

Catholics and the Covenants

By Steve Ray

Hello Jerry:

It was good talking with you on the phone. Sounds like your summer is about as busy as ours. Anyway, . . .

. . . following is a chart describing my understanding of the Catholic teaching on the Covenants, followed by a few paragraphs from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC)⁴. They relate to the covenants which I told you I would send over when we talked on the phone the other day. These paragraphs appear early on in the *Catechism* and are in the context of the progressive revelation of God to His people. The Catholic Church has always taught the covenants of God are ever-expanding as he reveals Himself to an ever-expanding group of people in His plan to redeem back for Himself members of every tribe and nation. I have an extra copy of the *Catechism* which I will give you; it is a fascinating piece of work.

The New Covenant, ratified by the blood of Christ Himself, the Creator, brings all parties within the scope of salvation and the New Covenant - Jew and Gentile. Jesus tells us in John 10:16 that *“And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold [non-Jews]; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd.”* Paul tells us that the great mystery is that the plan of God is to include not just the Jew but also the Gentile (Eph 3:3-6) - the whole world. They would have a new covenant and offer a new and pure sacrifice (Mal 1:11) which has been understood from the first century to refer to the Eucharist: *“My name will be great among the nations [gentiles], from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the Lord Almighty.*” (Endnote 1)

This is an overview of my understanding of the progressive covenants by which the Catholic Church teaches that God revealed Himself and brought His redemption to the world. I put it in a table format for ease of reading.

THE COVENANTS OF GOD

Type of Covenant/ Group of People	Patriarch-Father figure and (Successor and/or Deputy)	Sign of the Covenant; Promise
Individual/Couple	Adam (son, namely Seth)	Skins (sacrifice); <i>Promise</i> of future seed and redemption
Family	Noah (three sons)	Rainbow; <i>Promise</i> to all creation of no future flood
Tribe	Abraham (Isaac, Ishmael excluded, and the Twelve)	Circumcision; Name change; <i>Promise</i> of seed to

	tribes)	outnumber the stars
Nation	Moses (Prophets, priests, judges) e.g., Ex. 18:13 ff.; Mt 23:2 (Endnote 2)	Passover; Sabbath; <i>Promise</i> of the Land and prosperity for obedience
Kingdom (Intended to eventually include other nations drawn to the God of Israel, thus the marriage contracts/treaties with other nations)	David succeeded to the <i>throne</i> by his sons; (<i>authority “over the house”</i> to his Royal Steward, e.g. Is 22:15-24) (Endnote 3)	Temple; Throne; <i>Promise</i> of a future eternal kingdom and Messiah to inherit the throne of David (Is. 9:6-7)
World/Church (covenant expanded to Gentiles; visible patriarchy/hierarchy; qualitatively the same as previous covenants, but quantitatively expanded)	Jesus succeeds David and re-establishes the <i>Throne of David</i> (Lu 1:32-33); (re-establishes the dynastic <i>office of Royal Steward</i> with Peter, e.g. Mt 16:13-20; Jn 21:15-17)	Baptism (Ez 35:25-26; Jn 3:5); Eucharist (Mal 1:11; Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 8:6); <i>Promise</i> of Eternal Life and Resurrection (e.g., Jn 6:54)

I have also included the passages from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that may be of interest to you since they give a very concise overview of the progressive covenants of God. I hope it helps with your friend who is coming near to the faith. I will pray for him along with you.

The section in the CCC on the revelation of God progressively revealed through the covenants begins with the following subheading, Roman numeral II:

THE STAGES OF REVELATION

In the beginning God makes himself known

Paragraph 54 “God, who creates and conserves all things by his Word, provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities. And furthermore, wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation, he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning” (Dei Verbum 3; cf. Jn 1:3; Rom 1:19-20). (Endnote 4) He invited them to intimate communion with himself and clothed them with resplendent grace and justice.

CCC 55 This revelation was not broken off by our first parents’ sin. “After the fall, [God] buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption; and he has never ceased to show his solicitude for the human race. For he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well doing” (Dei Verbum 3; cf. Gen 3:15; Rom 2:6 7.).

“Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death...Again and again you offered a covenant to man” (Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer IV, 118).

The Covenant with Noah

CCC 56 After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin God at once sought to save humanity part by part. The covenant with Noah after the flood gives expression to the principle of the divine economy toward the “nations,” in other words, toward men grouped “in their lands, each with [its] own language, by their families, in their nations” (Gen 10:5; cf. 9:9 10, 16; 10:20 31).

CCC 57 This state of division into many nations, each entrusted by divine providence to the guardianship of angels, is at once cosmic, social and religious. It is intended to limit the pride of fallen humanity (Cf. Acts 17:26 27; Dt 4: 19; Dt (LXX) 32: 8), united only in its perverse ambition to forge its own unity as at Babel (Cf. Wis 10:5; Gen 11:4 6). But, because of sin, both polytheism and the idolatry of the nation and of its rulers constantly threaten this provisional economy with the perversion of paganism (Cf. Rom 1:18 25).

CCC 58 The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel (Cf. Gen 9:16; Lk 21:24; Dei Verbum 3). The Bible venerates several great figures among the Gentiles: Abel the just, the king priest Melchisedek a figure of Christ and the upright “Noah, Daniel, and Job” (Cf. Gen 14:18; Heb 7:3; Ezek 14:14). Scripture thus expresses the heights of sanctity that can be reached by those who live according to the covenant of Noah, waiting for Christ to “gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (Jn 11:52).

God chooses Abraham

CCC 59 In order to gather together scattered humanity God calls Abram from his country, his kindred and his father’s house (Gen 12:1), and makes him Abraham, that is, “the father of a multitude of nations.” “In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 17:5; 12:3 (LXX); cf. Gal 3:8).

CCC 60 The people descended from Abraham would be the trustee of the promise made to the patriarchs, the chosen people, called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church (Cf. Rom 11:28; Jn 11:52; 10:16). They would be the root onto which the Gentiles would be grafted, once they came to believe (Cf. Rom 11:17 18, 24).

CCC 61 The patriarchs, prophets and certain other Old Testament figures have been and always will be honored as saints in all the Church’s liturgical traditions.

God forms his people Israel

CCC 62 After the patriarchs, God formed Israel as his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them his law so that they would recognize him and serve him as the one living and true God, the provident Father and just judge, and so that they would look for

the promised Savior (Cf. Dei Verbum 3).

CCC 63 Israel is the priestly people of God, “called by the name of the LORD,” and “the first to hear the word of God” (Dt 28:10; Roman Missal, Good Friday, General Intercession VI; see also Ex 19:6), the people of “elder brethren” in the faith of Abraham.

CCC 64 Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts (Cf. Is 2:2 4; Jer 31:31 34; Heb 10:16). The prophets proclaim a radical redemption of the People of God, purification from all their infidelities, a salvation which will include all the nations (Cf. Ez 36; Is 49:5 6; 53:11). Above all, the poor and humble of the Lord will bear this hope. Such holy women as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Judith and Esther kept alive the hope of Israel’s salvation. The purest figure among them is Mary (Cf. Zeph 2:3; Lk 1:38).

III. CHRIST JESUS - “MEDIATOR AND FULLNESS OF ALL REVELATION” (Dei Verbum 2).

God has said everything in his Word

CCC 65 “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1 2). Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one. St. John of the Cross, among others, commented strikingly on Hebrews 1:1 2: *“In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word and he has no more to say... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty”* (St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2, 22, 3 5, in *The Collected Works*, tr. K. Kavanaugh OCD and O. Rodriguez OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 179 180: LH, OR Advent, wk 2, Mon.).

There will be no further Revelation

CCC 66 “The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (DEI VERBUM 4; cf. 1 Tim 6:14; Tit 2:13). Yet even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.

CCC 67 Throughout the ages, there have been so called “private” revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ’s

definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church. Christian faith cannot accept “revelations” that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfilment, as is the case in certain non Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such “revelations.”

There is a lot of rich teaching on this matter in Catholic documents, but this is just a summary from the *Catechism* and my “home-made” chart as I understand the teaching of the Catholic Church. Hope it helps. Look forward to seeing you soon. The Mounts mentioned they might like to get together again. What do you think about the three families getting together for an evening? We could have everyone over to our house and get a good movie or just talk. Let me know.

Your friend in Christ,

Steve Ray

Endnotes:

1. Malachi 1:11, (New International Version [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984]). The apostolic fathers and the whole early church understood this passage to refer to the Eucharist. Protestant Old Testament scholar Joyce Baldwin sums up the verse by noting: (1) God’s name will be honored among the nations (Gentiles), and they will come to know God; (2) this worldwide worship would not be dependent on levitical sacrifices offered in Jerusalem; and, (3) “is offered” refers to the imminent future, in which the pure offering that will transcend all previous offerings. Baldwin makes the important point that “the adjective ‘pure’ . . . is not used elsewhere to describe offerings. . . . At their best the levitical sacrifices were never described in these terms” (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, vol. 24 in the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press; 1972], 229-230). Malachi’s language is distinctly sacrificial, and is clearly explaining a unique offering, not found elsewhere in the Old Testament. This sacrifice, offered world-wide, is superior to the Jewish levitical sacrifices and could never conceivably be equated with pagan sacrifices, no matter how sincere they may be. The sacrifice (singular) will be offered world-wide (multiple sacrifices) and will supersede and be superior to all prior sacrifices. The unique sacrifice is fulfilled in the singular, once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ, whereas the best explanation for the multiple sacrifices “ from the rising to the setting of the sun” is the celebration of the Eucharist, as was understood by all those who sat at the apostles’ feet.

This leads us to see the Church, the covenant opened to all nations, Jew and Gentile, as the setting for this “pure offering” that will be offered in “every place” from the circumference of the globe. That this reference to the Eucharist was taught in the Church

can be seen as early as the *Didache* (c. 60 A.D.) which states that, “*Assemble on the Lord’s Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until they have been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, ‘Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations’ [Malachi 1:11].*” (*The Didache, or The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, sect. 14, “On Sunday Worship”, in *Early Christian Writings*, trans. by Maxwell Staniforth [Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968], 197). The Eucharist is mentioned in this way in almost every document of the first two centuries, as being the sacrifice of Malachi 1:11, esp. in relation to the “table of the Lord.”

The sacrifice is a singular “pure sacrifice”, yet it is “in every place”: The Catholic Mass answers to this perfectly. St. Augustine says, “What do you answer to that: Open your eyes at last, then, any time, and see, from the rising of the sun to its setting, the Sacrifice of Christians is offered, not in one place only, as was established with you Jews, but everywhere; and not to just any god at all, but to Him who foretold it, the God of Israel. . . . Not in one place, as was prescribed for you in the earthly Jerusalem, but in every place, even in Jerusalem herself. Not according to the order of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchizedek” (*The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 3:168).

2. New Testament scholar, Floyd V. Filson: “*The scribes, mostly Pharisees, copied, taught, and applied the Mosaic Law and the oral tradition, which they claimed was an integral part of the Law, received through a direct succession of teachers going back to Moses. Moses’ seat [was a] synagogue chair which symbolized the origin and authority of their teaching. Jesus does not challenge their claim; he seems here to approve it [Mt 23:2]*” (*A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* [New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1960], 243).

One of a multitude of quotes, St. Macarius of Egypt (c. 300-c. 390 A.D.) “*For of old Moses and Aaron, when this priesthood was theirs, suffered much; and Caiphias, when he had their chair, persecuted and condemned the Lord. . . . Afterwards Moses was succeeded by Peter, who had committed to his hands the new Church of Christ, and the true priesthood*” (*Homily 26*, in Rev. T. J. Capel’s, *The Faith of Catholics* [New York and Cincinnati: Fr. Pustet & Co., 1885], 2:22).

3. For a study of the Royal Steward who ruled the kingdom in the absence of the king see my book [Upon this Rock](#).

4. *Dei Verbum* (In English *Constitution on Divine Revelation*).

For more you should read Scott Hahn’s [A Father Who Keeps His Promises](#)