Catechism Question for Week of June 26- July 2, 2016

Question 8 (Part 3): 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?

3. IS THERE ANY FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN WILL? That there is in Man a certain freedom of will, is proven:

1. From the fact that Man was created in the Image of God, of which "free will" constituted a part: **"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." "God made man in the beginning, and left him in the hand of his counsel." (Gen. 1:26; Eccl. 15:14)**
2. From the definition of the freedom which belongs to Man; for Man acts upon deliberation, freely knowing, and desiring or rejecting this or that object. If this definition, now, correspond with the nature of Man, the thing which is expressed and defined by it must also belong to him.

Objection 1: If Man be in the possession of "freedom of will", the doctrine of Original Sin is overthrown; for it is a contradiction to say that Man is not able to obey God, and to affirm, at the same time, that he has "liberty of will".
Answer: There is no real opposition in what is here affirmed, because since the Fall Man has "liberty of will" only in part, and not such as he had before the Fall, nor to the same degree.

Objection 2: He who has not a "will" to choose in like manner the good and the evil, does not possess "free-will". But Man, since the Fall, has not a "will" to choose equally the good and the evil. Therefore, he does not possess true "freedom of will".

Answer: We reject the major proposition, because it contains an incorrect definition of liberty; for, according to this- God Himself does not possess any "liberty of will".

Objection 3: That which is dependent upon another is not "free". Our "will" is dependent upon Another. Therefore, it is not "free".
Answer: We reply to the major proposition, by making the following distinction: That which is dependent upon and ruled by another, and not by itself also, is not "free". The "will" of Man, however, is ruled not only by Another, but also by *itself*; for God influences men in such a manner, that they are not constrained and carried along involuntarily, but most freely; so that it may be said that they move themselves. The "being" or "will" which is moved only by itself, belongs to God alone, of Whom infinite Liberty may more correctly be predicated, than of creatures. In the meanwhile, however, it may be sufficient, as far as it respects the liberty which belongs to Man, to affirm, that whatever he wills, he wills *freely*, and by his own proper determination.

Objection 4: That which is enslaved is not "free". Our power of choice is enslaved since the Fall. Therefore, it is not "free".
Answer: The whole argument is conceded, if by "free" we understand that which has the power of choosing that which is good and pleasing to God: for thus far the "will" (of fallen Man) is held in bondage, and can only "will" and "choose" that which is evil. **"I am carnal, sold under sin," etc. (Rom. 7:14)** But if by "free" we understand voluntary, or deliberative, then the major proposition is false; for it is not the *subjection*, but the *constraint* of the "will", that takes away its liberty.