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John Calvin on the Sinfulness of Children

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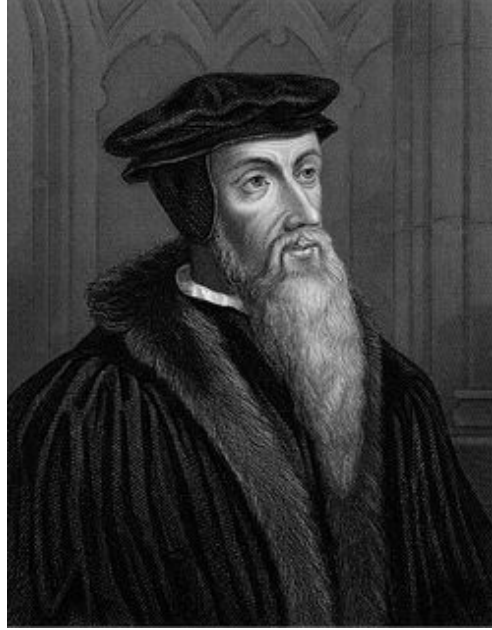
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May 04, 2011

John Calvin on the Sinfulness of Children

By Edyta Jankiewicz, Ph.D. cand.*



“Even infants bear their condemnation with them from their mother’s womb; for, though they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their own iniquity, they have the seed enclosed within themselves. Indeed, their whole nature is a seed of sin; thus it cannot be but hateful and abominable to God.”^[1]

Questions:

- Are children born as sinners, or with an innate tendency to sin, or both?
- Or are they born innocent, and only become sinners when they reach an age of moral awareness?
- If they are born innocent, and thus do not need baptism as infants, what is their status in the church?

[1] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. and tr. John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1311.




*Edyta Jankiewicz, originally from Australia, holds a M.Min. (Family) from Avondale College, Australia, and is currently working on a Ph.D. (Religious Education) at Andrews University with a concentration in children's spirituality. She is married to Darius, and they have two daughters ages 10 and 12.

Posted by [Angelika Kaiser](#) on May 04, 2011 in [Quotable](#) | [Permalink](#)

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What is sin? Is it to be born separated from God? Is it, as Luther said, to be "incurvatus in se"?

Here are a couple of Luther quotes:

Perhaps the fullest explanation is this one-

"The 'prudence of the flesh' chooses what is good for oneself and avoids what is disadvantageous for oneself, it rejects the common good and chooses what is harmful to community. This is a prudence which directs the flesh, that is, our concupiscence and self-will, which enjoys itself and uses everyone else, including God Himself; in all matters it looks out for itself and its own interests. This prudence makes man feel that he himself is the final and ultimate object in life, an idol, on whose account he does, suffers, attempts, plans, and says all things. He considers good only those things which are for his own personal good, and those things only as evils which are bad for him. This crookedness, this depravity, this iniquity is condemned over and over in Scripture under the name of fornication and idolatry, and it is, as we have said earlier in chapter 6,12 something most profound in our nature, indeed, it is our very nature itself, wounded and totally in ferment, so that without grace it becomes not only incurable but also totally unrecognizable." LW 25:350

"Therefore I believe that with this commandment 'as yourself' man is not commanded to love himself but rather is shown the sinful love with which he does in fact love himself, as if to say: 'You are completely curved in upon yourself and pointed toward love of yourself, a condition from which you will not be delivered unless you altogether cease loving yourself and, forgetting yourself, love your neighbor. For it is a perversity that we want to be loved by all and want to seek our interests in all people; but it is uprightness that if you do to everyone else what in your perverseness you want done to yourself, you will do good with the same zeal as you used to do evil." LW 25:513

Does this apply to children? Can you see your own children in this description?

Posted by: Bill Cork | [May 04, 2011 at 09:43 PM](#)

(I grabbed those quotes from this webpage (<http://zwingliusredivivus.wordpress.com/2010/01/22/incurvatus-in-se/>) having done a quick Google. I accidentally included a sentence from the author of that blog, i.e., "Perhaps the fullest explanation is this one-").


Posted by: BC | [May 04, 2011 at 09:45 PM](#)

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