

PART ONE, SECTION ONE, CHAPTER TWO, ARTICLE 2, PARAGRAPH 74

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

OVERVIEW

Paragraph 74 of the Catechism serves as the theological preamble to the section on 'The Transmission of Divine Revelation.' It grounds the Church's missionary mandate in the antecedent will of God, citing 1 Timothy 2:4. The text establishes two primary pillars: first, that God desires the salvation of all humanity; and second, that this salvation is inextricably linked to 'the knowledge of the truth,' which is defined not merely as abstract dogma but as the person of Christ Jesus. Consequently, the text argues that the proclamation of Christ to all nations is not an optional activity but a divine necessity to fulfill God's desire that revelation reaches the 'ends of the earth.' This paragraph acts as the foundational 'why' before the Catechism explains the 'how' (Apostolic Tradition and Scripture) in subsequent paragraphs.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Father), Christ Jesus, All Men (Humanity), The Church (Implied Proclaimer)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. UNIVERSAL SALVIFIC WILL

Assertion: God desires all men to be saved.

"God 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'"

Evangelical Comparison: The Catechism here affirms the 'Universal Salvific Will' of God, citing the Pastoral Epistles. In Evangelicalism, this is a standard belief, particularly in Arminian and Wesleyan traditions which hold that God's grace is available to all. Reformed (Calvinist) Evangelicals would agree with the citation of 1 Timothy 2:4 but might offer a nuanced exegesis regarding the 'effectual call' versus the 'general call.' However, functionally, both traditions agree on the necessity of global proclamation based on this desire.

2. CHRISTOCENTRISM OF TRUTH

Assertion: The 'truth' that saves is specifically the person of Christ Jesus.

"knowledge of the truth": that is, of Christ Jesus."

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly identifies 'the truth' as a person: Christ Jesus. This prevents the reduction of Christianity to a mere ethical system. Evangelicals fully affirm this (John 14:6). However, a latent friction point exists in how this truth is accessed: Evangelicals believe this Truth is mediated primarily through the Holy Spirit and Scripture, while the surrounding context of the Catechism will argue this Truth is mediated through the Church's Magisterium and Tradition.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: No

Theological Gap: This text represents a moment of 'Mere Christianity' where Catholic and Evangelical missiology overlap completely. Both agree that God wants people saved, that Jesus is the content of that salvation, and that believers must tell the world. The divergence only appears when one asks 'How is this truth transmitted reliably?' (The Catholic answer involves Apostolic Succession/Tradition; the Evangelical answer is Sola Scriptura). However, that divergence is not present in the text of paragraph 74 itself.

Shared Values:

The Great Commission; The exclusivity of Christ as 'The Truth'; God's desire for human salvation; The necessity of evangelism

Friction Points:

1. [Minor] Sola Scriptura (Contextual) – While not violating it here, this text sets the stage for 'Tradition' as the vehicle for this proclamation in subsequent paragraphs.

Semantic Warnings:

"Knowledge of the truth"

In Text: Knowing Christ Jesus (and implicitly, the fullness of the Catholic faith as the repository of that truth).

Evangelical: Knowing the Gospel and trusting in Christ (1 Timothy 2:4, John 17:3).

Example: An Evangelical reads 'knowledge of the truth' as accepting the Gospel message. A Catholic reads it as that, plus eventually accepting the fullness of the Church's teaching which safeguards that truth.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Coming to the knowledge of the truth (Christ Jesus).

How Attained: Implied through the reception of this revelation/proclamation.

Basis of Assurance: God's desire (He *wants* you saved).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the *objective* provision of salvation (God's will/Christ's truth) rather than the *subjective* reception (faith vs. works). Therefore, it does not explicitly contradict Sola Fide here.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Christ must be proclaimed to all nations and individuals.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Believers must engage in evangelism/missions.
2. Believers must align their will with God's desire for universal salvation.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. I love that this passage quotes 1 Timothy 2:4. If God desires all men to be saved, what does that tell us about His heart toward you personally?
2. The text says 'the truth' is actually a person—Christ Jesus. How does that change the way we think about 'finding the truth'? Is it about learning facts or meeting a person?
3. We both agree that Christ must be proclaimed to all nations. What is the core message about Christ that needs to be proclaimed?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Seeking God – God is not hiding; He is actively seeking humanity. This bridges to the Gospel of Grace where God initiates salvation, not man. [Luke 19:10]
2. Truth as Person – Truth is not a philosophy but a Savior. This allows for a transition to a relationship-based Gospel (Faith) rather than a ritual-based religion. [John 14:6]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Missional Responsibility [Mild] – The command that Christ 'must' be proclaimed places the weight of global salvation on the Church's activity. While biblical, if decoupled from God's sovereignty, it can lead to burnout or guilt regarding the 'ends of the earth.'

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Divine Revelation (Scripture).

Verification Method: Acceptance of the apostolic witness recorded in the New Testament.

Evangelical Contrast: No contrast in this specific paragraph; both traditions rely on the Bible to know God's will regarding salvation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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

Authorship: Drafted by commission under Cardinal Ratzinger; Promulgated by Pope John Paul II

Textual Issues: None; this is a modern doctrinal summary.