Catechism Question for Week of June 19- June 25, 2016

Question 8 (Part 2): But are we so depraved, that we are wholly unapt to any good and prone to all evil?
Answer: Yes; unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.

The Holy Scriptures teach that no work acceptable and pleasing to God can be undertaken, and performed by any one, without regeneration and the Special Grace of the Holy Spirit; neither can there be any more or less "good" in the counsels and actions of any man, than God of His Own free Grace chooses to produce in them; nor can the will of any creature be inclined in any other direction than that which seems good to the eternal and gracious Counsel of God. And yet all the actions of the created will, both good and bad, are performed freely.

That this may be the better understood, let us inquire:

1. What is freedom of will, or free power of choice?
2. What is the distinction which exists between the liberty which is in God, and that which is in his rational creatures, angels and men?
3. Is there any freedom of the human will?
4. What kind of freedom of will is there in man; or how many degrees of free-will are there in man, according to his fourfold state?

2. WHAT IS THE DISTINCTION WHICH EXISTS BETWEEN THE LIBERTY WHICH IS IN GOD AND HIS CREATURES, ANGELS AND MEN? There are two things common to God and rational creatures as it respects the liberty of the "will":

1. That God and intelligent creatures act upon deliberation and counsel, that is, they choose or reject objects by the exercise of the understanding and "will".
2. That they choose or reject objects by their own proper and inward activity, *without* any constraint, which is the same thing as to say that the "will" being in its own nature capacitated to will the opposite of that which it does will, or to defer acting, inclines of its own accord to that course which it prefers. (**Ps. 104:24; 115:3; Gen. 8:6; Isaiah 1:19, 20; Matt. 23:37**)

There are three differences between the liberty which belongs to God and that which belongs to His creatures:

A. The first relates to the understanding. God sees and understands of Himself all things in the most perfect manner, from all eternity, without the least ignorance or error of judgment. Creatures, on the other hand, know nothing of themselves, neither do they know all things, nor the same things at all times; but only so much of God, together with His works and will, as He is pleased, at particular times, to reveal unto them. Hence they are ignorant of

many things, and often err. The following passages of Scripture confirm this distinction which we have made in regard to the understanding: **"Of that day and hour knows no man, no not the angels of heaven; but my Father only." "He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them, that know understanding." "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord?" "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight." "He enlightens every man that cometh into the world." (Matt. 24:36; Dan. 2:21; Ish. 40:13; Heb. 4. 13; John 1:9)**

B. The second distinction holds in the "will". The Will of God is neither governed by, nor dependent upon, anything beyond or out of itself. The wills of angels and men are indeed the *causes* of their own actions; yet they are notwithstanding influenced and controlled by the secret Counsel and Providence of God, in the choice or rejection of objects, whether immediately by God, or through certain instrumentalities, be they good or evil, which God sees fit to employ. It is consequently *impossible* for them to do *anything* contrary to the eternal and immutable Counsel of God. Hence the term *autexousion* [autonomous]which means: *to be absolutely his own, at his own will, and in his own power*, by which the Greek Theologians express free power of choice, belongs more properly to God alone, Who is perfectly and absolutely at His Own control, not being bound to any one; while the term *ekousion*- which means: *voluntary or free* is more correctly used in relation to creatures, and is thus applied in the following passages of Scripture: (**Phil. 5:14; Heb. 10:26; 1 Pet. 5:2)** The various arguments and testimonies from the Word of God, will be presented at large when we come to the consideration of the doctrine of the Providence of God. That God, however, is indeed the "First Cause" of His Counsels, these and similar declarations of His Word plainly affirm: **"He has done whatsoever he has pleased." "Who doeth according to his own will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." (Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:35)** That the will and counsels of creatures depend upon the Permission and Will of God, may be proven by the following and similar passages of holy writ: **"The Lord shall send his angel before you," etc. "Go and gather the children of Israel together," etc. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." "But God has fulfilled those things," etc. "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever your hand and your counsel determined before to be done." "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walks to direct his steps." "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord." (Gen. 24:7; Ex. 3:16; Acts 2:23; 3:17; 4:27; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 2l:1)** The will, therefore, of angels and men, and all other *second* causes, are in like manner governed by God, as they are from Him, as their First and Chief Cause. But the Will of God is ruled by none of His creatures, because as He has no efficient cause out of Himself, so He has no moving or inclining cause; otherwise He would not be God, the First and great Cause of all His Works, and creatures would be substituted in the place of God. God does not constrain and force, but moves and directs the will of

His creatures; in other words, He effectually inclines the will by presenting objects to the mind, to choose that which the understanding at the time judges to be good, and to reject what it conceives to be evil.

C. The third distinction holds in the understanding and will at the same time. God, as He knows all things unchangeably, so He has also decreed them from everlasting, and wills unchangeably all things which are done in as far as they are good, and permits them in as far as they are sins. But as the notions and judgment which creatures form of things are changeable, so their wills are also changeable. They will that which before they would not, and refuse to choose that which they formerly delighted in. And still further, as all the Counsels of God are most Good, Just and Wise, He never disapproves of them; neither does He correct or change them, as men often do, when they perceive that they have unwisely decided upon anything. These declarations of Scripture are here in point: **"God is not a man, that he should He; neither the Son of man, that he should repent." "I am the Lord, I change not." "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much," etc. (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 9:22)**

Objection 1: He who cannot change his counsel has no free will. God cannot change His Counsel. Therefore, God's Will is not "free".
Answer: We reply to the first proposition of this syllogism by making a distinction: it is not he who cannot change his purpose that has no liberty of will, but he who cannot change his counsel, being hindered by some external cause, although he might wish to change it. But God does not change His Counsel, neither can He change it; not, however, on account of any hindrance arising from some external cause, nor on account of any imperfection of nature or ability, but because He does not will, neither can He will a change of His Counsel, on account of the immutable rectitude of His Will, in which no error nor any cause of change can possibly exist.

Objection 2: That which is governed and ruled by the unchangeable Will of God does not act freely. The will of angels and men acts freely. Therefore, it is not ruled, nor bound in the choice which it makes, by the unchangeable Will of God.
Answer: It is necessary here again, in answering the above objection, to make the following distinction with reference to the major proposition: He who is so ruled and controlled by the Will of God as to act without any deliberation and choice of his own, does not act freely; but it is not in this way that God influences the will of angels and men. He presents objects to the understanding, and through these effectually moves and inclines the human will, so that although they choose that which God wills, they nevertheless do it from their own deliberation and choice, and therefore act freely. Hence creatures may be said to act freely, not when they disregard every form of government and restraint, but when they act with deliberation, and when the will chooses or rejects objects by its own free exercise, even though it may be excited and controlled by someone else.

Objection 3: If the will, when God changes it, and directed it upon other objects, cannot resist, it is wholly passive. But this involves us in error. Therefore, the will cannot be thus influenced and controlled.
Answer: The conclusion here drawn is incorrect, in as much as there is not a sufficiently full and distinct enumeration in the major proposition of those exercises and actions of which the will is capable; for it may not only resist the influence which God brings to bear upon it, but it has the ability also, by its own proper determination, to obey God, and to assent to the suggestions and influences of His Spirit. In doing this, however, it is not only passive, but also active, and performs its own actions, although the power of assenting and obeying is not from itself, but from the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

Objection 4: That which resists the Will of God is not governed by it. The will of man opposes and resists God in many things. Therefore, man's will is not governed by God.
Answer: There are here four terms. The major proposition is true, if it be understood as including both the "secret" and "revealed" Will of God; the minor, however, merely expresses the Will of God as expressed or revealed, for the secret decrees of God's Will are always ratified and performed in all, even in those who most violently resist the Commandments of God.

Objection 5: If all the determinations, including even those of the wicked, are excited and ruled by the Will of God, and if many of these are sinful, then God seems to be the Author of sin.
Answer: There is here a fallacy of accident in the minor proposition, for the determinations of the wicked are sins, not in as far as they are ordained and proceed from the Will of God (for so far they are good, and agree with the Divine Law), but in as far as they are from devils and men, who in acting either do not know the Will of God, or do not perform it with the design that they may thus obey and glorify God.