

PART ONE, SECTION TWO, CHAPTER TWO, ARTICLE 4, PARAGRAPHS 571-573

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

OVERVIEW

Paragraphs 571-573 of the Catechism serve as the theological introduction to the specific articles on Christ's passion. The text asserts that the Paschal mystery is the core of the Good News which the Apostles and the Church proclaim. Crucially, it defines God's saving plan as being accomplished 'once for all' through the redemptive death of Jesus. It emphasizes that the Church must adhere to Jesus' own interpretation of the Old Testament scriptures—specifically that the Messiah was destined to suffer. The text also grounds the theology of the atonement in history, citing the concrete rejection of Jesus by the religious authorities and his handover to the Gentiles. Finally, it invites the faithful to examine these historical circumstances to better grasp the meaning of Redemption.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, The Apostles, The Church, Elders, Chief Priests, and Scribes (The Sanhedrin), The Gentiles (Romans)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

Assertion: The Cross and Resurrection stand at the center of the Good News.

"The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the centre of the Good News"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicals and Catholics agree on the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). However, the term 'Paschal Mystery' in broader Catholic theology often encompasses the liturgical re-presentation of these events in the Mass. In this specific text, however, the definition is strictly historical and soteriological, aligning with the Evangelical view of the Gospel's core.

2. DEFINITIVE ATONEMENT

Assertion: God's saving plan was accomplished 'once for all' by Christ's death.

"God's saving plan was accomplished 'once for all' 313 by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ."

Evangelical Comparison: The use of the phrase 'once for all' (Greek: ephapax) is the cornerstone of Evangelical soteriology (Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 10:10). It implies that the work of salvation is complete and cannot be repeated or added to. While broader Catholic theology introduces the concept of the Mass as a sacrifice and the necessity of purgatorial cleansing, this specific paragraph affirms the sufficiency of the historical event in a way that Evangelicals strongly endorse.

3. CHRISTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC

Assertion: The Church must interpret Scriptures exactly as Jesus did—pointing to His necessary suffering.

"The Church remains faithful to the interpretation of 'all the Scriptures' that Jesus gave"

Evangelical Comparison: Both traditions affirm that Jesus is the key to the Old Testament (Luke 24). The text asserts that the Church's faithfulness is contingent upon maintaining this specific Christocentric interpretation of prophecy.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: No

Theological Gap: This section of the Catechism is remarkably consistent with Reformed and Evangelical soteriology. It emphasizes the 'once for all' (Hebrews 7:27) nature of the sacrifice and the necessity of the Cross as predicted by Scripture. Divergences arise in other sections of the Catechism regarding *how* that merit is applied (sacraments, purgatory), but the *source* of the merit is here correctly identified as the unique, historical death of Christ.

Shared Values:

Centrality of the Cross and Resurrection; The "Once for all" nature of the Atonement; Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy; Historicity of the Gospels; Divinity of Christ (Son of God)

Semantic Warnings:

"Paschal Mystery"

In Text: The combination of Christ's cross and Resurrection as the center of the Good News.

Evangelical: Evangelicals typically refer to this as the 'Gospel' or the 'Death and Resurrection.' In Catholic theology, 'Paschal Mystery' often implies the liturgical celebration (Mass) that makes these events present, though that nuance is not explicit in this specific paragraph.

Example: *Evangelicals view the 'mystery' as revealed truth (Colossians 1:26); Catholics often view it as a sacramental reality participated in through liturgy.*

"The Church"

In Text: The institution following the Apostles that proclaims the Good News.

Evangelical: The invisible body of all true believers (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Example: *When the text says 'The Church remains faithful,' it implies the institutional Roman Catholic Church's magisterium, whereas Evangelicals would apply this to the faithful remnant of believers.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Redemption accomplished by the death of God's Son.

How Attained: Through God's saving plan accomplished 'once for all' (implicit reliance on Christ's work).

Basis of Assurance: The historical reality and scriptural necessity of the Passion.

Comparison to Sola Fide: While Sola Fide is not explicitly stated, the 'once for all' language strongly supports the sufficiency of Christ's work, which is the objective basis for Sola Fide.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Proclaim the Good News to the world (assigned to Apostles and the Church)
2. Examine the circumstances of Jesus' death

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the 'once for all' nature of the atonement
2. Interpret Old Testament scripture through the lens of Christ's suffering
3. Acknowledge the historical reality of the Passion

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. This passage says God's saving plan was accomplished 'once for all' by Jesus. What does 'once for all' mean to you regarding your daily standing before God?
2. If the work of redemption was accomplished 'once for all' on the Cross, as this text says, how does that affect our need to do works of penance?
3. The text says we should examine the circumstances of Jesus' death to understand Redemption. What did Jesus say on the cross that indicates the work was finished?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Once for All (Ephapax) – This is the bridge to the assurance of salvation. Just as a debt paid 'once for all' never needs to be paid again, our sin debt is fully cleared. [Hebrews 10:10-14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. None (in this specific text) [Mild] – This specific text is liberating rather than burdensome, as it focuses on Christ's completed work. The burden in Catholicism comes from later texts that add requirements to access this work.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Divine Revelation (Scripture) supported by Historical Inquiry.

Verification Method: Examining the Gospels and "other historical sources" to understand the Redemption.

Evangelical Contrast: This text displays a high view of historical verification which aligns well with Evangelical apologetics (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:6). It does not appeal to private revelation or papal fiat in this section, but to the public record of Scripture and history.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1997 (Latin typical edition)

Authorship: Promulgated by John Paul II; drafted by a commission led by Joseph Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI).

Textual Issues: None relevant to this excerpt.