

# PART THREE, SECTION ONE, CHAPTER TWO, ARTICLE 2 (PARAGRAPHS 1897-1904)

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

## OVERVIEW

This section of the Catechism delineates the Catholic understanding of political authority and social participation. It asserts that human society inherently requires authority to function and prosper, defining authority as the power to make laws and expect obedience. Crucially, it grounds this authority not merely in social contract, but in the 'moral order' established by God, explicitly citing Romans 13 to affirm that resisting legitimate authority is resisting God. However, the text balances this high view of authority with strict limitations: authority exists solely to serve the 'common good.' It validates the diversity of political regimes (implicitly supporting democracy) provided they respect natural law and human rights. It introduces a critical 'conscience clause,' stating that if rulers enact unjust laws or violate the moral order, such authority 'breaks down' and is not binding in conscience. It concludes by advocating for the 'rule of law' and the separation of powers to prevent arbitrary despotism.

## KEY FIGURES

God (The ultimate source of authority), Civil Rulers/Authorities, The Citizen/Subject, The Community

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. DIVINE ORIGIN OF CIVIL AUTHORITY

**Assertion:** Political authority is not merely a human construct but a requirement of the moral order established by God.

*"The authority required by the moral order derives from God... 'For there is no authority except from God' (1899)."*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Both Catholicism and Evangelicalism affirm the divine institution of civil government based on Romans 13. Evangelicals view this as part of God's common grace to restrain evil and promote order. The Catechism aligns here, viewing authority as necessary for the 'unity of the state.' The divergence is minimal on the source, but may differ on the scope; Catholicism ties this authority intrinsically to the 'common good' and 'natural law,' whereas some Evangelical streams emphasize the state's role primarily as a restrainer of evil (sword-bearer) rather than a promoter of social virtue.

### 2. LEGITIMACY VIA NATURAL LAW AND COMMON GOOD

**Assertion:** Authority is only legitimate if it seeks the common good and employs morally licit means; unjust laws are not binding.

*"Regimes whose nature is contrary to the natural law... cannot achieve the common good... If rulers were to enact unjust laws... such arrangements would not be binding in conscience (1901, 1903)."*

**Evangelical Comparison:** While Evangelicals affirm the duty to disobey the state when it commands sin (Acts 5:29), the Catechism provides a more philosophical framework for this resistance: 'Natural Law.' The CCC asserts that a law loses its binding nature not just when it contradicts Scripture, but when it violates the 'natural law' or fails the 'common good.' Evangelicals generally rely on Sola Scriptura as the gauge for civil disobedience, whereas the Catholic position integrates philosophical reasoning and Church tradition regarding what constitutes 'natural law.'

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Partial

**Theological Gap:** While the conclusions on civil obedience are nearly identical to conservative Evangelical views, the foundation differs. The Catechism builds its argument on a synthesis of Scripture (Romans 13) and Aristotelian/Thomistic philosophy (Natural Law, the nature of the State). Evangelicalism tends to be wary of Natural Law as a primary authority due to the noetic effects of sin (the corruption of the human mind), preferring to ground civil ethics strictly in Biblical commands. Additionally, the CCC elevates the 'Common

Good' to a near-doctrinal status, whereas Evangelicals might view it as a wise principle but not a binding theological category.

#### **Shared Values:**

Divine institution of government; Duty of civil obedience; Right to conscientious objection/civil disobedience against sin; Rejection of anarchy

#### **Friction Points:**

1. [Minor] Sola Scriptura – The text elevates 'Natural Law' and the 'Common Good' (philosophical constructs) to the level of binding moral authority alongside Scripture.

#### **Semantic Warnings:**

##### **"Common Good"**

**In Text:** The sum total of social conditions which allow people to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily (defined elsewhere in CCC, implied here as the goal of authority).

**Evangelical:** Not a technical biblical term; Evangelicals usually speak of 'justice' or 'righteousness' in the public square.

**Example:** *In the CCC, a law can be invalid if it fails the 'common good' test. In Evangelicalism, a law is usually only invalid if it compels sin.*

##### **"Natural Law"**

**In Text:** The moral order inscribed in human nature, accessible by reason.

**Evangelical:** General Revelation (Romans 1:20), often viewed as insufficient for moral guidance without Scripture due to sin.

**Example:** *The CCC appeals to natural law to invalidate regimes (1901); Evangelicals appeal to Scripture.*

## **SOTERIOLOGY**

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**Salvation Defined:** Not explicitly defined in this section (focus is social ethics).

**How Attained:** N/A for this specific text.

**Basis of Assurance:** N/A

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** While not soteriological, the text implies that moral behavior in the civic sphere (obedience, seeking common good) is part of the 'moral order' required of the believer, which in Catholic theology contributes to merit/sanctification, contrasting with the Evangelical view that good works are solely the fruit of salvation.

## **MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS**

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#### **Explicit Commands:**

1. Be subject to governing authorities (1899)
2. Give due honor and respect to those in authority (1900)
3. Treat authorities with gratitude and good-will (1900)

#### **Implicit Obligations:**

1. Participate in the choice of political regimes (1901)
2. Discern whether a law is unjust or contrary to the moral order (1903)
3. Refuse obedience to unjust laws (implied by 'not binding in conscience') (1903)

## **EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**

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#### **Discovery Questions:**

1. The text says authority breaks down when it enacts unjust laws. How do you personally determine if a law is 'unjust'—is it by feelings, society's consensus, or Scripture?
2. Paragraph 1899 says resisting authority is resisting God. How do you balance that with the command to resist unjust laws in paragraph 1903? Does that create tension for you?

3. Do you believe human reason (Natural Law) is enough to determine right and wrong, or do we need the Bible to correct our reasoning?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The Broken Authority – Human authority always eventually fails or becomes abusive because of sin. This points to our need for the only truly just King, Jesus Christ, whose authority is perfect and whose yoke is easy. [Isaiah 9:6-7, Matthew 11:28-30]
2. The Need for a Mediator – Just as society needs a head to function, humanity needs a federal head to be reconciled to God. Adam failed as our head; Christ succeeded. [Romans 5:12-21]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Burden of Discernment [Moderate] – The adherent is placed in a tension: they are told resisting authority is resisting God (fear of judgment), yet they are also told not to obey unjust laws (fear of participation in sin). Without Sola Scriptura as the sole anchor, the definition of 'unjust' becomes a complex navigation of Church teaching and Natural Law, creating anxiety about when to submit and when to resist.

## **EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Reason (deducing needs from human nature) and Revelation (Scripture).

**Verification Method:** Adherents verify claims by checking if a regime serves the 'common good' and aligns with 'natural law.'

**Evangelical Contrast:** Evangelical epistemology relies primarily on Special Revelation (Scripture) to define moral duties. The CCC places high confidence in human reason's ability to discern 'natural law' and the 'common good' independent of specific biblical commands.

## **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

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**Dating:** 1992 (French), 1997 (Latin typical edition)

**Authorship:** Drafted by a commission under Joseph Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI), promulgated by John Paul II.

**Textual Issues:** None; this is a modern systematic theology text.