

PART ONE, SECTION TWO, CHAPTER TWO, ARTICLE 7 (PARAGRAPHS 668-677)

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

OVERVIEW

This section of the Catechism expounds upon the article of the Creed: 'From thence he will come again to judge the living and the dead.' It establishes that Christ's Ascension inaugurated his messianic Kingdom, yet this reign remains 'under attack' by evil powers until the end of time. The text emphasizes an 'already/not yet' tension: Christ dwells on earth in his Church, and the Kingdom is present in mystery, yet the Church possesses a sanctity that is 'real but imperfect.' A significant portion is dedicated to the signs preceding the Second Coming. It explicitly states that the return is suspended until the recognition of the Messiah by 'all Israel,' citing the 'full inclusion' of the Jews as a prerequisite for the consummation of history. The text warns of a final trial—a 'mystery of iniquity' and religious deception centered on the Antichrist—where man glorifies himself in place of God. Theologically, it firmly rejects 'millenarianism' (the idea of a literal earthly golden age within history) and 'secular messianism' (political utopias). Instead, it teaches that the Church will not triumph through progressive historical ascendancy but must follow Christ in his death and Resurrection—a 'final Passover.' The Kingdom will be fulfilled only by God's direct intervention in the Last Judgment.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (Lord of History), The Father, The Holy Spirit, The Church (The Bride/Body), Israel (The Jewish People), The Antichrist, St. Peter, St. Paul

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE CHURCH AS THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

Assertion: The Kingdom of Christ is already present in mystery on earth within the Church, which possesses a real but imperfect sanctity.

"The kingdom of Christ [is] already present in mystery", "on earth, the seed and the beginning of the kingdom". (669)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals agree that the Kingdom is 'already/not yet,' the Catechism identifies the institutional Church much more closely with the Kingdom itself ('seed and beginning'). Evangelical theology generally distinguishes between the visible church (institution) and the invisible church (true believers), and sees the Kingdom as the spiritual reign of God in hearts, rather than an entity possessing 'imperfect sanctity' through sacraments and institutions.

2. ESCHATOLOGICAL ROLE OF THE EUCHARIST

Assertion: Christians pray for the hastening of Christ's return 'above all in the Eucharist.'

"That is why Christians pray, above all in the Eucharist, to hasten Christ's return by saying to him: Maranatha! (671)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Catechism elevates the Eucharist to the central act of eschatological anticipation. For the Evangelical, prayer for the return of Christ is a constant posture of the believer's heart and not tethered to the sacramental liturgy. This reflects the Catholic view of the Mass as a re-presentation of the sacrifice, whereas Evangelicals view the ordinance as a memorial ('do this in remembrance of me').

3. THE CORPORATE PASSOVER OF THE CHURCH

Assertion: The Church will not triumph historically but must follow Christ in his death and Resurrection (a final Passover).

"The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection. (677)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine personifies the Church as a corporate entity that must mystically re-enact the life of Christ, including his death. While Evangelicals expect persecution (Matthew 24), they do not typically frame the end times as a sacramental 'Passover' of the institution itself, but rather as the rescue of the saints (Rapture/Gathering) and the judgment of the world.

4. REJECTION OF MILLENARIANISM

Assertion: The Church rejects the claim that the messianic hope can be realized within history (millenarianism) or through secular politics.

"The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism... (676)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Catechism classifies 'millenarianism' (the belief in a literal earthly reign of Christ before the final judgment) as a 'falsification.' This puts Catholic doctrine in direct opposition to Dispensationalism and Historic Premillennialism, which are dominant views in American Evangelicalism. Amillennial Evangelicals, however, would align with the Catholic rejection of a literal earthly golden age.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Partial

Theological Gap: While the eschatological endpoints (Judgment, New Heavens/Earth) are similar, the journey there differs. The Catholic text posits the Church as a sacramental institution that must undergo a 'Passover'—a mystical participation in Christ's death. This imbues the institution itself with a role in salvation history that Evangelicals reserve for Christ alone. Furthermore, the explicit rejection of Millenarianism alienates Premillennial Evangelicals who hold to a literal interpretation of Revelation 20. Finally, the focus on the Eucharist as the primary vehicle for eschatological prayer shifts the focus from the believer's direct access to God to a mediated, sacramental access.

Shared Values:

Jesus is Lord of history; The Second Coming is literal and physical; The Resurrection of the dead; The existence of a personal Antichrist; Rejection of secular/political utopias; Final Judgment by God

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Scriptura / Universal Priesthood – The text ties the Kingdom's presence to the institutional Church and its sacraments, implying a mediating structure is necessary for the Kingdom's presence.
2. [Minor] Sola Fide / Sola Gratia – Elevating the Eucharist as the place where Christians 'above all' pray for the return suggests a ritualistic necessity for eschatological hope.
3. [Moderate] Christology (Uniqueness of Christ's Passion) – The idea that the Church must undergo a 'final Passover' risks conflating the suffering of believers with the redemptive work of Christ, or at least creating a required 'corporate martyrdom' for the institution.
4. [Major] Sola Scriptura (Hermeneutics) – Dogmatic rejection of Millenarianism (literal 1000 years) binds the conscience to an Amillennial view, excluding other biblical interpretations held by many Evangelicals.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Church"

In Text: The institutional body with sacraments, hierarchy, and 'imperfect sanctity' that is the seed of the Kingdom.

Evangelical: The invisible body of all true believers in Christ, regardless of institutional affiliation (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Example: In CCC 669, Christ dwells 'in his Church' implies the institution; Evangelicals believe Christ dwells in the individual believer's heart by faith (Ephesians 3:17).

"Mystery"

In Text: A reality present in the sacraments and the Church structure that is real but not fully manifest.

Evangelical: A truth previously hidden but now revealed by God (Colossians 1:26).

Example: The 'Kingdom present in mystery' in the CCC refers to the sacramental reality; in the Bible, it often refers to the inclusion of Gentiles or the Gospel message itself.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Participation in the Kingdom, which involves the 'full inclusion' of Israel and the Church's passage through a final trial.

How Attained: Implicitly through adherence to the Church ('in her sacraments') and endurance to the end.

Basis of Assurance: The objective victory of God over evil, yet subject to the 'imperfect sanctity' of the present time.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on corporate destiny and sacramental participation rather than individual justification by faith alone. The emphasis is on the Church's journey rather than the individual's standing in Christ.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Pray 'Maranatha' (Our Lord, come!)
2. Wait and watch for the return of Christ
3. Reject secular messianism and millenarianism

Implicit Obligations:

1. Participate in the Eucharist as the primary means of hastening the return
2. Endure the 'final trial' and persecution without apostasy
3. Accept the 'imperfect sanctity' of the Church institution

Ritual Requirements:

1. The Eucharist (identified as the place where the return is prayed for)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The Catechism mentions the Church has a sanctity that is 'real but imperfect.' How does that impact your confidence in the Church's leadership versus trusting in Christ's perfect righteousness?
2. What do you think is meant by the Church needing to pass through a 'final Passover'? How does that relate to Christ's finished work on the cross?
3. When you pray 'Maranatha' in the Mass, do you feel you are hastening Christ's return? How does that affect your daily prayer life outside the Mass?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for Justice – Humans long for a justice that politics cannot provide. This points to the need for a Savior who solves the internal problem of sin, not just external structures. [2 Peter 3:13 ('...a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.')]
2. The Imperfect Church – Admitting the Church is imperfect bridges to the Gospel truth that our hope is not in the institution or other believers, but solely in the perfect Christ. [Hebrews 12:2 ('fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Deception/Trial [Moderate] – The text emphasizes a 'final trial' that will 'shake the faith of many.' This creates a burden of anxiety regarding one's ability to withstand the Antichrist's deception without the institutional safety net.
2. Ritual Dependence [Mild] – By tying the prayer for the return to the Eucharist, the believer may feel their eschatological hope is dependent on access to the Mass rather than their personal relationship with Jesus.
3. Intellectual Restriction [Moderate] – The dogmatic rejection of millenarianism restricts the believer from exploring literal interpretations of Revelation, enforcing a specific historicist/amillennial view as the only 'safe' orthodoxy.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Dogmatic Theology derived from Scripture and Tradition.

Verification Method: Adherence to the Magisterium's interpretation of history and prophecy.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals verify truth by testing it against Scripture alone (Acts 17:11). The CCC presents the Church's interpretation of the 'final trial' and 'millenarianism' as authoritative dogma, not merely one exegetical option.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1997 (Latin Typical Edition)

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

Textual Issues: No significant manuscript issues; this is a modern dogmatic text.