" of the Creator.

The understanding was that there is a celestial waiting room until Christ descended into hell to deliver these holy souls. This false doctrine caused many Catholic couples to live in fear that in the tragic event that their newborns perished, the infants would go not to heaven but to a cheery yet inaccessible outer parking lot, a locale where they would enjoy eternal happiness but be denied the actual presence of God.

Several Popes have since clarified that the Catholic Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Innocents--(usually around December 28) honouring infants and children who died tragically or through abortion. The church's idea of God is not a God who would condemn a baby to an imperfect life for eternity." Children have long been recognized in the Christian tradition as gift from God. Just as in the same sense that Jesus Christ is a "gift" of God to the world at Christmas, an incarnation of the joy and goodwill for which humanity is primordially created. God will not deny heaven to the blameless. Parents are still encouraged to baptize their babies as infants.