

ARTICLE II.

THE MEANING OF IRENAEUS IN THE PHRASE "REGENERATED
UNTO GOD."

By Irah Chase, D. D., Boston, Mass.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[SEVERAL years ago, my attention was called to the passage embracing the memorable phrase *renascuntur in Deum*, in the work of Irenaeus against heresies; and the following Article presents the result of an examination, instituted for the purpose of ascertaining the sense in which he there uses that phrase. I was not satisfied with any explanation of it which I had seen; and I resolved to let the author himself furnish an explanation. I examined every page of his work, and was led to a conclusion which, to me, was quite unexpected. I re-examined the whole, and was again conducted to the same conclusion.

Since that time, I have, here and there, met with some brief statements indicating that others have been led to a similar result; as in the *History of Doctrines* by Baumgarten-Crusius (Vol. II. p. 1209), and in Dr. Krabbe's Prize Essay on the Apostolical Constitutions (p. 410). Böttinger, in his recent historical work entitled the *Church of Christ and its Witnesses*, (Vol. I. p. 245—254), assumes substantially the same exposition. What was published on the subject in one of our Periodicals, in 1838, was, in effect, primarily derived from the examination which I have mentioned, and was confirmed by an independent examination.

Most of those who have written with commendable erudition respecting Irenaeus, have been occupied with discussions which have led them away from examining the particular point which I have endeavored to elucidate. That the impartial and venerable Neander should seem to have acquiesced in an interpretation which I suppose to be erroneous, may easily have arisen from the intensity with which, while he was reading Irenaeus, his mind was attracted to other matters than the one here discussed. Were he to read him with a special view to this, he would, I am confident, come to the result set forth in the subsequent pages.

Respecting the manner in which the subject is presented by the learned Mr. Wall, and by the equally learned Schlosser, who translated Mr. Wall's *History* from English into Latin, and enlarged it

with Observations and Defences, more than a hundred years ago, it is unnecessary, I trust, to make any remark. Let every candid and earnest inquirer after truth read, and judge for himself.

Views resembling those of Irenaeus on the relation of Christ to mankind, whether right or wrong, are scattered over the fields of theological literature, ancient and modern. To understand his expressions correctly is desirable, as being connected with the history of opinions, and with an argument from ecclesiastical antiquity. For no thoroughly Christian teacher would think it right and wise, even in maintaining the truth, to employ a wrong exposition of a passage, occurring either in the holy Scriptures, or in the writings of the Fathers.]

According to Irenaeus, Christ, in becoming incarnate and thus assuming his mediatorial work, brought the human family into a new relation, under himself, and placed them in a condition in which they can be saved. In this sense, he is the Saviour of all. He restored them, or summed them up anew, in himself. He became, so to speak, a second Adam, the regenerator of mankind. Through him they are regenerated unto God: *per eum renascuntur in Deum*.

The thought occurs frequently; and it is variously modified by the various connections in which it is introduced.

In the passage which has often been brought forward as recognizing the baptism of infants, Irenaeus is maintaining that Christ appeared as he really was, and passed through the various stages of human life, sanctifying, it is added, sanctifying every age by the likeness that it had to himself; *for he came to save all by himself*; — *all, I say, since by him they are regenerated unto God*,¹ — infants, and little ones, and

¹ *Omnes enim venit per semetipsum salvere: omnes, inquam,— qui per eum renascuntur in Deum, etc.* That *omnes* is repeated for the purpose of giving it, not restriction but emphasis, is manifest from the amplification which is extended throughout the paragraph. The proposition that Christ came to save all by himself, seems to be based on the assumed fact that by him all are regenerated unto God. That, whatever is meant here by being regenerated, it was, in such a connection as this, conceived of as belonging to all, appears also from other passages, in which the same thing or its equivalent is most clearly attributed to "all," to "man," or to "men," without any limitation; in short, to mankind, the whole human family, "*genus humanum*." The critical reader will perceive that, in accordance with this view, *qui*, in the connection above, is regarded as being used instead of a causative conjunction, and is freely translated *since they*. The relative *qui*, it is well known, is sometimes used in this manner. See Cicero's Letters to Atticus, Lib. V. Epist. 20. *Ephesum ut venirem, etc.* I attach no special importance to my version. But I prefer it to the usual and literal one, as presenting the purport of the Latin phraseology more readily to the English reader. The Greek original of this passage being lost, we cannot speak positively of its form. But

children, and youths, and elder persons. Therefore he came through the several ages, and for infants was made an infant, sanctifying infants; among little ones, a little one, sanctifying those of that age; and, at the same time, being to them an example of piety, uprightness, and obedience; among the youth, a youth, becoming an example to the youths, and sanctifying them to the Lord; thus also an elderly person among elderly persons, that he might be a perfect master among all, not only in respect to the presentation of truth, but also in respect to age, sanctifying at the same time also the elderly persons, and becoming to them an example. Then, too, he passed through even unto death, that he might be the first born from the dead, himself holding the primacy in all things, the prince of life, superior to all, and preceding all. B. II. c. 22. § 4.¹

What Irenaeus thought of baptism must be gathered from the passages in which he is speaking of the subject. But that he is speaking of it in this passage, there is no sufficient evidence. For a mere resemblance in one or two words to certain terms sometimes used in connection with baptism, falls very far short of proving the point assumed. The context is against it; for the context directs our attention to *Christ* and what he himself, personally, came to do for the human family. It is by *him*, and not by baptism, that they are here said to be renewed, born anew, or regenerated. And parallel passages are against it; for they abundantly confirm the sense which I have given, as being the true sense of the passage before us. Some of these are the following:—

When our Lord became incarnate and was made man, he summed up anew, in himself, the long array of men, affording us salvation in a compendious manner, so that what we had lost in Adam, that is, to be according to the image and similitude of God, we might regain in Christ. III. 18. 1. (in G. c. 20.)

Unless man were united with God, he could not partake of incorruption. For it became the Mediator between God and men, by his intimate connection with both, to bring both together into friendship and concord, and, on the one hand to present man to God,

there seems to be no good reason to doubt that it has been rendered into Latin with much literalness. And we know that in Greek the relative corresponding to *qui*, "sometimes implies a *cause, reason, occasion, motive*, or something else, which would properly be expressed by a conjunction. E. g. *Θαυμαστὸν ποιεῖς ὃς ἡμῖν οὐδὲν δίδως*; thou behavest strangely, *who* givest us nothing; i. e. *that* or *in that* thou givest us nothing." See Buttman's Larger Greek Grammar, § 143. 1., and compare Kühner, § 334. 2, where the same fact is recognized.

¹ In Grabe's edition, c. 39.

and on the other to make known God to men. For in what manner could we become partakers of the adoption of sons, unless through the Son we receive again from him that communion which there is with himself, — unless his Word, being made flesh, communicate it to us? Wherefore also he passed through every age, restoring to all that communion which there is with God. III. 18: 7. (in G. c. 20, near the end.)

And for this cause [the heretic Mark represents] that man, according to Moses, was made on the *sixth* day, and moreover that in the economy on the sixth day, which is the Preparation, the last man appeared for the regeneration of the first man. Of which economy [the suffering of Christ], it is asserted, the beginning and the end was that sixth hour on which he was affixed to the cross; because the perfect mind knowing the number *six* to have the power of making and regenerating, has manifested to the sons of light that regeneration which was accomplished by him who appeared prominent at that number. I. 14: 6. (in G. c. 10.)

What Irenaeus is here animadverting upon, is the idle and cabalistic speculations concerning the numbers, in respect to events acknowledged by all. Elsewhere he says:

. . . And signifying that it is he [our Lord] who has summed up anew, in himself, all nations scattered abroad from Adam, and every language and generation of men, with Adam himself. III. 22: 3. (in G. c. 33.)

For the Lord, who was born is *the first-begotten of the dead*; and receiving the pristine fathers into his bosom, he regenerated them unto the life of God, being himself made the commencement of the living, as Adam was made the commencement of the dying. On account of this also, Luke traces back to Adam the genealogical series, beginning it from the Lord, — thus signifying that He has regenerated them unto the gospel of life. . . . Thus, too, the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. For what the virgin Eve bound by unbelief, the virgin Mary loosed by faith. III. 22: 4. (in G. c. 33.)

And on account of this, in the end, he himself exhibited the similitude: The Son of God was made man, taking up into himself the ancient formation; as we have shown in the preceding book. IV. 33: 4. (in G. c. 59.) Sec. III. 18: 1 with 7, and 16: 6.

They who predicted the Emmanuel who was to be born of a virgin, manifested the union of the Word of God with what he had formed, that the Word should become flesh, and the Son of God the son of man; (the pure one purely opening the pure womb, — that which regenerates men unto God, and which he himself made pure); and though

he became what we are, he is the mighty God, and has an extraction that cannot be declared. IV. 33: 11. (in G. c. 66).

... Our Lord ... bringing man again into connection with God, by his incarnation. V. 1: 1.

But what he appeared, this he also was; God, summing up anew in himself the ancient formation of man, that he might slay sin, make death void, and give life to man. III. 18: 7. (in G. c. 20).

... The Son of God, being made a man among men, formed the human race afresh. IV. 24: 1. (in G. c. 41).

God the Father had compassion on what he had formed, and gave it salvation, restoring it by his Word, that is, by Christ; that man may learn by experience that he receives imperishableness, not from himself, but by the gift of God. V. 21: 3.

Tertullian, about forty years after the time when these passages were written, gave a similar representation. In his treatise on the flesh or Body of Christ, (c. 17.) he says: But first of all is to be set forth the reason that the Son of God should be born of a virgin. It became him to be born in a new manner, as he was the author of a new nativity; concerning which, when God was about to give a sign, it was predicted by Isaiah. What was that sign? Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bring forth a son. A virgin therefore conceived, and brought forth Emmanuel, God with us. This is a new nativity, since man is born in God; in which man God has been born,¹ the flesh of the ancient seed being assumed, without the ancient seed, so that by the new seed, that is, spiritually, he might form that flesh anew, it being purified and the defilement of its ancient state removed. But this whole newness, as also it has been done in all things, was of old represented in a figure, our Lord being born of a virgin in accordance with a reasonable arrangement. The earth was still a virgin, not yet compressed by tillage, not yet subjected to the sower: from it we have received man made by God for a living soul. Therefore, if the first Adam is given from the earth; with good reason the new Adam, as the apostle has said, has been produced by God for a quickening spirit, equally from the earth, that is, from flesh not yet unsealed for generating. But, lest I should not avail myself of the mention of the name of Adam, why has Christ been called Adam by the apostle, if man did not belong to his earthly census? Here also reason alleges that God, by a rival operation, has regained his image and similitude which was taken away by the devil. For into Eve, still a virgin, had crept the word causing death. Into a virgin, too, was to be introduced the word of God, productive of life; that what by such a sex

¹Dum homo nascitur in Deo; in quo homine Deus natus est.

had gone off to perdition, might by the same sex be brought back to salvation. Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel. What sin the former committed by believing, the latter blotted out by believing. But Eve then conceived nothing in her womb from the word of the devil. Nay, she did conceive. For, after that, as subject, she should obey, and in pangs bring forth. The word of the devil impregnated her, and she brought forth a devil, a fratricide. On the other hand, Mary brought forth him who should at length save Israel, the carnal brother, his murderer. Into the womb, therefore, God brought down his Word, the good brother, that he might efface the remembrance of the bad brother. Christ had to come forth thence for the salvation of man, whither man, already condemned, had entered. . . . (c. 20.) What there is new in Christ's being born of a virgin, is manifest; namely, that it was of a virgin, according to the reason which we have given; and that a virgin might be our regeneration, . . . sanctified through Christ.

In his work against Marcion, B. III. c. 9, Tertullian expresses himself thus: Christ in respect to the flesh, had to be born of the flesh, that by his nativity he might form anew our nativity; and thus also might by his death dissolve our death, by rising again in the flesh, in which he was born that he might be able also to die.

In another class of passages, Irenaeus teaches that the extraordinary generation of Christ, which, he says, was given for a sign of salvation, must be received by faith: we must, as it were, come into it, and accede to the divinely appointed arrangement.

Alluding to the wiles of that old serpent, the tempter, as recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, and to the account given in the book of Numbers (21: 8), and to the words of our Lord, in the Gospel according to John (3: 14 and 15, and 12: 32), he says it was taught that men cannot be saved from the ancient sting of the serpent, unless they believe in him who, in the likeness of our sinful flesh, was on the cross lifted up from the earth. IV. 2: 7. (in G. c. 5.)

He asks, How shall man come to God, unless God come to man? How indeed shall he leave the generation of death, if he does not come into the new generation wonderfully and unexpectedly given by God, for a sign of salvation,—the regeneration which is from the virgin through faith? Or what adoption shall they receive from God who remain in this generation which is according to man in the world? IV. 33: 4. (in G. c. 59). In other places he teaches thus:

Those of the human race who believe God and follow his word, receive that salvation which is from him. IV. 33: 15. (in G. c. 66).

In respect to condition, so to speak, we are all children of God

because we are all made by him. But as to obeying him and receiving his doctrine, all are not children of God, but they who believe him, and do his will. IV. 41: 2. (in G. c. 79).

The Ebionites are unreasonable, not receiving into their mind by faith the union of God and man, but persevering in the old leaven of generation; not willing to understand that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her. Wherefore also what was generated is holy, and the Son of the most high God, the Father of all, who performed his incarnation, and exhibited the new generation; that, as by the former generation we have inherited death, so by this generation we might inherit life. V. 1: 3.

But who are they that are here saved, and receive eternal life? Is it not they who love God, and who believe his promises, and in respect to malice are made little ones? IV. 28: 3. (in G. c. 47).

The Lord descended into those places which are under the earth, preaching also to them his advent; there being remission of sins to those who believe on him. But on him they all believed who hoped in him; that is, who foretold his advent, and complied with his arrangements, — the just men and prophets, and patriarchs, to whom he remitted sins in the same manner as to us. . . . For all men come short of the glory of God; and they who regard his light are glorified, not by themselves, but by the Lord's advent. IV. 27: 2. (in G. c. 45).

Irenaeus, in giving a summary of the doctrine taught by the apostles, proceeds to say in reference to our Lord, That they who believe in him shall be incorruptible and incapable of suffering, and receive the kingdom of heaven. IV. 24: 2. He quotes as authoritative the passage, 1 John, 5: 1, Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. III. 16: 8. And says, Jesus Christ our Lord makes them who believe in his name children of God. III. 6: 2.

At the same time, in our being renewed in our minds and prepared for heaven, he often ascribes an essential influence to the Holy Spirit:

Thus therefore God was manifested; for through all these things God the Father is shown, the Spirit indeed operating, the Son ministering, the Father approving, and man consummated to salvation. IV. 20: 6. (in G. c. 37).

. . . Signifying that Christ would from among freemen and servants make children of God, giving alike to us all the gift of the Spirit that quickens us. IV. 21: 3. (in G. c. 38).

For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Spirit, man is made according to the likeness of God. V. 6: 1.

He quotes the epistle to the Ephesians (1: 13) — In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salva-

tion ; in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance — and then adds, Thus therefore this the pledge dwelling in us now makes us spiritual. . . . Yet this is done, not by ceasing to have flesh, but by having the communion of the Spirit. For they to whom the apostle wrote, were not without flesh, but they had received the Spirit of God *by which we cry Abba, Father.* V. 8: 1.

He alludes to the grafting of the olive : — As the wild olive inserted loses not the substance of its wood, but changes the quality of its fruit, and takes another name, being now no longer a wild olive, but a fruitful olive ; thus also the man inserted by faith, and receiving the Spirit of God, loses not the substance of his flesh, but changes the quality of his fruit, his works, and receives another name, signifying that change which is for the better : he is now denominated, not flesh and blood, but a spiritual man. Moreover, as the wild olive, if it does not receive insertion, continues useless to its owner, through its wild quality, and as the unfruitful wood is cut down and cast into the fire ; so also the man not receiving by faith the insertion of the Spirit, continues to be what he was before : being flesh and blood, he cannot inherit the kingdom of God. V. 10: 2. And after illustrating and confirming these sentiments at some length, he concludes by quoting the words of the apostle, (Rom. 8: 14), For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

In another passage, he says : And again, giving to the disciples the authority of regeneration unto God, he said to them, Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For by the prophets he promised to pour this out in the last times upon his servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy. Whence also he descended on the Son of God, made the son of man, accustoming himself to dwell with the human race, and to rest on men, and to dwell with what God had made, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old condition to the new condition in Christ. III. 17: 1. (in G. c. 19).

Here it seems too obvious to require any comment, that Irenaeus contemplated the conversion of persons whose minds should be enlightened by evangelical instruction, and influenced by the Holy Spirit ; and who, by being baptized, should make a suitable profession of their faith. At the same time, it ought to be known that he attributed to our baptism some special efficacy ; for it may be useful to see the germ of an opinion which soon came to exert great influence. The extent of the efficacy alluded to, is very distinctly expressed in

the following passage : That union which is unto incorruption our bodies have received by the laver, but our minds by the Spirit. Whence also both are necessary ; since both are profitable in respect to the life of God. III. 17: 2. A similar efficacy he attributes also to the eucharist : — Our bodies upon receiving the eucharist, he says, are no longer corruptible, but have the hope of the eternal resurrection. IV. 18: 5. (in G. c. 34). See also V. 2: 3. With this it may be well to connect what he had affirmed just before, namely : But altogether vain are they who contemn the whole arrangement of God, and deny the salvation of the flesh, and spurn its regeneration, saying that it is not capable of incorruptibility. V. 2: 2.

Clement of Alexandria, writing near the close of the second century, uses the following remarkable expressions : — Knowledge, therefore, is illumination, which removes ignorance, and gives perspicacity. Now the rejection of the bad is the bringing of the good to light ; for what ignorance has sadly bound, is happily loosed by knowledge. And these bands are quickly dissolved *by faith indeed on the part of man, but by grace on the part of God* ; our sins being removed by one healing remedy, BAPTISM, RECEIVED IN THE DUE EXERCISE OF THE MIND. See his work entitled the Paedagogue, B. I. c. 6.¹

Like Clement, Irenaeus seems to have taken it for granted that baptism was received in the exercise of reason and of faith, and that as being a most emphatic expression of faith on the part of men, it was pre-eminently connected with grace on the part of God.

If we have this in mind, it will help very much towards explaining a passage in which he speaks of certain persons thus : They were sent by Satan to deny the baptism of regeneration unto God, and reject the whole faith. I. 21: 1. (in G. c. 18). He contended, as we have already seen, that 'our bodies' were affected 'by the laver, but our minds by the Spirit,' so that both were renewed or regenerated, and united to God ; — we being understood to have received the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel in the liveliest exercise of faith, at the moment of our baptism. He, it had already been stated by Irenaeus, he who retains unwavering in himself the rule of truth, which he received along with baptism, will acknowledge the terms derived from the Scriptures, and the readings, and the parables. I. 9: 4. (in G. c. 1, near the end).

¹ Φωτισμός ἄρα ἡ γνώσις ἐστίν, ὁ ἐξαφανίζων τὴν ἀγνοίαν καὶ τὸ διορατικὸν ἐντιθεῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ τῶν χειρόνων ἀποβολή, τῶν κρείττωνων ἐστίν ἀποκάλυψις. ἂ γὰρ ἡ ἀγνοία συνέδησε κακῶς, ταῦτα διὰ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως ἀναλύεται καλῶς· τὰ δὲ δεσμὰ ταῦτα, ἃ τάχος, ἀνίεται· πίστει μὲν ἀνθρωπίνῃ, θεῖκῃ δὲ τῇ χάριτι· ἀφιεμένων τῶν πλημμελημάτων ἐν παιωνίῳ φαρμάκῳ λογικῷ βαπτίσματι.

On this passage, Massuet, the editor of the most valuable and complete edition of Irenaeus, (which was published at Venice, in 1734,) has the following note: — ‘ He means the general faith, that especially, as he himself explains in the next chapter, which is in one God, the Father almighty; and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit who foretold by the prophets the arrangements of God, and the advent, and that generation which is from the virgin, and the passion, etc. This faith Irenaeus represents as having been received along with baptism, as what the catechumens were taught so accurately before baptism, and what in baptism itself they professed, according to the words of its institution; as Tertullian states in his book on Public Shows. . . . To this faith received in baptism and solemnly sworn to, almost all the holy Fathers who have written against the heretics, have referred, supposing that nothing is more efficacious for refuting the novelty of profane dogmas. . . . But the more boldly did our author urge this kind of argument against the Valentinians, because they had impiously rejected the whole of the apostolic symbol or creed which was professed by those who were to be baptized.

In another place Irenaeus says, And since in that formation which was according to Adam, man made in transgression, needed the laver of regeneration, after he [the Saviour] put clay on his [the blind man’s] eyes, he said to him, *Go to Siloam and wash*, at the same time restoring to him both the formation and that regeneration which is by the laver. And on account of this, when washed, he came seeing, so that he might know him by whom he was formed, and recognize him who gave him life. V. 15: 3. And in one of his Fragments¹ on the book of Kings, is found the following paragraph: It was not in vain that anciently the leprous Naaman was cleansed upon being baptized, but it was for our instruction; who, being leprous in sins, are by the holy water and the calling upon the Lord, cleansed from the old transgressions, as new-born children, being spiritually regenerated, according to what our Lord said: Except any one be born again, by water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

How much of the representation in these two passages is fanciful, and how much evangelical, it is not necessary to determine. It is sufficient to know, and I do not hesitate to admit, that Irenaeus sometimes speaks of a regeneration as being connected with baptism. And, in view of the many passages which have been adduced, it surely cannot be denied that he also sometimes speaks of a regeneration, and sometimes uses some kindred term, in various other connections.

¹ Ex. Ms. Bibliothecae Coislianæ Catena.

With baptism he associated the decisive reception of the true Christian faith, and transition from the world into the church, from a state of bondage to a state of redemption, from spiritual death to spiritual life. In some degree at least, he confounded the sign with the thing signified. This, it is well known, was done too generally, even in his early time. And thus occasion was given for some of the Gnostics to object that an undue efficacy was attributed to baptism. One extreme is apt to produce its opposite. Hence, it seems, they rejected what he denominates the baptism of regeneration. And to his strong statement of this he adds the following : But they say that redemption belongs necessarily to them who have received the perfect knowledge, so that they are regenerated unto the power that is over all ; for that otherwise it is impossible to enter within the Fulness (*ἐντός πληρώματος*), since it is this that leads them into Profundity (*τὸ βάθος*). Indeed, it is said, that the baptism of the appearing Jesus was of the forgiveness of sins, but that the redemption of Christ who descended upon him, was unto perfection. The one, they assert, was animal ; the other, spiritual ; and the baptism of John was announced unto repentance ; but the redemption was procured by Jesus unto perfection ; and that it is this concerning which he says, *I have another baptism to be baptized with, and very much do I hasten to it*. And to the sons of Zebedee, when their mother requested of the Lord to seat them with him in his kingdom on his right hand and on his left, they say that he set forth this redemption, saying, *Can ye be baptized with the baptism that I am about to be baptized with ?* And they affirm that Paul has often expressly mentioned *the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*. I. 21: 1 and 2 (in G. c. 18). Compare § 4.

Irenaeus himself, as we have seen, does not always confound baptism with regeneration, renewal, restoration, or introduction to a better state. Often, when he speaks of these, he has in view the incarnation and mediatorial work of Christ, as bringing the human family into a new relation to God. He gives great prominence to faith and to the Holy Spirit, in whatever connection they may appear. And in a Fragment of his that remains,¹ he says, 'The first thing is to deny one's self, and follow Christ ; and they who do thus, go on unto perfection, performing all the will of the Teacher, being children of God by *the spiritual regeneration* (*διὰ τῆς πνευματικῆς*), and heirs of the kingdom of heaven ; for they who seek this first, shall not be deserted.

¹ Ex Codicibus manuscriptis Bibliothecae Regiae Turinensis.