Catechism Question for Week of May 29- June 4

QUESTION 7 (Part 3): From where, then, comes this depraved nature of man?
ANSWER: From the Fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise, whereby our nature became so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin.

Exposition (continued from last week)

OF SIN IN GENERAL The questions which are usually discussed, in relation to sin in general, are chiefly the following:

1. From what does it appear that sin is in the world, and also in us?
2. What is sin?
3. How many kinds of sin are there?
4. What is the origin of sin, or the causes of it?
5. What are the effects of sin?

4. WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF SIN, OR WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF IT? That God is not the cause of sin, is proven,

1. **From the testimony of Scripture:** "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good." "You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness." (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 5:4)
2. **God himself is supremely and perfectly good and holy, and cannot therefore be the author of evil.**
3. **God forbids all manner of sin in his law.**
4. **God punished most severely all sin, which he could not consistently do if it had its origin in him.**
5. **God would not destroy his own image in man.**

From these considerations it is evident that the origin of sin is not to be attributed to God. But the proper, and in itself efficient cause of sin, is the will of devils and men, by which they freely fell from God, and deprived themselves of his image. **"Through envy the devil brought death into the world." (Wisdom 2:24)** But death is the punishment of sin. **"You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie speaks of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it." "he that commits sin is of the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." "By one man sin entered into the world." (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; Rom. 5:12)**

The cause, therefore, of the first sin, or of the fall of our first parents in Paradise, was the devil tempting and urging man to sin; and the will of man freely separating itself from God, and falling in with the suggestions of the tempter. This

fall of Adam is the efficient cause of original sin both in himself and in his posterity. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." The preceding cause of all actual sins in posterity, is original sin. **"It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." "When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin."** (**Rom. 7:17; James 1:14**) Those objects which entice men to sin may be regarded as accidental or casual motives. **"Sin, taking occasion by the commandments, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence." (Rom. 7:8)** The devil and wicked men are the cause of sin in and of themselves.

Preceding actual sins are the causes of those which follow, for the Scriptures teach that God punishes sin with sin, and that sins which follow are the punishments of those that precede: **"God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts; working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet." "Therefore God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." (Rom. 1:24, 27; 2 Thess. 2:11)** But as man in his wisdom (so great is his insolence) is accustomed to frame various arguments, for the purpose of throwing the cause of sin from himself upon God, and so free himself from blame, we must speak more fully of the causes of sin, and refute the vain pretenses by which men are wont to justify themselves. There are some who pretend to find the origin of sin in their destiny, as revealed by the stars, saying, we have sinned because we were born under an unlucky planet. Others, when rebuked for their sins, reply, *"Not we, but the devil is the cause of the wicked deeds we have committed".* Others, throwing aside all excuses, cast the blame directly upon God, saying, God willed it thus; *for if He had not willed it, I had not sinned.* Others, again, say, in extenuation of their sins, *"God was able to prevent me from doing that which was wrong, and as He did not restrain me, therefore, He Himself is the Author of my sin."* With these, and similar pretenses, men have often, (for it is no new thing) sharpened their blasphemous tongues against God. Our first parents, when they had sinned, and God charged their crime upon them, endeavored to throw the blame of their wicked deed from themselves upon others, nor did they honestly confess the truth. Adam threw it, not so much upon his wife, as upon God himself. **"The woman,** said he, **whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat;"** as if he would say, *"I had not sinned, except You had joined her to me."* (**Gen. 3:12)** The woman charged the evil deed wholly to the devil, saying, **"The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." (Gen. 3:13)** These are the false, impious, and detestable conclusions of wicked men in regard to the origin of sin, by which great reproach is cast upon the Majesty, Truth, and Justice of God. Nor is the nature of man the cause of sin, because God created it good, according as it is said: **"God saw all things which he had made, and behold it was very good." (Gen. 1:31)**

Sin is an adventitious, or accidental quality, which attaches itself to man in consequence of the Fall, and not a substantial property; although it became natural after the Fall, and is called so correctly by Augustine, because we are now all born in sin, and are the children of wrath, even as others. But these things must be more largely considered.

1. Those who would make destiny an excuse for their sins, define destiny to mean an order, or chain linked together through eternity, and a certain

perpetual necessity of purposes, and works, according to the counsel of God, or the evil stars themselves. Now if you ask them, *"Who made these stars?"* they reply, *"God"*. Therefore, these men charge their sins upon God. But such a destiny as this, all the wiser (not to speak of Christian) philosophers unite in rejecting. Augustine, in opposing two epistles of the Pelagians to Boniface, says, *"Those who affirm destiny to be the cause of sin, contend that not only actions and events, but also our wills themselves, depend upon the position of the stars at the time of every one's conception, or birth, which they call constellations. But the grace of God does not only rise above all the stars and all the heavens, but also above all the angels."* We may conclude our remarks in reference to this vain pretense, by adducing the word of the Lord, as uttered by the Prophet Jeremiah, chapter 10, verse 2. "**Thus says the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of the heavens, for the heathen are dismayed at them."** That the heathen astrologers should, therefore, call the planet Saturn unmerciful, rigid and cruel; and Venus benignant, favorable, and mild, is the vanity of vanities; for the stars have no power of doing good or evil; and hence the crimes of wicked men ought never to be attributed to them.

2. That the devil is not the sole author of sin, who, when we are guilty of transgression, should alone bear the blame, and we be free from censure, is evident from this one consideration, that he can only suggest and entice men to do that which is evil; but cannot compel them to commit it. God so restrains the devil, by His Power, that he cannot do what he desires; but only what, and as much as, God permits. Yea, he has not so much as control over filthy swine, much less over the most noble souls of men. He has, indeed, subtlety and great power of persuasion; but God is more powerful than Satan, and never ceases to suggest good thoughts to man, nor does He permit the devil to go farther than is for our good. This we may see in the case of Job, that most holy man, and also in Paul, and in those words of his: **"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able." (1 Cor. 10:13)** They reason falsely, therefore, who attempt to throw the blame of their sins upon the shoulders of Satan.

It remains to be demonstrated that God is not the Author of sin.

There are some who argue: God willed it thus, and if He had not willed it, we had not sinned. Who can resist His Power? **Again:** When God had the Power to prevent us from sinning, and did not, He is the Author of our sins. These are the cavils, the foul slanders, and sophisms of the wicked. God might, indeed, by His absolute Power, prevent evil; but He will not wrong and despoil His own creature, man, whom He created righteous and holy. He acts with man in a manner that corresponds with the nature with which He has endowed him. Hence He proposes laws to which He attaches rewards and punishments—He commands us to embrace the good and shun the evil; and that we may do this, He both grants His grace,

without which we can do nothing, and also encourages our diligence and labor. But if a man come short of doing what he ought, his sin and negligence are chargeable upon himself, and not upon God, although God had the Power to prevent it, and yet did not. Nor is it proper that God should prohibit, in any direct manner, the evil deeds of the wicked, lest by so doing, He should disturb the order which He has established, and so destroy His own Work. Hence, God is not the Author of sin, or of evil.

We shall now give the testimony of the Scriptures in reference to this subject—refute certain objections, and investigate the origin of sin. The Scriptures, in many places, teach that God is not the Author of sin. We can merely refer to a few passages bearing upon this point. **"God made not death, nor has he pleasure in the destruction of the living." "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." "You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with you. The foolish shall not stand in your sight." "God has made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." "Our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God." "By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin." "I know that in me dwells no good thing." (Wisdom 1:13; Ezek. 18:23; Ps. 5:4- 5; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 3:5; 5:12; 7:18)** From these express declarations of Scripture, we may safely conclude, that God is not the Author of sin; but that its origin must he traced to man, the devil being the instigator; yet in such a manner, that we may say, the devil who became corrupt from the beginning, deprived man of his original holiness, which, however, he could not have done, had not man of his own free will consented to the evil. Here it is necessary for us to revert to the Fall of our father Adam, whom God created in His Own Image by which we mean that He created him good, perfect, holy, just, and immortal, and furnished him with the most excellent gifts, so that nothing was wanting to his full and perfect enjoyment. His understanding was fully enlightened; his will was most free and holy; he had the power of doing good, or evil; and had the law which directed him what to do, and what to avoid; for the Lord said, **"You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:17)**

God demanded simple obedience and faith, that Adam might depend wholly upon Him, and that not constrainedly, as if he were compelled thereto by some necessity; but freely and cheerfully. "God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his counsel, saying, If you will, you shall keep the commandment, and perform acceptable faithfulness." (Eccl. 15:14) When the serpent, therefore, tempted man, and persuaded him to taste of the forbidden tree, he was not ignorant that the counsel and device of the serpent was contrary to the command of God; for the Lord had said, **"You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." (Gen. 3:3)** It was, therefore, in the hand of his counsel to eat, or not to eat. God declared His law, expressly enjoining upon him not to eat, and endeavored to restrain him from eating by foretelling the penalty— *"Lest you die."* Nor did Satan use any compulsive measures, (which it was not possible for him to do) but probably advised, and urged man on, until he at length overcame him by his entreaties; for when the will of the woman inclined to the word of the devil, her mind receded from the word of God, and in rejecting his law, she committed an evil deed.

Afterwards she inclined her husband, and drew him along with her, who, by consenting, became a partaker of her sin. The Scriptures teach this, where it is said, **"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." (Gen. 3:6)** Here we have the beginning of evil, the devil; and that which moved the will of man, viz.: the false praise and commendation of the devil, and therefore, a manifest lie; and the pleasant and attractive appearance of the tree.

Hence, Adam and Eve did, of their own choice and free will, what they did, being deceived by the hope of obtaining greater and more excellent wisdom, which the seducer had falsely and deceptively promised. We conclude, therefore, that sin had its origin, not in God, Who forbids what is evil, but in the devil, and the free choice of man, which was corrupted through the falsehood of Satan. Hence, the devil, and the perverted will of man following him, are to be regarded as the true cause of sin. This evil now flows over from our first parents, into all their posterity, so that sin does not take its rise from any other source, than from ourselves, from our perverted judgment and depraved will, together with the suggestion of the devil. For an evil root, or principle, such as the fall of our first parents, brings forth of itself, a corrupt and rotten branch, corresponding with its own nature, which Satan now also by his fraud and lies, cultivates just as plants; but it is all in vain that he should so labor, if we do not offer ourselves to him to be molded according to his will. That is called original sin which flows from the original fountain, viz.: from our first parents, into all their posterity, by propagation, or generation.

We bring this sin with us in our nature out of our mother's womb, when we are born into the world. **"I was born in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Ps. 51:7)** And Christ thus speaks of the devil: **"He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)**

Objection 1: Satan was created by God; therefore, his malice must also be from Him.
Answer: We deny the antecedent. The devil was made Satan or an adversary, not by God, for He created him a good angel; but by voluntary apostasy. Hence, it is said that he abode not in the truth, from which we may infer that he must have stood in the truth, prior to his fall.

Objection 2: God created Adam; and, therefore, the sin of Adam.
Answer: There is here a fallacy of accident, in attributing to God the creation of an accidental and accessory evil, in the place of that which is good. Sin is not natural; but it is a corruption of the nature of man, which God created good; for God made man good; but man, by the instigation of the devil, deprived himself of the gifts which he had received from God, and corrupted himself.

Objection 3: But the will and power which Adam possessed, was from God. Therefore, sin, which is committed by this will, must also be from God.

Answer: There is here, again, a fallacy of accident, for the will of Adam was not the cause of sin, in as far as it was from God; but in as far as it of its own accord inclined to the word of the devil. God did not give to man the will and power of doing evil, for He strictly forbade and denounced it in His law. But Adam abused and perverted the will and power which he had received from God, in as much as he did not devote them to the purposes for which they were given.
The prodigal son received money from his father, not that he should waste it in riotous living, but that he might have as much as would be sufficient for his necessity. Wherefore, when he wickedly squandered that which he had received from his father, and was reduced to starvation, it was not the fault of the father from whom he had received it, but it resulted from the abuse of what he had received.

Objection 4: God made man fallible; nor did he establish him in the goodness in which He created him. Therefore, it was according to His Will that man sinned.
Answer: The Scriptures rebuke and put to silence this frowardness of men wickedly curious, saying, **"Who are you that replies against God." "Woe unto him that strives with his Maker." (Rom. 9:20; Ish. 45:9)** Unless man had been created fallible, there would have been no praise attaching itself to his work, or virtue; for he would have been good from necessity. And what if it had been proper that man should have been thus created? The very nature of God required it to be thus. God does not give His Glory to any creature. Adam was a man, and not God. And as God is Good, so is He also Just. He does good to men, but He wills that they be obedient and grateful to Him. He bestowed innumerable benefits upon man; therefore, it was necessary for him to be thankful, obedient, and subject to God, Who has declared, in His law, what would be pleasing to Him, and what would not, saying, **"Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, lest you die." (Gen. 2:17)** As if he would say, you shall have respect to Me, adhere to Me, serve and obey Me; you shall not ask and seek rules of good and evil from anyone else than from Me; you shall thus show yourself obedient to Me.

To this, it is objected: God foreknew the fall of man, which He might have prevented, if He had not willed it; but He did not prevent it. Therefore, Adam sinned by the will and fault of God.
Answer: An answer has already been returned to this objection; yet we may remark, in addition to what we have said, that it does not necessarily follow from the foreknowledge of God, that man was compelled to fall. A certain wise father did, from some particular signs, foresee that his degenerate son, at some subsequent time, would be thrust through with a sword; nor does his fore knowledge deceive him; for he is slain for fornication. But no one believes that he is thus slain because the father foresaw that he would come to a miserable end; but because he is a fornicator. Ambrose thus speaks of the murder of Cain: *"God certainly foreknew to what his rage would lead him when excited and exasperated; yet he was not on this account urged to the deed which he perpetrated by the exercise of his own will, as by*

a necessity, to sin; because, in His foreknowledge, God cannot be deceived." And Augustine says: *"God is a just Revenger of those things of which He is not the wicked Perpetrator."*