

PART ONE, SECTION ONE, CHAPTER ONE (PARAGRAPHS 27-49)

FAITH: Catholicism | TEXT: Catechism of the Catholic Church | VOLUME: 1997 Volume | AUTHOR: John Paul II

OVERVIEW

This chapter of the Catechism, titled 'Man's Capacity for God,' establishes the anthropological foundation of Catholic theology. It argues that the desire for God is inscribed in the human heart (the 'sensus divinitatis'), evidenced by the universal history of religious expression. The text posits a dual epistemology: First, that the existence of God can be known with 'certainty' by the natural light of human reason through observing the physical world and the human person (Natural Theology). Second, it acknowledges that while this capacity exists in principle, the historical condition of sin and human limitation makes Divine Revelation necessary for humanity to know religious truths with 'firm certainty and with no admixture of error.' It emphasizes that human language about God is analogical-valid but always limited. The text concludes that man only lives a fully human life when living in communion with God, setting the stage for the necessity of the Church's teaching authority to guide this search.

KEY FIGURES

God (Creator/First Principle), The Human Person (Religious Being), St. Augustine, Vatican Council I

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. NATURAL THEOLOGY (CAPABILITY OF REASON)

Assertion: Human reason, by its natural light, can know God's existence with certainty through creation.

"Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God... can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason." (Para 36)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Catechism asserts a high view of human reason's capacity to attain 'certainty' about God independent of special revelation. While Evangelicals agree that creation testifies to God (Romans 1:20), the Reformed/Evangelical tradition emphasizes the 'noetic effects of sin'—that the fallen mind suppresses this truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Therefore, while the *evidence* is objective, the *subjective capacity* of the unregenerate man to process this into 'certainty' or 'truth' is broken. Evangelicals view natural theology as sufficient to condemn (render without excuse) but insufficient to inform or save.

2. HOMO RELIGIOSUS (MAN AS RELIGIOUS BEING)

Assertion: Man is by nature a religious being, and this bond is vital to his humanity.

"Man is by nature and vocation a religious being... man lives a fully human life only if he freely lives by his bond with God." (Para 44)"

Evangelical Comparison: Both traditions agree man was created for God. However, the Catechism suggests that despite sin, man retains an ability to seek God with 'an upright heart' (Para 30) through effort. The Evangelical baseline, relying on texts like Romans 3:10-11 ('no one seeks God'), argues that the natural man runs *from* God, and any seeking is actually a response to God's prior drawing (prevenient or irresistible grace), not a natural human capacity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Partial

Theological Gap: While both traditions affirm God reveals Himself in nature, the Catechism (citing Vatican I) elevates 'natural reason' to a status where it can independently achieve 'certainty' about God. Evangelical theology, particularly the Reformed tradition, argues that while the *revelation* in nature is clear, the *receiver* (fallen man) is broken. Romans 1 argues men 'suppress' this truth. Therefore, claiming man can have an 'upright heart' (Para 30) in his search for God prior to regeneration minimizes the biblical diagnosis of the human condition (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:10-12). The Catechism sees reason as wounded but functional; Evangelicalism sees the natural mind as hostile to God (Romans 8:7).

Shared Values:

God as Creator and End of man; Existence of General Revelation (Creation/Conscience); The transcendence and ineffability of God; The reality of the human soul; The necessity of evangelism

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Theology Proper (Anthropology/Hamartiology) – Underestimates the noetic effects of sin (Total Depravity) by claiming natural reason can attain certainty about God.
2. [Minor] Sola Scriptura – Establishes Church Dogma (Vatican I) as the authority for defining human epistemological capacity.
3. [Major] Sola Gratia – Suggests the search for God relies on human effort ('every effort of intellect') and an 'upright heart' rather than solely on God's drawing.

Semantic Warnings:

"Certainty"

In Text: Intellectual conviction arrived at through converging arguments and natural reason.

Evangelical: Assurance of faith granted by the Holy Spirit concerning the promises of God (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: *The Catechism claims reason gives 'certainty' of God's existence; Evangelicals believe true certainty comes only through the Spirit witnessing with our spirit (Romans 8:16).*

"Upright heart"

In Text: A prerequisite condition man must bring to the search for God (Para 30).

Evangelical: A result of regeneration, not a natural state (Ezekiel 36:26).

Example: *The text demands an 'upright heart' to find God; the Bible says 'The heart is deceitful above all things' (Jer 17:9).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Living in communion with God; finding truth and happiness.

How Attained: The text focuses on *knowledge* of God here, which is a precursor. It implies attainment involves intellect, will, and welcoming revelation.

Basis of Assurance: Certainty derived from 'converging and convincing arguments' and Church teaching.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text is pre-soteriological (focusing on existence rather than redemption), but the emphasis on 'effort of intellect' and 'sound will' (Para 30) sets a trajectory of cooperation (synergism) rather than monergistic faith.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Seek God with intellect, will, and an upright heart (Para 30)
2. Purify language of limited/imagebound elements when speaking of God (Para 42)
3. Bring the light of the living God to those who do not know Him (Para 49)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the Church's teaching authority regarding the capability of reason
2. Engage in dialogue with philosophy, science, and other religions (Para 39)
3. Acknowledge the validity of proofs for God's existence

Ritual Requirements:

1. Participation in the 'religious beliefs and behaviour' (prayers, sacrifices, rituals) is framed as a natural expression of the quest for God (Para 28)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The Catechism says seeking God requires an 'upright heart.' Do you feel your heart is naturally upright, or do you struggle with inner contradictions?
2. Paragraph 30 mentions that finding God demands 'every effort of intellect.' How much intellectual effort is enough to be sure you've found Him?
3. Do you feel 'certainty' about God based on looking at nature, or do you sometimes have doubts that nature alone can't answer?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Unceasing Desire (Sehnsucht) – This universal longing is a bridge to the Gospel. We agree the thirst exists. The Gospel offers the Living Water that satisfies the thirst, which human effort cannot reach. [John 4:13-14 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman)]
2. The Unknown God – Like Paul at Mars Hill, we can affirm their religious instinct and searching, then introduce the specific Person of Christ who is the answer to their vague questions. [Acts 17:23]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Intellectual Performance/Uncertainty [Moderate] – By asserting that God *can* be known with certainty by reason, the text places the burden of doubt on the believer's intellect or will. If I doubt, is it because I haven't exerted 'every effort of intellect' (Para 30)? This creates a pressure to rationalize faith rather than rest in grace.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Dual Source: Natural Reason (Creation/Conscience) and Divine Revelation.

Verification Method: Converging and convincing arguments (proofs) validated by Church teaching.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit through Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Catechism suggests a 'natural light' is sufficient for certainty of existence, whereas Evangelicals see the natural mind as darkened (Ephesians 4:18).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1997 (Latin Typical Edition)

Authorship: Promulgated by Pope John Paul II; drafted by a commission led by Joseph Ratzinger.

Textual Issues: This is a modern systematic compilation, not an ancient manuscript. No textual variance issues.