A Time to be "Born Again":

A New Year - For New Beginnings

by RUSSELL J. FORNWALT

"I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you."
Ezekiel 36.26.

It's a New Year! It's time for a new calendar, a new diary, a new engagement book, a new driver's license and many other new papers and documents. For some people it's time for new clothes, a new apartment, a new car or whatever. For others the beginning of a New Year means the ritual of new resolutions – even though they may be short-lived.

In any event, the birth of a New Year drives home the need for and the importance of new beginnings. Coming as it does just a week after the glorious celebration of the birth of Christ, New Year's Day is indeed the appropriate time to be "born again" – but born again in a context larger than is Biblically prescribed.

As we review the ministry of Jesus, it seems the entire thrust of His efforts was in helping people who were discouraged, defeated or disadvantaged to begin again. The Gospels have numerous accounts of individuals who encountered Jesus and received a new start in life or, if you will, were "born again."

One poignant story is about the woman at the well. Leaving His disciples, Jesus went to the well to get some water. There He met a woman whose life was most confused. As a result of their conversation her life was changed. It was a grand new beginning for the woman as she was caught up in the goodness and strength of Jesus' spirit.

What a new beginning it was, too, for Zaccheus, the despicable tax collector, who was really no one's friend and just about everyone's adversary, after Jesus went to his house! Zaccheus, born again, gave up his old ways and promised to pay back four-fold everything that he had taken from others and to give half of what was left to the poor.

Actually we are born again every time we wake up in the morning. During the long, dark night we are *dead* for all intents and purposes although we may at times think we are alive in the unreal or fanciful world of dreams.

As the "born again sun" shines upon us shortly after the dawn, we are given opportunities for new beginnings in the world of work, school, business, art, music, sports or whatever. Perhaps it would be well to begin every day with the words of the Psalmist (118,24) – "This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it."

Every new day offers us new challenges, new choices, and new chances for changing ourselves and our lives. The new day, which the Lord has so wisely and so lovingly given us, is indeed a time for rejoicing and gladness.

You are born again whenever you make an important decision that drastically changes your lifestyle, moral behavior or philosophy. It goes without saying, of course, that the important decision must be implemented with strong desire, dedication, determination and doing.

It should be noted, too, that you can be reborn into a life of depravity as well as into one of service and sanctity. You can choose vice or virtue. God made you a free agent.

Hopefully, you choose your new beginning on the side of integrity rather than infamy and on the side of decency rather than depravity. Decide to be born again in terms of self-discovery, self-development, self-improvement and self-fulfillment.

You can be born again as far as your job or career is concerned. One young man I know quit his dead-end job, so to speak, in an auto graveyard. The job paid well, but it was no source of satisfaction, and it provided the young man with no opportunity for self-realization. He went back to school to study fashion design and in time "gave birth" to the artist which was within him all the time.

Vocationally speaking, some people are not born again until they retire at the age of 60, 65 or later. This was true of Ralph Davis who had to give up his position as superintendent of schools in a small town at the age of 62.

But Mr. Davis did not retire to the rocking chair or a life of idleness. He chose not to be bored but to be born again – occupationally. It was during the Second World War, and young social workers and other professionals were scarce because they were going into military service.

Mr. Davis convinced a social agency working with delinquent boys to hire him as a counselor. He performed well. In fact, he was able to give his teen-age clients a perspective and insights of which a younger counselor might not be aware.

Socially, educationally and vocationally, Mr. Davis had a rich and diversified background and, above all, he was spiritually mature. He knew young people and related to them easily. He helped them to be *born again* into lives of purpose and usefulness.

Of course, when he became 70, the boys' organization "suggested" to Mr. Davis that he might want to retire. He did retire from that work, but he was soon born again. He and a partner opened an employment agency for teachers, librarians and school superintendents. It was a highly successful venture.

With every new beginning or rebirth in the world of work, Mr. Davis did indeed take advantage of the "many dwelling places in the Father's house" *(John 14, 2-3)*. He went from "glory to glory." Life for the elderly man became ever more challenging, exciting, thrilling and fulfilling. When the demands of running a teachers' agency became too much for him, Mr. Davis rounded out his long and productive life by writing articles for professional magazines. Indeed, he had much to write about.

The experience of Mr. Davis and that of many others like him show that we are and can be born again, and again, and again. God makes it all possible as He provides us with new opportunities and new beginnings for our talents, time, training and temperment.

That one can be born over and over again is not an invention of man. It is a fact and feature of life ordained and maintained by God. Nor is it an experience intended only for man. Every leaf of a tree, every flower, every blade of grass and even every weed is born again in the spring. Nothing in nature has a monoploy on a new beginning.

With the help of a spiritual counselor, a psychiatrist or some other therapist, you are born again as you emerge from the dark and dismal depths of depression, fear, anxiety, insecurity, infidelity or hostility.

Of course, the more you are advanced spiritually the less you will need or depend upon professional help. You will say with the Psalmist (46,11), "Desist! and confess that I am God." You will know "The reign of God is already in your midst." *(Luke 17, 21)*.

"In him who is the source of my strength
I have strength for everything."
– *Philippians 4,13.*

When a woman gives birth to her first child, she is born again. She is reborn into the new and beautiful world of motherhood. What a wonderful new beginning!. The father, too, is born again as he dedicates himself to the health and happiness of the new baby. Together the parents are reborn into a new world of love, joy, hope, promise, responsibility and, of course, occasional sorrow and disappointment.

You are born again when you join a church and take certain vows. You make a new beginning when you decide to eliminate a negative attitude, a false belief or a prejudice. You can even be born again as you leave one political party and affiliate with another.

You are born again when you dedicate your time and talents to the service of mankind and to the glory of God. You are born again when you see fit to become involved in a worthwhile community or charitable project.

You are born again when you are able to say with Christ, "I came that they might have life and have it to the full." *(John 10,10)*.

How grateful we can all be that God has given us all the resources we need to make new beginnings not only at New Year's but on any day of the year! God has richly blessed us with intelligence, imagination, insight, integrity, energy and interests.

"I am the resurrection and the life:
whoever believes in me, though he should die,
will come to life."
John 11,25

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