

PART ONE, SECTION ONE, CHAPTER TWO, ARTICLE 1 (PARAGRAPHS 51-53)

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

OVERVIEW

This section of the Catechism outlines the fundamental nature and purpose of Divine Revelation. It asserts that revelation is not merely the transmission of data, but a self-disclosure of God born from His goodness and wisdom. The text establishes a Trinitarian structure of salvation: the Father's will is for humanity to have access to Him through the Son (the Word made flesh) and in the Holy Spirit. The ultimate goal of this revelation is 'Theosis' or divinization—that humans might become 'sharers in the divine nature' and adopted sons. The text also introduces the concept of 'Divine Pedagogy,' explaining that God communicates Himself gradually, preparing humanity in stages (implicitly the Old Testament history) to receive the fullness of revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. It emphasizes that revelation consists of both 'deeds and words' which are intrinsically connected, establishing the historical and propositional nature of God's interaction with man.

KEY FIGURES

God the Father, Jesus Christ (The Incarnate Word), The Holy Spirit

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE PEDAGOGY

Assertion: God reveals Himself gradually, in stages, rather than all at once, preparing man for the culmination in Christ.

"It involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates himself to man gradually."

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine aligns closely with the Evangelical understanding of Progressive Revelation—that God revealed His plan of redemption over time through the Old Testament covenants, leading to the final revelation in the New Testament. Both traditions agree that the Old Testament was a preparation for the Gospel. However, Evangelicals view the canon of Scripture as the closed, final record of this pedagogy, whereas Catholicism views the Church's living Tradition as the vehicle that continues to transmit this revelation.

2. PARTICIPATION IN DIVINE NATURE (THEOSIS)

Assertion: The goal of revelation is for men to become sharers in God's own nature.

"...and thus become sharers in the divine nature."

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals affirm 2 Peter 1:4, they typically interpret 'partaking in the divine nature' as a moral renewal and relational union with Christ through the indwelling Spirit. The Catholic tradition, reflected here, often interprets this ontologically—that sanctifying grace is a created quality infused into the soul that elevates human nature to a supernatural state, making the believer capable of acts (merit) that are otherwise impossible. This lays the groundwork for the sacramental system as the means of this infusion.

3. REVELATION BY DEEDS AND WORDS

Assertion: God's plan is realized by historical events and propositional truths that interpret each other.

"The divine plan of Revelation is realized simultaneously 'by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other'."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicals agree that God acts in history (deeds) and interprets those acts through Scripture (words). However, in Catholic theology, the 'deeds' of God are not limited to the biblical record but continue in the life of the Church (Tradition). This phrase is often used to justify the authority of Tradition as a mode of transmission distinct from but bound to Scripture, whereas Evangelicals hold to Sola Scriptura.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Partial

Theological Gap: While the text is highly Christocentric and Trinitarian, the phrase 'make them capable of responding... beyond their own natural capacity' introduces the Catholic concept of elevated human nature through infused grace. In Evangelical theology, the believer is dead in sin and made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5), but the focus is on the imputation of Christ's righteousness. In Catholic theology, as hinted here, the focus is on the impartation of a supernatural quality that enables the human to perform meritorious acts of love. This is the seed of the divergence between Justification by Faith Alone (Evangelical) and Justification by Faith formed by Love/Works (Catholic).

Shared Values:

Trinitarian Theology; The Incarnation of the Word; God's initiative in salvation (Grace); The historical nature of faith; Adoption as sons

Friction Points:

1. [Minor] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Implies grace makes man 'capable' of responding in a way that may lead to merit, rather than grace being the sole cause of salvation.
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – The coupling of 'deeds and words' is the foundational argument for Sacred Tradition having equal authority with Scripture.

Semantic Warnings:

"Mystery"

In Text: A divine truth revealed by God, often associated with the sacraments in broader Catholic theology.

Evangelical: A truth previously hidden but now revealed to God's people (Colossians 1:26).

Example: *In Catholicism, 'mystery' often connects to the 'Paschal Mystery' celebrated in the Mass.*

"Divine Nature"

In Text: Ontological elevation of the soul via sanctifying grace.

Evangelical: Moral and relational renewal; escaping corruption (2 Peter 1:4).

Example: *Evangelicals view this as union with Christ; Catholics view it as a change in the substance of the soul.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Access to the Father, adoption as sons, sharing in the divine nature.

How Attained: Through Christ, in the Holy Spirit (Trinitarian mediation).

Basis of Assurance: God's goodness and wisdom in revealing Himself.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text does not explicitly mention faith vs. works, but the language of being made 'capable of responding' suggests a cooperative model of salvation rather than a monergistic receipt of Christ's finished work.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Implicit Obligations:

1. Welcome the supernatural Revelation
2. Respond to God
3. Know God
4. Love God beyond natural capacity

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says God wants us to love Him 'beyond our own natural capacity.' What do you think that looks like in daily life?
2. It mentions becoming 'sharers in the divine nature.' How do you understand that happening? Is it something we do, or something done to us?
3. When it says God reveals Himself by 'deeds and words,' which deeds of God give you the most comfort?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Access to the Father – This is the heart of the Gospel. We were cut off, but Christ is the bridge. [Ephesians 2:18 - 'For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.']
2. Divine Pedagogy (Gradual Teaching) – Just as a parent teaches a child slowly, God used the Law to lead us to Christ. [Galatians 3:24 - 'So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Capacity Anxiety [Moderate] – The idea that one must love God 'far beyond their own natural capacity' can create anxiety. If I fail to love God perfectly, have I lost the 'capacity' (grace)? It shifts focus to the believer's internal state rather than Christ's external sufficiency.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Supernatural Revelation (Top-down disclosure)

Verification Method: Acceptance of the 'deeds and words' presented by God through the economy of salvation.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals rely on the written Word (Bible) as the sole infallible source of this revelation. This text presents the revelation as a dynamic of 'deeds and words' culminating in a Person (Christ), which Catholicism teaches is transmitted through Scripture AND Tradition.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1992 (French), 1997 (Latin Typical Edition)

Authorship: Drafted by a commission under Joseph Ratzinger; Promulgated by John Paul II.

Textual Issues: No manuscript issues; this is a modern doctrinal summary.