
1-1-2012

Augustine con leche: Reading the Milk Metaphor of 1 Peter 2.2 with Help from Augustine's Insights Regarding the Affections

Kelly Liebengood
KellyLiebengood@letu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>

Recommended Citation

Liebengood, Kelly (2012) "Augustine con leche: Reading the Milk Metaphor of 1 Peter 2.2 with Help from Augustine's Insights Regarding the Affections," *Leaven*: Vol. 20: Iss. 3, Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol20/iss3/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.

Augustine *con leche*: Reading the Milk Metaphor of 1 Peter 2.2 with Help from Augustine's Insights Regarding the Affections

KELLY D. LIEBENGOOD

Perhaps one of the most significant gifts that Augustine bequeathed to the church was his insistence that the foundational problem of humanity is that we do not love (or desire) the right things. The fourth-century bishop of Hippo develops this anthropological insight in his *On Christian Teaching*, where he argues that in order for Christians rightly to interpret and teach the scriptures and thus live flourishing and godly lives they must learn how to properly order their affections:¹

Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally.²

In a catechetical treatise, Augustine makes a similar point—this time by discussing love in relation to faith and hope:

When we ask whether somebody is a good person, we are not asking what he believes or hopes for, but what he loves. For one who rightly loves without doubt rightly believes and hopes, and one who does not love believes in vain, even if the things he believes are true; he hopes in vain, even if the things for which he hopes are those which, according to our teaching, belong to true happiness, unless he also believes and hopes that if he asks he may also be given the ability to love.³

In *City of God*, Augustine yet again underscores his foundational insight regarding the human condition, remarking that the primary difference between the earthly city and the city of God is the object of its affection.⁴ He further elaborates that the inhabitants of the city of God demonstrate that their affections are rightly ordered when they look for their reward in the fellowship of the saints rather than looking for glory from men.⁵

1. See especially Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.22–1.29. In this essay I am making no distinction between the words love, desire and affection.

2. *On Christian Teaching* 1.27.

3. Augustine, *The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Bruce Harbert, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 130.

4. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 14.28: “We see that the two cities were created by two kinds of love”; 19.24: “to observe the character of a particular people we must examine the object of its love.” See also *City of God* 14.11; 19.17.

5. *City of God*, 14.28.

For Augustine, a proper ordering begins by aiming the affections towards the proper end, or *telos*, which he describes as the enjoyment of the eternal and unchangeable God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁶ Augustine acknowledges, however, that this proper ordering of the affections is a process, or as he describes it, a journey: “since it is our duty to fully enjoy [God]...the soul must be purified... And let us look upon this purification as a kind of journey or voyage to our native land.”⁷ He elaborates further, writing that “a man is never in so good a state as when his whole life is a journey towards the unchangeable life, and his affections are entirely fixed upon that.”⁸

What does this have to do with the milk metaphor of 1 Peter 2.2? In this paper, I will suggest that Augustine’s insight regarding the affections can help illuminate our understanding of this puzzling passage while also instructing us in how to appropriate Peter’s exhortation in our own spiritual formation and in aiding the formation of others. I will seek to demonstrate this claim first by analyzing the pastoral strategy that Peter unveils in his letter, and in particular in 1.1–2.10, as he aims to equip his addressees to interpret their suffering and social alienation as a result of their allegiance to Jesus Christ. I will follow this analysis with an appraisal of the milk metaphor of 1 Peter 2.2 in light of the pastoral strategy of the letter. Finally, I will offer some reflections about how reading 1 Peter with Augustine can help us better understand what it means to “crave the unadulterated milk.”

The Situation of 1 Peter: Competing Affections

At its core, 1 Peter is a pastoral letter concerned with helping Christians who are suffering. It is important to underscore, however, that when Peter writes of suffering, he is specifically addressing mistreatment that is a consequence of one’s allegiance to Jesus Christ (e.g., 3.14; 4.2–4; 4.12–16).⁹ We can glean from within the letter that most of the addressees experienced suffering in the form of ridicule, slander and social ostracism (2.12; 3.14–17; 4.2–4; 4.14–16): they were called names, accused of wrong-doing, and looked upon with derision and skepticism because they placed their allegiance to Jesus Christ above familial and civic obligations.¹⁰ We must understand that in a culture in which value, meaning, purpose and obligations are learned through the prism of honor and shame, such as we find in first-century Asia Minor (1 Pet 1.1), slander and ridicule have a very specific function: they are intended to redirect wayward group members back to the values, standards and obligations of the dominant group (in the case of the 1 Peter addressees, their particular *polis*).¹¹ In other words, slander and ridicule are forms of deviancy control; they are a culture’s way of saying “you are going the wrong way; your allegiances are out of place!” The converse of this, of course, is honor, whereby a culture rewards its members with praise and accolades for embodying the values, vision and obligations of the dominant group.

If we were to restate the situation that the 1 Peter recipients were facing by using the framework and language of Augustine’s insight regarding the affections, we might say that they were suffering because their compeers were trying to compel them to reorder their misplaced affections. Said in a manner that is in keeping with the observation Augustine made in *City of God*, the 1 Peter recipients were suffering because of their refusal to accept glory and honor from the earthly *polis*. It is in this context of competing allegiances and affections that Peter offers his pastoral response.

Given that the letter has a pastoral aim, it is instructive to reflect upon the strategy that Peter employs in order to accomplish his objective. Broadly speaking his approach can be traced in two movements. First, he

6. *On Christian Teaching*, 1.22; 1.5.

7. *On Christian Teaching*, 1.10.

8. *On Christian Teaching*, 1.22.

9. He is not, in other words, offering a comprehensive theodicy.

10. The letter also suggests that suffering could take the form of physical abuse (e.g., 2.20), formal accusations (including public trials; e.g., 3.15; 4.12–17) and perhaps even legal punishment resulting in execution (e.g., 2.21–24).

11. For a helpful introduction to honor and shame in the Greco-Roman world see David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 43–93.

orients his addressees theologically and eschatologically, providing an interpretive framework for making sense of the social alienation his readers experience as a result of aligning themselves with Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1.1—2.10). As we will see, this theological orientation is characterized as a journey towards an incorruptible inheritance. Second, Peter offers a variety of exhortations that inform his addressees how they ought to live in light of this new theological orientation (esp. 2.11—5.14). These exhortations are undergirded with constant reference (in a variety of manners) to the theological/eschatological orientation offered at the beginning of the letter (i.e., 1 Pet 1.1—2.10).¹² I will focus principally on the first part of Peter's strategy (1.1—2.10), that is, the way in which he orients his readers in terms of a journey towards their incorruptible inheritance.

The Pastoral Strategy of 1 Peter: The Christian life is a new exodus journey towards the incorruptible inheritance

Peter anchors his entire message in what is sometimes referred to as the *exordium* (1.3–12), where he affirms that although his readers have not seen Jesus they nevertheless love and enjoy him (1.8).¹³ This is his starting point: as a result of their new birth, the addressees of 1 Peter have had their affections reordered (1.3, 8–9). Nevertheless, it becomes clear very quickly that this love and enjoyment that they have for Jesus will have to be tested and therefore maintained (1.5–7), or perhaps we can even say, occasionally reordered, in what Peter describes as a journey. This journey motif is first hinted at in the letter prescript (1.1–2) and is then fully developed in 1 Peter 1.13–2.10.

In the letter prescript (1.1–2) Peter orients his readers who are being pressured to reorder their affections with what is initially a puzzling epithet: “elect-sojourners” (*eklektoi parepidēmoi*).¹⁴ For reasons that will become clear, I think it is best to regard the epithet as a shorthand for a predominant theme in the letter, which is initially developed in the *exordium* (1.3–12) and the first main section of the letter body (1.13–2.10): followers of Jesus are to understand themselves as sojourners traveling toward their prepared inheritance.¹⁵

The *exordium* begins to develop the meaning of this epithet, first by highlighting all that awaits those who have been “born-again” through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead (1.3): they have a living hope (1.3), an incorruptible inheritance that is kept in heaven for them (1.4), a prepared salvation which is to be revealed in the last time (1.5). Peter affirms that this living hope/incorruptible inheritance/prepared salvation, is the *telos* of their faithfulness, that is, their steadfast allegiance to, or we could say affection for, Jesus Christ (1.9).¹⁶

These glimpses into the final stage of God's eschatological program are balanced by a set of passages that address the trying circumstances of the 1 Peter addressees, which, as we have already learned, principally

12. For a comprehensive analysis of the argumentative strategy of 1 Peter see Kelly D. Liebengood, “Zechariah 9–14 as the Substructure of 1 Peter's Eschatological Program,” <http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/10023/1858/3/KellyLiebengoodPhDThesis.pdf>, (accessed October, 2011), 166–202.

13. Paul Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 80: “the opening two verses set the stage for what is to follow in the letter in terms of content and themes.”

14. My translation. The NIV reads “elect, strangers in the world.”

15. Scholars have hinted at this journey motif. For example, Leonhard Goppelt writes that “Peter views the church as being on the march, like Israel in the wilderness” (*A Commentary on 1 Peter* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 152). Troy Martin writes, “[t]hey have embarked upon an eschatological journey that takes them from their new birth to the eschaton . . . the new birth has taken place in the past, and the reception of salvation in the eschaton remains in the future” (*Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], 152).

16. As David Horrell (“Whose Faith(fullness) Is It in 1 Peter 1:5?” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 48 [1997]: 110–115) has demonstrated, it is difficult to adjudicate whether *dia pisteōs* (1.5) refers to God's faithfulness in sustaining Christians, or whether the faith(fullness) of Christians is in view. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that both aspects are in view given that the letter stresses both the Christian duty to entrust themselves to God's protection (e.g., 4.19) and the fact that suffering is in keeping with the will of God (4.19). However, I would argue that the stress in 1.5 is on the faithfulness of Christians, not least because the theme is repeated in 1.7 and again in 1.9.

consisted of verbal abuse and social ostracism intended to redirect allegiances and affections. Those awaiting the incorruptible inheritance are in the meantime guarded by the power of God until the “last time” (1.5). Here I underscore that the language of 1 Peter 1.5 suggests a rudimentary narrative that involves a time of testing that will require God’s protection, and a prepared salvation that is to be revealed in the last time. It also projects optimism—a stalwart confidence in God’s sustaining power through the duration of this time of trouble until salvation is finally manifested. For this, the addressees can rejoice—they will be safely brought to the object of their desire; but this is tempered by the reality that the road to their inheritance will necessarily require, as our author puts it, “all kinds of trials” (1.6).¹⁷

This rudimentary narrative that is outlined in the *exordium* is developed into a new exodus journey in 1 Peter 1.13—2.10. Drawing on Passover language, Peter reminds his readers that they have been “redeemed with the precious blood of the lamb” who was without defect or blemish, namely Jesus (1.19). Within this narrative, Peter draws attention to the admonishment given to the original wilderness sojourners, quoting the often-repeated refrain from Leviticus (a foundational wilderness text): “be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1.16; Lev 11.44, 45; 19.2; 20.7). Several other significant OT texts are drawn on in 1 Peter 1.13—2.10, which confirm that Peter wants his readers to understand that they are participating in a new exodus/wilderness journey. Their new birth (1.3, 23) is said to be in keeping with the word that was announced in Isaiah 40.6–8, a passage that many scholars have noted serves as the prologue to Isaiah 40–55 and its program of restoration, regularly described in terms of a second exodus. This is followed by an allusion in 1 Peter 2.3 to Psalm 34.8, “taste and see that the Lord is good.” It is likely that Psalm 34 has become operative here and in 1 Peter 3.10–12 because it models behavior which is fitting for sojourning righteous sufferers who are facing opposition and seeking to maintain their allegiance to God while they await the culmination of his will.¹⁸

The priesthood/holy nation imagery of 1 Peter 2.4–10, perhaps counterintuitively, reiterates and even intensifies what Peter has been developing thus far in the letter. This can be seen in 1 Peter 2.9, where there is a conflation of terms which are derived from Exodus 19.5–6 and Isaiah 43.20–21: “you are a chosen people (Isa 43.20), a royal priesthood (Exod 19.6), a holy nation (Exod 19.6), a people belonging to God (Exod 19.5), that you may declare the praises of him (Isa 43.21) who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” In the literary setting of Exodus 19.1–6, YHWH has gathered his freshly redeemed and newly formed people in the wilderness at the foot of Mount Sinai, and has commissioned them to be a nation of priests who have a communal vocation to reflect YHWH’s character and will. It appears that Peter’s appropriation of Exodus 19.5–6, then, is intended to evoke in his readers the call of recapitulating the wilderness journey of their fathers, this time in fidelity to YHWH.

This recapitulating call is confirmed by Peter’s use of Isaiah 43 in 1 Peter 2.9, where he draws his readers, not to the first exodus, but rather to the promise of a second exodus found throughout Isaiah 40–55.¹⁹ It is within this section of Isaiah that YHWH speaks of a new day to come, one in which he will ransom his exiled people, renew his covenant with them, and make a way in the desert for them to journey to their inheritance (cf. 1 Pet 1.3–4).

This brief survey of 1 Peter 1.1—2.10 fills out the picture that Peter wishes to paint when he opens his letter with the epithet “elect-sojourners.” The term *elect* reminds his readers of their privilege and obligation to orient their lives towards God in worship and obedience. That they are *elect sojourners* highlights that for now their devotion to God is to be expressed in the wilderness, where their allegiances and affections will be tested until they reach their final destination.²⁰ In short, Peter offers an implicit narrative through

17. Cf. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 101.

18. The variant reading in LXX Psalm 33 (MT 34) seems to confirm this: whereas the righteous sufferer in the Hebrew text is delivered from all his fears, in the Greek variant he exclaims, “I sought the Lord, and he heard me and rescued me from all of my sojournings” (LXX Ps 33.4).

19. B. W. Anderson, “Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of J. Muilenburgh*, ed. B. W. Anderson & W. Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962); M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

20. Tim Laniak (*Shepherds after My Own Heart* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006], 225–229) develops a similar line of thought: “Peter encourages these churches as ‘aliens and sojourners’, understanding their identity as God’s renewed covenant community, freshly formed in a new wilderness of testing, and anticipating glory in their future home” (225).

which his addressees are to view their lives: Jesus Christ has caused something to happen—as a result of his sacrificial death, the addressees have been relationally restored to God, their affections have been radically reordered, they are no longer conformed to their ignorant desires of the past (1.14), and they are presently awaiting the culmination of God’s will, when they will fully enjoy the object of their desire. In the meantime, as the renewed people of God, they now find themselves living in a transition period that is characterized both as fiery trials (1.6; 4.12) in which their fidelity to God will be tested, as well as a wilderness/second exodus journey in which they must diligently maintain their rightly-placed affections in order to arrive at their prepared inheritance.

It is within this second exodus framework that Peter offers several exhortations which, to borrow from Augustine, seek to “fix the affections upon the journey towards the unchangeable life.” For example, in 1 Peter 1.13 he urges his readers to “hope completely in the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Echoing the narrative of the exodus, he calls them to “gird up the loins” of their mind (1.13; cf. Exod 12.11), that is, to understand that they are on a journey in which their affections will be tested (1.1, 3–7). Additionally, he stresses that his readers are to conduct themselves with fear while they are in this time of sojourning (1.17). The exhortation to “love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (1.22) is also offered in response to their new eschatological reality that has been generated as a result of Christ’s resurrection and their subsequent new birth. Peter regards this new birth as the fulfillment of that which was promised in Isaiah 40.6–8, the word which announced a second exodus which would be initiated through God’s suffering servant (Isaiah 40–55).

It is within this new exodus journey motif that we also encounter the exhortation to “crave the unadulterated spiritual milk” (1 Pet 2.2). Although most scholars agree that the milk metaphor in 1 Peter 2.2 has been appropriated in order to encourage spiritual and moral development on the part of the addressees, nevertheless there is no clear consensus regarding the precise referent of the imagery that one must long for in order to “grow up into salvation” (2.2). Most have argued that the unadulterated “spiritual” milk refers in some way to the divine word because that which is translated as “spiritual” (*logikos* in Greek) is a derivative of *logos*, which can be translated “pertaining to the word.” Those who read *logikos* in this manner, however, are divided about whether this divine word is a reference to the sacred scriptures, the gospel, the preached word, or the message developed in the letter itself. Recently, Karen Jobes has challenged this reading of the milk metaphor, in part by demonstrating that the word *logikos* does not mean “spiritual” or “pertaining to the word,” but is better translated as “true to real nature.”²¹ Furthermore, she convincingly argues that 1 Peter 2.3 implies that the milk metaphor refers to the experience that the addressees have had with the Lord.²² Jobes concludes by arguing that *logikos* milk, rather than being “spiritual milk” or “word-milk” is instead nourishment that is “true to the nature of the new eschatological reality established by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and into which Peter’s readers have been reborn.”²³ In other words, that which enables growth unto salvation is setting the affections on (i.e., craving) the true *telos*. What makes Jobes’ reading compelling, in my view, is that it runs with the grain of what Peter has been developing throughout 1 Peter 1.1–2.10.

What is important to note, for the purposes of this paper, is that the exhortation to “crave the unadulterated milk which corresponds to the nature of the new eschatological reality” is part of the wider pastoral strategy that I have tried to highlight in the letter, in which Peter consistently reminds his readers that they are on a journey in which their allegiances and affections are constantly being challenged and tested. Peter urges his addressees to understand their suffering in this context of competing allegiances and affections, and reminds his readers that in order to make it to the object of their love, the incorruptible inheritance, they will need to cultivate and keep their affections fixed on Jesus. Here I would simply contend that it is Augustine who helps us perceive and understand this pastoral strategy with greater clarity.

21. Karen Jobes, “Got Milk? Septuagint Psalm 33 and the Interpretation of 1 Peter 2.1–3,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2002): 3; Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 136.

22. *Ibid.*, 139.

23. *Ibid.*, 140.

Craving the Milk Today

Arguably, one of the more profound and unexamined assumptions in our contemporary culture is that human beings will enjoy flourishing and meaningful lives if they are given the right information and the proper techniques. In a variety of modes, we are told (implicitly and explicitly) that if we can only secure more and better education and/or technology (including such things as economics, the science of making money), then we will be able to reach our goals and fulfill our desires. The milk metaphor of 1 Peter 2.2, read in the context of the pastoral strategy of the letter, challenges this pervasive assumption. Reading 1 Peter alongside Augustine's insights regarding the problem of the human condition not only alerts us to the deceptive assumptions that permeate our culture (of which the church is not immune), but more importantly reminds us that the fundamental task of Christian discipleship involves not just amassing information (biblical and theological) and effective ministry techniques (for such activities as preaching, counseling, evangelism, church growth, biblical interpretation, etc.) but also rightly ordering and cultivating our affections—or as Augustine says, fixing our affections entirely upon the journey towards the unchangeable life.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine reminds us that we do not desire in a vacuum. Instead, our desires are learned, conditioned and cultivated within a community, which implicitly teaches us what the ultimate *telos* of life really is.²⁴ We have seen how this worked in 1 Peter; through the vehicles of honor and shame, the predominant group sought to teach each member where the affections ought to be directed, or if need be, redirected. In our hyper-individualized iWorld, we might be tempted to ask what each of us individually needs to do in order to “crave the milk” that will enable us to grow up into salvation. Augustine reminds us that we should also be asking questions such as: *Which communities are shaping my affections? What kinds of desires are being cultivated by my community? What is my community's vision of the good life?* For most of us, our families, our churches and our institutions of higher education shape and cultivate our desires. As leaders in these communities, what do these formative institutions implicitly teach us to crave? As participants in these communities, what have you (perhaps implicitly) learned to crave as a result of being a member of these institutions?²⁵ First Peter challenges us with the reminder that these institutions are primarily set with the task of shaping what we love.

Finally, 1 Peter teaches us that orienting our lives eschatologically, that is conceiving our lives as a journey toward our incorruptible inheritance, is the means by which we create distance from a life that is shaped by the desires of this age.²⁶ But this also challenges us: if in fact we are craving the unadulterated milk, then most likely we are suffering (in the sense in which the 1 Peter addressees were suffering, because their allegiance to Jesus Christ was perceived as a misplaced affection). First Peter challenges us to look at the absence of suffering in our lives as a possible indication that our affections are out of place—that we are in fact craving something other than the unadulterated milk that is true to the nature of the new eschatological reality established by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and into which we have been born.

KELLY LIEBENGOD IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL STUDIES AT LETOURNEAU UNIVERSITY IN LONGVIEW, TEXAS, AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR GLOBAL SERVICE LEARNING (KELLYLIEBENGOD@LETU.EDU). HE CO-EDITED *ENGAGING ECONOMICS: NEW TESTAMENT SCENARIOS AND EARLY CHRISTIAN RECEPTION* (EERDMANS, 2009).



24. See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwich (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2009), 1.18–20; 2.4–8.

25. Cf. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), who seeks to rethink the goal of higher education and the means by which we seek to form students.

26. Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 68.