GETTING “SAVED”

The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament

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Milk to Grow On: The Example of Christ in 1 Peter

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In 1 Peter, the Christian community lives between two revelations of Jesus (1:7, 13, 20); and while they are tested in the time between the revelations, the power of God protects them (1:5-7). The metaphor of rebirth describes the work of God in all these moments of Christian life. He gave them new birth through his living and enduring word (1:22-23), and now he nourishes the newly born with his word-milk in order to grow them into eschatological salvation (2:2-3). The example of Christ (2:4-10, 18-25) functions as the word-milk that nourishes the Christian community in the time between the revelations, a function that fits within the ancient understanding of exempla.

The call to imitate the pattern of Christ stands at the heart of 1 Peter (2:21-25), but how should we understand the function of that pattern in the post-conversion lives of the Petrine community? What is the soteriological value of the example of Christ? Morna Hooker finds the language of imitation soteriologically inadequate. Commenting on Paul, she claims, “Appeals to imitate the example of others are all very well, but do not in the long run provide the power which is necessary to put the appeal into effect.” In his recent monograph on 1 Peter, J. de Waal Dryden offers a more hopeful analysis of the value of Christ’s example, stating, “Christ is not only an exemplar, but also a savior. He not only provides a model, but also the means for the moral life.” He affirms that Christ as exemplar can simultaneously be both the pattern for life and the power that enables imitation. He does not adequately explain how this is so in 1 Peter, however. The present study will demonstrate how the example of Christ functions soteriologically within the conceptual framework of 1 Peter. In short, the author of 1 Peter portrays the example of Christ as the “milk” that nourishes the Christian community after their conversion and grows them into eschatological salvation. After establishing the situation of the Petrine audience, we will outline the metaphor of rebirth that the author uses to describe both the conversion and post-conversion experiences of his audience. We will conclude by reviewing the function of exempla in ancient paranesis and showing how the example of Christ functions as part of the metaphor of rebirth.

Living between the Revelations

In 1 Peter, the Christian community lives between two revelations of Jesus. He _was_ revealed (φανερωθέντος) at the end of the ages (1:20), and he _will be_ revealed in the future (ἐν ἀποκάλυψις Ἡσιοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:7, 13; φανερωθέντος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 5:4). The first revelation was Jesus’ advent within human history, and in particular it connotes the suffering and resurrection of Jesus. The prophets, filled with the Spirit of Christ, testified in advance to this first revelation (1:10-11); and although the Petrine community did not personally witness the suffering and glorification of Jesus, it is made present to them through the proclamation of the good news. For them, in other words, the first revelation is the initial proclamation of the suffering and glorification of Jesus Christ that precipitated their conversion.

The second revelation will be the eschatological advent of Jesus. When God reveals Jesus again in the last time, he will also reveal the salvation he has prepared and kept ready for his children (1:5). Jesus will bring them grace when he is revealed (1:13), consummating the goal of their faith, the salvation of their souls (1:19). Hope for the future revelation thus marks the present experience of the Christian community (1:3, 13). First Peter 1:8-9 positions the audience between these two revelations and might be paraphrased as follows: “Although you did not witness Jesus during his first revelation, you


love him; and even though you do not see him now because you are waiting for him to be revealed in the future, you have utmost confidence in his coming revelation and the salvation it will bring, and thus you can rejoice with an indescribable joy.”

For the audience of 1 Peter, “various trials” fill the time between the revelations. Because of the exclusive monotheism of the Christian community, they have withdrawn from participation in the Roman religious cult and have suffered religious, political, and social repercussions. Glimpses of their plight abound in 1 Peter, but 4:3-4 states it most succinctly. They once joined with their associates (co-workers, neighbors, friends, family members) in Gertile-like living. Now that they abstain from idolatry and licentiousness, their associates are surprised, “and so they blaspheme.” The author describes their change in lifestyle as a movement from darkness into light, from having no identity to being part of God’s own people (2:9-10). From the author’s viewpoint, they have been ransomed from the futile ways of their ancestors, but the audience’s former associates would have described the change in behavior differently.

The withdrawal from all forms of honoring the Roman gods would have led to various accusations. From a religious perspective, their refusal to honor the gods would have been considered atheism. Because the Roman cult functioned to placate the gods and thus protect the city and ensure future benefaction from the gods, however, participation in the Roman cult was more than a religious duty. It was also a matter of civic duty. Therefore, abstention would have been considered unpatriotic and possibly treasonous. Also, a Christian convert who refused to worship the household gods threatened the stability of the oikos, the basic building block of ancient society. As a result, “the Christian mission was necessarily understood as an attack on the social foundations.” Christian slaves and wives who converted apart from the rest of the household would have been labeled insubordinate “home-wreckers,” and the community as a whole would have been labeled anti-social “haters of humanity” for the perceived threat they posed to society. The family and neighbors of the converted Christians would have responded by applying social pressure — through verbal abuse, economic restrictions, or other forms of ostracizing — in order to correct the social deviancy.

First Peter shows evidence of the verbal abuse the community is suffering. As mentioned above, their neighbors blaspheme (βλαψιμοῦντες)


on account of their changed behavior (4:4). The author states elsewhere that they are unjustly accused of evildoing (καπαλισμόν ὀμόν ὡς κακοποίου; 2:12; cf. 3:16) and therefore will potentially suffer for doing good (2:20; 3:14, 17). Jesus, the living stone, was rejected by mortals (ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων ἄποδεικμασμένον) despite being chosen by God, and the author calls his audience to be like living stones who, though rejected by mortals because of their election by God, will not be put to shame (κατασταθήνη) if they trust Jesus, the rejected cornerstone (2:4-6). Jesus also refused to return abuse for the abuse he suffered (2:23), an attitude the author calls his audience to emulate when they receive abuse (3:9).

Joel Green nicely summarizes the situation of the Petrine community: “These are people whose commitments to the lordship of Christ have led to transformed dispositions and behaviors that place them on the margins of respectable society. Their allegiance to Christ has won for them animosity, scorn, and vilification.” They were once “insiders” in society, but they have defected from cultural norms by joining the Christian community, becoming in the process “foreigners.” Thus, the author addresses them as “aliens and exiles” (παροικοις καὶ παρεπιθήμοις, 2:11). They are experiencing the “flipside of election.” Belonging to God and his family results in an otherness that places them on the margins of society and exposes them to forms of social control that include shaming through “name-calling or public ostracism or malice.”

During this period of trials in the time between the revelations of Jesus, God sustains and protects the Christian community. The author of 1 Peter affirms that their present suffering is neither meaningless nor outside of God’s control. He describes their “fiery ordeal” as a period of testing that he likens to a refining fire that purifies precious (though perishable) metals (1:7). Their sufferings are one means of preparing them for the second revelation of Christ. Second, the author affirms that the arc of their lives matches Jesus’ He moved through shame and suffering into vindication and glory, and their narrative will mirror his. He is their pattern; they should neither fear nor be surprised by their present suffering (2:21; 4:1). Third, the author regularly employs language that reveals God as the enabling power that will

sustain the community during their time of testing. They are "protected by the power of God" while they await the salvation prepared for them (1:5); God supplies the words and strength they need to live out the ethical demands of the present time (4:11); after a short time of suffering, God will "restore, support, strengthen, and establish" them (5:10).

For the author of 1 Peter, all three moments of the Christian life outlined above — the moment of conversion associated with the first revelation of Christ, the Christian life marked by hope in the midst of various trials, and the eschatological salvation that awaits the community and grounds their present hope — have soteriological significance. In other words, "for Peter, salvation is past, present, and future." And in all three moments, the Christian community relies ultimately on the enabling power of their gracious Father. To communicate the community's dependence on divine enablement in every part of the "soteriological journey," the author employs the metaphor of new birth and growth to maturation.

New Birth through the Living and Enduring Word

In the opening verses of 1 Peter, the author characterizes his community as those to whom God has given "new birth (νεογεννησας) into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1:3). He returns to the vivid image in 1:23 when he asserts, "You have been born anew (νεογεννησας), not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God." Green notes that in 1 Peter the "existential beginning point of this [soteriological] journey is entry into the new reality to which Peter refers as God's having 'given us new birth' (1:3)." The provision of God at this beginning point is clear: he is the subject of the indicative verb in 1:3 and the implied subject of the passive verb in 1:23. He regenerates through his enduring word, and they are the recipients of his gracious action. Eugene Boring notes that the rebirth metaphor aptly describes God's role in conversion: "Just as God's act in raising Jesus was the divine overturning of all human possibilities, so begetting and birth is an apt metaphor for the conversion process: none of us decides to be born, the initiative is prior and apart from us, we simply find ourselves having been given life." 10

Along with depicting the moment of conversion, the rebirth metaphor also describes the present situation of the Christian community. Rebirth results in new kinship relationships. The community now relates to God as Father (1:17), and they should act as his obedient children. As God's children, they are now heirs (1:4), an image that captures the "in-between-ness" of their life between the revelations of Jesus. They are guaranteed to receive the imperishable inheritance that will be revealed at the eschaton, but they have not received it yet. The assurance of the coming inheritance, however, allows them to live with hope during their present crisis.

Following their new birth, the community's members also relate to one another as siblings, and they are called to love one another in accordance with this new relationship (1:22). The metaphor of rebirth affirms that "they are not called to be heroic individuals but members of a family that cares for and supports them." 11 Conversion and relationship with God, therefore, should never be misunderstood as a purely individual experience. As the metaphor of rebirth affirms, conversion involves incorporation into the family of God.

As with their conversion, the post-conversion lives of the community members depend on the gracious providence of God. The author of 1 Peter affirms that the brotherly and sisterly love (φιλαδελφίας) that they steadfastly give to one another is founded on the sustaining work of God. The spiritual energy to fulfill the love command comes from the "living and enduring word of God" (1:23), which he later defines as the good news that was pronounced to the community (1:25). 12 Matthias Konradt paraphrases the meaning of the 1:22-23: "The call for permanent brotherly love results consequently from the fact that the effective word, to which Christians owe their conversion, is not transitory, but remains eternally. It does not merely give one single impulse, but works permanently, continuously providing the necessary vital elements for the new life." 13

The author of 1 Peter explains how the word continuously provides the

8. Green, 1 Peter, 274.
9. Green, 1 Peter, 276.
10. M. Eugene Boring, 1 Peter (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 62.
11. Boring, 1 Peter, 87.
12. In 1:3, new birth is attributed to the resurrection of Jesus, but we need not posit two distinct sources for regeneration. As Boring explains (1 Peter, 88): "In 1:3 the new birth was by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; here it is through the word that is inseparably bound to the event and mediates it to the believer."
vital elements necessary for the new life by extending the metaphor in 2:1-3 to describe not only birth but also the nourishment and growth of the newly born. Because the primary concern of the present study is the post-conversion lives of the Petrine community, we will give more attention to the milk metaphor that describes divine sustenance in the time between the revelations of Jesus Christ.

**Milk That Nourishes unto Salvation**

In 1 Pet 2:2, we encounter an “unquestionably difficult” phrase: τὸ λογικὸν ἀδόλου γάλα. The phrase is usually translated as “pure, spiritual milk” (NRSV, NIV) or “pure milk of the word” (NASB, NKJV), though it is variously glossed by commentators. While interpreters debate the referent of the metaphorical milk and the meaning of the odd adjective λογικόν (issues we will address presently), they generally agree about the function of the milk. As newborn babies crave the nourishing milk they need for growth, so the Petrine community is exhorted to long for that which will “nourish” them and grow them into salvation. The milk, whatever it might be, is the means (ἐν αὐτῷ) for growth into eschatological salvation. Thus, scholars who define the milk differently can still affirm its basic function. For example, Eugene Boring, who argues that the milk “must be the divine word that brought their new life into being,” concludes that the metaphor reminds the readers that “just as their entrance into the household of faith was a matter of divine begetting and birth, so their continued growth is not something they can generate themselves, but depends on life-giving nourishment.”

Karen Jobes, who argues passionately that the milk cannot be the word of God, likewise concludes that Peter “is saying that God in Christ alone both conceives and sustains the life of the new birth.” The metaphor clearly communicates, therefore, that the Christian life lived between the revelations of Christ is divinely nourished. Just as the Christian community depended wholly on God for their rebirth through his enduring word, they now depend wholly on his sustenance for growth to salvation.

Commentators also generally agree on two further important points. First, even though the author metaphorically describes his audience as “newborn newborns” (ἀρτιγήνευσας βρέφη), we should not assume that they are freshly baptized new converts. The author describes his whole audience as newborn children of God (1:23), and a general audience that includes Christians from across Asia Minor cannot all be newly baptized. The metaphor is not intended to describe the newness of their conversion but rather to “instruct them to crave the things of God even as newborn babies crave milk — instinctively, eagerly, incessantly.”

Second, craving for “spiritual milk” is not a sign of spiritual immaturity. In other NT texts, milk has pejorative connotations. In Heb 5:12-13, for example, the preacher chides his audience for still needing infantile milk, which he defines as the basic elements of the “oracles of God” (τῶν λόγων τοῦ θεοῦ). He hopes they can advance to eating solid food; that is, he hopes they will mature into being teachers skilled in the “word of righteousness” (λόγος δικαιοσύνης). Peter, on the other hand, does not expect his community to outgrow their craving for spiritual milk. Again, the focus of the metaphor is not the spiritual youth of the readers but the intensity of their desire. And their desire for the sustenance that nurtures their new life should never wane.

While commentators largely agree on the basic function of the imagery in 2:1-3 (the Christian life is sustained by divine nourishment), the metaphor raises what Karen Jobes calls “two puzzling questions.” Namely, how should λογικὸν be understood and translated, and what is the referent of the metaphorical milk? We turn now to analyze these questions, and as Jobes notes, “The answer to either question informs the other.”

In the most common interpretation, the meaning of λογικὸν actually helps define the milk’s referent. As mentioned above, many modern interpreters translate λογικὸν γάλα as “milk of the word,” and even those who translate the phrase as “spiritual milk” will often relate the milk to the word
of God, “either through the cognate relationship between λόγος (logos, word) and logos or by proximity with the immediately preceding context in 1:23–25.”23 Paul Achtenmeier appeals to both lines of reasoning. He assumes the meaning of the adjective λογικός is determined by its etymological root, λόγος. “If the root λόγος is to be understood in the sense of ‘word,’ then λογικός would express the relationship of γάλα (‘milk’) to the word of God as the proper nourishment for Christians.”24 He also draws on evidence from the immediate context:

Since, therefore, in this context the word of God (λόγος Θεοῦ) was the agency by which the readers were rebegotten as Christians (1:23), and since the word of the Lord (δόμινος κυρίου) was the good news that has been communicated to them (1:25b), some relationship between the divine word and the adjective λογικός seems most likely.25

Achtenmeier’s analysis is typical, though it still leaves room for considerable variation. Even if it is established that 2:2 refers to “milk of the word,” what exactly is the divine word? Few follow Grudem in identifying the milk-word as the Bible itself.26 Many more assume the word refers to the proclaimed gospel mentioned most immediately in 1:25.27 Often, however, this question is not adequately addressed. After surveying two significant challenges to the common interpretation of λογικός γάλα, we will return to this question in our own interpretation.

Karen Jobes cites a few dissenters to the “widespread consensus among modern interpreters that the pure spiritual milk of 2:2 is the word of God” that have “seen in the metaphor a wider view of God’s life-sustaining grace in Christ.”28 She considers herself among the number of dissenters that have roots going back at least as far as Calvin. Also cited as a dissenter is J. Ramsey Michaels. We will address his challenge to the mainstream interpretation before surveying Jobes’s more substantial critique.

Michaels admits that the author of 1 Peter may be using milk as a metaphor for the proclaimed message of the gospel, as 1:25 indicates, but he argues that the translation “milk of the word” misses the point of the metaphor. “It shifts the emphasis from ‘milk,’ where it belongs, to ‘word,’ where it does not belong.”29 When interpreters too quickly identify the milk as word, they ignore the rich imagery of the milk metaphor in its own right. In fact, he argues, λογικός is best understood as “metaphorical.” It does not interpret the milk as much as indicate that it is spiritual milk. If λογικός does not define the milk, then one must look elsewhere to explicate the meaning of the “pure spiritual milk.” Michaels turns to nursing imagery in the Odes of Solomon for insight.

In the Odes of Solomon the image of milk from the breasts of the Lord most often relates to God’s life-giving mercy or kindness. Thus, Christ says of his followers, “my own breasts I prepared for them, that they might drink the holy milk and live by it” (8.14). Elsewhere the narrator sings, “A cup of milk was offered me, and I drank in the sweetness of the Lord’s kindness. The Son is the cup, and the Father is he who was milked; and the Holy Spirit she who milked him” (19.2). In this fascinating example, the milk is clearly the kindness that comes from God through the work of the Spirit and the mediation of the Son. Thus, Michaels concludes that in 1 Peter the milk probably represents both divine mercy and divine life. While the proclaimed message of the gospel might be the medium by which the milk is received, “the milk itself is more appropriately interpreted as the sustaining life of God given in mercy to his children.”30

Michaels’s interpretation admirably returns the focus of the metaphor to the life-sustaining power of the milk, but his conclusion proposes a false dichotomy. He makes an unnecessary distinction between the medium and the power. The cup is different from the milk, of course, and logically one can make a distinction between the message (or medium) and the power the message communicates. Such logical distinctions are complicated, however, when speaking of the word of God, which is often portrayed as both message and active power.

In the creation account of Gen 1, for example, the commanding word of God, “Let there be light,” has both content and power. It communicates the command and actualizes it. Likewise in the writings of Isaiah, which Peter appeals to in 1:24–25, God announces that his word (τὸ δόμινος μου) will ac-
complain his will (5:11). His word not only announces his will; like the rain and snow that fall and cause seeds to sprout, his word has effective power to accomplish his life giving will.\(^1\) In the NT, Paul uses the term “gospel” to refer not only to the message about Jesus but also to the effective power of God. In Rom 1:16, for example, Paul describes the gospel as “the power of God for salvation” (δύναμις Θεοῦ εἰς σωτηρίαν). We should be careful not to truncate the meaning of “word,” therefore, when the author of 1 Peter defines it as the proclaimed gospel. Michaels does well to remind us of the life-giving power of the milk, but that does not mean the milk needs to be distinguished from the announcement of the good news. The gospel can be both medium and power.

Karen Jobes offers a sustained critique of the prevailing interpretation of the λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα in her commentary on 1 Peter.\(^2\) She notes several problems with relating the milk to the word of God. First, interpreters must avoid the etymological fallacy of assuming λογικός derives its meaning from its root λόγος. A word means what it means in context, and frequently in extra-biblical contexts λογικός has the sense of “rational” or “reasonable.”\(^3\) The Stoics, for example, used λογικός to mean reasonable “in the sense of being true to the ultimate reality, which in Stoic thought was ordered by the divine rationality of the Logos.”\(^4\) Jobes concludes, therefore, that Peter (and Paul as well in Rom 12:1) might also use λογικός to describe what is true to the ultimate reality, only their ultimate reality is not defined by the Stoic Logos but the new creation established with the resurrection of Jesus.

Most commentators avoid the etymological fallacy by appealing to the immediate context of 1 Pet 2:2. The term λογικός is related to the word of God not because of its etymology, but rather because of its proximity to the references to the divine word (1:23, 25). In this case, even if one chooses to translate λογικός as “rational” or “spiritual,” the context still indicates that the term would have been associated with the similar-sounding λόγος. Jobes counters that one’s understanding of the milk in 2:2 should be determined by the context, but the immediate context is 1:23, not 2:23-25. In fact, the author’s use of ἔρπεμαι rather than λόγος in 1:24-25 indicates that those verses do not provide the best context for understanding the λογικός as milk. Instead, she argues, one must find an interpretation that accounts for 2:21 and 2:3.

In 1 Pet 2:3, the author alludes to LXX Ps 33, an acrostic psalm of thanksgiving that envisions David’s deliverance from afflictions while he is “sojourning” away from home.\(^5\) The author of 1 Peter, who slightly changes LXX Ps 33:9 (34:8) in order to make it fit his context,\(^6\) clarifies the referent of the metaphorical milk with the biblical allusion. The milk that the newborns have tasted and now crave is their experience of the Lord himself.\(^7\) Any interpretation of the milk metaphor, Jobes contends, must take this into account.

For Jobes, the milk metaphor must also fit with 2:1. The vice list in 2:1 begins with a participle (ἀποθεμένου) that depends on the imperative in 2:2 (ἐπιθυμεῖτε, linking the two verses syntactically. Jobes argues that the participle in 2:1 is “the mode in which craving for the pure milk is expressed.”\(^8\) Her reading has much to commend it, so we will quote her explanation at length before noting some potential difficulties:

The word preached to Peter’s readers mediated their experiences of God (1:25) and gave them their initial taste of the Lord. But when Peter exhorts them to crave spiritual milk, he is not telling them to crave the

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31. It should not be missed that in the imagery of Isa 55 the word is compared to rain that nourishes plant growth (and even provides more seeds for further planting). The image may be agricultural rather than neonatal, but the function of the word closely resembles what Peter describes in 2:2-3.
33. See Dan G. McCartney (“λογικός’ in 1 Peter 3.2,” ZNW 82 (1991): 128-32), who nonetheless concludes that λογικός should be understood as “having to do with verbal communication,” since rationality and verbal communication were closely related in the ancient world.
34. Jobes, 1 Peter, 136.
35. The LXX translator highlights the theme of “sojourning” by translating the Hebrew נַעֲרֵי נִירָא מֵאָבֵיַתְךָ ("from all my fears he delivered me") as εἴκοσι ὁμοιοῦς παραμυθίων μου ἔρπεμα με ("from all my sojournings he delivered me"). The reading might reflect the translator’s own experience of exile, and it certainly fits the exile motif in 1 Peter.
36. First, he changes the tense of the main verb “to taste” from the imperatival mood (ἐρπον) to the indicative (ἐρπον). He is not imploring his audience to experience the Lord; rather, he is reminding them of their past experience (possibly their conversion when they first tasted the goodness of God’s mercy). Second, he omits the second verb from LXX Ps 33:9, which reads “taste and see (καὶ ἴδητε) that the Lord is good.” He probably omits the second verb in order to maintain the coherence of the milk metaphor. One craves the taste of milk, not the sight of it. The omission might also reflect his understanding of the Christian life as being lived between the two revelations of Christ. In the present, they do not see Jesus (1:8).
38. Jobes, 1 Peter, 140. See also Mariette du Toit (“The Expression λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα as the Key to 1 Peter 2:1-3,” HToSt 63 (2007): 221-29), who closely follows Jobes’s interpretation.
word of God, as if commanding them to listen to more sermons or to read more Scripture, as good and even necessary as those activities may be. He is saying that God in Christ alone both conceives and sustains the life of the new birth. They are to crave the Lord God for spiritual nourishment. They have tasted the goodness of the Lord in their conversion, but there is more to be had. The more-of-the-Lord-to-be-had by Peter's readers involves putting off all evil and all deceit and hypocrisies and jealousies, and all backbiting (2:1). Refusal to do so would stunt their growth in the new life.39

Jobes's emphasis on moral transformation needs to be appreciated. First Peter 1:22 and 2:1 demonstrate the author's overarching purpose in this section: to encourage the brotherly love that builds community (1:22) and to discourage the attitudes that destroy it (2:1). The nourishing milk is part of that transformation process.

A recent article by Philip Tite40 supports Jobes's intuition that the milk is tied to moral transformation. He studies the Greco-Roman context in order to articulate the role of wet nurses and breast-feeding in moral development. Romans typically used a wet nurse, who might be either a "free mercenary nurse" (from outside the household) or a slave nurse (from within the household). Slave nurses would often accompany the child into young adulthood as a nanny or chaperone, while the mercenary nurse would care for the child for a set period of time (usually about two years) before returning the child to the parents.

Ancient medical theorists offer advice on choosing the wet nurse. The quality of the milk and the quality of the wet nurse were both important considerations because, as Tite notes, "the character and lifestyle of the nurse affected the quality of the milk, the proper care of the nursling, and the development of habits in the child."41 Thus, Soranus (Gyn. 2.19)42 recommends that parents choose a wet nurse who is self-controlled and Greek because a self-controlled person will refrain from drinking (which would spoil the milk and possibly lead to the nurse neglecting the child) and a Greek-speaking person will expose the child to the best speech. Likewise, Quintilian says that a child's nurse must speak correctly and should ideally be a philosopher, because the child will try to imitate his nurse (Inst. 1.1.5). Because children are so impressionable, parents should take great care in choosing who will make those first impressions on their newborn.

In a striking example, Aulus Gellius tells the story of a certain philosopher Favorinus, who advises a senator to have the mother instead of a slave nurse the baby. In building his case, he notes that children adopt the moral qualities of those who birth and nurse them: "Just as the power and nature of the seed are able to form likeness of body and mind, so the qualities and properties of the milk have the same effect" (Attic Nights 12.1.15 [Rolle, LCL]). Plutarch also praises the benefits of a mother nursing her own children. In the story of Cato the Elder's wife, he recalls that she nobly nursed her own child but "gave suck also to the infants of her slaves, so that they might come to cherish a brotherly affection for her son" (Cat. Mai. 20.2–3 [Perrin, LCL]). As Tite notes, the mother thus "enables a mutual affection between the son and his playmates (and later his servants). The milk becomes a bonding."43

Tite firmly establishes the importance of breast-feeding in the moral development of children. Milk not only sustains life, it shapes it. Ancient thinkers took care in choosing wet nurses for their children because they knew the milk and the wet nurse would not only support the life of their child; they would also shape their moral development. Also noteworthy, considering what immediately precedes and follows 1 Pet 2:1-3, the milk builds familial relations. According to Plutarch, children who share milk from the same source, even if they are not biologically related, build brotherly affection. Tite's survey supports Jobes's interpretation by affirming the importance of moral transformation in the milk metaphor. The milk builds the community and develops it morally.

Despite all that commends Jobes's interpretation, she overstates her case in two ways. First, like Michaels, she assumes a truncated definition of the "word of God" that she rightly rejects as an insufficient interpretation of the milk. In 2:1, she argues, Peter is not urging his readers to listen to more sermons or to read more scripture; therefore, it would be incorrect to assume that he wants them to crave the "word of God." The word in 1 Pet 1:22–2:3, however, cannot be simply identified with preaching or scripture. The word is the good news (1:25), which can be proclaimed, but which is also the

39. Jobes, 1 Peter, 140.
41. Tite, "Nurslings," 379.
42. For a translation of Soranus see O. Temkin, Soranus' Gynecology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
43. Tite, "Nurslings," 386.
generating power of the Christian life. It is the message about Jesus, the imagination-shaping story of his death and resurrection, which one can encounter in the apostolic preaching and the prophetic writings, to be sure, but which one can also encounter in the memory, prayer, and worship. The story of Jesus’ suffering and glorification can be an object of praise and proclamation in the gathering of the Christian community, and it can be a pattern recalled in the memory that shapes the imagination, enabling new ways of living in the world.

Second, Jobes overstates her case by implying that the moral transformation itself is the nourishment. In the section quoted above, she explains, “The more-of-the-Lord-to-be-had by Peter’s readers involves putting off all evil and all deceit and hypocrisies and jealousies, and all backbiting (2:1).” And in the next paragraph she reiterates, “Peter’s readers are to crave the Lord by adopting the attitudes and behaviors that will sustain the new life they have begun by faith in Christ.”

Certainly, actions shape identity and generate moral development. But by equating the milk with the putting off of vice, Jobes threatens to contradict her own affirmation that “God in Christ alone . . . sustains the life of the new birth.” The milk enables the moral transformation; it is not the moral transformation itself. Also, such an understanding of the milk is incoherent with 2:3. Peter says explicitly that his audience has tasted the Lord, Jesus, and the story of his death and resurrection, is the milk they have tasted, affirmed as good, and now crave. Jobes’s contribution ensures that we remember the milk has moral implications, but the milk need not be equated with right living.

Is there a way that we can incorporate Michaels’s and Jobes’s insights into an interpretation of 1 Pet 2:1-3 and still maintain the milk’s relation to the word? A careful definition of the word as the gospel, the story of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection that acts as both pattern and power for Christian living, fits the context of 1 Pet 1:23-2:3 (and beyond). As pattern, the gospel gives shape to the moral life Peter expects of his audience. As power, the gospel enables the moral transformation for which it calls. With this interpretation, the milk, associated with the word of God mentioned in 1:23-25, is both the sustaining life of God and the way of life consistent with new birth.

44. Jobes, 1 Peter, 140.

A survey of Greco-Roman moral philosophers will demonstrate that Peter’s description of the story of Jesus as both pattern and power fits within the ancient understanding of the function of exempla in moral transformation. Then, two examples from 1 Peter (2:4-10. 18-25) will illustrate how Peter offers the nourishing milk of the word to his audience in order to sustain their life in the time between the revelations of Jesus.

**Exempla in Moral Philosophy**

Abraham Malherbe notes in his survey of Hellenistic moralists that the use of exempla is widespread. He explains, “To be a true follower one must imitate (μυμηται) his model, be his μυμητης or τρωτης. The moralist therefore reminds (ὑπομνησκειν) his hearers of outstanding figures, taking care to describe the qualities of the virtuous men. This call to remembrance is in fact a call to conduct oneself as a μυμητης of the model.” Examples were particularly effective because “they were regarded as more persuasive than words and as providing concrete models to imitate.”

**Exempla**, unlike other forms of precepts, can be pictured or placed before the eyes, and this is part of their power. The ancients believed that moral transformation could occur as the result of attention to a given object, a process sometimes called “transformation by vision.” By seeing their teacher, therefore, students of a philosopher were transformed and enabled to live like him (Xenophon, Mem. 4.1.1). In a similar way, devotees of the gods were also changed by their attention to the gods during worship (Seneca, Ep. 94.42). This pervasive cultural assumption undergirds the importance of exempla in moral training.

The cultural assumption is rooted in Plato’s metaphysics. In the creation of the cosmos, Plato imagines an Architect (τεκτανούμενος) or Constructor (δημιουργος) who keeps his gaze fixed on a model, the Eternal.


48. Charles Talbert outlines the concept in his recent work on Matthean ethics and soteriology: “Indicative and Imperative in Matthean Soteriology,” Bib 82 (2001): 510-38; *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5-7* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004). See also his contributions to the present volume on the Pastoral Epistles and the Gospel of Matthew.
while forming the cosmos (Tim. 28C-29C). The beauty of the cosmos stands as proof that the architect maintained his gaze on the Eternal, the pattern only apprehensible by reason, while forming the cosmos. Plato explains that “when the artificer of any object, in forming its shape and quality, keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform, using a model of this kind, that object, executed in this way, must of necessity be beautiful” (Tim. 28A-B [Bury, LCL]). Contrariwise, if his gaze were to stray from the perfect model, the object would not be beautiful. Thus, the model or pattern, and one’s focused attention on it, determines the quality of the object.49

Middle Platonists like Plutarch and Philo applied Plato’s metaphysics more explicitly to the field of ethics. Philo uses the language of “implanting” to describe the transformative power of patterns or examples. Like Plato, he imagines that a demiurge created the visible world by attending to the intelligible, incorporeal patterns (Opif. 17-20). He uses the analogy of an architect who receives the patterns of a city in his soul, “as it were in wax.” “Then,” Philo continues, “by his innate power of memory, he recalls the images of the various parts of this city, and implants their types yet more distinctly in it: and like a good craftsman begins to build the city of stones and timber, keeping his eye upon his pattern” (Whitaker, LCL). The architect’s work results from imprinting the pattern on his soul, reinforcing it through memory, and keeping his gaze on it while building.

In other contexts, Philo explicitly states that vision of human exemplars imprints their pattern on the soul. Israel, for example, will be a blessing to the nations by living virtuously. A virtuous nation stands above all other nations, seen from every side, “not for its own glory but rather for the benefit of the beholders. For to gaze continuously upon noble models imprints their likenesses in souls which are not entirely hardened and stony” (Praem. 114 [Colson, LCL]). Therefore those who would imitate these examples, Philo continues, need not despair of changing for the better. Their souls are altered by the vision of the virtuous. They are imprinted with the pattern and thereby shaped into its image.

Plutarch prefers the language of “implanting.” Attention to the pattern of virtuous exemplars implants an impulse toward virtue in the observer. Plutarch explains, in very Platonic terms, “The Good creates a stir of activity towards itself, and implants at once in the spectator an active impulse.” The Good acts with almost magnetic pull and draws the observer toward itself. Therefore, Plutarch concludes, “our intellectual vision must be applied to such objects as, by their very charm, invite it onward to its own proper good” (Per. 1-2 [Ferrin, LCL]). He records the lives of virtuous exemplars in order to implant in his readers the impulse that will accomplish moral transformation.

In the work of Stoic moral philosophers, like Seneca, the pervasive cultural assumption of “transformation by vision” undergirds the importance of exempla. Seneca may not use the language of implanting or imprinting, but he still assumes that “seeing” exemplars has transformative effects. In his letters to his student Lucilius, Seneca not only employs copious exempla; he also discusses the importance of good examples in moral transformation. He disagrees with philosophers who find no place for precepts, or practical advice and instruction, in their teaching. Some want only to teach dogmas and define the Supreme Good, but Seneca emphasizes the importance of practical advice. Practical advice “engages the attention and rouses us, and concentrates the memory, and keeps it from losing grip,” and it stirs to growth that which is honorable (Ep. 94.25, 29 [Gummere, LCL]). And the most effective form of practical advice, Seneca notes, comes in the form of good examples: “Nothing is more successful in bringing honorable influence to bear upon the mind, or in straightening out the wavering spirit that is prone to evil, than association with good men. For the frequent seeing, the frequent hearing of them little by little sinks into the heart and acquires the force of precepts” (94.40 [Gummere, LCL]).

The path to virtue is long, however, and the soul needs guidance along the way, just as a student needs letters to trace in order to perfect his writing (94.51). Good examples, living or dead (Ep. 52-7-9), act as guides for the student. Seneca exhorts Lucilius to choose a master whose life he admires and “picture him always to yourself as your protector and your pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our characters; you can never straighten that which is crooked unless you use a ruler.”

49. Also interesting is Plato’s description of human sight. A fire-stream issuing from the eyes meets a fire-stream coming from the object of vision, and “distributes the motions of every object it touches, or whereby it is touched, through all the body even unto the Soul, and brings about the sensation which we now term ‘seeing’” (Tim. 45C-D [Bury, LCL]). Sight resonates in the soul, changing its vibrations. Thus, attending to the ordered revolutions on display in the heavens stabilizes the revolutions of the soul according to the same ordered beauty (Tim. 47B-C [Bury, LCL]).
The Example of Christ in 1 Peter

With the understanding of the function of *exempla* in ancient moral philosophy in mind, we turn now to the example of Christ in 1 Peter. The author does not call his audience to imitate specific details of Jesus’ teachings or works but rather the general arc of his life, specifically his suffering and death. In his survey of the narrative of 1 Peter, Boring notes, “Scenes from the life of Jesus play a minimal role in this story. It is important to the author that Jesus lived, that his life was righteous, and that he suffered unjustly for the sake of others without threatening retaliation. . . . [T]he saving act of God in Jesus is concentrated in his suffering, death, and resurrection, not in his life.”51 Thus, the gospel that was proclaimed to the Christian community—Jesus’ death and resurrection—is also the pattern or example that remains with them.

The pattern of Christ is broadly defined in 1 Peter, and it lacks the specificity that concrete stories from his life might provide. This does not detract from the effectiveness of his example, however. In ancient paranasis, the teacher provided examples to inculcate the emulation of a particular character trait, not necessarily the mimicry of particular actions. Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians illustrates the point. He calls them to have the same “mind” or “attitude” of Christ Jesus (which, not unlike the author of 1 Peter, he defines as a self-sacrificing obedience to God that leads through suffering to glorification) rather than to ape specific actions. In Phil 2:1-13 the community’s participation in the pattern of Christ “is guided by analogy rather than isomorphic imitation.”52 The many examples provided in the letter to the Philippians shape the imagination of the audience so that they can learn to draw analogies and formulate how the pattern might take shape in their unique context.

The example of Christ in 1 Peter functions in similar ways. The author highlights the continuity between the situation of his audience and the life of Christ, so that some members—slaves and wives in particular—can imitate him almost exactly. They too suffer unjustly; and they too should respond without retaliation. As Joel Green notes, however, “imitation has a more expansive sense of ‘performance’ or ‘putting into play’ the character of the person or thing imitated” (italics mine).53 Imitation of Christ’s example calls for “creative fidelity” to the “score” of Christ’s character. Like a Jazz musician improvising according to the chord progressions of a song, the imitator of Christ submits to the pattern while freely expressing it in her own particular context. Green summarizes: “the imitation of Christ might take different forms—not because the pattern of Christ’s life has changed, but because the social contexts within which that pattern is imitated vary. What is crucial here, then, is Peter’s concern that we internalize or come to embody the pattern of Christ, that our dispositions be conformed to his.”54 The whole Christian community, therefore, can follow the example of Christ even if their life circumstances do not match his.

The basic pattern of Christ, as mentioned above, includes his fidelity to God that leads through suffering to resurrection and glorification. Thus, the basic content of the gospel has become the pattern for the lives of the Christian community. The proclaimed word through which they were born is now the word that sustains in the time between the revelations of Jesus. The author appeals to this pattern multiple times, but two illustrations will demonstrate how the example of Christ functions as the sustaining word.

First, immediately following Peter’s exhortation to crave the nourishing milk of the word, he appeals to the example of Christ to encourage the growth of the Christian community. He calls his audience to come to the living stone, which he defines according to the pattern of Christ outlined above. It is the stone rejected by mortals but chosen by God. He then calls his audience to imitation of Christ’s example. They too are living stones, implying that they too have been rejected by humans because of divine election. Their imitation leads not to shame, however, but to incorporation into

51. Boring, 1 Peter, 201. In the first appendix of his commentary, Boring offers a detailed narrative outline of 1 Peter, plotting the events mentioned in the letter in chronological order.
53. Green, 1 Peter, 278.
54. Green, 1 Peter, 278.
God's family. They are built into a spiritual house founded on the rejected cornerstone.

In this case, the imitation of the example of Christ carries an indicative force more than an imperative one. Green explains that when the author develops the identity of his audience in terms of the imitation of Christ, “he does so not in terms of what his audience must become but in terms of what they already are.” The author highlights what we might call the “typological imitation” of Christ: the situation of his audience mirrors the situation of Jesus. They imitate him because they are experiencing the shame of God's election. The world maligns and rejects what God finds precious. The imperative force of the image is more implied: “You share in Jesus’ identity, so respond to your antagonists as he did (knowing that it is only God’s evaluation that matters).”

First Peter 2:4-10 affirms that the imitation of Christ depends on Christ himself. The passive tense hints at what the imagery makes explicit. They are “being built” (οἰκοδομεῖται) into a temple founded on the living cornerstone. The verb implies that God, who must be the architect since he is choosing the cornerstone, is responsible for the building of the spiritual house, just as he was responsible for generating the new birth. The imagery of the living cornerstone indicates that they depend on Christ for their existence as the people of God. Just as their rebirth came through the living word, now their new life depends on the enduring word. Christ the example is Christ the foundation that undergirds the new community.

The second illustration of the function of the example of Christ in 1 Peter closely follows the first. In 2:18-25, the author addresses the slaves in his audience and places the example of Christ before them in order to encourage their endurance through unjust suffering. He instructs the slaves to defer to their masters, both gentle and harsh, continuing to do good despite suffering. He then invokes the example of Christ: Christ left a pattern of suffering without retaliation that they must follow in their present circumstances. He faithfully followed God and was abused because of it; but the abuse did not alter his faithfulness. He endured by entrusting himself to God, the only judge that matters. The slaves are called to similarly endure and thereby enjoy the approval of the ultimate judge.

The instruction in 2:18-25 specifically addresses the slaves in the author's audience, but the call to imitation applies more broadly to the audience as a whole. Slaves who have joined the Christian community without the rest of their household are likely suffering abuse for their conversion. As mentioned earlier, they are likely being malignantly as “home-wreckers” whose refusal to worship the household gods destabilizes the οἰκος and thereby threatens the stability of the society at large. The author encourages them to continue doing right in the midst of suffering in order to silence and shame the slanderers. If they live as model slaves in every possible way, they will undercut the accusation that they are destroying the household by embracing this strange new religion. In fact, they might even earn the Christian community a positive reputation. Such instruction applies by analogy to the whole community (2:12; 3:16), and so the call to follow Christ's example also applies by analogy to the whole community.

As in 2:4-10, the gospel provides both the example and the means of imitation. The word initially proclaimed to the Christian community doubtlessly included the story of the unjust suffering that Jesus resolutely endured, maintaining faithfulness to God through death and ultimately into his glorification. They are called to imitate that example, continuing to do good in the midst of unjust suffering and clinging to the hope of future glorification. The story of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection also provides the means for the Christian life. Christ's suffering brought the community to God initially (3:18) and now continues to sustain the community. The author adopts the language of Isa 53 to explain how Christ and his exemplary suffering function in the community. He takes the burden of sins from the community and heals them with his wounds. As free and healed people, they now can live for righteousness; but Christ's act was not a one-time occurrence. He now remains with those who have come to him as shepherd and guardian or overseer (ἐπίσκοπον).

The language of 2:25 shares affinities with Seneca's descriptions of ex-

55. Green, 1 Peter, 60.
56. Victor A. Copan labels this form of unintentional imitation “paralleling reality” (Saint Paul as Spiritual Director: An Analysis of the Imitation of Paul with Implications and Applications to the Practice of Spiritual Direction [Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007], 53).
57. Green, 1 Peter, 60.
epitaphs. Seneca exhorts Lucilius to find a man of high character, living or dead, and "keep him ever before your eyes, living as if he were watching you, and ordering all your actions as if he beheld them" (Ep. 11.8, quoting Epicurus [Gummere, LCL]). Seneca calls this exemplar a custodem (guardian or protector), paedagogum (attendant), or exemplum (pattern or example). He continues his advice to Lucilius:

We can get rid of most sins, if we have a witness who stands near us when we are likely to go wrong. The soul should have someone whom it can respect — one by whose authority it may make even its inner shrine more hallowed. Happy is the man who can make others better, not merely when he is in their company, but even when he is in their thoughts! And happy also is he who can so revere a man as to calm and regulate himself by calling him to mind! One who can so revere another, will soon be himself worthy of reverence. Choose therefore a Cato; or, if Cato seems too severe a model, choose some Laelius, a gentler spirit. Choose a master whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector and pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our characters; you can never straighten that which is crooked unless you use a ruler. (Ep. 11.9-10 [Gummere, LCL], italics mine)

Seneca calls Lucilius to find a witness whose authority will make his soul into a hallowed place, an image of the soul as a holy temple that calls to mind 1 Pet 1:16 and 2:5. Lucilius's attention to that exemplar will regulate his actions and shape him into a person worthy of reverence. Seneca therefore exhorts Lucilius to choose an exemplar and picture him always, and in that way he will function as both the pattern and protector for Lucilius's moral transformation.

Likewise, the author of 1 Peter pictures Jesus as the pattern and guardian for his community. And additionally, Jesus acts as the foundation for the community's new life. His suffering, death, and resurrection — the event the gospel proclaims — heals the community and frees them from sins, bringing them to God and giving them birth into a new life. The same gospel provides the pattern of life — faithful endurance through suffering into glorification — that the community is called to emulate by analogy in their own circumstances of unjust suffering. The author of 1 Peter places the pattern before the eyes of the slaves (and the whole community) in order to encourage their continued endurance. By keeping the gospel before their eyes, the community has both a pattern and a protector. Jesus acts as their guardian or overseer, regulating their characters by his example, and he will continue to do so until he appears again.

Conclusion

The author of 1 Peter depicts the Christian community living between two revelations of Christ. His suffering, death, and resurrection mark his first appearance, and his revelation at the eschaton marks the second. Between these two appearances, the community is protected by the power of God during their various trials. The author describes the three moments of the Christian life — conversion, post-conversion life, and eschatological salvation — with the metaphor of rebirth, which can be summarized as follows.

The community was given new birth through the resurrection of Jesus (1:3), an event they experienced first through the proclamation of the gospel, the word of God (1:23). Thus, the author of Peter can say both that they were given new birth by the resurrection of Jesus and by the word of God (1:23). That word, the gospel as event and proclamation, endures forever. It was not a one-time event experienced only at conversion. It is an event that endures with them in their post-conversion lives, nourishing them to salvation during the trials they experience in the time between the revelations of Christ. The word endures with them specifically in the pattern of Christ, which both describes and compels the moral transformation expected of the community. In this way, Christ himself — experienced by the community through the proclamation of the gospel, the story of his death and resurrection — is the word that provides new birth and the milk that grows the Christian community into salvation.

59. Obviously, a direct linguistic connection cannot be made between Seneca, who writes in Latin, and the author of 1 Peter, who writes in Greek. The conceptual framework is the same, however. Both Seneca and Peter appeal to an exemplar who acts as an overseer or protector for those who seek to imitate him.