

# The Discerner

the voice of... Religion Analysis Service

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING  
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 27, Number 4

October • November • December 2007

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth  
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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## DEAR READER

**W**e greet you into this New Year with Psalm 84:11:  
"For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD  
bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold  
from those whose walk is blameless"; and then with two  
stanzas from "May the Mind of Christ our Savior" by  
Kate B. Wilkinson:

May the mind of Christ my Savior live in me from day to day,  
By His love and pow'r controlling all I do and say.

May the love of Jesus fill me as the waters fill the sea,  
Him exalting, self abasing, this is victory.

We thank all who have written notes and comments and  
given gifts recently. For instance:

Dr. William BeVier, president of the Religion Analysis

Service for 25 years, writes from Missouri that he and JoAnn are enjoying retirement. Jo Ann plays the piano at a nursing facility in Elfindale while Bill ministers monthly in Elfindale and teaches regularly on Sunday evenings at the Springfield Bible Church. Both continue to help us betimes with The Discerner.

“Thank you for your faithful stand to expose deception and to honor the Word of God. We enjoy your interesting journal”. D. and S. Dubois, Lake Tahoe, California

“Enclosed is our year-end giving check. We are thankful for The Discerner. It means a lot to us”.  
Bill and Nancy Johnson, Edina, Minnesota.

“I enjoy every issue of The Discerner. It is a great magazine. I read it and reread it a year later. ... (I’m) looking forward to the next issue”.  
Robert H. Johnson, Lincoln, Nebraska.

“It is some time that I have written to you about a movement in the Christian religious field. Your replies have always been a help”.  
Albert Springer, North Bay, Ontario writes about the Fresh Fires Ministries.

“I would like to order The Discerner for the following... The articles on the Pope and Global Warming are worth the sending of the voice of the RAS to other conservative Christians”. (They requested five copies, editor).  
Dick and Jane Nunn, Park Rapids, MN

God bless you all.

Sincerely, gratefully,

Laurence J. Sutherland

## WITH THIS ISSUE

The New Year is still very much a “tabula rasa” for us as this issue goes to print. We are assured that this issue will stimulate and stir our hearts and minds about basic currents in the Church which we view with a certain amount of angst. RAS is committed to fulfill our mandate to expose these aberrant teachings and to warn the Church of Jesus Christ about them. Professor Emeritus David Larsen, one of RAS’ faithful advisors and article contributors, steps up to the plate with a cogent evaluation of Pentecostalism at this historical junction. Pentecostalism’s preoccupation with the “health and wealth gospel” threatens its traditional vitality and adherence to biblical authority.

While we are thinking of historical views on biblical teaching and practice, we are submitting two articles from yesteryear that have relevance to our modern perceptions on The New Birth. William Plumer defines biblically and factually God’s special and singular work in the human heart; Arthur Pink, a prolific writer and expositor, explains The New Birth more from angle of the outworking of this wonderful doctrine. Buddhists, Muslims, New Agers and even modern psychology have their distorted accounts of being “born again”, but nothing compares to the biblical and experiential accounts of genuine Christians.

For the first time in its 61 years of existence, RAS has cataloged 958 articles from former editions of The Discerner. Our own treasurer and volunteer office manager, Ron Anderson, has performed this remarkable and mammoth work for all concerned. With this issue we present a sample of articles written in 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, and 2005. These years were selected at random, but they should provide a kaleidoscopic view of the themes dealt with over the years - from theological expositions, countercult analyses and book reviews to

personal anecdotal confrontations with pernicious error and satanic deception. Please take time to look over the sample. An order form is provided, and the photocopy, original copy and mailing costs are minimal. Upon request, we would be pleased to send the complete catalog of the 958 articles to you.

A quiz about theological expressions should challenge lay leaders, preachers, and teachers alike. If you achieve 100% without encyclopedic help, you are to be congratulated.

Laurence J. Sutherland

# THE HORRENDOUS CASE OF A CONTEMPORARY HI-JACKING

*By David Larsen, Ph.D, Professor Emeritus of Preaching  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

## **Probing and Perceiving a Theological Peril**

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy...” John 10:10a

“Certain men ...have secretly slipped in among you...who change the grace of God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord ...”Jude 4

The hostile hi-jacking of a plane or any mode of transportation strikes fear into every traveler’s heart. The so-called emergent church (really the submergent church) is hi-jacking some among us into a bizarre movement which generally disdains theology, preaching and evangelium as we have known them. But I am here speaking primarily of what appears to be the hi-jacking of the world Pentecostal movement by the prosperity gospel, health and wealth theology, the so-called “name and claim it” approach to Christian living and service. We need to be discerning and very cautious because there are false prophets all about us.

While we have differed with our Pentecostal brothers and sisters on many issues (such as their insistence that speaking in tongues is the sign-gift of the Holy Spirit), we have stood together on the Book, the Blood and the Blessed Hope. We have lamented that preaching is often subordinated to experience and demonstration but have rejoiced that the world-wide spiritual conflagration which commenced in the Azusa Street Prayer Meeting in Los Angeles in 1906 has been and is bringing many to Christ. We have admired the passion and zeal of our Pentecostal friends even though that zeal has sometimes seemed to be without knowledge. Although a few voices in the movement are speaking against it, the fact is an historic departure from orthodoxy is underway and we need to grasp the issues for much is at stake.

## **The Source of the Heresy**

Preaching in the tradition of the New Testament and the

Reformation is vertical, i.e. God-centered. Preaching in the tradition of the Enlightenment is horizontal, i.e. man-centered. Theology in the latter becomes anthropology, not about God but about man. The American Religion is seen to be a hotch-potch of Emersonian gnosticism (cf. his His famous essay “On Self-Reliance”), Harvard pragmatism and American Manifest Destiny. Its anthem has been Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Self” (“I sing of myself”) Professor E. Brooks Holifield subtitles his splendid *A History of Pastoral Care in America - From Salvation to Self-Realization*”.

While Spurgeon, Maclaren, Liddon and Parker proclaimed the everlasting Gospel in England in the 19th century, in America the great preachers like Horace Bushnell, Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks were denying the substitutionary atonement and were preaching a message of works leading only to self-inflation. Sadly the tradition has been perpetuated in Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller and now Joel Osteen, the Houston pastor who preaches in what was once a football stadium to the largest church in America. His message is that God wants you to prosper materially, have preference in the job-market and in finding the best parking slot. This is narcissism with a vengeance. God is more concerned that we be holy than we be happy. This message caters to the flesh and downgrades the cross of Christ. Professor Thomas Johnston of Midwestern Baptist Seminary in Kansas City has shown that Rick Warren’s message downplays sin and denatures the substitutionary atonement of Christ (cf. *TRINITY JOURNAL*, Fall 2004, p.157-185). Many around us have moved out upon this slippery slope in our times.

### **The Susceptibility of Pentecostalism to this Error**

While many are being gobbled up by this pernicious error, our Pentecostal friends are especially vulnerable. Historically both the Assembly of God and the Church of the Foursquare Gospel have subscribed to the pre-tribulational rapture of the Church and the establishment of the Kingdom at the coming of Christ in power and glory with His Church. Presently there is sweeping through Pentecostalism an upsurge of triumphalism, call it old-fashioned post-millennialism in which the Church will defeat our spiritual enemies and that anything less than total victory by the Church is a negative reflection on God and His power. This is sometimes called “positive confession” by our charismatic friends. But is it Biblical?

The further common error among Pentecostals and some others, healing in the atonement (by virtues of which every believer is entitled to full physical health by faith just as in the case of salvation) makes them vulnerable to health and wealth pitfalls. No one among us would deny God's power to heal but this is all in His sovereign purpose and we must joyfully yield to His blessed will. Some of the most godly people we have known have had little of this world's goods and have coped with serious physical and emotional problems. It is a serious mistake to suggest that we can reproduce the Book of Acts or the Gospels in our times. Some Pentecostal extremes have been most distressing as when people vomit in the Spirit or when the emphasis falls on changing the base metals in our fillings into gold. God have mercy!

The Kingdom of Heaven is not yet on earth; culture and nature are yet in their fallen state (Romans 8:18-27). "It does not yet appear what we shall be!" It is therefore most troubling when we realize that the huge gospel harvests reported in Latin America (400 an hour coming to Christ) or in Africa (700 an hour coming to Christ even in the face of militant Islam) are largely Pentecostal and deeply into the prosperity gospel. We can rest assured that the underground Church in China is not much into prosperity theology. They are almost entirely premillennial.

### **The Scripture Touchstone**

Basic to this mass confusion is the improper application of Old Testament promises for Israel to the Church which is Christ's body. Pentecostals have historically stood with us in seeing the certainty of God's promises to Israel and their restoration at the end of the age. God did promise prosperity and peace in the land if the children of Israel would obey (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27-28). These are not promises made to any other nation - these are for Israel and the Church is not Israel. We are promised in the New Testament that God will take care of us (Matthew 6:25-34). He will supply our need, not our greed (Philippians 4:19). Israel is the earthly people of God and the Church is the Heavenly people of God. Failure to observe this distinction leads to colossal errors such as health and wealth teaching all around us. Paul marveled that the Galatians were "soon removed" from the sound teaching he had given them (1:6). We need to be under a deep burden of prayer in the present growing confusion. Failure to



observe dispensational differences can quickly lead us into wrong paths. Dispensationalism is the key to history and prophecy and is the reliable safeguard against some of the convoluted tangents into which some around us are being catapulted. "TO THE BOOK AND THE TESTIMONY!"

David Larsen, Ph.D

# THE NEW BIRTH DEFINED

By William Plumer (1802-1880)

**F**rom first to last, salvation is all of grace. Paul says: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 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 3:3-6). So it is clearly by the grace and mediation<sup>1</sup> of our Lord Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit is sent down to renew our natures and to accomplish in us the new birth. *Pardon* saves a sinner from the curse of the Law and the lake of fire; *acceptance* through Christ gives him a title to heaven; but in *regeneration* the dominion of sin begins to be destroyed and the soul begins to be fitted for the Master's use.

The new birth is a great mystery, yet it is much insisted on in Scripture. "The washing of regeneration" is as necessary as washing in the blood of Christ. "The renewing of the Holy Ghost" is as essential as the "justification of life." Within the space of four verses, our Lord thrice declares how necessary it is to salvation. Hear Him: "Ver-ily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...Except a man be born of water and of the Spir-it, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God...Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:3, 5, 7). The fallow<sup>2</sup> ground must be broken up or the good seed will not take root in our hearts. The wild olive must undergo the operation of engrafting with the good olive, or it will remain worthless. All the Scriptures teach as much. Christ regarded it as by no means marvelous<sup>3</sup> that a vile sinner must undergo a great spiritual change before he could be fit for the service of God.

Perhaps there is not a more driveling<sup>4</sup> error than that which teaches that baptism with water is the regeneration that Jesus Christ and His Apostles insist upon. When men can

confound the “washing of regeneration” with the washing with water, they are fully prepared to follow, in fact they are *already* following, in the footsteps of those who confounded “that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh” with that circumcision, which is “of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom 2:29). Perhaps, too, no error is more mischievous than this. It is monstrous that such error and folly should be taught in lands where God’s Word is in general use.

To baptism, some add an outward reformation and insist that this should be admitted as sufficient. Supposing this to be the meaning of Christ and His Apostles, it is impossible to defend them from the charge of using very mysterious language to convey so simple an idea. But such a belief is never entertained by those who have a becoming<sup>5</sup> respect for God’s Word. It will therefore claim no more attention at this time.

**Sound divines have very remarkably agreed in telling us what regeneration is.** Dr. Witherspoon says, “A new birth implies an universal change. It must be of the whole man, not in some particular, but in all without exception.”<sup>6</sup> And he shows at length that it is not partial, external, imperfect, but that it is universal, inward, essential, complete, and supernatural.

Charnock says, “Regeneration is a mighty and powerful change, wrought in the soul by the efficacious working of the Holy Spirit, wherein a vital principle, a new habit, the Law of God, and a divine nature are put into and framed in the heart, enabling it to act holily and pleasingly to God, and to grow up therein to eternal glory.”<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Thomas Scott<sup>8</sup> quotes with approbation<sup>9</sup> another definition, but does not give his author. He says, “Regeneration may be defined [as] a change wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit in the understanding, will, and affections of a sinner, which is the commencement of a new kind of life, and which gives another direction to his judgment, desires, pursuits, and conduct.”

Although this change is called by various names, yet the doctrine of Scripture respecting it is uniform. Sometimes it is called a holy calling, a creation, a new creation, a translation, a circumcision of the heart, a resurrection. But whatever be the name, the thing signified is everywhere spoken of in very

solemn terms and as a rich fruit of God's grace. Thus says Paul, "It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me" (Gal 1:15-16). Again: "[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2Ti 1:9). Again, Peter says that "the God of all grace...hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus" (1Pe 5:10).

**Nor have the purest churches ever doubted the necessity of this change.** They also remarkably agree concerning its nature. The Westminster Assembly<sup>10</sup> teaches that "[God] is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spir-it, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace."<sup>11</sup>

The Latter Confession of Helvetia<sup>12</sup> says, "In regeneration the understanding is illuminated by the Holy Ghost, that it may understand both the mysteries and will of God. And the will itself is not only changed by the Spirit, but is also endued with faculties, that, of its own accord, it may will and do good,"<sup>13</sup> and quotes in proof Romans 8:4; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27; John 8:36; Philippians 1:6, 29; and 2:13.

The Synod of Dort<sup>14</sup> says, "This regenerating grace of God worketh not upon men as if they were stocks and stones, nor doth it abolish the will and properties of their will, or violently constrain it, but doth spiritually revive it, heal it, rectify it, and powerfully yet gently bend it: so that where formerly the rebellion of the flesh, and stubbornness did domineer without control, now a willing and sincere obedience to the Spirit begins to reign; in which change the true and spiritual rescue and freedom of our will doth consist..."<sup>15</sup>

**The truth is that if we give up regeneration, the last hope that a sinner may ever again be either holy or happy is gone forever.** The Church of Ireland<sup>16</sup> holds that

“All God’s elect are in their time inseparably united unto Christ, by the effectual and vital influence of the Holy Ghost, derived from him, as from the head, unto every true member of his mystical body. And being thus made one with Christ they are truly regenerated, and made partakers of him and all his benefits.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, nothing could more distress one, who rightly considered his lost estate, than to have the hope that springs from the doctrine of regeneration destroyed or seriously shaken...Every man, who has ever had his eyes opened to see his own wretchedness and vileness, will agree to the saying of Usher: “It is not a little reforming will save the man, no, nor all the morality of the world, nor all the common graces of God’s Spirit, nor the outward change of the life: they will not do, unless we are quickened and have a new life wrought in us.”<sup>18</sup>

In his old age, when he could no longer see to read, John Newton<sup>19</sup> heard someone repeat this text, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1Co 15:10). He remained silent a short time and then, as if speaking to himself, he said, “I am not what I ought to be. Ah! How imperfect and deficient! I am not what I wish to be. I abhor that which is evil, and I would cleave to that which is good. I am not what I hope to be. Soon, soon I shall put off mortality and with mortality all sin and imperfection. Though I am not what I ought to be, what I wish to be, and what I hope to be, yet I can truly say, I am not what I once was, a slave to sin and Satan; I can heartily join with the apostle and acknowledge, ‘By the grace of God, I am what I am.’ ”

...Our second birth brings us into a state of grace. It is one of the richest of God’s covenanted mercies. When one is born anew, a fatal blow is given to Satan’s kingdom in the heart; for “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Joh 3:6). *This is a work of amazing energy!* It was for good cause that the Synod of Dort taught, “God, in regenerating a man, doth employ that omnipotent strength, whereby he may powerfully and infallibly bow and bend his will unto faith and conversion.”<sup>20</sup> Paul uses all the strong words he is master of to teach us that we are renewed by power, by amazing energy. He prayed that his Ephesians might know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Eph 1:19-20). We know of no greater

power than that which accomplished the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the same power converts the soul...Dr. Nevins says, "Some think and represent it as easy to save a soul—to bend a will—to change a heart. Easy? It is God's greatest work...God, in saving a soul, putteth forth a mightier energy than in making many worlds."<sup>21</sup> In his *Views in Theology*, Dr. Beecher admits, "The power of God in regeneration is represented as among the greatest displays of his omnipotence ever made, or to be made in the history of the universe. When the fair creation rose fresh in beauty from the hand of God, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy; but sweeter songs will celebrate and louder shouts will attend the consummation of redemption by the power of God's Spirit..."<sup>22</sup>

From *The Grace of Christ*, reprinted by Sprinkle Publications.

**William S. Plumer (1802-1880):** American Presbyterian minister; author of *Vital Godliness, The Law of God*, and many others. Born in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

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- <sup>1</sup> **mediation** – the redeeming work of Jesus Christ for sinners, as Prophet, Priest, and King.
- <sup>2</sup> **fallow** – land left unplowed and unseeded during growing season; uncultivated.
- <sup>3</sup> **no means marvelous** – not surprising; not astonishing.
- <sup>4</sup> **driveling** – senseless; nonsensical.
- <sup>5</sup> **becoming** – befitting; suitable.
- <sup>6</sup> **John Witherspoon** (1723-1794) – Presbyterian leader, signatory of the Declaration of Independence, 6<sup>th</sup> President of the College in New Jersey in Princeton; from *Treatises on Justification and Regeneration* (Amherst: J. S. & C. Adams, 1830), 94.
- <sup>7</sup> **Stephen Charnock** (1628-1680) – English Presbyterian Puritan; from "A Discourse of the Nature of Regeneration" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* Vol. III, (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust), 87.
- <sup>8</sup> **Thomas Scott** (1747-1821) – Anglican author of *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*.
- <sup>9</sup> **approbation** – approval.
- <sup>10</sup> **Westminster Assembly of Divines 1643** – an assembly of 121 theologians appointed by the "Puritan" Long Parliament with making proposals

for reforming the Church of England; it produced the Westminster Confession, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Directory for Public Worship, and the Form of Church Government.

- <sup>11</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith 10.1.
- <sup>12</sup> **Latter Confession of Helvetia** – a.k.a the Second Confession of Helvetica; a confession of the Swiss Reformation, authored by Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575).
- <sup>13</sup> Latter Confession of Helvetia 9.6.
- <sup>14</sup> **Synod of Dort or Dordt** – a council convened to settle the serious controversy in the Dutch churches initiated by the rise of *Arminianism*. Arminians were the followers of Jacob Arminius, a theological professor at Leiden University, who questioned the teaching of Calvin on a number of important points. After Arminius's death, his followers presented their views on five of these points in the Remonstrance of 1610. The Canons of the Synod of Dort rejected the Arminians' views and set forth the doctrines of unconditional election, definite atonement, radical depravity, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of saints.
- <sup>15</sup> The Articles of the Dort 3.16.
- <sup>16</sup> **The Irish Articles** – one hundred and four theological points adopted by the Irish Episcopal Church (1615) and written by James Usher (see note 18 below). These articles were a major influence on the Westminster Confession of Faith.
- <sup>17</sup> Irish Articles of Religion 33.
- <sup>18</sup> **James Usher or Ussher** (1581-1656) – Anglican Archbishop of Armagh, Ireland, and professor of divinity at Dublin; from *Eighteen Sermons Preached in Oxford 1640* (London: S. Griffin for John Rothwell at the Fountain in Cheapside, 1660), 57.
- <sup>19</sup> **John Newton** (1725-1807) – Anglican minister, author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*.
- <sup>20</sup> Canons of the Synod of Dort: Rejection of Errors on the third and fourth chapters, in nine articles.
- <sup>21</sup> William Nevins (1797-1835), *Select Remains* (New York: J. S. Taylor, 1836), 291.
- <sup>22</sup> Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), *Views in Theology (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1836)*, 202-203.

# THE NECESSITY OF THE NEW BIRTH

By Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

Two chief obstacles lie in the way of the salvation of any of Adam's fallen descendants: bondage to the guilt and penalty of sin, bondage to the power and presence of sin; or, in other words, their being bound for hell and their being unfit for heaven. These obstacles are, so far as man is concerned, entirely insurmountable.<sup>1</sup> This fact was unequivocally<sup>2</sup> established by Christ, when in answer to His disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?" He answered, "With men this is impossible." A lost sinner might more easily create a world than save his own soul. But—forever be His name praised—the Lord Jesus went on to say, "With God all things are possible" (Mat 19:25-26). Yes, problems that completely baffle human wisdom are solvable by Omniscience. Tasks that defy the utmost efforts of man are easily accomplished by Omnipotence. Nowhere is this fact more strikingly exemplified than in God's saving of the sinner.

As intimated above, two things are absolutely essential in order to salvation: deliverance from the guilt and penalty of sin, deliverance from the power and presence of sin. The one is secured by the mediatorial work<sup>3</sup> of Christ; the other is accomplished by the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit. The one is the blessed result of what the Lord Jesus did *for* God's people; the other is the glorious consequence of what the Holy Spirit does *in* God's people...

Now a vital and saving knowledge of these Divine truths cannot be acquired by a mere study of them. No amount of pouring over the Scriptures, no painstaking examination of the soundest doctrinal treatises, no exercise of the intellect is able to secure the slightest spir-itual insight into them. True, the diligent seeker may attain a natural knowledge, an intellectual apprehension of them, just as one born blind may obtain a notional knowledge of the colorings of the flowers or of the beauties of a sunset. But the natural man can no more arrive at a spiritual knowledge of spiritual things than a blind man can a true knowledge of natural things, yea, than a man



in his grave can know what is going on in the world he has left. Nor can anything short of Divine power bring the proud heart to a felt realization of this humbling fact: only as God supernaturally enlightens is any soul made conscious of the awful spiritual darkness in which it naturally dwells.

The truth of what has just been said is established by the plain and solemn declaration of 1 Corinthians 2:14: "But the natural man receiv-eth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"...An external knowledge of Divine truth, as revealed in Scripture, may charm the mind and form ground for speculation and conversation, but unless there is a Divine application of them to the conscience and heart, such knowledge will be of no more avail in the hour of death than the pleasing images of our dreams are of any satisfaction when we awake. How awful to think that multitudes of professing Christians will awaken in Hell to discover that their knowledge of Divine truth was no more substantial than a dream!

While it be true that no man by searching can find out God (Job 11:7), and that the mysteries of His kingdom are sealed secrets until He deigns<sup>d</sup> to reveal them to the soul (Mat 13:11), nevertheless, it is also true that God is pleased to use means in the conveyance of heav-enly light to our sin-darkened understandings. It is for this reason that He commissions His servants to preach the Word, and, by voice and pen, expound the Scriptures. Nevertheless, their labors will produce no eternal fruits unless He condescends to bless the seed they sow and give it an increase. Thus, no matter how faithfully, simply, helpfully a sermon be preached or an article written, unless the Spirit applies it to the heart, the hearer or reader is no spiritual gainer. Then will you not humbly entreat God to open your heart to receive whatever is according to His holy Word in this booklet?

**...Regeneration is no mere outward reformation, no mere turning over a new leaf and endeavoring to live a better life.** The new birth is very much more than going forward and taking the preacher's hand: it is a supernatural operation of God upon man's spirit, a transcendent wonder. All of God's works are wonderful. The world in which we live is filled with things that amaze us. Physical birth is a marvel; but from several standpoints, the new birth is more remark-

able. It is a marvel of Divine grace, Divine wisdom, Divine power, and Divine beauty. It is a miracle performed upon and within ourselves, of which we may be personally cognizant.<sup>5</sup> It will prove an eternal marvel.

**Because regeneration is the work of God, it is a mysterious thing.** All God's works are shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Life, natural life, in its origin, in its nature, its processes, baffles the most careful investigator. Much more is this the case with spiritual life. The Existence and Being of God transcends the finite grasp. How then can we expect to understand the process by which we become His children? Our Lord Himself declared that the new birth is a thing of mystery: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound there-of, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Joh 3:8)...

**Regeneration is an intensely solemn thing.** The new birth is the dividing line between Heaven and Hell. In God's sight there are but two classes of people on this earth: those who are dead in sins and those who are walking in newness of life. In the physical realm there is no such thing as being between life and death. A man is either dead or alive. The vital spark may be very dim, but while it exists, life is present. Let that spark go out altogether, and, though you may dress the body in beautiful clothes, nevertheless, it is nothing more than a corpse. So it is in the spiritual realm. We are either saints or sinners, spiritually alive or spiritually dead, children of God or children of the Devil. In view of this solemn fact, how momentous is the question, "Have I been born again?" If not, and you die in your present state, you will wish you had never been born at all.

**1. THE NEED FOR REGENERATION LIES IN OUR NATURAL DEGENERATION.** In consequence of the fall of our first parents, all of us were born alienated from the Divine life and holiness, despoiled of all those perfections wherewith man's nature was at first endowed. Ezekiel 16:4-5 gives a graphic picture of our terrible spiritual plight at our entrance into this world: cast out to the loathing of our persons, rolling ourselves in our own filth, impotent to help ourselves. That "likeness" of God (Gen 1:26), which was at first stamped on man's soul, has been effaced,<sup>6</sup> aversion from God and an inordinate love of the creature having displaced it. The very fountain of our beings is

polluted, continually sending forth bitter springs, and though those streams take several courses and wander in various channels, yet are they all brackish.<sup>7</sup> Therefore is the “sacrifice” of the wicked an abomination to the Lord (Pro 15:8) and his very plowing “sin” (Pro 21:4).

There are but two states, and all men are included therein: the one a state of spiritual life, the other a state of spiritual death; the one a state of righteousness, the other a state of sin; the one saving, the other damning; the one a state of enmity, wherein men have their inclinations contrary to God, the other a state of friendship and fellowship, wherein men walk obediently unto God, and would not willingly have an inward notion opposed to His will. The one state is called *darkness*, the other *light*: “For ye were (in your unregenerate days, not only in the dark, but) sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8). There is no medium between these conditions: all are in one of them. Each man and woman now on earth is either an object of God’s delight or of His abomination. The most benevolent and imposing works of the flesh cannot please Him. But the faintest sparks proceeding from that which grace hath kindled are acceptable in His sight.

**By the Fall, man contracted an *unfitness* to that which is good.** Shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5), man is a “transgressor from the womb” (Isa 48:8). “They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psa 58:3), and, “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). He may be civilized, educated, refined, and even religious; but at heart he is deceptively wicked (Jer 17:9), and all that he does is vile in the sight of God. For nothing is done from love to Him and with a view to His glory. “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Mat 7:18). Until they are born again, all men are “unto every good work reprobate” (Ti 1:16).

**By the Fall, man contracted an *unwillingness* to that which is good.** All motions of the will in its fallen estate, through defect of a right principle from whence they flow and a right end to which they tend, are only evil and sinful. Leave man to himself, remove from him all the restraints that law and order impose, and he will swiftly degenerate to a lower level than the beasts, as almost any missionary will testify. And is human nature any better in civilized lands? Not a whit. Wash off the artificial veneer, and it will be found that “as in

water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19). The world over, it remains solemnly true that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Christ will prefer the same charge in a coming day as when He was here on earth: “Men loved darkness rather than light” (Joh 3:19). Men will not come to Him that they might have “life.”

**By the Fall, man contracted an *inability* to that which is good.** He is not only unfitted and unwilling, but unable to do that which is good. Where is the man that can truthfully say he has measured up to his own ideals? All have to acknowledge there is a strange force within, dragging them downward, inclining them to evil, which, notwithstanding their utmost endeavors against it, in some form or other, more or less, conquers them. Despite the kindly exhortations of friends, the faithful warnings of God’s servants, the solemn examples of suffering and sorrow, disease and death on every side, and the vote of their own conscience, yet they yield. “They that are in the flesh (in their natural condition) cannot please God” (Rom 8:8).

Thus, it is evident that the *need* is imperative for a radical and revolutionary change to be wrought in fallen man before he can have any fellowship with the thrice-holy God...[Man] must be grafted upon another stock,<sup>8</sup> united to Christ, partake of the power of His resurrection: without this he may bring forth fruit, but not “unto God.” How can anyone turn to God without a principle of spiritual motion? How can he live to God who has no spiritual life? How can he be fit for the Kingdom of God who is of a brutish and diabolical nature?

**2. THE NEED FOR REGENERATION LIES IN MAN’S TOTAL DEPRAVITY.** Every member of Adam’s race is a fallen creature, and every part of his complex being has been corrupted by sin. Man’s heart is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). His mind is blinded by Satan (2Co 4:4) and darkened by sin (Eph 4:18), so that his thoughts are only evil continually (Gen 6:5). His affections are prostituted, so that he loves what God hates and hates what God loves. His will is enslaved from good (Rom 6:20) and opposed to God (Rom 8:7). He is without righteousness (Rom 3:10), under the curse of the Law (Gal 3:10), and is the captive of the Devil. His condition is truly deplorable and his case *desperate*. He cannot better himself, for he is “without strength” (Rom 5:6). He cannot work out

his salvation, for there dwelleth no good thing in him (Rom 7:18). He needs, then, to be born of God, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal 6:15).

Man is a fallen creature. It is not that a few leaves have faded, but that the entire tree has become rotten, root and branch. There is in every one that which is radically wrong. The word *radical* comes from a Latin one which means "the root," so that when we say a man is *radically* wrong, we mean that there is in him, in the very foundation and fiber of his being, that which is intrinsically<sup>9</sup> corrupt and essentially evil. Sins are merely the fruit: there must of necessity be a root from which they spring. It follows, then, as an inevitable consequence that man needs the aid of a Higher Power to effect a radical change in him. There is only One who can effect that change: God created man, and God alone can recreate him. Hence, the imperative demand, "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7). Man is spiritually dead and naught but almighty power can make him alive...[Therefore], the more clearly we are enabled to discern the imperative *need* of regeneration and the various reasons why it is absolutely essential in order to a fallen creature being fitted for the presence of the thrice-holy God, the less difficulty are we likely to encounter when we endeavor to arrive at an understanding of the *nature* of regeneration...

Jesus Christ came into this world to glorify God and to glorify Himself by redeeming a people unto Himself. But what glory can we conceive that God has, and what glory would accrue<sup>10</sup> to Christ, if there be not a vital and fundamental difference between His people and the world? And what difference can there be between those two companies but in a change of heart, out of which are the issues of life (Pro 4:23), a change of nature or disposition, as the fountain from which all other differences must proceed—sheep and goats differ in nature. The whole mediatorial work of Christ has this one end in view. His priestly office is to reconcile and bring His people unto God; His prophetic, to teach them the way; His kingly, to work in them those qualifications and bestow upon them that comeliness which is necessary to fit them for the holy converse<sup>11</sup> and communion with the thrice holy God. Thus does He "purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works" (Ti 2:14).

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived” (1Co 6:9). But multitudes *are* deceived, deceived at this very point and on this most momentous matter. God has warned men that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9), but few will believe that this is true of them. Instead, tens of thousands of professing Christians are filled with a vain and presumptuous confidence that all is well with them. They delude themselves with hopes of mercy while continuing to live in a course of self-will and self-pleasing. They fancy they are fitted for Heaven, while every day that passes finds them the more prepared for Hell. It is written of the Lord Jesus, “He shall save His people from their sins” (Mat 1:21), and not in their sins. [He will] save them not only from the *penalty*, but also from the *power* and *pollution* of sin.

To how many in Christendom do these solemn words apply, “For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful” (Psa 36:2)? The principal device of Satan is to deceive people into imagining that they can successfully combine the world with God, allow the flesh while pretending to the Spirit, and thus “make the best of both worlds.” But Christ has *emphatically* declared that “no man can serve two masters” (Mat 6:24)...

**3. THE NEED FOR REGENERATION LIES IN MAN’S UNSUITEDNESS TO GOD.** When Nicodemus, a respectable and religious Pharisee, yea, a “master in Israel,” came to Christ, He told him plainly that “except a man be born again” he could neither see nor enter the “kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3, 5), either the Gospel-state on earth or the Glory-state in Heaven. None can enter the spiritual realm unless he has a spiritual nature, which alone gives him an appetite for and capacity to enjoy the things pertaining to it. This, the natural man has not. So far from it, he cannot so much as “discern” them (1Co 2:14). He has no love for them nor desire after them (Joh 3:19). Nor can he desire them, for his will is enslaved by the lusts of the flesh (Eph 2:2-3). Therefore, before a man can enter the spiritual kingdom, his understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, his heart renewed, and his will emancipated.

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**A.W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author of *Studies in the Scriptures* and many books, including his well-known *The*

*Sovereignty of God.* Born in Nottingham, England, immigrated to the U.S., and later returned to his home-land in 1934.

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- <sup>1</sup> **insurmountable** – impossible to overcome.
- <sup>2</sup> **unequivocally** – exhibiting a single, clearly defined meaning.
- <sup>3</sup> **mediatorial work** – It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Saviour of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.—The 1677/89 London Baptist Confession of Faith 8.1.
- <sup>4</sup> **deigns** – descends to the level of one considered inferior; i.e., lowers Himself.
- <sup>5</sup> **cognizant** – aware.
- <sup>6</sup> **effaced** – rubbed or wiped out.
- <sup>7</sup> **brackish** – spoiled by mixture, as of sea-water with fresh.
- <sup>8</sup> **grafted...stock** – inserted into the trunk of a living tree; metaphor for union with Christ.
- <sup>9</sup> **intrinsicly** – in the nature of a thing; in and of itself.
- <sup>10</sup> **accrue** – increase.
- <sup>11</sup> **converse** – spiritual communication.



# THE DISCERNER ARCHIVE

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## QUIZ

Theologians and educators sometimes use Latin, Hebrew and Greek expressions to convey their thoughts. Do you know the following?:

1. Who asked Jesus the question: “Quo vadis?”  
 a. Herod the Great  
 b. Peter  
 c. Philip  
 d. Pilate
2. The “Nunc dimittis” - who said this?  
 a. John the Baptist  
 b. Anna  
 c. Simeon  
 d. Zechariah
3. The “imago dei” refers to  
 a. God’s power  
 b. God’ providence  
 c. God’s guidance  
 d. God’s likeness
4. “Tabula rasa” refers to  
 a. a colorful flower  
 b. absence of sin  
 c. original sin  
 d. a cry of repentance
5. Pneumatology is the study of  
 a. sin  
 b. salvation  
 c. the Holy Spirit  
 d. church ordinances
6. The tetragrammeton refers to  
 a. a secret code  
 b. God’s name  
 c. a measure  
 d. God’s decree

7. “Tohu wabohu” signifies  
\_\_\_ a. an exciting discovery  
\_\_\_ b. a state of ignorance  
\_\_\_ c. an arrogant assertion  
\_\_\_ d. a chaotic situation
8. The “Agnus dei” is  
\_\_\_ a. the servant of God  
\_\_\_ b. the God of truth  
\_\_\_ c. the lamb of God  
\_\_\_ d. the reign of God
9. The “Septuagint” is  
\_\_\_ a. the Latin translation of the Old Testament  
\_\_\_ b. the accepted Hebrew text of the Old Testament  
\_\_\_ c. the Greek translation of the Old Testament  
\_\_\_ d. is the same as the Masoretic text
10. The abbreviation (acronym) for the words on the cross is:  
\_\_\_ a. INRI  
\_\_\_ b. YHWH  
\_\_\_ c. AWANA  
\_\_\_ d. SHMA

ANSWERS: 1. (b); 2. (c); 3. (d); 4. (b); 5. (c); 6. (b); 7. (d); 8. (c); 9. (c); 10. (a)

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