

PART ONE SECTION TWO CHAPTER TWO ARTICLE 3 (PARAGRAPHS 456-483)

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

OVERVIEW

This excerpt from the Catechism of the Catholic Church provides a systematic theological exposition of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It begins by outlining the four primary reasons for the Incarnation: to save humanity by reconciling us with God, to reveal God's love, to serve as a model of holiness, and—most distinctively—to make believers 'partakers of the divine nature' (Theosis). The text then moves into a rigorous historical defense of Christology, citing the Ecumenical Councils (Nicaea, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Constantinople) to refute heresies such as Docetism, Arianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism. It affirms the Hypostatic Union: that Christ possesses two natures, divine and human, united in one divine Person without confusion or division. Furthermore, it addresses the reality of Christ's human soul, knowledge, and will, asserting that His human will perfectly submits to the divine will. Finally, the text utilizes the doctrine of the Incarnation to justify the use and veneration of holy images (icons), arguing that because the invisible God took on a visible human face, He may be legitimately portrayed and venerated.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, The Virgin Mary, St. Athanasius, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Cyril of Alexandria, Arius, Nestorius, Apollinarius of Laodicea

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

Assertion: Jesus Christ is true God and true man, with two natures united in one divine Person, without confusion or separation.

"He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. (Para 464)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine represents a significant point of convergence between Evangelicalism and Catholicism. Both traditions accept the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) regarding the two natures of Christ. The Catechism's rejection of Arianism (Christ is created) and Docetism (Christ only appeared human) aligns perfectly with conservative Evangelical theology. The text's insistence that Christ is 'consubstantial with the Father' is a shared orthodox pillar.

2. DEIFICATION (THEOSIS)

Assertion: The Son of God became man so that humans might become God/gods.

"For the Son of God became man so that we might become God. ... The only-begotten Son of God... assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods. (Para 460)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Catechism explicitly quotes St. Athanasius and St. Thomas Aquinas using the phrase 'make men gods.' In Catholic theology, this refers to a participation in the divine nature (grace) rather than an ontological change into the Godhead. However, for the Evangelical baseline, this language is startling and often rejected. Evangelicals emphasize 'imputed righteousness' and 'glorification' but maintain a strict boundary between the nature of the Creator and the nature of the creature, viewing the phrase 'become God' as potentially heretical or confusingly similar to Mormon exaltation or New Age pantheism.

3. LEGITIMACY OF HOLY IMAGES (ICONODULISM)

Assertion: Because God took on a visible human form, it is legitimate to portray and venerate holy images of Him.

"Since the Word became flesh in assuming a true humanity, Christ's body was finite. Therefore the human face of Jesus can be portrayed... the believer who venerates the icon is venerating in it the person of the one depicted. (Para 476-477)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Catechism relies on the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II, 787 AD) to justify icons. The logic is Christological: the Incarnation abrogates the absolute ban on images because God has made Himself visible. The Evangelical baseline, particularly those influenced by the Reformed tradition, often

rejects this, adhering to a stricter interpretation of the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-5). Evangelicals distinguish between art and 'veneration,' viewing the latter as bordering on or constituting idolatry.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Partial

Theological Gap: The fundamental Christology (who Jesus is) is nearly identical between the Catechism and the Evangelical baseline. Both affirm the Hypostatic Union. The gap opens in the *implications* of the Incarnation. First, the Catechism teaches that God became man so we might 'become God' (Para 460). While nuanced in Catholic theology as participation in grace, this phrasing violates the Evangelical emphasis on the permanent distinction between Creator and creature. Second, the Catechism uses the Incarnation to mandate the veneration of images (Para 477), which the Evangelical baseline rejects as a violation of the Second Commandment and a distraction from Sola Fide/Sola Scriptura.

Shared Values:

The Trinity; The Deity of Christ; The Humanity of Christ; The Virgin Birth; The Atonement (Expiation for sins); Rejection of Gnosticism and Arianism

Friction Points:

- 1. [Major] Theology Proper (Creator/Creature Distinction) – The assertion that humans 'become God' (even if qualified) blurs the absolute distinction between the Uncreated God and created humanity maintained in strict Evangelical theology.
- 2. [Major] Sola Scriptura / Second Commandment – The authorization of image veneration is based on Conciliar tradition (Nicaea II), not explicit Scripture, and appears to violate the biblical prohibition against bowing to images.

Semantic Warnings:

"Become God / Make men gods"

In Text: To partake in the divine nature through grace and adoption (Theosis).
Evangelical: Evangelicals interpret 2 Peter 1:4 as moral likeness and communion, rejecting the phrase 'become God' to avoid pantheistic or polytheistic implications.
Example: CCC 460: 'The Son of God became man so that we might become God.'

"Venerate"

In Text: To show honor to a person represented by an image, distinct from adoration (worship) due only to God.
Evangelical: Evangelicals often view bowing to or kissing images as indistinguishable from worship (idolatry) prohibited by Exodus 20.
Example: CCC 477: 'The believer who venerates the icon is venerating in it the person of the one depicted.'

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Reconciliation with God, knowing God's love, and partaking in the divine nature (becoming gods).

How Attained: Through the Incarnation and the believer's entry into communion with the Word (Para 460).

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tied to the objective reality of the Incarnation and the Church's dogmatic stability, rather than individual subjective assurance.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the *ontological* change in humanity (becoming partakers of divine nature) rather than the *forensic* declaration of righteousness (justification) emphasized in Sola Fide. The mechanism is 'communion' and 'effective offering of oneself' (Para 459) rather than faith alone.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Confess the Nicene Creed (Para 456)
- 2. Listen to Jesus (Para 459)
- 3. Love one another as Jesus loved (Para 459)

4. Venerate holy images/icons (Para 477)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the definitions of the Ecumenical Councils (Nicaea, Ephesus, Chalcedon, etc.) as authoritative binding truth
2. Reject specific Christological heresies (Arianism, Nestorianism, etc.)
3. Participate in the 'divine nature' through the means provided by the Church

Ritual Requirements:

1. Veneration of icons (Para 477)
2. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Para 478)
3. Liturgical recitation of Creeds (Para 456)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In paragraph 460, the Catechism says the Son of God became man 'so that we might become God.' How do you understand that phrase in light of God being the Creator and us being creatures?
2. Paragraph 477 mentions venerating icons because we are venerating the person depicted. How does this practice help you trust in Jesus's finished work, or do you find it difficult to distinguish from the worship due only to God?
3. The text says Jesus is our model of holiness (459). Do you feel you must imitate Him *to be* saved, or do you imitate Him *because* you are saved?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Human Face of God – Humanity longs to see God. The text correctly identifies that in Jesus, God became accessible and knowable. This bridges to the Gospel truth that we don't need to climb up to God; He came down to us. [John 1:18, Hebrews 1:3]
2. Sympathy of the Savior – This connects deeply with the human need for being understood. Jesus isn't a distant deity but one who felt human emotion, pain, and love, making Him a perfect High Priest. [Hebrews 4:15]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Ontological Pressure / Theosis [Moderate] – The concept of 'becoming God' can create a subtle but heavy burden to achieve a level of holiness or spiritual state that transcends human limitation, potentially obscuring the peace of being a sinner saved by grace.
2. Ritual Complexity [Mild] – The requirement to navigate the distinction between 'veneration' (of icons/saints) and 'worship' (of God) creates a constant spiritual tension and fear of idolatry that is absent in the simplicity of Sola Fide.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Dogmatic Revelation preserved by the Church. Truth is known through the synthesis of Scripture, Council decrees, and Liturgical tradition.

Verification Method: Adherence to the historic creeds and councils of the Church.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit through Scripture alone (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). The Catechism relies on the Church's magisterial authority to define what is true (e.g., defining Mary as Theotokos to protect Christology).

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 on specific translations of Patristic texts (Athanasius, Aquinas) that emphasize theosis.