

# PART ONE, SECTION ONE, CHAPTER THREE (PARAGRAPHS 142-184)

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

## OVERVIEW

This section of the Catechism, titled 'Man's Response to God,' articulates the Catholic understanding of faith. It begins by establishing faith as a personal adherence to the Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While acknowledging faith as a supernatural gift requiring the interior help of the Holy Spirit, the text strongly emphasizes the human component: the 'obedience of faith' involves the complete submission of intellect and will. Crucially, the text transitions from personal faith to ecclesial faith, asserting that the Church is the 'Mother' of faith. It argues that the Church believes first and that the individual receives faith through the Church. It explicitly rejects a 'faith alone' epistemology that bypasses the Church, citing St. Cyprian's dictum that one cannot have God as Father without the Church as Mother. The text also addresses the relationship between faith and reason (compatibility), the necessity of faith for salvation, and the possibility of losing this gift through sin or negligence. It concludes by defining the content of faith as everything contained in the written Word of God or handed down by Tradition which the Church proposes for belief.

## KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, God the Father, The Holy Spirit, The Virgin Mary, Abraham, St. Peter, St. Augustine, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Cyprian, St. Thomas Aquinas

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. ECCLESIAL MEDIATION OF FAITH

**Assertion:** Faith is not merely individual; the Church believes first, and the individual receives faith and life through the Church, who is 'Mother.'

*"It is the Church that believes first... It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism... 'No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother'"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Evangelical theology teaches that the Church is the result of faith, formed by the gathering of those who have already believed in the Gospel (Ephesians 1:13). The Catechism reverses this order, suggesting the Church 'precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes' the individual's faith (Para 181). While Evangelicals value the church for discipleship, they reject the notion that the institution is the 'Mother' of salvation or a necessary mediator for the 'obedience of faith.'

### 2. THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

**Assertion:** Faith is defined as the complete submission of the human intellect and will to God and, by extension, to what the Church proposes.

*"By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God... We believe all 'that which is contained in the word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church proposes for belief'"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** For Evangelicals, the 'obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5) is responding to the Gospel call to trust Christ. In this text, the definition is broadened to include an intellectual assent to 'all that... the Church proposes for belief' (Para 182). This binds the conscience of the believer not just to Scripture (Sola Scriptura), but to the developing dogmas of the Roman Catholic institution, creating a dual authority structure rejected by Evangelicals.

### 3. LOSS OF SALVATION

**Assertion:** Faith is a free gift that can be lost through negligence or rejection of conscience.

*"We can lose this priceless gift... By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith."*

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text explicitly warns that faith can be lost (Para 162), citing 1 Timothy. While some Evangelical traditions (Arminian) agree that apostasy is possible, the Reformed Evangelical baseline emphasizes that true faith is sustained by God's power (Philippians 1:6, John 10:28). The Catechism places a heavy emphasis on the believer's responsibility to 'wage the good warfare' to maintain their standing, introducing a maintenance-based anxiety regarding salvation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

**Theological Gap:** While both traditions affirm the necessity of faith, the 'object' and 'mechanism' of faith differ significantly. For the Evangelical, faith is trust in Christ's finished work as revealed in Scripture. For the Catholic (as presented here), faith is a submission to the Church's teaching authority which is viewed as the 'Mother' of the believer. The text explicitly states, 'No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother' (Para 181). This creates a fundamental incompatibility with the Evangelical doctrine of the Universal Priesthood, where every believer has direct access to the Father through the Son (Hebrews 4:16), without the necessity of an institutional mediator.

Shared Values:

Trinitarian nature of God; Divinity of Jesus Christ; Necessity of faith for salvation; Faith involves both intellect and will; Compatibility of faith and reason

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Explicitly includes 'handed down' tradition and Church propositions as binding objects of faith (Para 182).
- 2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes the Church as the 'Mother' and teacher without whom one cannot have God as Father (Para 181).
- 3. [Major] Sola Fide – While affirming faith is necessary, it defines faith as 'working through charity' (Para 162) and implies salvation is a process that can be lost, rather than a declared status.
- 4. [Major] Assurance of Salvation – Teaches that faith can be 'shipwrecked' and lost, denying the assurance of eternal security (Para 162).

Semantic Warnings:

"Faith"

**In Text:** Submission of intellect and will to God AND to all that the Church proposes for belief (Para 182).  
**Evangelical:** Trust and reliance on God's character and promises, specifically the finished work of Christ (Romans 4:5).  
**Example:** *In this text, 'Faith' includes accepting dogmas like Papal Infallibility (implied in 'what the Church proposes'). In Evangelicalism, 'Faith' is resting in Christ alone.*

"Church"

**In Text:** The Mother of believers, a necessary institution that precedes and engenders faith (Para 168).  
**Evangelical:** The body of Christ, comprised of all true believers, gathered by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:27).  
**Example:** *The text says the Church 'sustains my faith.' Evangelicals would say the Spirit sustains faith through the Word, within the fellowship of the church.*

SOTERIOLOGY

**Salvation Defined:** Eternal life, the beatific vision (seeing God face to face), fellowship with God.  
**How Attained:** By faith (which includes baptism and works of charity) and perseverance to the end.  
**Basis of Assurance:** There is no absolute assurance; confidence is based on 'motives of credibility' and the hope of persevering.  
**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text quotes Mark 16:16 ('believes and is baptized'), linking ritual to salvation. It also demands faith 'working through charity' (Para 162), conflating justification with sanctification, whereas Sola Fide distinguishes them (Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Submit intellect and will to God (Para 143)
- 2. Believe in Jesus Christ (Para 151)
- 3. Nourish faith with the Word of God (Para 162)
- 4. Beg the Lord to increase faith (Para 162)

5. Turn to witnesses of faith (Mary, Abraham) in times of trial (Para 165)

**Implicit Obligations:**

1. Accept all dogmas proposed by the Church as divinely revealed
2. View the Church as a spiritual Mother necessary for salvation
3. Maintain faith through works of charity (Para 162)

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Baptism (referenced as the means of receiving faith/new life in Para 168)
2. Profession of the Creed ('I believe', 'We believe' in Para 167-168)

## **EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**

---

**Discovery Questions:**

1. The Catechism says we believe 'because of the authority of God himself.' How do you distinguish between God's authority and the Church's authority?
2. Paragraph 162 mentions we can 'shipwreck' our faith. How does that impact your peace with God on a daily basis?
3. If faith is a personal adherence to God (Para 150), why is the Church described as the 'Mother' without whom we cannot have God as Father (Para 181)?
4. When the text says we must believe 'all that the Church proposes,' does that ever feel like a burden to your intellect?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. Faith seeks understanding – This desire is good and God-given. In the Gospel, this understanding comes through the Spirit illuminating the Word, leading to a deeper relationship with Christ, rather than just intellectual assent to dogmas. [Ephesians 1:17-18]
2. The desire for certainty – The text acknowledges the human need for a solid foundation. The Gospel offers this certainty not through an infallible institution, but through the finished work of Christ and the promise of God that cannot lie. [Hebrews 6:19]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Intellectual Submission [Moderate] – The requirement to submit the intellect not just to God, but to 'all that the Church proposes' creates a burden of having to defend or accept extra-biblical dogmas (e.g., Marian dogmas) that may conflict with biblical reading.
2. Dependency [Severe] – By defining the Church as 'Mother,' the believer is kept in a state of spiritual dependency on the institution for access to the Father, hindering direct spiritual maturity and confidence.
3. Uncertainty/Fear [Moderate] – The teaching that faith can be 'shipwrecked' and must be maintained by 'waging war' creates a subtle but constant fear of losing one's salvation, robbing the believer of the peace of Christ.

## **EPISTEMOLOGY**

---

**Knowledge Source:** Revelation (Scripture + Tradition) interpreted by the Church, supported by Reason.

**Verification Method:** Motives of credibility (miracles, prophecies, the Church's growth/holiness) and the authority of the Church itself.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit through the written Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). The Catechism adds 'external proofs' (Para 156) and the institutional Church's teaching authority as necessary verification methods, suggesting that the Bible alone is insufficient for full certainty without the Church's guidance.

## **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

---

**Dating:** 1997 (Latin typical edition)

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

**Textual Issues:** The text relies heavily on selective Patristic quotes (Augustine, Irenaeus) to bolster the authority of the institutional Church.