

PART ONE, SECTION TWO, CHAPTER TWO, ARTICLE 6 (PARAGRAPHS 659-664)

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

OVERVIEW

The text articulates the Catholic understanding of Christ's Ascension, distinguishing between the 'veiled' glory of the Resurrection appearances and the 'exalted' glory of the Ascension. It asserts that Christ's body was glorified at the Resurrection but that the Ascension marks the irreversible entry of His humanity into God's presence. Theologically, it emphasizes that humanity, left to natural powers, cannot access God's life; only Christ, who descended, can ascend and open the way for His members. The text links the Ascension to the Incarnation and the Cross, presenting Christ as the one High Priest who entered the heavenly sanctuary to make permanent intercession. It defines 'seated at the right hand' as the inauguration of the Messiah's Kingdom, fulfilling Daniel's prophecy of an everlasting dominion. Notably, it connects Christ's heavenly priesthood to the concept of 'liturgy,' positioning Him as the principal actor in the worship of the Father.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, God the Father, Mary Magdalene, The Apostle Paul, The Prophet Daniel, St. John Damascene

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE ASCENSION OF HUMANITY

Assertion: The Ascension represents the irreversible entry of Jesus' humanity into divine glory, opening a path previously inaccessible to natural man.

"Jesus' final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory... Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the 'Father's house'"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine aligns closely with standard Evangelical Christology. Both traditions affirm that Christ's ascension was a bodily event that glorified His human nature. The text's assertion that 'humanity does not have access' to God by 'natural powers' resonates with the Reformed doctrine of Total Depravity or human inability. The divergence is minimal here, as both view Christ as the Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20) who secures access for believers.

2. CHRIST AS LITURGICAL HIGH PRIEST

Assertion: Christ is the center and principal actor of the liturgy that honors the Father in heaven.

"As 'high priest of the good things to come' he is the centre and the principal actor of the liturgy that honours the Father in heaven."

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals enthusiastically affirm Christ's High Priestly intercession (Hebrews 7:25), the Catholic use of the term 'liturgy' (leitourgia) here bridges the heavenly reality to the earthly Mass. In Catholic theology, the earthly liturgy participates in this heavenly liturgy. Evangelicals view the work of atonement as 'finished' (John 19:30) and distinct from church service 'liturgies.' The friction lies in whether this 'liturgy' implies a re-presentation of the sacrifice or solely intercession.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: No

Theological Gap: This specific section of the Catechism (659-664) is a robust defense of orthodox Christology that aligns almost perfectly with the Evangelical Baseline. It affirms the physical resurrection, the historical ascension, the intercessory role of Christ, and the exclusivity of Christ as the way to the Father. The only potential 'gap' is the semantic loading of the word 'liturgy' in paragraph 662, which in broader Catholic theology connects the heavenly intercession to the Eucharistic sacrifice. However, reading strictly within the bounds of this text, the divergence is minimal to non-existent.

Shared Values:

The bodily Ascension of Christ; The physical Resurrection; Christ's session at the Right Hand of the Father; The inability of man to save himself (natural powers); The eternal nature of Christ's Kingdom; The Trinity (consubstantiality mentioned in 663)

Friction Points:

1. [Minor] Christology (Finished Work) – The term 'liturgy' suggests an ongoing ritualistic work, whereas Evangelicals emphasize the 'finished' nature of the atonement.

Semantic Warnings:

"Liturgy"

In Text: The service Christ performs in heaven as High Priest (Para 662).

Evangelical: Often translated as 'ministry' or 'service' (leitourgia) in Hebrews 8:6, referring to Christ's priestly work.

Example: Evangelicals view this liturgy as Christ's intercession alone; Catholics view the earthly Mass as a participation in this heavenly liturgy.

"Veiled"

In Text: The glory of the Risen Christ hidden under ordinary humanity appearances (Para 659).

Evangelical: Not a standard technical term in Evangelical theology for the 40 days, but conceptually accepted.

Example: The text uses 'veiled' to explain why Jesus looked human despite being glorified.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Access to the 'Father's house', God's life and happiness (Para 661).

How Attained: Through Christ, who opens the access that natural powers cannot reach.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence that the members will follow the Head (Para 661).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text does not explicitly mention faith vs. works here; it focuses on the objective work of Christ opening the way. It is compatible with Sola Fide in its denial of 'natural powers' to save.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Implicit Obligations:

1. Belief in the bodily Ascension of Jesus.
2. Reliance on Christ alone for access to the Father.
3. Recognition of Christ's ongoing intercession.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Participation in the 'liturgy' (implied by the connection of Christ's priesthood to liturgy in para 662).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says humanity left to 'natural powers' cannot access God. How does that shape your view of good works? Do they help us access God, or is it entirely Christ?
2. Paragraph 662 mentions Christ's 'liturgy' in heaven. How do you understand the relationship between what Christ is doing in heaven right now and what happened on the Cross?
3. It says we have 'confidence' that we will go where Christ has gone. On what do you base that confidence personally?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Head and the Members – Just as the head goes through a door and the body must follow, Christ's entry into heaven guarantees the believer's entry. [Ephesians 2:6 ('seated us with him in the heavenly places')]
2. The Impossible Gap – This admits the futility of religion/works without a Savior. [Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8-9]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Ritual Dependence [Mild] – By linking Christ's heavenly intercession to 'liturgy,' the believer may feel that their connection to Christ's intercession is dependent on their participation in the earthly liturgy (Mass), rather than direct access through faith.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Divine Revelation recorded in Scripture, interpreted by the Church.

Verification Method: Acceptance of the Apostolic witness (Paul, the Twelve) and the teaching authority of the Church.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals would accept the scriptural proofs but might contest the liturgical extrapolations derived from them.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1997 (Latin typical edition)

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

Textual Issues: None relevant to this excerpt.