

A Place To Belong

To be human is to be in relationship, in community. The only question is what kind. We need “a place to belong”, a place where we may be truly our selves. In the first part of the Catechism, we explore the Covenant of Baptism – its benefits, its obligations – as a calling to salvation. In belonging to Christ, to God, and to his Kingdom, we become what we truly are.

BELONGING TO CHRIST I

Name-giving

QUESTION. What is your Name?

Answer. N. or N. N.

Question. Who gave you this Name?

Answer. My Sponsors in Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMES

"With whom am I speaking?" That's a phrase from old-school manuals of telephone etiquette. Now we say to the unidentified text messenger, "who is this?" The name represents the person, and by a name we may know and enter into relationship with another. Now we may remember how important a role names play in the Bible – as when God names himself to Moses (Exodus 3:13-15), or the apostles proclaim the gospel in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6, 16): the name is God's disclosing himself to us, in his power to save and bless, that we may know him and enter into relationship with him, and receive that salvation and blessing. And we may remember how the Lord gives new names to certain individuals – Abraham to Abram, or Israel to Jacob, or Peter to Simon – as a sign of a new calling from God. Names not only tell us who we are, they open the door to new relationships, new callings, and new futures. When Jesus in the garden of his tomb calls out "Mary", that one word called her from shadows of grief and despair into joy beyond hope (John 20). The first question of the Prayer Book Catechism asks "What is your name?", and in that question we know that the Catechism is not just "information" which may or may not interest us: it concerns us as individual persons, both in ourselves, and in relationship with others, and especially in relationship with God. "Thus saith the LORD ... I have called thee by name, thou art mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

So much is evident in the second question and answer: "Who gave you this name?" *Answer.* My Sponsors in Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." The giving of a name at baptism - a *given* name, a *Christian* name, as we say - calls us into relationship with God, with Christ, with his Church, in which (like Abraham, or Jacob, or Peter) we have an identity and a calling we did not have before.

NAMES AND IDENTITY

Who and what I am is something that is given, something I receive, in and through the community which God has established in relationship with himself. "My Sponsors in Baptism", my godparents, represent and speak for the spiritual family of the Church into which I am reborn by Baptism; but Baptism not only brings me into relationship with a human community, but with the God who acts through it: "wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven". To know myself, therefore, I must know God, and the Catechism's instruction is designed to help me do so. It is a manual of instruction in what it means to be what God has made in Baptism, "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven."

In our culture, it is commonly held that identity, meaning, and purpose in life are not something we receive from outside ourselves, but something we construct for ourselves, something we choose for ourselves; and it is held necessary that we be emancipated from every kind of constraint in order that we may engage in this construction. The only limit set upon this freedom is that we should not constrain the freedom of any other to do exactly the same. One may question whether this emancipation from cultural or social pressure is really what takes place: although some cultural or social constraints may be removed, other ones are subtly imposed. For example, we may be emancipated from an older sexual morality, but there is intense pressure to conform to new sexual mores. One may also question the kindness of demanding that persons choose and construct an identity for themselves, without giving them criteria for making good choices. If in the end there are no criteria, then not only all choices in the spiritual shopping mall are equally "valid" but they are also equally meaningless and pointless. Moreover, if there is no objective frame of reference by which to measure our choices, and we are left to make them solely for ourselves, then even the most altruistic choices are in fact selfish.

LOSING OUR SELVES TO FIND THEM

C. S. Lewis has this profound comment on this question of receiving one's identity from Christ.

It is no good trying to 'be myself' without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. In fact what I so proudly call 'Myself' becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I cannot stop. What I call 'My wishes' become merely the desires thrown up by my physical organism or pumped into me by other men's thoughts or even suggested to me by devils. (...) I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call 'me' can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own. (...) There are

no real personalities anywhere else [than in God]. Until you have give up your self to Him you will not have a real self.¹

What we may think of as our self is, Lewis points out, often just a “false self”. The true self is the one that is given to us in Christ. And therefore, he says, “there must be a real giving up of self”:

Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really ours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.²

In his love for us, God in Baptism has given us both a name, and a place of for us in the Body of Christ, in the Family of God, in the Kingdom of Heaven. Now we must become what we are! The purpose of the Catechism is to equip us to become everything that God has made us to be – truly ourselves.

Further Reading:

- Genesis 1:1-2:3 *Made in the image of God.*
- Genesis 11:27-12:9; 17. *Abraham and Sarah called and named by God.*
- Matthew 16:13-19. *Simon named Peter.*
- 1 Corinthians 1:1-3. *Called to be saints.*
- St. Matthew 16:24-26 – *Losing one’s life to gain it.*
- Ephesians 4:17-32 *Putting off the old man, putting on the new, becoming what we are.*

Questions for Review

- What are names for? Why do we have names?
- Why does the Catechism begin with a question about my name, and who gave it to me?
- What three-fold identity is given to me in Baptism?
- How does the culture claim identity should be constructed? What actually happens?

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp.225, 226 (HarperCollins edition).

² *Ibid*, p. 227.

- What is Lewis' critique of the "false self"?
- Where is the true self found?
- How do we receive it? how do we grow into it?

Questions for Discussion

- How does non-Christian society shape our identity? How does the Christian religion?
- Why do you think that Christ is uniquely capable of giving us our true selves?
- Discuss whether we truly know ourselves without knowledge of God? Can we truly become ourselves apart from God?
- What is the problem with the "shopping mall" approach to self-construction?
- How do come to know ourselves? what has to happen for us to become our true selves?
- It is common for parents to choose family or "fashion" names (often those of actors, celebrities, or characters from popular shows) for their children: how do think Christians might fittingly approach the naming of their children?

BELONGING TO CHRIST II

A Member of Christ

Question. Who gave you this Name?

Answer. My Sponsors in Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

GRAFTED INTO THE VINE

Grape Phylloxera is a kind of aphid, and a noxious pest of grapevines throughout the world. It attacks the roots of the vines, gradually cutting off the flow of nutrients and water to the vine itself. Originally native to eastern North America, in the late 19th century it spread to Europe where it destroyed vineyards and most of the European grape and wine industry. Fortunately, the native vines of North America though coarse are resistant to phylloxera, and when shoots or scions of the desirable European varieties were grafted into the healthy American vinestock, vines resulted that were resistant to phylloxera and bearing the refined European grapes resulted.

We too - infected indeed by the disease of sin - have been grafted into Christ (an image Paul uses of Christians in Romans 11) - the sinless vinestock - and in him we both protected from sin and made fruitful. In St. John's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). This is the key to understanding the second answer of the Catechism, that in Baptism I was made "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven". Though the images and words are different, the concept is the same: I have been grafted into Christ.

THE MEANING OF MEMBER

We often use words like "member", "child", and "inheritor" and so we assume that we know what they mean, but to understand them as the Bible does we have to dig down below the surface.

First we often speak of someone's being a member of a club, or some other group, even the church. He belongs to it, we say; and perhaps that belonging matters much to him – but even so, his belonging to it is a matter of his own choice. These are merely voluntary associations, and he can opt in and opt out of them at will, as he decides they do or do not "meet his needs". In this view the individual is essentially an autonomous consumer, and when we say that someone is a "member" of a group, we often mean no more than this "consumerist" approach would allow. But that is not what the Bible means by it.

For the Bible uses “member” in its root sense, to mean an organ or part of the body. (A usage that still applies when we call a body that has been cut into pieces “dismembered”). The eye, the ear, the arm, the leg, are *members* of the body (just as branches are of the vine). Apart from the body, they have no useful purpose; only in the body do they have a useful purpose, and it is precisely as they are in the body that they have distinctive individuality. Moreover, in the unity of the body, there is kind of fellowship or communion of members, in which a wonderful exchange that takes place. Each member contributes its own distinctive function (the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, the heart for pumping blood, the lungs for taking in oxygen, the legs for walking, etc.) and each member benefits from the distinctive functions of the others. (When I use my legs for walking, there is a benefit to being able to see where I am going!)

A MEMBER OF CHRIST

In the Biblical sense of the word, a Christian is a member of Christ, in the same or similar way a leg or an eye is a member of a human body. That’s very different from the idea of a member as someone who belongs to a club. As a member of Christ, I belong to Christ as a member belongs to the body; and he belongs to me, as a body belongs to the member. I live in him, as he lives in me. "My beloved is mine, and I am his". "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing".

This means that there is a real spiritual communion and fellowship between Christ and the Christian. "In Christ", that is, by this being made one body with him ("incorporation"), all that he is and all that he has done becomes mine also. As he died and rose again for me, so I am dead and risen with him. As God vindicates (or ‘justifies’, to use the Bible’s language) and delivers his own sinless Son from condemnation and death, so he vindicates and delivers from condemnation and death all those who belong to his Son, as members of Christ, even though they are sinners!

All that I bring to baptism – the curse and condemnation of sin, death, and hell, the legacy of Adam - Christ takes upon himself, and takes away; all that he is – the blessing of righteousness, eternal life, and heaven, his own inheritance - he freely gives to me: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree’ [quoted from Deuteronomy 21:23]: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:13, 14). So in Christ I am no longer under sin, under the law, under its power to condemn me for my sin: my sins are forgiven, because for Christ’s sake - and through faith - God accepts and accounts me righteous and just before him. (The Bible calls this *justification*, and it is the great theme of Romans 1-5, and Galatians 1-4).

We will return to the role of faith again, but for now we may note, that my incorporation in Christ's Body by Baptism takes effect through faith. Membership is an act and gift of God extended to me through Christ and his Church by means of baptism – but it is by means of faith that I receive this action and gift of God and it takes effect with all its benefits. St. Paul puts it this way: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

MEMBERS IN THE BODY

There is a further dimension to membership in Christ, which has to do with my relation to other members of Christ – other baptized and believing Christians. My belonging to Christ and of Christ to me is a belonging that takes place as a member of his Body, the church. The personal relationship with Jesus commits me to an interdependent relationship with all other members, under his headship. I cannot be a Christian apart from other Christians, whether I like them or not. Nor can I be a "facebook" Christian, choosing who shall be my "friends". That is the choice of Christ. If I start to think and act like a religious consumer, as a "cafeteria Christian" on the path of self-expressive individualism, I am false to Christ and also to myself.

In fact, however, individual Christians depend on their fellowship with one another. As we have seen, each member of the body (the ear, the eye) has its own distinctive individuality in interdependent relation to the other members of the body (the ear for hearing, the eye for seeing), so the human members of Christ's body have their individuality in interdependent relation with one another. Likewise, we each have our distinctive contribution to make to the benefit of the whole Body, and we each benefit from the distinctive contributions that others make, using the gifts that the Spirit has distributed among them for the good of all. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office [duty or function]: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another" (Romans 12:4, 5 cf. 1 Corinthians 12). Christians are not all alike - for it is precisely as members in the body that they each have distinct individual character and personality; yet that true individuality does not mean that autonomous individualism incompatible with the communion and fellowship of Christians in one Body in Christ.

Further Reading: A Member of Christ

- Ephesians 2 *In Christ Jesus, reconciled to God in one body*
- Galatians 3:22-29 *As man of you as have been baptized have put on Christ.*
- Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12, 13. *Many members in one Body, each with his own gifts.*

Questions for Review

- What are the three benefits of baptism? What does God make me in Baptism?

- What is the root meaning of the term “member”? What image does it imply?
- What does it mean in a Biblical sense to call someone "a member of Christ"?
- What "wonderful exchange" takes place between Christ and me as a member of his Body?
- What is the role of faith in this communion and exchange with Christ?
- Into what other relationships does membership in Christ bring me?

Questions for Discussion

- Read John 15:1-11 and discuss how this image of the vine and branches compares to the image of the body and members. Why is abiding in him important?
- By what means do we abide in him? What is the Father's role? the Son's? our own? What is the importance of "the word" (vv.3, 7) ? of "bearing much fruit" (v.8)?
- Looking at either Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12-13 discuss how do you think membership in Christ changes the way we relate to other Christians. Does membership in Christ make Christians alike or different?

BELONGING TO CHRIST III

Child and Inheritor

Question. Who gave you this Name?

Answer. My Sponsors in Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

ADOPTION AND GRACE

In ancient Rome it was not uncommon for wealthy powerful but childless adults to adopt some worthy young man as his son, with all the privileges that involved, including the right to inherit, in order to perpetuate their name. Thus Julius Caesar adopted Octavian, his great-nephew, who became Augustus Caesar; and Augustus in turn adopted Tiberius, his stepson, who also became emperor. It was a terrific leg up for an able young man. His debts and other legal obligations were taken over by his adoptive father, his prospects expanded immensely, already he enjoyed something of the authority that comes with being son to such a father, with prospect of inheritance. Despite the fact that God already has a beloved Son in whom he delights - or rather, precisely because he already does! - we too may receive the Adoption of Sons, and be made the children of God, and heirs of God, for the glory of his Name, and for our salvation.

CHILD OF GOD

That's why, in addition to being made "a member of Christ", the Catechism also says that I am made "the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven". As in the case of the language of "membership", this means more than we might think. One often hears that every one is naturally "a child of God" – but with the exception of an isolated text (Acts 17:28), Scripture does not speak this way. Far from being a universal fact of nature, entered into by birth, divine Sonship (to give it its proper name) is a supernatural grace bestowed on the elect people of God (Exodus 4:22), the seed of Abraham, which is constituted by faith and baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:26ff). That God should be our Father, and that we should be his children, is not a *given* of our nature, but a *gift* of his grace, in Jesus Christ.

Our adoption by God is a free and unmerited act of grace, by which we share in the Sonship of Christ. And it is the gift of the Spirit which elevates and ennoble us as sons: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption" – that is Sonship - "whereby we cry, Abba, Father". By evoking in us this wholehearted response to and awareness of God as our Father in Christ, the "Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit,

that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:14-16).

As Catechism implies, it is as “a member of Christ”, that I am “the child of God and the inheritor of the kingdom of heaven”. As a member of Christ, I can look to God as the righteous and merciful Judge who for his dear Son’s sake has accounted me righteous, despite my sins, and delivered me from my sins, through faith in the gospel. But that is not all: because “my beloved is mine, and I am his”, everything that is his is also mine: as a member of Christ, I also share in his Sonship, as the child of God, I am also the inheritor of his kingdom: God gives himself to me as Father, and receives me as his own dear child, from whom he can withhold nothing - not even the Kingdom of heaven.

INHERITOR OF KINGDOM

Yes! As "the child of God" I am also therefore his heir, "an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven". There is nothing God will withhold from us; indeed we are to be made “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), god-like beings sharing in his life and glory in the resurrection of the body (Romans 8:18-23), when death is conquered, and "God shall be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). The "first fruits" or "earnest" (down-payment) of this inheritance is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Ghost in us. As Peter said to the crowds on Pentecost, after his preaching of the gospel, "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). That grace of the Holy Spirit is the beginning of glory in us. In his grace do we begin to experience the power of the Kingdom of Heaven at work in us.

BELOVED AND LOVING

Of course sonship runs both ways: it brings responsibilities too, as we shall see further on in the Catechism. Sonship is being loved and it is loving in return; it is both the assurance of God's unmerited and unconditional favour, and it is also the dedication of total commitment to him. As a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of his kingdom, I am not my own, but he possesses me; but precisely as such, I possess him. Here is the assurance of total security - here is the demand of total surrender. "My beloved is mine and I am his".

But before rushing to consider how we might love and serve him, we must first ponder how he has loved us: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God”! (1 John 3:1). As a fine old hymn puts it, “Love for the loveless shown/That they might lovely be”³. It is this Spirit-imparted consciousness of ourselves as God’s children, of God as our Father, this assurance of being loved down to the

³ “My Song is Love Unknown”, by Samuel Crossman, Dean of Bristol, 1624-1683.

very roots of our being, this is what we call faith. And it is in this faith, this knowledge of being loved by God, that we ourselves may learn to love others.

Further Reading:

- Galatians 3:22- 4:7 – *Belonging to Christ, Son, and Heir of God.*
- Romans 8:18-39 – *Assurance of God's love.*
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-end - *The hope of resurrection.*
- Heidelberg Catechism, Question 1:
- "What is your only comfort in life and death? *Answer.* That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from the power of the devil; and so preserves me, that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.
- *Prayer Book, Collect for Christmas, p. 96*

Questions for Review

- Review the benefits of baptism? What does God make me in Baptism?
- What does it mean to say that I am made "the child of God" and how do I become "an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven"?
- what is the difference between sonship by nature and sonship by grace?
- What is the role of the Spirit in this?
- What are the benefits of being child, and inheritor?
- What is my present relationship with God, and what is its basis?
- What can I expect to inherit?
- Why is it important to think of God's love for us before considering our love for him?

Questions for Discussion

- A secure sense of self is important to a well-lived life. Where does the Catechism direct us to find that security?
- How might we strengthen our sense of God's love for us?
- How would you compare the Catechism's three benefits of Baptism with the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism? What other connections does that suggest to you?

BELONGING TO CHRIST IV

Promise and Vow

Question. What did your Sponsors then for you?

Answer. They did promise and vow three things in my name: First, that I should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; Secondly, that I should believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith; And Thirdly, that I should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life.

COVENANT

The Catechism tells me that in Baptism I was made "a member of Christ, the Child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven". The is the language of *relationship* - and relationship runs two ways. As a member of Christ, I belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to me; as the child of God, I belong to God, and God belongs to me; as an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven (in present grace and future glory), it belongs to me, and I belong to it. To speak in these terms is to use the Biblical language of *covenant*, a bond of mutual obligation uniting God with his people. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3). He is *our* God; we are *his* people.

COVENANT - OLD AND NEW

The history of salvation begins with Abraham, and with the covenant God made with him – implicit at first, in the call of Abram (as he was named by his parents) to leave his country, and his kindred, for a land which God would show him and promises to give to his seed (Genesis 12:1-9) - but explicit before long, and signified by name-giving - Abraham - and circumcision (Genesis 17). The covenant is not negotiated but granted – that's why the word "covenant" is sometimes translated "testament", because it is God's definitive will for his people: God puts himself under oath and obligation to Abraham and his seed for ever, and on that basis claims their undivided allegiance, and obedience to his stipulations. The blessing promised under this covenant with Abraham is handed down, not without incident, from Abraham to Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob, and from Jacob to his sons, the twelve patriarchs of Israel.

It is for the sake of his promises to Abraham and his seed forever that God comes down to deliver the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-18).

He delivers them through the Red Sea, and he brings them to Mount Sinai, where the covenant is made with the entire nation, through the mediation of Moses (Exodus 19:1-6). In this expanded version of the covenant with Abraham, God gives them a Law, through obedience to which they may testify to their gratitude for their deliverance by him. The long history of Israel, in the wilderness, in the promised land, under Moses, under Joshua, under Judges, and under David and many kings, is the history of Israel's fidelity or infidelity to the covenant. At the end of this history is the testimony of the prophets to the irretrievable breakdown of the covenant, due to Israel's disobedience (Jeremiah 11:1-17), the destruction of the Temple, of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the people in Babylon.

Is the end of the story? No: the same prophet looks beyond the end of the old covenant, to the making of one that is new and better, a definitive cleansing from old sin, a renewal of our sinful nature (Jeremiah 31:34) – and it is the inauguration of this new and eternal covenant that Christ proclaims at the last supper, and accomplishes by his death (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Hebrews 9:11ff) - a covenant not restricted to descent from Abraham or observance of the ritual law of Israel, but open to "all sorts and conditions of men", a church that is called "catholic" or "universal". It is into this new covenant or testament that we enter by means of baptism and faith (Mark 16:16), and look with hope for its consummation, when Christ comes again in glory, to share his glory with his bride, the people of the new covenant (Revelation 21:1-8).

COVENANT IN CHRIST

What is the difference between the new covenant mediated by Christ, and the old covenant mediated by Moses? Simply this: that the old covenant depended upon Israel's obedience to the Law, which obedience was not and could not be forthcoming; whereas the new covenant depends upon the obedience of Christ, which was complete and perfect. And that is why the new covenant, like the covenant made with Abraham, rests not on our works, but on faith, faith in Christ who "was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). As St. Paul says, "the scripture [the written law] hath concluded [or 'locked up'] all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Galatians 3:22). Within that covenant, we show forth our gratitude for grace, by works of love done in obedience to his Word (John 15:9-10), without which our faith is indeed "dead" (James 2:14-26) – yet this obedience is not the *cause* but the *effect* of this new covenant.

Christian life is participation in the new covenant made by Christ, and the sign of our entrance into this covenant is Baptism. In the benefits of Baptism we learn what benefits God brings to us in this covenant. But what about our side of this covenant? He has given himself to us to be *our* God - what does it mean for us to be *his* people? He has

given himself to me to be *my* Father - what does it mean for me to be *his* child? The human side of the covenant is spelled out in the answer to the third question: "What did your Sponsors then for you? *Answer*. They did promise and vow three things in my name: First, that I should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; Secondly, that I should believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith; And Thirdly, that I should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life".

THREE PROMISES

The three promises are logically related to each other. I renounce what old tradition called the "three foes of Man" – the flesh, the world, and the devil, powers opposed to God – so that I may give myself to him in faith and obedience. If I don't renounce false gods, then my faith in the true god is going to be compromised. If I don't follow him, then it is clear I don't really believe in him. If I do follow him, then, I can't follow the false gods. The three promises hold together, and without the others, each one quickly frays!

BENEFITS AND PROMISES

The three promises are also related to the benefits we have received. The first benefit, membership in Christ, communion with Christ, entails breaking fellowship with those powers that would divide us from him: the devil, the world, and the flesh. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Corinthians 10:21). "Know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17).

The second promise follows likewise from the second benefit: as the child of God, I will indeed trust his Word; I will "believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith", "all things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health" (Prayer Book, p. 277), the undiminished Rule of Faith taught by Christ, proclaimed by the apostles, written in Scripture, and summarized in the ancient Creeds. It is by receiving his Word that we become the children of God: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). And it is in keeping his Word that our sonship is manifested: "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it" (Luke 8:21). Therefore, says the Apostle to Timothy, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). And Jude exhorts us "earnestly contend for the faith

which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). With the father of an epileptic boy, who is asking for the help of Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Third, as an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, I will follow the Lord, walking in the path of righteousness that leads me into that inheritance: and so I promise to “keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life”. “A certain lawyer stood up, and tempted [Jesus], saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:25-28). Though faith alone justifies, the faith which justifies us, St. Paul says, is "faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6), and St. James agrees that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

St. Paul urges us to invest as much energy in the service of the Lord as we did in the service of sin, and points out the great disparity in rewards between the two:

I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:19-23)

Likewise St. Peter urges the brethren to grow in virtue: "give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10, 11). It is through the good works that spring from faith that we enter into our inheritance of the Kingdom of heaven.

Further Reading

- Genesis 12; 17:1-8 - *God makes and renews a covenant with Abraham*
- Genesis 28 - *God confirms the covenant with Jacob*
- Exodus 19, 20, 24 - *God makes a covenant with Israel by Moses*
- Exodus 34 - *After Israel's rebellion, God renews the covenant*
- Jeremiah 11:1-14 - *God pronounces judgment on Judah for breaking the covenant*
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 *The promise of a new and eternal covenant*

- Hebrews 8 & 9 - *the promise of a new covenant fulfilled by Christ*
- Revelation 21:1-8 *the realization of the new covenant*
- Prayer Book, Collect for Easter III, p. 173 - *prayer for the baptized, to live out vows to renounce, believe, and keep.*

Questions for Review

- What is a covenant? What are its characteristics?
- Why is a covenant sometimes called a testament?
- Who are God's partners in covenant throughout history?
- Why does the old covenant break down?
- Why does the new testament succeed?
- How do we share in that success?
- What are the three promises/obligations of Baptism?
- How are the promises (obligations) of man related to the promises/benefits conferred by God ?
- How do the three promises depend on each other?

Questions for Discussion

- Discussions about Christian life often end by talking about "trying harder" and "doing more". In light of the Old Testament's breakdown, and the inauguration of the New, do you think this approach to spiritual life is helpful? Why or why not? What might be a more fitting basis for thinking about the Christian life?

BELONGING TO CHRIST V

Called to salvation

Question. Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe, and to do, as they have promised for thee?

Answer. Yes, verily; and by God's help so I will. And I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end.

SAVED FROM PERISHING

In five chapters, Genesis tells the tale of how God made the world very good, how sin and death entered the world by man's disobedience. In chapter six we are told that God, seeing the wickedness of man, the corruption of his heart, was grieved, and decided to destroy the world he had made. The outlook is grim: "but" we are told, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8), one man, though not perfect, God regarded with favour. Well you know the story - how God commanded Noah to make an ark, and to bring into it his family, and two of every unclean creature, and seven of every clean creature, and how Noah, trusting God's promise, and obeying his commandments, rode out the Flood in the safety of the ark, to emerge in a world washed clean of old wickedness, for a fresh new start.

So God is not only the Creator, and the Judge of the world - he is also its Savior - and not for the first time. Over and over again, God the Creator and Judge will prove himself the Savior of his people - saving them from bondage in Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea, bringing them into the promised land through the river Jordan - the story told in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Joshua - and then saving them again, in a new and greater Exodus from sin and death - the story told in the New Testament.

Both Noah's Flood, and the Exodus prefigure the salvation Christ won for us eternally. When Christ accepted Baptism in the river Jordan from John the Baptist, is a sign of the saving work he comes to accomplish in death and resurrection. He spoke of his saving death as a baptism (12:50), a 'drowning' in the flood of death; and he spoke of it as an exodus (9:51), a deliverance from death. And so our baptism is the sign of our deliverance also, through his death and resurrection - a deliverance that has past, present, and future aspects. All these motifs are beautifully combined in the ancient "Flood prayer", which appears in this form in the 1662 Prayer Book service of Baptism:

Almighty and everlasting God, who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water; and also didst safely lead the children of Israel thy people through the Red Sea, figuring thereby thy holy Baptism; and by the Baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, in the river Jordan, didst sanctify Water to the mystical washing away of sin: We beseech thee, for thine infinite mercies, that thou wilt mercifully look upon this Child; wash him and sanctify him with the Holy Ghost; that he, being delivered from thy wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ's Church; and being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally he may come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with thee world without end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BOUND TO BELIEVE

It is Baptism as a Calling to Salvation, that the Catechism now addresses. But first it calls for a decision, about the promises made on my behalf at my Baptism (the Catechism assuming Baptism as an infant). The Catechism asks me to acknowledge and accept the binding nature of these vows: "Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe, and to do, as they have promised for thee?" It prompts a hearty affirmative: "Yes, verily; and by God's help so I will...".

In this hyper-individualistic age, we may well balk at accepting as our own a choice that has already been made for us. For us, freedom has largely become freedom from constraint, to construct our lives according to our own choices. As we have seen, it may be questioned just how real this freedom is: if we have been emancipated from older cultural and social pressures, these have been replaced by new ones, of doubtful value. Constraints on passion may be removed, but this does not liberate us from them: the compulsive smoker, glutton, drunkard, drug addict, fornicator, pornography-consumer, gambler, is not really free, but is a slave to his addictions. The reality is that the choices we make are largely conditioned by the choices – good or bad - that others have made for us. It is one of the points at which contemporary liberalism loses touch with reality, is that it does not acknowledge that human beings are not always able to make rational choices on their own behalf. This does not mean they are less than human! If someone has made a good choice on my behalf when I could not (because, for instance, I was a newborn infant), that is not a constraint on my freedom, but a provision for and condition of it.

GRATITUDE FOR SALVATION

So the Catechism's appeal to the binding nature of the promise made on my behalf at baptism is not finished without an acknowledgment of the benefits I received because

someone made that promise: “Yes, verily; and by God's help so I will...” – it continues without stopping - “...And I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end.” The obligation we acknowledge to keep the vows of baptism is grounded in gratitude for the benefits of salvation that I received in baptism.

This is critically important. What is promised *for* us in Baptism (by our godparents) is a response to the promises of grace made *to* us in Baptism (by God). God's grace always takes the initiative: anything we do is a response to what God has done. And what is received is nothing else than “salvation”. This is the first time this important word has been used in the Catechism, and it deserves some reflection.

SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW

As we have already seen, that God saves and delivers his people from various dangers is a constant theme in the Old Testament. This salvation may be experienced in different ways, by the individual or by the entire people, as deliverance from the enemy, healing of sickness, victory in battle, or ransom from slavery. He saves Noah and his family from the flood in the ark; and he saves Israel from Egypt in the Red Sea. By far the largest portion of the psalms are prayers or thanksgivings for deliverance, and often addressed to “the God of my salvation”. Against the false gods “that cannot save”, the Lord proclaims “there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:20-22).

It is this God and Saviour, who sends his Son into the world, “for us men and for our salvation”, as the Nicene Creed testifies. At this birth, by divine command, he is named Jesus (which means “God saves”), “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Like God in the Old Testament, he heals the sick, cleanses lepers, raises the dead, makes the blind to see and the lame to walk. And in proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and calling men to repentance and faith, he calls them to salvation. In the house of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, he declares, “This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9, 10). The apostles proclaim salvation of the entire human being through faith in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:10-12).

THE SCOPE OF SALVATION

But the scope of this salvation is greater than anything seen before Jesus. It is salvation both inward and outward, present and future – a salvation from sin, from guilt, from condemnation and wrath; and a deliverance from death, by resurrection to glory. His salvation is the deliverance of the entire person, from all that is corrupting, false and

unreal, and although it begins in this life, the world in its present state is too small to contain its full dimensions. We look to the promise of "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13 cf. Isaiah 65:17, 66:22, 11:1-10). We look to the promise of resurrection, when "God shall be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Lazarus is saved from death, but he will die again: the salvation that Jesus accomplishes in his resurrection is everlasting.

SALVATION IN THREE TENSES

Scripture therefore speaks of salvation in all three tenses, as something past, and already accomplished for us (what theologians call "justification"); as something future, and yet to be fulfilled in us ("glorification"); and as something that is unfolding in us, here and now ("sanctification"). The Catechism situates us in the middle of that unfolding process, a matter of thankfulness and hope, when it teaches me to say, "I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end." Is this what *you* are grateful for? Is this what *you* are praying for?

Further Reading

- Genesis 6-9 – *God saves Noah in the Ark.*
- Exodus 14-15 - *God saves Israel at the Red Sea*
- Judges 7 - *God saves Israel from the Midianites by the hand of Gideon.*
- Daniel 6 – *God saves Daniel from the den of lions.*
- Psalms 3, 9, 18, 20, 25, 95, 98, 103 *etc.*

Questions for Review

- Is liberation from our passions freedom or slavery?
- Is obligation to a vow a Sponsor made for us a constraint or a condition of freedom?
- In what is our obligation grounded?
- What different kinds of salvation are recorded in the Old Testament?
- What do they manifest about the God revealed in the Old Testament?
- What salvation is Jesus sent to accomplish? How does it resemble, and how does it differ, from acts of salvation in the Old Testament or even in his own proclamation of the kingdom?
- What are the three tenses of salvation? What dispositions of soul correspond to them?
- What history of salvation past and future is sketched for a baptized person in the "Flood Prayer"?

Questions for Discussion

- What kinds of salvation (liberation) does the world offer today? How are these like or unlike salvation in Christ?
- Look at the thanksgivings and prayers with which a number of Pauline epistles begin (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9) – What is the relation of thankfulness and hope? For another reference, look at the General Thanksgiving on p. 19.