

Pope: Unbaptized babies no longer in limbo: "Never a defined truth of faith"

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Clarifying Catholic thinking on one of the most perplexing theological enigmas, Pope Benedict XVI has explicitly endorsed a Vatican report offering hope that unbaptized infants can reach heaven.

In a report published April 20, the International Theological Commission concluded that the medieval concept of limbo—an intermediate zone between heaven and hell whose denizens enjoy natural happiness but not the “beatific vision” of the Creator—represents an “unduly restrictive view of salvation.”

Limbo, which has fallen out of favor since the 1950s and is not mentioned in the current edition of the Roman Catholic catechism, was originally posited by theologians as a way to reconcile belief in divine mercy with the doctrine that there is “no salvation outside the church.”

Catholic theologians long taught that babies who died without the benefit of baptism would reside in limbo permanently on account of original sin. The name *limbo* also referred to a place where virtuous Jews and pagans who had lived before the time of Christ would reside temporarily until Christ’s second coming.

The 41-page report reaffirmed that “there is no salvation which is not from Christ and ecclesial by its very nature,” but explained that God can “give the grace of baptism without the sacrament being conferred,” particularly in cases when conferring it is impossible.

Benedict himself has expressed views similar to the report’s conclusion. “Limbo was never a defined truth of faith,” then-cardinal Joseph Ratzinger told Italian journalist Vittorio Messori in 1985. “Personally . . . I would abandon it, since it was only a theological hypothesis.” *—Religion News Service*