

PART ONE, SECTION ONE, CHAPTER THREE, ARTICLE 2 (PARAGRAPHS 166-167)

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

OVERVIEW

In this excerpt from the Catechism, the nature of faith is presented as a dual reality: it is a personal, free response to God's initiative, yet it is fundamentally non-individualistic. The text argues that faith is not self-generated ('You have not given yourself faith') but is received through a 'chain of believers.' This establishes a high ecclesiology where the Church is not merely a gathering of the saved, but an active agent-personified as 'Mother'-that teaches, supports, and sustains the individual's faith. The distinction is drawn between the 'I believe' of the baptismal profession and the 'We believe' of the conciliar definitions (Nicene Creed), suggesting that individual faith is enveloped within and carried by the corporate faith of the Church. For the Evangelical, this presents a critical nuance: while the communal aspect of Christianity is affirmed, the text elevates the institutional Church to a mediatorial role in the **act** of believing itself, asserting that one 'cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others.'

KEY FIGURES

God (The Initiator), The Church (Mother/Teacher), The Believer (The Respondent), Jesus (Object of Love), Bishops (Confessors of 'We believe')

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ECCLESIAL MEDIATION OF FAITH

Assertion: Individual faith is impossible without the support and mediation of the Church's faith.

"I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others... 'I believe' is also the Church, our mother, responding to God by faith as she teaches us"

Evangelical Comparison: The Catechism asserts that the Church, personified as a Mother, is the entity that 'teaches us to say' I believe and carries the individual believer. In contrast, Evangelical theology holds that while the Church is the **context** for discipleship, the **source** and **sustainer** of faith is the Holy Spirit working through Scripture. Evangelicals view the Church as the aggregate of those who believe, whereas this text views the Church as the repository and dispenser of faith that precedes the individual. This creates a dependency on the institution for the validity of personal faith that is foreign to the Evangelical concept of the Priesthood of the Believer.

2. APOSTOLIC TRADITION/SUCCESSION

Assertion: Faith is a deposit received from others and handed on in a continuous chain.

"The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others... Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers."

Evangelical Comparison: The text describes a 'great chain of believers' which implies an authoritative transmission of the deposit of faith. While Evangelicals agree with the duty to evangelize ('hand it on'), the Catholic context implies a structural and sacramental succession (alluded to by the mention of Bishops and Councils in para 167). For Evangelicals, the continuity of faith is maintained by the preservation of the Gospel message in Scripture (Sola Scriptura), not necessarily by an unbroken chain of human mediators or institutional hierarchy.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the locus of authority and the mechanism of grace. The Catechism presents a system where the individual is 'carried' by the Church's faith, implying a treasury of merit or a collective spiritual validity that supports the individual. This personification of the Church as 'Mother' who 'teaches' creates a hierarchical dependency. Evangelicalism, adhering to the Universal Priesthood, views the believer's relationship with God as mediated solely by Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). While Evangelicals value the

church community for edification, they deny that the Church itself is the source or necessary mediator of the act of saving faith.

Shared Values:

Faith is a response to God's initiative (Grace); Importance of Evangelism ('speak to others'); Rejection of isolationism; Use of Creeds as summaries of faith

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Universal Priesthood – The text establishes a hierarchy where the Church (Bishops/Councils) defines and mediates faith to the individual, rather than the individual having direct access to truth through Scripture.
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Authority is located in the 'faith of the Church' and Creeds rather than Scripture alone.
3. [Minor] Sola Fide – By stating one is 'carried by the faith of others,' the text obscures the necessity of personal, individual reliance on Christ alone, introducing a communal merit component.

Semantic Warnings:

"Church"

In Text: A Mother, a teacher, and a mystical body that possesses faith and mediates it to the individual.

Evangelical: The assembly (ekklesia) of called-out ones; the aggregate of all true believers in Christ.

Example: *In this text: 'The Church... teaches us.' In Evangelicalism: 'The Holy Spirit teaches us through the Word.'*

"Faith"

In Text: A deposit received from the Church and a communal act of the 'We'.

Evangelical: Personal trust and reliance on Christ alone for salvation (Sola Fide).

Example: *In this text: 'Received faith from others.' In Evangelicalism: 'Faith comes from hearing the message of Christ' (Romans 10:17).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly, being part of the 'chain of believers' and responding to God.

How Attained: Through a response to God that is supported and carried by the Church (Sacramental/Communal).

Basis of Assurance: The stability of the Church's faith ('carried by the faith of others') rather than the finished work of Christ alone.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text qualifies the 'personal act' of faith by making it dependent on the collective. Sola Fide emphasizes that the individual stands justified before God solely on Christ's merit, not 'carried' by the church's collective faith.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Hand on the faith to others
2. Speak to others about our faith

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the Church's teaching ('she teaches us')
2. Participate in the corporate confession ('We believe')
3. Rely on the community for spiritual sustenance

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism (context for 'I believe')
2. Liturgical assembly (context for 'We believe')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says 'I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others.' How does that impact your assurance if you feel let down by the Church community?
2. When the Catechism calls the Church 'our Mother,' what role does she play in your salvation that Jesus doesn't play directly?
3. Do you feel your faith is primarily a direct response to God's Word, or is it dependent on the Church's teaching authority?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Chain of Believers – This connects to the 'Cloud of Witnesses' in Hebrews 12:1. It validates the desire for legacy and connection. [Hebrews 12:1-2 (We are surrounded by witnesses, but we look to Jesus, not the witnesses, for salvation).]
2. No one can live alone – Highlights the human need for family, which God provides through adoption into His family. [Romans 8:15-16 (Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Institutional Dependency [Severe] – The believer may feel they cannot access God or truth without the mediation of the Church. If the institution falters (e.g., scandals), the individual's personal faith foundation is threatened because they are 'carried' by it.
2. Obligation of Tradition [Moderate] – The pressure to 'hand on' the faith exactly as received from the hierarchy creates a burden of doctrinal precision and submission, rather than the freedom of sharing a personal testimony of grace.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Mediated Revelation (God reveals -> Church receives -> Church teaches -> Individual believes)

Verification Method: Alignment with the 'faith of the Church' and the Creeds.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology is Direct Revelation (God reveals in Scripture -> Holy Spirit illuminates -> Individual believes). The text inserts the Church as an epistemological necessity ('teaches us to say').

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1997 (Latin typical edition)

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

Textual Issues: No manuscript issues; this is a modern doctrinal summary.