

## LIMBO: A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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THE DEATH of an unbaptized infant presents Catholic theologians with a poignant problem. The dawn star of Christian culture had hardly risen when men first raised the question, and it has continued to echo through the centuries. There are reasons enough for the persistent reappearance of the difficulty. The fate of an unbaptized child is closely tied to several highly volatile questions: original sin, the necessity of baptism, the salvific will of God. Each of these issues is a vital nerve in the body of Catholic doctrine, and each can be studied with clinical precision in the person of an unbaptized child. The question, then, is not pure pedantry; and if it seems a discouraging one, we have the admonition of St. Gregory of Nyssa: "I venture to assert that it is not right to omit the examination which is within the range of our ability, or to leave the question here raised without making any inquiries or having any ideas about it."<sup>1</sup>

The problem we have set ourselves is only a fraction of Gregory's much larger difficulty. Ours is a question of evaluation: where does the *limbus puerorum* stand on the scale of theological values? Is it merely an opinion of theologians or is it something more? In recent years we have seen a denial of limbo used as a springboard for speculation about the possible salvation of children.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, limbo has been declared a "Catholic doctrine which cannot be denied without temerity."<sup>3</sup> Which of these views is the more accurate appraisal of the *limbus puerorum*? A preliminary remark or two may help to illuminate both the question and a possible approach to it.

As the Scholastics envision it, limbo embraces two ideas: the exclusion of infants from heaven and their exemption from the pains of hell.<sup>4</sup> Both of these elements are essential to the notion of limbo; of

<sup>1</sup> *De infantibus qui praemature abripiuntur* (PG 46, 178).

<sup>2</sup> G. Fangauer, "Fate of Unbaptized Infants," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 47 (1946) 11; E. Boudes, "Réflexion sur la solidarité des hommes avec le Christ," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 71 (1949) 589.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. W. A. Van Roo, "Infants Dying without Baptism," *Gregorianum* 35 (1954) 408.

<sup>4</sup> A. Gaudel, "Limbes," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 9, 760; W. Stockums, *Das Los der ohne die Taufe sterbenden Kinder* (Freiburg, 1923) p. 135.

the two, however, the second is more important to limbo as such, the first being common both to infants and to those who die in a state of personal sin. It would seem, then, that any theological evaluation of limbo must be keyed to the second of the elements, exemption from the pain of sense. This at once suggests a solution and presents a problem. A survey of the past fifty years indicates that only one theologian in eight has gone as far as "common and certain" in evaluating the immunity of infants from the pain of sense. Kerygmatically the picture is much the same; only one catechetical writing in six has used the word "limbo." Two-thirds of them are completely silent on the question of the pain of sense for infants. A glance at the preceding century shows an even greater hesitation before the problem.<sup>5</sup> This somewhat anomalous situation seems to find its explanation in an earlier age, centuries during which a denial of limbo was protected by decrees of the Holy See. In this article we will try to trace the question of the pain of sense through the past four centuries. The information we gather may help towards a more accurate evaluation of limbo.

The whiplash of Augustine's genius carved a channel through Western thought, and the bitter stream of his views on the fate of infants swept up to the shores of the twelfth century. The Schoolmen analyzed and distilled his thought and passed on to the centuries the idea of a limbo that was free of the pain of sense. This conception of the fate of infants coursed nearly unimpeded through the next four centuries. It was not until the sixteenth century that a serious attempt was made to turn the current of thought back into its ancient channel. Prominent in this new movement were Petau, Jansenius, Bossuet, Noris, Berti, and Tamburini. Their motives, methods, and—more important—their reception by the Church are all curiously linked in the tangled history of the time. What was this relationship?

#### THE RETURN TO AUGUSTINE: PETAU AND JANSENIUS

The intellectual topography of Europe was profoundly altered when the Reformation tore loose from Rome a great segment of the body Catholic. The Reformers passed over the Middle Ages in their "return to the Gospel" and buttressed their doctrines with the authority of St. Augustine. Their ideas of necessary grace and moribund liberty

<sup>5</sup> This survey is summarized at the conclusion of this article.

cracked the foundations of Catholic theology. Catholic theologians hastened to fill the breach, and the great theories of grace were born.

One of the by-products of this struggle with heresy was the centering of attention on Augustine. A new reverence for the great doctor began to spread through the Catholic universities of Europe. Men began to turn to his anti-Pelagian writings for inspiration in their wrestling with new problems. These works were read and reread by the theologians of the day; studied as they are with references to unbaptized infants, they began to exert a growing influence. Here and there men began to adopt Augustine's views on the fate of infants. No less than eighteen theologians had done so before the rise of Jansenism, and of these Denis Petau is the most prominent.<sup>6</sup> It remained, however, for the troublesome Bishop of Ypres to spark a real controversy.

The *Augustinus* is a eulogy of Augustine; consequently it was no surprise when Jansenius adopted the Saint's views on unbaptized children.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately the book was more than a eulogy; it was a raking broadside that swept across the theology of some of the most prominent Jesuit theologians. Stung into a reply, the Jesuit College at Louvain published a defense of the "doctrine of the theologians of the Society of Jesus," consisting of a series of theses in which the ideas of Jansenius were confronted with the doctrines of the great Jesuit theologians. Two of the points scored by the Jesuits are of particular interest. They denied a pain of sense for infants and they tried to bring Augustine's authority back into focus.<sup>8</sup>

These theses are of great interest because they mark both the objections to Jansenius and the method of attack that the Jesuits were to employ during the remainder of the controversy.<sup>9</sup> Through them the problem of unbaptized infants and the question of Augustine's authority gained a definite place in the Jansenist debates. The more important question of the two was, of course, that of Augustine's authority; it was basic to the entire controversy. At times, however,

<sup>6</sup> For lack of space, only their names will be listed: Mainardus, Musaeus, Driedo, Baius, Conrius, Fabricius, Paludanus, Mercerus, Bayus, Wiggers, Rampen, another Paludanus, Estius, Sylvius, Petrus, Pollet, Colvenerius.

<sup>7</sup> *Augustinus* 2 (Paris, 1641) lib. 2, cap. 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Theses theologicae de gratia, libero arbitrio, praedestinatione* (Antwerp, 1641) pp. 19, 120.

<sup>9</sup> A. de Meyer, *Les premières controverses jansénistes en France* (Louvain, 1917) p. 120.

the two ideas were juxtaposed, and men employed the very severity of Augustine's views on unbaptized infants to restrict his authority. Isaac Habert, an early polemist, saw here an ideal fulcrum with which to tumble Augustine from the pedestal on which the Jansenists had placed him. If theologians could abandon Augustine in this case, he asked, why not in others?<sup>10</sup> The argument was an excellent one, but dangerous. Theologians who tried to temper the prestige of Augustine found themselves sailing a narrow channel between Scylla and Charybdis. It took a skilful hand to temper the exaggerated reverence for Augustine preached by Jansenius without at the same time offending the orders or universities. Polemics, unfortunately, do not breed discretion, and a number of well-intentioned authors sailed into trouble.

#### BOSSUET, NORIS, AND BERTI

Portalié places Richard Simon among the handful of Catholics who believed that Augustine should be abandoned to the Jansenists.<sup>11</sup> One reason for which Simon would have jettisoned Augustine was the Saint's disquieting views on unbaptized infants. Simon championed the opinion of a certain Hilary, who said that hell was reserved for personal sin. This, he said, was quite consonant with the belief of the Fathers, who had unanimously proclaimed that our salvation or damnation depended entirely upon our own free will.<sup>12</sup>

Simon's outspoken criticism of Augustine provoked the *Défense de la tradition* of Jacques Bossuet. Bossuet denounced Simon's theory as manifest Pelagianism. Both the Council of Lyons and that of Florence, he said, had taught that original sin would be punished in hell. He rejected the idea of an "upper hell" where infants might dwell. Lyons and Florence had made no such distinction, he said, but had consigned to hell those who died in either personal or original sin, marking only the inequality of their sufferings.<sup>13</sup>

The limbo debate received further momentum from the writings of three Jesuit theologians: Adam, Annat, and Moraines. In their attempts to silence the Jansenists, they accused Augustine of being

<sup>10</sup> *Défense de la foy de l'église et de l'ancienne doctrine de Sorbonne, touchant les principaux points de la grâce* (Paris, 1644) p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> "Augustinisme," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 1, 2516.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. Bossuet, *Défense de la tradition*, in *Oeuvres* 2 (Paris, 1887) 580.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

obscure, contradictory, excessive; among the excesses which they re-proved was Augustine's opinion on the fate of unbaptized infants.<sup>14</sup> Their arguments did more than embarrass the Jansenists; they embittered the Augustinians. One of the most astute of the Augustinian students was chosen to defend the honor of Augustine and of the order; he was Henry Noris, then twenty-seven years of age.

Noris was no ordinary polemist; Pastor places him side by side with Mabillon as the most important scholar of the seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> Noris replied to the critics of Augustine with vast erudition and not a little irony, claiming that Augustine's views on children were those of his age and had, moreover, been adopted by succeeding centuries. If the Schoolmen had been aware of the history of the Pelagian controversy, he said, they would not have abandoned Augustine so readily. Noris did not pretend that Augustine's opinion was the only possible one, nor did he claim that Augustine's arguments were beyond question. His purpose, he said, was to free the Saint of the accusations leveled against him, to demonstrate that his views deserved consideration. Indeed, he said, the evidence was such that it made Augustine's opinion the more probable one.<sup>16</sup>

Noris' *Historia pelagiana* sparked an explosion that reverberated throughout Europe for seventy-five years. Certain theologians, indignant at an attack from this quarter while they fought the enemies of the Church, made serious efforts to have the book condemned. We will see more of this, however, when we review the Church's attitude toward the limbo question.

The man largely responsible for developing Noris' ideas and carrying them through the eighteenth century was John Berti. Sciaffinati, the Augustinian General, had asked Berti to write a book that would set forth the whole of Augustine's thought. When the work was completed, it was to serve as a text for the students of the order. The result of Berti's labors was the massive *Opus de theologicis disciplinis*.<sup>17</sup> The semi-official character of the book was one of Berti's lines of

<sup>14</sup> Cf. H. Noris, *Vindiciae augustinianae* (Padua, 1677) p. 14; C. Werner, *Franz Suarez und die Scholastik der letzten Jahrhunderte* 1 (Regensburg, 1889) 295.

<sup>15</sup> L. F. von Pastor, *The History of the Popes* 35 (St. Louis, 1938) 363.

<sup>16</sup> Noris, *op. cit.*, p. 45; cf. also pp. 39, 33, 46, 104.

<sup>17</sup> H. Hurter, *Nomenclator literarius* 5 (Innsbruck, 1911) 2.

defense when he was denounced to the Holy See. His doctrine, he said, was that of Augustine and of the Augustinians.<sup>18</sup>

Berti made his own Noris' defense of Augustine. According to Berti, Augustine's mind on the future life of unbaptized children was beyond question. The children would go into eternal fire; they would be afflicted by it; they would burn in it. Augustine, he said, had rejected not only the Pelagian compromise of *vita aeterna*, but any middle ground at all between the happiness of the kingdom and the torment of hell. This was the opinion which Berti too felt that he must embrace.<sup>19</sup>

#### PIETRO TAMBURINI AND THE SYNOD OF PISTOIA

With the introduction of Jansenism into Italy, the limbo controversy entered upon its final development. Pavia was the center of Peninsular Jansenism in its definitive phase, and it was here that the great lines of the movement were drawn. The leader of the Pavian group was Pietro Tamburini, "perhaps the most prominent and interesting figure of Italian Jansenism."<sup>20</sup> More to the point, Tamburini was the promoter of the Synod of Pistoia, the man "who put together this variety of errors, from the *schemata* of the decrees read in the congregations up to the definitive redaction made public in 1788."<sup>21</sup> Many of the synodal decrees, it has been shown, were taken almost literally from the writings of Tamburini.<sup>22</sup> Particularly his are the decrees on predestination, grace, free will, and the sacraments. The last is of peculiar interest because here we find Pistoia's statement on the fate of unbaptized infants.<sup>23</sup>

Tamburini's interest in the limbo question seems to have been mainly forensic. He found the subject useful as a weapon against the Molinists and as a breastwork for his own brand of Jansenism.<sup>24</sup>

Limbo, said Tamburini, pointed up the parallel that existed between Pelagianism and Molinism. By drawing near to the Pelagian idea of

<sup>18</sup> *Opus de theologiacis disciplinis* 5 (Rome, 1765) 63, 73, 75, 76.   <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 22.

<sup>20</sup> G. Mantese, *Pietro Tamburini e il Giansenismo bresciano* (Brescia, 1942) p. vii.

<sup>21</sup> B. Matteucci, *Scipione de' Ricci* (Florence, 1941) p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> G. A. Rasier, *Analisi del concilio diocesano di Pistoja* (Assisi, 1790) p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Rasier, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Mantese, *op. cit.*, p. 144; Matteucci, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>24</sup> Nowhere does Tamburini devote a treatise to the fate of infants. His views are found in his writings on grace, the nature of the Church, and the development of dogma.

grace, he said, the Molinists had also come quite close to the Pelagian conception of original sin and its consequences.<sup>26</sup> To protect their system of grace, the Molinists had eviscerated the doctrine of original sin, reducing it to a mere privation of grace. It was now possible, said Tamburini, to see the fatal logic of their views on the consequences of original sin. Having denied, in effect, that original sin was truly and properly a sin, the Molinists also denied that there was any punishment for it. Consequently, said Tamburini, they placed infants in a sort of middle place where there was neither suffering nor glory.<sup>26</sup>

Tamburini found the limbo question useful in his *apologia* for Jansenism. Innovators, he said, considered the doctrine of the majority to be the truth. Tamburini sought the tessera of truth in antiquity, holding that the oldest doctrine was the truest one.<sup>27</sup> The true doctrine could be traced back to the apostles, he said. If the link were broken, if at some time some doctrine had not been taught or the contrary had been taught, then it was clear that this doctrine was not an apostolic one. A good example of this, said Tamburini, was the limbo "fable." Limbo was some five or six centuries old, but in apostolic times the contrary had been taught. The age of the limbo "fable" and the conspiracy of the Schools in defending it served only to show, he said, that a revealed doctrine could exist in the Church in almost complete oblivion.<sup>28</sup>

When we recall Tamburini's influence at Pistoia, it comes as no surprise to see the Synod denouncing the limbo "fable": ". . . cosi rigettiamo come un favola Pelagiana un luogo di terzo per collocarvi i Bambini, che muojona colla sola colpa d'origine."<sup>29</sup> Children, decreed the Synod, must suffer the torment of fire together with the devil and his angels.

In Pietro Tamburini and in Pistoia the Jansenist denial of limbo received its final expression. It bore a marked similarity to the Augustinian position, but it was no less disparate. As we have seen, both the Jansenists and the Augustinians rejected the limbo of the Scholastics and designated the pain of sense as the punishment of original sin.

<sup>26</sup> *Petri Tamburini de summa catholicae de gratia Christi doctrinae praestantia dissertatio* (Pavia, 1790) p. 113.    <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>27</sup> *Analisi del libro delle Prescrizioni di Tertulliano* (Pavia, 1781) p. 160.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> *Atti e decreti del concilio diocesano di Pistoja* (Florence, 1786) p. 110.

Neither group, moreover, dealt gently with its adversaries. Noris and Berti, however, had the good sense of scholarship; and although they were caustic, they did not censure. The Jansenists, unfortunately, showed no such restraint. Tamburini ridiculed the limbo of the Schoolmen as a Pelagian fable. The Molinist views on the future lot of infants were for him an instance par excellence of Molinist and Pelagian affinity. Both the Molinists and the Pelagians, he charged, had drawn their ideas on the subject from the same tainted source—a faulty conception of grace which led to a distortion of the doctrine of original sin.

The Church's intervention in the controversy finds its explanation in the chemistry of the times. The Jansenists detested the Molinists, the Molinists scored the Jansenists, and the Augustinians took issue with them both. The air was charged with suspicion and not a little slander. Molinists were accused of Pelagianism; Augustinians of Jansenism; and Jansenists, rightly enough, of heresy. This was the situation when the Church intervened. Limbo, of course, was not a major issue in her investigation; imbedded as the limbo question had become in the Jansenist controversy, however, it received its share of attention.

#### THE CHURCH AND THE AUGUSTINIANS

In 1758 the Augustinian General, Vasquez, submitted a petition to Clement XIII asking that the Augustinian School be protected against the "calumnies" of its enemies.<sup>30</sup> This petition contained what might be termed a manifesto of Augustinian theology, for it embraced twenty-three propositions which Vasquez termed the "principal points of the doctrine" peculiar to the Augustinians. The sixth proposition read as follows: "Parvulos in originali peccato sine baptismo morientes non modo Dei visione carere, et angī, sed et poena ignis licet mitissima in Infernis cruciari, ex Sacris Literis cum S. Augustino censemus." The Augustinians, said Vasquez, had ever felt free to teach these doctrines, since they had been declared sound and orthodox in nearly all their parts by the Apostolic Letters of Pope Paul III and by the three congregations which had examined Noris' writings under various popes.

<sup>30</sup> Accademia dei Lincei: Biblioteca Corsiniana, Rome, N. 1485, ff. 183-209; cf. Dammig, *Il movimento giansenista a Roma nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII* (Vatican City, 1945).



Clement submitted the matter to the cardinals of the Holy Office. Their examination went through several sessions before a decree was finally drawn up and approved by Clement.<sup>31</sup> The decree refers to the decisions of Paul III and to the case of Noris and Berti and states that with these the Augustinian School is sufficiently secure and need fear nothing. The decree also mentions nine other papal letters, briefs, or bulls. For the most part these consist in general approbations or prohibitions. More to our point are the letters of Paul III and the case of Noris and Berti.

Augustine Mainardi of Asti in Italy had been accused to Clement VII of preaching and defending ideas that were erroneous and not Catholic. Clement, on the complaint of the Bishop of Asti, told him to correct Mainardi or to silence him. Mainardi appealed his case to Rome, submitting ten propositions for examination. If the propositions were indeed Catholic and not erroneous, the Augustinian asked that the sentence passed upon him be revoked. The eighth proposition read as follows: "Pueri decedentes cum solo originali peccato damnantur ad aeternos cruciatus ignis inferni."<sup>32</sup> Paul III submitted the propositions to Thomas Badia, the Master of the Sacred Palace. Badia replied that the propositions were, as Mainardi claimed, "Catholic and not erroneous." The Pope thereupon forbade the Bishop of Asti or any other of Mainardi's superiors to molest him because of his ten propositions. Referring to the eighth proposition on the fate of infants, Paul declared that it was Saint Augustine's and could be found in many of his writings.<sup>33</sup>

This same Pope gave a nearly identical decision in the case of Musaeus Tarvisinus, another Augustinian. Here again the Pope imposed silence on the accusers and freed the accused of whatever strictures had been imposed upon him.<sup>34</sup>

Noris' book got a frigid reception when it was first submitted to the Inquisition in 1672. Rumors had reached Rome that the author had attempted to cloak condemned doctrines with the authority of

<sup>31</sup> Biblioteca Corsiniana, *op. cit.*, f. 183.

<sup>32</sup> This letter of Paul III is reprinted in Berti's *Opus de theologicis disciplinis* 7, 36.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> This was the second letter of Paul III to which Vasquez referred in his petition to Clement XIII; text in Berti, *op. cit.* 1, 167.

St. Augustine.<sup>35</sup> At first somewhat hostile, Cardinal Casanata ended by approving the book enthusiastically. Noris was shortly afterwards appointed a *qualificator* of the Roman Inquisition.<sup>36</sup>

After several turbulent years Noris' book was denounced to the Inquisition for renewing the errors of Baius and Jansenius. The examination dragged on for months with Cardinal degli Albizzi fighting for the complete condemnation of the book. Fortunately, Noris found a champion in Cardinal Colonna, "che é terribile e vehemente . . . e parlò più alto dell'altro."<sup>37</sup> When the decision was finally given, the verdict was favorable to Noris. His writings were returned "indemnes, nullaque nota perstricti."<sup>38</sup>

Fifteen years later Noris was appointed Prefect of the Vatican Library. When the appointment became known, all the old accusations were renewed, and the Pope hesitated to confirm the appointment. Cardinal Casanata, however, told the Pope that Noris had replied to the charges fifteen years earlier; the matter was settled—for the moment.<sup>39</sup> In December of 1693 new accusations were brought against his book. Pope Innocent appointed a special board of theologians to examine the book, and once again the decision was favorable.<sup>40</sup> Noris' opponents were still not satisfied, however, and demanded further investigation. Apparently trying to silence the critics, Innocent made Noris a Consultor to the Inquisition.<sup>41</sup> Hopes for peace were dashed when an anonymous author addressed several books of "scruples" to the censors of Noris' writings, questioning the wisdom of their decision.<sup>42</sup> Innocent ordered Noris to reply to these attacks. He did so, and in the words of a later Pope, "was enrolled as a victor in the College of Cardinals to universal applause."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>35</sup> H. Zazzarius, "Vita Norisii," in Noris' *Opera omnia* 1 (Venice, 1769) xiii.

<sup>36</sup> F. H. Reusch, *Der Index der verbotenen Bücher* 2 (Bonn, 1885) 672.

<sup>37</sup> *Clarorum Venetorum ad Ant. Magliabechium nonnullosque alios epistulae* (Florence, 1765) pp. 83, 86.

<sup>38</sup> Noris, *Opera omnia* 3, vii; Bonnard, "Noris," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 11, 801; Gutierrez, "Noris," *Enciclopedia cattolica* 8 (Vatican City, 1952) 1935-36.

<sup>39</sup> *Clarorum Venetorum ad Ant. Magliabechium nonnullosque alios epistulae*, p. 151; M. F. Miguelez, *Jansenismo y regalismo en España* (Valladolid, 1895) p. 64, note 1.

<sup>40</sup> Miguelez, *op. cit.*, p. 66, note 1. <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67, note 1.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Bonnard, *loc. cit.* (supra n. 38).

<sup>43</sup> *Acta Benedicti XIV . . . cura Raphaelis de Martinis* 1 (Naples, 1894) 554.

The attacks upon Noris' writings continued even after his death. The long controversy entered its final stage when the Spanish Index banned Noris' two works: the *Historia pelagiana* and the *Dissertatio de Synodo V oecumenico*.<sup>44</sup> When Benedict XIV discovered what had happened in Spain, he wrote the Grand Inquisitor, Perez de Prado, demanding that Noris' books be removed from the Spanish Index. He reviewed the history of Rome's various investigations and reminded the Inquisitor that nothing bad or opposed to sound doctrine had been found. In view of these facts, he concluded, it was not the business of the Spanish Inquisition to reexamine Noris' works and still less to condemn them.<sup>45</sup> Benedict was thoroughly annoyed that books which had been approved after so many discussions in the Roman Inquisition had been condemned by the Spaniards.<sup>46</sup> In spite of his obvious concern, it was ten years before Benedict won his point; in 1757 the Spanish King approved a decree removing Noris' name from the Spanish Index.<sup>47</sup>

Berti, like Noris before him, spent much of his theological career defending himself. John d'Yse de Saléon, the Bishop of Rodez, accused Berti of reviving the errors of Baius and Jansenius. He submitted his indictment to the Holy See. Benedict XIV in turn referred the matter to his theologians. When their investigation had been completed, the Pope replied that nothing had been found in Berti's work that was contrary to the decisions of the Church. Though the examining theologians, he said, disagreed with Berti's opinions, none the less they judged them to be sound.<sup>48</sup>

Archbishop Languet of Sens joined de Saléons in the attack on Berti. On April 25, 1750, he sent a letter to Benedict presenting his criticism of Berti and asking for papal confirmation. The Pope again replied that nothing had been found in Berti's writings which was contrary to the decisions of the Church.<sup>49</sup>

We have now seen the Roman decisions that formed the backbone of Clement XIII's decree of 1758. With these the Augustinians had

<sup>44</sup> Report of Spanish Inquisitor to Ferdinand VI; text in Miguelez, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

<sup>45</sup> *Acta Benedicti XIV* 1, 554.

<sup>46</sup> Letter of October 9, 1748; text in Miguelez, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

<sup>47</sup> Text of the decree in Miguelez, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>48</sup> *Acta Benedicti XIV* 2, 74.      <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 397.

been declared to be sufficiently secure in their doctrine. What approval, if any, was given the Augustinian doctrine by these decisions?

From what we have seen of Paul III it seems clear that he did not endorse in any way the Augustinian propositions. He did give Mainardi freedom of expression while at the same time protecting him against reprisal.

Pope Benedict himself gives us the result of the many investigations of Noris' works: "Nothing bad or opposed to sound doctrine . . . nothing worthy of condemnation or any other censure was found in his works."<sup>50</sup> He speaks of a book "approved after so many discussions in the Roman Inquisition."<sup>51</sup> What was the nature of the "approval" of which Benedict spoke? The Pope shows us his mind in the matter in an illuminating letter to Cardinal Tencin. Strictly speaking, he said, one should say that Noris' writings had not been disapproved by Rome, though broadly speaking one might say that they had been approved.<sup>52</sup> We must conclude, then, that the "approval" given Noris' work meant simply that it contained nothing that merited disapproval; as Benedict said: "... nihil anathemate vel alia censura dignum in operibus fuerit inventum."<sup>53</sup> This interpretation finds corroboration in the Pope's judgment of Berti. Nothing, he said, was found contrary to the decisions of the Church; Berti's doctrine was sound.

Returning to the decree approved by Clement XIII, we can now weigh its force more accurately. The Augustinians had been told that they could rest secure in the decisions given by Rome. From what we have seen we may say that these decisions had both a dogmatic and a disciplinary effect. Dogmatically they meant that there was nothing in the Augustinian doctrine which merited disapproval. The disciplinary force of these decisions we have seen in the writings of Benedict XIV, who severely rebuked those who disapproved what Rome had not disapproved. Since the pain of sense for unbaptized infants was part of the Augustinian doctrine, we may conclude that it was an opinion which in no way merited the disapproval of Rome and could

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 554; letter of July 31, 1748.      <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; letter of October 9, 1748.

<sup>52</sup> *Correspondance de Benoit XIV*, ed. E. de Heeckeren (Paris, 1912); letter of June 25, 1749, Vol. 1, p. 496.

<sup>53</sup> *Acta Benedicti XIV* 1, 554; letter of July 31, 1748.

therefore be freely taught. A difficulty, however, arises immediately. Did this situation perdure, or was it changed by the bull *Auctorem fidei*? The answer seems to lie in the Church's attitude toward the Jansenists.

#### THE CHURCH AND THE JANSENISTS

On August 28, 1794, *Auctorem fidei* condemned Article 3 of the decrees of the Synod of Pistoia:

Doctrina, quae velut fabulam Pelagianam explodit locum illum inferorum (quem limbi puerorum nomine fideles passim designant), in quo animae decedentium cum sola originali culpa poena damni citra poenam ignis puniantur; perinde ac si hoc ipso, quod, qui poenam ignis removent, inducerent locum illum et statum medium expertem culpae et poenae inter regnum Dei et damnationem aeternam, qualem fabulabantur Pelagiani—falsa, temeraria, in scholas catholicas iniuriosa.<sup>54</sup>

The interpretations of this condemnation vary widely. Some say that it constitutes a papal endorsement of limbo. Others deny that it lends any dogmatic value to limbo at all; it is, they say, directed solely against a calumny on Catholic Schools.<sup>55</sup> The second interpretation seems to have the stronger case.

Is the mere denial of limbo or the manner of denial under censure in *Auctorem fidei*? The answer, we believe, lies in the phrase: "velut fabulam Pelagianam." The bull declares false not the doctrine which denies limbo but the doctrine which rejects it as a Pelagian fable. The entire emphasis of the article seems to be upon the manner of the denial, for the explanatory clause is devoted to it: "perinde ac si hoc ipso. . ."

There were two distinct ideas in the decree of Pistoia. One declared that there were but two places for men in eternity, the kingdom of heaven and the hell of fire. The second rejected as a Pelagian fable a third place for those infants who died in a state of original sin. The Bull *Auctorem fidei* reaches back twelve centuries to state definitively the exact nature of the Pelagian fable. The Pelagians, it said, had imagined a state and a place in which there was neither guilt nor punishment, midway between the kingdom of God and eternal damna-

<sup>54</sup> J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* 38 (Florence, 1769) 1268.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. W. A. Van Roo, *art. cit.* (supra n. 3) p. 457.

tion. Those who do away with fire as a punishment for original sin do not thereby reintroduce the Pelagian fable; and the doctrine which asserts that they do is false, temerarious, and injurious to Catholic Schools. It seems, then, that *Auctorem fidei* was concerned not with the denial of limbo but with the manner of the denial.

Recent investigations have declared Cardinal Gerdil to be the sole redactor of the bull *Auctorem fidei*.<sup>56</sup> His manuscript is still in existence in the Barnabite Library in Rome with the marginal notations still legible; one of these notations is of particular interest. Fastened to the margin of Article 26 is a small piece of paper; on it in Gerdil's handwriting are the following remarks:

Concil. Carthag. an 418. Item placuit ut si quis dicit ideo dixisse Dominum in domo Patris mansiones multae sunt, ut intelligatur, quia in regno coelorum erit aliquis medius aut ullus alicubi locus, ubi beati vivant parvuli qui sine baptismo.

S. Aug. 1. 2. de orig. animae. c. 12. Novellos haereticos pelagianos justissime Conciliorum Catholicorum, et Sedis Apostolicae damnavit auctoritas, eo quod ausi fuerint non baptizatis dare quietis ac salutis locum etiam praeter regnum coelorum.<sup>57</sup>

These marginal notes appear to confirm what seems clear from the Bull itself: *Auctorem fidei* was concerned with the libel of the "Pelagian fable," and it was against this slander that it would defend the Schools. It does not seem, then, that the Bull did anything to enhance the dogmatic value of limbo. We may conclude, therefore, that the Church's earlier decisions on limbo retained their force.

With the close of the eighteenth century we find the limbo debate at an impasse. Rome's decisions indicate that she considered limbo an open question. These decisions had, however, still another effect. By defending first one position and then the other against its detractors, Rome drained the question of its forensic value. The limbo question is obviously a highly speculative one; it takes on an added dimension, however, when it is coupled to a more volatile issue. This was the case during the period which we have examined. Jansenius' vicious attack on Molinism first propelled the question of unbaptized infants into the Jansenist controversy; charges of "Jansenist" and "Pelagian" helped to keep it there. When the Holy See drew the sting from the debate, the controversy began to die.

<sup>56</sup> Matteucci, *op. cit.* (supra n. 21) p. 218, note 2; Mantese, *op. cit.* (supra n. 20) p. 86.

<sup>57</sup> Manuscripts of Cardinal Gerdil, Vol. 16, pp. 103-42.

## THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

During the nineteenth century the limbo question retreated to the comparative obscurity of a theological scholion. For all practical purposes the controversy was dead; nevertheless, it seems to have left its mark on theological thought. In an attempt to appraise the "mind of the Church" as we find it in that century, the present author conducted a survey of the literature of the period. It is by no means exhaustive, yet it did produce some interesting results.

Of forty-two theological manuals: two teach the pain of sense (denial of limbo); forty teach no pain of sense (limbo). Thus the nineteenth-century theologians favor limbo overwhelmingly; yet they fail to display any unanimity at all when they come to evaluate their position. Of those who hold no pain of sense, we find the following qualifications: eleven consider it *communis*; for six, *controvertitur*; five give no theological qualification at all; four qualify it as *communissima*; four, *probabilior*; two, *communis et certa*; two say that it is not dangerous to the faith; two, that it is not of faith; two, that it may be held; for one, *ecclesia favet*; for another, *nobis verior*.<sup>58</sup>

We might ask how deeply the notion of limbo had taken root in the minds of the faithful during this same century. An apodictic answer is impossible, of course; but perhaps the catechetical writings of the period may give us some hint. Of forty-one catechetical writings, seven have nothing to say about the fate of infants.<sup>59</sup> Of the thirty-four who deny them the beatific vision, thirteen add nothing else; of these, ten remain silent, three are unwilling to comment further. The remaining twenty-one further clarify the fate of these infants: two teach limbo by name; six say that the punishment is not like that of mortal sin; eleven, that there is no pain of sense; two, that they are not in hell.<sup>60</sup> Somewhat surprisingly we find that only half of the

<sup>58</sup> For lack of space only the names of the authors will be listed: Abelly, Bonal, Dens, Einig, Gousset, Tanquerey, Dobmayr, Minges, Novana, Rolfus, Schouppé, Bautz, de Baets, Berthier, Klee, Sardagna, Bouvier, Casajoana, Salmanticenses, Egger, Heinrich, Kenrick, Mendive, Perrone, Schmid, Tepe, Palmieri, Lazzari, de Liguori, Claramontenses, Wirceburgenses, Friedhoff, Miller, Oswald, de Smet, Guillois, Knoll, Simar, Polmano, Marcelli, Pedrini, Jungmann. If an earlier text were reedited during the nineteenth century, it was included in this list.

<sup>59</sup> The silence of catechetical writings on a given point is obviously of some significance: "And how are they to hear, if no one preaches?" (Rom 10:15).

catechists present the limbo of children to the faithful and only two of these mention it by name.

Limbo, as we find it in the nineteenth century, seems to have been theological opinion, although one held almost unanimously by the writers that we surveyed. The hesitation these men manifest in placing a stronger theological note on limbo may reflect the controversy of the previous centuries. If the catechetical writings we have observed are any indication of the mind of the faithful, we cannot conclude that limbo was very deeply rooted in their thinking. What theological value can we assign to limbo at the close of the nineteenth century? *Sententia communis* seems to be the fairest estimate.

The over-all picture of limbo in the twentieth century does not differ markedly from that of the preceding period. A survey of forty-six twentieth-century theological manuals shows unanimity on the fact that there is no pain of sense; there is wide divergence, however, on the qualification involved. For eighteen it is *communis*; six give no theological qualification; six have it *communis et certa*; three, *communissima*; two, *probabilior*; for two the pain of sense is not of faith; for two, *ecclesia favet*; for one, *controvertitur*; for one, *probabilis*; one says that it may be held; another, that it must be held; one affirms that it is almost certain; one, that it should be defended; one, that the pain of sense should not be admitted.<sup>61</sup>

To some extent the catechetical writings mirror the uneven picture which we find among the theologians. Of sixty-six catechetical writ-

<sup>60</sup> These catechetical writings embrace: standard exhaustive catechisms; commentaries on catechisms for priests, teachers, and catechists; catechetical sermons; textbooks for grammar school, high school, and college students; and adult catechisms. The authors are: de la Salle, Schmid, Weninger, Hirscher, Martinet, Dieringer, Byrne, Deharbe (large and small editions), Schmitt, Fander-Deharbe, Lynch-Deharbe, Fox-Deharbe, Gaume, Hay, Bressanvido, Keenan, Meynell, O'Rafferty, Power, Wilmers, Gibson, Mey, Overberg, Battaglia, Schouppé, Wenham, König, Martin, Danes, Perry, Faerber, Luche, Ranieri, Wermelskirchen, Zollner. Although these authors wrote only in German, French, Italian, and English, their writings were in some instances translated into other languages, e.g., Polish, Bohemian.

<sup>61</sup> The authors are: Hermann, Hunter, Pohle-Gummersbach, Pohle-Gierens, Sanda, Schanz, Schmaus, Baisi, Dalmau, Hervé, Otten, Pohle, Arbazuza, Coghlan, Hurter, Van Noort, Connell, Diekamp, Esser, Goupil, Garretti, Hove, Huarte, Lahitton, Lepicier, Miller, Ott, Pignataro, Parente, Premm, Sasia, del Val, Piolanti, Denis, Janssens, Pohle-Preuss, d'Alès, Jacobs, Wilhelm, Hugon, Petroccia, Lottini, Manners, Beraza, Boyer, Lercher.



ings, nineteen have nothing to say about the fate of infants. The remaining forty-seven deny them the beatific vision; of these twenty-three add nothing else, twenty-four further specify. The specifications are: ten mention limbo; for seven there is no pain of sense; for four, they are not in hell; two say that the punishment is not like that for mortal sin; one, that they are in a place of rest.<sup>62</sup> Limbo is presented in substance by about one-third of the catechetical writings; fewer than one in six mention it by name.

There is a clear tendency among twentieth-century theologians to give greater theological weight to the limbo of children. Six of them declare it to be *communis et certa*, and three others seem inclined to agree. The over-all picture, however, favors a more conservative view, with the simple *sententia communis* being most in evidence. The catechetical writings of the period once again fail to evince a common persuasion among the faithful.

#### CONCLUSION

Where does the *limbus puerorum* stand on the scale of theological values? Is it merely an opinion of theologians, or is it something more? These are the questions with which we began our study. As a premise for a possible solution we sketched the theological history of limbo through the past four centuries—its reception by the magisterium, the theologians, and the faithful. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century limbo was, as we saw, an open question—debatable and debated. In the nineteenth century the controversy died, and limbo won a common, although uncertain, acceptance among theologians. In our own century we found that theologians were at once unanimous in accepting limbo and at variance in evaluating it. A survey of the catechetical literature of the past 150 years failed to evince a persuasion among the faithful that would permit a solid argument *ex sensu fidelium*.

<sup>62</sup> The authors are: Faerber, Fink, Gründer, MacEachen, Richter, Brownson, Bandas, Nolle, Smith, Schmitt, Drinkwater, Rosenberger, Russell, Coppens, Broussole, Baltimore Catechism (nos. 1, 2, 3), Kinkead, Urban, Christian Brothers, Collot, Hay, McGovern, O'Brien, Schorsch, Annunziata, Bolton, Burbach, Eaton, Greenstock, Fitzpatrick, Kirsch, Philipps, Sheehan, Spirago, Pichler, Cassilly, Chrysostom, Gerard, Polidori, Cooper, Hart, Michel, Morrison, Hublet, de Zulueta, Marshall, Noll, Frederic, Lanslots, Schumacher, Ranieri, Gasparri, Morrow, Fox-Deharbe, Gibson, Cogan, Deharbe (small American edition), Katholischer Katechismus der Bistümer Deutschlands.

The common acceptance of an idea among theologians would seem to create a presumption in its favor. May we conclude from this that limbo is a *sententia certa*? In view of the tortured history of the question—the decisions of the magisterium, the varied opinions of theologians, the lack of a clear persuasion among the faithful—*sententia certa* appears to be too strong a qualification. It seems that we would reflect its theological position more accurately if we said that limbo was a safe and commonly accepted explanation of a difficult question.