

Introduction to Part 2

The previous issue carried a sermon by Menno Simons on the new birth. Originally, the plan was to use a short excerpt of that sermon, but it was such a thorough article that we went ahead and published the whole thing. Now, in Part 2, we want to continue the original aim of providing an overview of the Anabaptist teaching on being born again.

We are surrounded by voices claiming to be born again. As mentioned in the last issue, over 40% of the USA claims to be born again. But ... where are the fruits?

The sad part is that many people claiming a new birth are accepting something less than the real thing—a counterfeit. As you read these small excerpts, notice words like “character,” “nature,” and “creature” ... all connected with another very important word—“NEW”!

Compare what these men said with what is being said today about a new birth experience. Who is right? Check it with your Bible, and look at the fruit of those who are teaching the new birth as something less than a thorough remanufacturing of the spirit of man by the Holy Ghost.

These excerpts are in general chronological order, along with the man-given name (i.e. “Hutterian”) of the group they would have associated with most closely, to show the unity of this teaching across time and space. Although various expressions of the Anabaptist movement did arise, at the very core of each expression was a common view of the new birth as the entrance into the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, some descendents of the Anabaptists have now lost the essence of the new birth. They have swallowed the teachings of modern Evangelicalism, or have almost rejected entirely the truth about being born again.

Take the time needed to contemplate well what these men are saying. Especially so if you would like to experience a total renovation of your character and be changed into the very image of God Himself! ~

Leonhard Dax

“Hutterian” Anabaptist, mid 1500s

One does not need to cross the ocean to see heathenism, because whoever forsakes God’s demands and orders is already in heathenism. Heathenism has covered all the earth.

But whoever wants to forsake heathenism can do so easily, only through true repentance and through the new birth, and the renewing accomplished through the Spirit. This is how one “comes out of heathenism.” In other words, this is the beginning and entrance into Christianity, when:

- * one forsakes all unrighteousness
- * forsakes the devil and his company
- * surrenders to God
- * builds a covenant with Him
- * in all diligence guards himself from all unrighteousness

The Spiritual

Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead

Part



* surrenders to making himself common with all the children of God, where one can serve God in a right way.

That is how the Holy Spirit has appointed it to be in His church.¹

Dirk Philips

Dutch Anabaptist, mid 1500s

Therefore, I was compelled out of Christian love to warn you of all such false Christians and messengers of Satan, and through God’s grace to write you a little about the new birth and the new creature, and then to show how not everyone who boasts of the new birth and chatters much about the new creature is therefore a new person who is born out of God.

But whoever has become a partaker of:

- * the divine character
- * the being of Jesus Christ
- * the power and character of the Holy Spirit

Resurrection

lead, and Christ shall give thee light. Ep. 5:14

Part 2



... and, who conforming himself to the image of Jesus Christ in all submission, obedience, and righteousness serves God—in summary, one who is a right-believing Christian—is a new person and a new creature in Christ Jesus. 2 Pe. 1:4; He. 3:14; 1 Jn. 4:13 Therefore, it is necessary to consider how the new birth takes place, where it comes from, through what it happens, how powerful it is, and what fruit it produces

I say thus in conclusion: The born-again children of God and new creatures in Christ Jesus are those who are born the second time out of God the heavenly Father through Christ Jesus, and are made new and holy through the Holy Spirit. They have become participants of God's nature, of the being of Jesus Christ, and of the character of the Holy Spirit. Jn. 1:12; 1 Pe. 1:23; 2 Pe. 1:4; He. 3:14

They are those who have died to sin and still daily die more and more, and experience righteous living. They never boast in themselves, but only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to them and

they to the world. Ga. 6:14 They walk, in true faith, according to the teachings of Christ and follow in his footsteps. 1 Pe. 2:21 They know no one according to the flesh. 2 Co. 5:16 Neither do they have an appetite for what is human, but for what is divine. Ma. 16:23.

In summary, these are righteous and do righteousness just as God out of whom they are born is righteous; these are minded like Christ Jesus and are motivated by the Holy Spirit. 1 Jn. 2:29; Ph. 2:5 Ro. 8:14

Where this takes place, there one sees the kingdom of God; (Jn. 3:3) there one comes into the kingdom of heaven; there is a new creature in Christ Jesus. Ga. 6:15²

Peter Riedemann

“Hutterian” Anabaptist, mid 1500s

Since we are born of God in the spiritual way of Christ—and not in the human way of Adam—we must carefully consider how the birth of Christ took place. It occurred, as already noted, in faith and through the working of the Holy Spirit. Lu. 1:26-38 Whoever wishes to have Christ's nature and character must also be born of God. 1 Pe. 1:3-5 That person must, with Christ, be God's child. Ro. 8:14-16 This is what Peter says with the words, “You have been born anew, not of mortal but of immortal seed, and this seed is the word of truth.” 1 Pe. 1:3-5

Here is how this birth takes place:

If the Word is heard and believed, then faith is sealed with the power of God, with his Holy Spirit. Ep. 1:12-14 The Spirit immediately makes the person new (Ro. 12:2) since that person has been dead in sin, (Ep. 2:1-10) restoring to life the one who stands before God in righteousness. That person has been made into a new creature, (2 Co. 5:17) a new person after God's likeness, (Ge. 1:27) and has become renewed in this likeness. Ep. 4:20-32; Co. 3:1-11 Whoever is born in this way should receive baptism as a bath of rebirth. Ti. 3:1-7 This signifies being inscribed in the covenant of the grace and knowledge of God. Je. 31:33-34³

Thomas von Imbroich

“Swiss Brethren,” mid 1500s

Yes, they must be reborn, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, namely, the living Word of God (which remains eternally). 1 Pe. 1, Jn. 3

Those who are thus born of this spiritual “seed of Abraham” will bring forth spiritual fruits; that is, all kinds of kindness, righteous deeds, and truth. They are obedient to their Father; they keep the commandments and follow His precepts. Ep. 5; Jn. 10, 14, 15; Is. 55 They abandon ungodly living (Ro. 12) and are not conformed to the world. They seek the things that are above, where Christ is, and not those things that are on the earth. They kill and crucify the sinful

“I wants” of their flesh (Co. 3) and follow in the footsteps of Jesus (their predecessor) in grief, needs, and persecution, and are obedient to Him unto death. Ga. 3; 1 Pe. 2; He. 11 We therefore say that those who are thus driven by the Spirit of God are the spiritual descendents of Abraham and are children of God. Ro. 4, 8

Thus, all the Scriptures cited above testify that no one is born of God who does not have such faith and has not received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance. Ep. 1⁴

Hans de Ries

Dutch “Mennonite,” early 1600s

The new birth is an act of God effected in the soul of the truly repentant, a restoring of the image of God in man, a renewing of the mind and heart, an enlightening of reason through an acknowledgment of the truth. This new birth brings with it a transformation of the will, of the fleshly desires and lust. It is a sincere putting to death of all evil within, a killing of the old man with his desires and life of sin and rebellion.

At the same time, the new birth brings an awakening of new life in God, in true goodness, righteousness, and holiness. Being born again is a taking away of the heart of stone with its pride, ignorance, blindness, sin, and sinful lusts. It is truly an unmerited granting of the promised fleshly heart filled with the law of God, light, wisdom, understanding, virtue, and holy desires. This new birth comes from God through Christ. It is worked in us by the Holy Spirit with his fire and power, not by something we creatures do by natural means. This is how the regenerate person testifies whether he is born the second time or not.

By means of the new birth, we become children of God, spiritual-minded, righteous, and holy. We believe and teach that this new birth is necessary for salvation according to the words of Christ: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and again, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”⁵

Henry Funck

“Mennonite” immigrant to US, mid-1700s

When a sinner becomes alarmed at the awful and threatening sound of the gospel—so that his hard heart begins to break, and melt into contrition—then the word of the Spirit

is ready to enter into the heart and give instructions how the sinner must amend his life, abstain from sin, and repent like those of Ninevah in Jonah 3. He must come with true repentance and humbleness of mind, in fasting and prayer, and with the prodigal son return, saying, “I have sinned against heaven and before thee!” Lu. 15:18 With Peter, he must acknowledge his sins ... go out and weep bitterly. Mt. 26:75 And with those who were pricked in their heart at Jerusalem, cry, “Men and Brethren, what shall we do?” To these Peter answered, “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.” Ac. 2:37-38

Now when man is brought to see and acknowledge his natural evil state by the word of God—which is spirit and life!—he is then rightly drawn to God, by God.

He will then find in himself a living faith, newness of life, and regeneration. Jn. 3:8 So is every one that is born of the Spirit. And as the Apostle Peter writes in his first Epistle (1:3): Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Also, James 1:18: Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

When man, by the word of the Spirit, is remanufactured—born again—then will be fulfilled in him what the Lord spoke by the prophet Ezekiel (36:25-27), as mentioned above. For man will then be cleansed from all his filthiness and idols, by the sprinkling of clean water upon him, in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For the word of the Spirit teaches him that all impurity and unholiness must be done away and renounced. A new heart and a new spirit is now given him, and the heart of stone is removed by the Spirit, and a heart of flesh given him. And by the Spirit, such men will be made that will walk in the commandments of the Lord and keep his judgments. And when man is thus renewed by the Spirit, he is a partaker of spiritual baptism. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Ti. 3:5-6

Thus is man remanufactured and born again of God, by the sowing of His word; and by the sprinkling and pouring out the Word, and water of the Spirit, he will be washed and cleansed from all uncleanness; and by faith in Jesus Christ be made a child of God, and a partaker of His spiritual gifts!⁶

The new birth is a restoring of the image of God in man.

David Beiler

“Amish” bishop, mid 1800s

According to the witness of the prophets, the new birth is a work of God within man; man is illuminated and anointed from above through God’s grace; so that he can recognize his great poverty, sinful manner, nature, and character; so that he comes to be spiritually poor. Mt. 5:3 This continues until he confesses that nothing good dwells in his flesh (Ro. 7:18) and he very much deserves the eternal punishment and pain due to his fleshly living.

When a person is stirred and broken in his heart in this way, an earnest and true repentance will undoubtedly follow. He will be completely shaken and moved, so that he speaks from an overflowing heart and mouth: “Lord have patience with me and I will pay Thee all;” (Mt. 18:26) or have patience with me a poor sinner, I want to mend my ways. Then it may happen as Christ teaches us: “The master of the servant had compassion and released him and also forgave him his debt.” Mt. 18:27; Lk. 18:13 When we observe carefully how merciful God is towards us poor sinners and we turn to Him with a heart of faith, then God

for Christ's sake will forgive everything and release us (we might well say) from the bands in which Satan has bound us for a long time. Lu. 13:16; 8:27

The new birth is to be understood as Paul says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Co. 5:17 James says: "Of His own will He has begotten us through the Word of Truth, so that we become first fruits of His creatures." Ja. 1:18 And Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1 Pe. 1:3

I believe Paul speaks here in the same manner as Christ spoke to Nicodemus. We must be born of God if we want to overcome the world and ourselves through the grace of God, because we are too weak without God's help and support. When we are born of God, we receive the greatest and most precious promise of obtaining a godly nature.

When we have a godly manner and nature, we have the same inclination as He who said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Jn. 6:38 Therefore all newborn Christians must be so inclined that they follow the command of Jesus Christ with full obedience—not only saying that we accept His teachings, but believing with the whole heart that Jesus Christ is the eternal wisdom of God in whom dwells all the fullness of the deity bodily (Co. 2:9) and He is the likeness of the invisible God. We have to receive Him in faith, relying on the fact that God made Him to be our wisdom, righteousness, healing, and redemption"

We must acknowledge Him and that all good accomplished in and through us is of God's grace. In the same way, the new birth or rebirth within man is a work of God. Through illumination from above, we come to recognize our fallen nature and that in our natural state we are alienated from the life which is of God (Ep. 4:18) and the natural man comprehends nothing of the Spirit of God. To him it is foolishness and he cannot understand it because it must be spiritually discerned. 1 Co. 2:14

... Whatever is born within us of the Spirit is godly or heavenly; for as the seed is, so is the fruit. The naturally good seed produces, with God's blessing, good fruit. That which comes from God leads to God.

When we are renewed and converted through the power of the Spirit—from Adam into Christ, from the fleshly into the spiritual, from the earthly into the heavenly, so that we

overcome all fleshly desires which rage within us and tempt us to sin—then we have experienced the work of the new birth. The old Adamic man of sin must be brought into obedience to Christ, through the Spirit of His power. 2 Co. 10:5 This is the denying of which Christ speaks, "If any man will follow after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever loves his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of the Gospel, shall find it." Mk. 8:34-35

We must understand from the words of Christ that there is no promise of salvation outside of the new birth, because He says, "Ye must be born again."

When we look at our condition from our youth, what was the first fruit we produced? Was it not the first fruits of disobedience against the command and will of our parents? Self-will shows up early in youth. We can see this is true in our children. And disobedience is often the beginning of many more sins and leads to destruction

I believe there are people who put much trust into outward ceremonies, like baptism and the Lord's supper; but these do not bring salvation according to the words of Christ, apart from change of heart and belief that Jesus Christ came to save sinners: not those who continue in sin, but the burdened who are concerned about their salvation. He is the wellspring of life! Ps. 36:9 Pr. 13:14

... We cannot speak or teach others with spiritual power about the new birth, its function and fruit, without first having experienced it ourselves and thereby reached a true conversion and change of heart. We must have buried the old man of sin and **be resurrected with Christ to a new life**; so that we truly can say with Paul, "*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*" Ga. 2:20⁷ ~

Note that some of the above quotations have been adapted into modern English and may not therefore represent a word-for-word quotation from the sources listed below.

¹ Leonhard Dax, *Instructions* (Elk, Wa: Old Hutterian Publishing Company, 1996).

² Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1995), 57-59.

³ Peter Riedemann and John J. Friesen, *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith: Translation of the 1565 German Edition of Confession of Our Religion, Teaching, and Faith, by the Brothers ...* (Herald Press, 1999), 110.

⁴ Leonard Gross, trans., *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls* (Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1999), 98.

⁵ Taken from a "Confession of Faith" written by Hans in 1618

⁶ Henry Funck, *A Mirror of Baptism, with the Spirit, with Water, and with Blood* (Lancaster, Pa: John Baer's Sons, 1890), 29-31.

⁷ David Beiler, *True Christianity, A Christian Meditation on the Teachings of the Holy Scripture, translated from Das Wahre Christenthum*, trans. Adelheide Schutzi and Issac J. Lowry (Parkesburg, Pa: Benueel S. Blank Family, 2009), 223+.

When we
are born of God,
we receive
the greatest and
most precious promise
of obtaining
a godly nature.