'I remembered the saying' (Tobit 2:6)

Recognising Emotions in Scripture with Tobit and Eve

Abstract

This experimental paper is methodologically Christian, in the sense that it is structured as a Christian mimesis of how a scriptural saint cited scripture. However, the choice of subject matter commits it to engaging with the post-Enlightenment secular context, and principles of exegetical, historical, and theological analysis anchor it within wider scholarly debates. Concretely, the paper takes the scriptural portrayal of Tobit's recognition of his own emotion in scripture as a paradigm or type for one way of encountering scripture today. The first part examines a vignette of Tobit remembering a scriptural text about grief at a moment when he experiences intense grief. The second, longer part explores the transition to the post-Enlightenment context by performing and interrogating an act of recognising in scripture an emotion that has only been theorised since the 18th century, namely 'disgust,' which I 'recognise' in the scriptural narrative of Eve's Temptation in Genesis 3. The purpose of the mimetic reception and the scholarly interrogation of it is not to replicate or critique Tobit's example, but to allow it to be inhabited in a way that can remain meaningful from a Christian perspective without closing our eyes to the real challenges of modernity and, lest it be forgotten, of being human. This is offered simply as one exhibit in a potentially capacious gallery of attempts to learn from the scriptures and the saints how to inhabit scripture in the modern world.

Keywords

temptation, disgust, emotion, mimesis, self, death, narrative

Introduction

What is scripture, and what can a scriptural scholar possibly be good *for?* These two questions haunt the imaginative world of scriptural scholars in an era that has several centuries of post-Enlightenment thinking and post-Christian culture behind it. The terrain of Biblical Studies as an academic discipline is so diverse that nobody seems seriously to suppose that we are united by method any more, or even by goal. For many of us, the methods that we were taught in order to pass examinations are not the ones that seem most helpful to our students or to ourselves in receiving the gift and challenge of scripture in the world today.

This experimental paper (and it really is an experiment!) grows out of wrestling with this. Overall, it experiments with method, goal, and formal presentation of biblical study. The paper is methodologically Christian, in the sense that it is structured as a Christian mimesis of how a scriptural saint cited scripture. However, the choice of subject matter commits it to engaging with the post-Enlightenment secular context, and principles of exegetical, historical, and theological analysis anchor it within wider scholarly debates. Concretely, the paper takes the scriptural portrayal of Tobit's recognition of his own emotion in scripture as a paradigm or type for one way of encountering scripture today. The first part examines a vignette of Tobit remembering a scriptural text about grief at a moment when he experiences intense grief. The second, longer part explores the transition to the post-Enlightenment context by performing and interrogating an act of recognising in scripture an emotion that has only been theorised since the 18th century, namely 'disgust,' which I 'recognise' in the scriptural narrative of Eve's Temptation in Genesis 3. The purpose of the mimetic reception and the scholarly interrogation of it is not to replicate or critique Tobit's example, but to allow it to be inhabited in a way that can remain meaningful from a Christian perspective without closing our eyes to the real challenges of modernity and, lest it be forgotten, of being human. This moment in Tobit's story is not the only important scriptural or saintly 'type' for receiving scripture today; it is simply one exhibit in a potentially capacious

gallery of attempts to learn from the scriptures and the saints how to inhabit scripture in the modern world.[1]

Tobit's Example: Recognising His Grief in Amos 8:10

Early in the book of Tobit, Tobit is portrayed seated at table, with a feast spread before him to celebrate Shavuot. Before he tucks into supper, he tells his son, Tobias, to go and find a poor

[1] The selection of material for the content of this piece is contingent on opportunities afforded by a visiting research fellowship at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana: thank you to Mike Rea and the Center for Philosophy of Religion for hosting me while I worked on my project on taste/disgust in Clement of Alexandria; thank you to Mike Rea also for conversation about why the words of the text and tradition matter, and for articulating the discussion theme 'narrative concepts of the self'; thank you to Allison Krile Thornton for her paper on Genesis 3; thank you to participants in the CPR seminar for discussion and feedback, especially to Karl Ameriks for his exceeding grace in trying to set me right about German philosophers – in this area, my own limitations remain, and I have sought at least to cite the sources on which I am leaning; thank you also to Gary Anderson for the inspiring Faculty Bible Study on Tobit. The typological form and method of the paper is inspired by reflecting on the role of saintly patrons and exemplars at the University, including 'notre Dame' herself, and the forty saints in stained glass who were chosen to watch over the nave of the basilica. I am conscious that the paper leans heavily on texts within Jewish tradition, thus it constitutes a Christian reception of Israel's scriptures and other Jewish writing; both this and the rather dark choice of themes arose by accident rather than design. Thank you, finally, to my Durham colleague, Walter Moberly, for reading and responding to a draft, and for encouragement by word and by example. And thank you to the anonymous readers for *JTI,* whose feedback was both helpful and kind.

person to share the meal. Tobias quickly comes back, announcing that a fellow-Israelite has been murdered in the market-place. Tobit hurries to bring in the corpse so that he can give it a decent burial after sunset. Later he returns, washes, and eats. He narrates,

> ἤσθιον τὸν ἄρτον μου ἐν λύπῃ [6] καὶ ἐμνήσθην τῆς προφητείας Αμως καθὼς εἶπεν στραφήσονται αἱ ἑορταὶ ὑμῶν εἰς πένθος καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ εὐφροσύναι ὑμῶν εἰς θρῆνον καὶ ἔκλαυσα
>
> I ate my bread in pain (*lupē*). And I remembered the prophecy of Amos, as he said, 'Your festivals will be turned to grief and all your merry-making to lamentation.' And I wept.

Or,[2] in the longer recension,

> ἤσθιον τὸν ἄρτον μου μετὰ πένθους· [6] καὶ ἐμνήσθην τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ προφήτου, ὅσα ἐλάλησεν Αμως ἐπὶ Βαιθηλ λέγων στραφήσονται ὑμῶν αἱ ἑορταὶ εἰς πένθος καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὁδαὶ[3] ὑμῶν εἰς θρῆνος καὶ ἔκλαυσα
>
> I ate my bread with grief (*penthos*). And I remembered (*emnēsthēn*) the saying (*rhēma*) of the prophet, which Amos spoke against Bethel, saying, "Your festivals will be turned to grief (*penthos*) and all your songs into lamentation and I wept
>
> (Tob. 2:6, quoting Am 8:10).

---

[2] The textual tradition of Tobit is complex, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 3-17. It was probably originally written in Aramaic (Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 18-28), but our principal witnesses are in Greek. The shorter recension was widely circulated in antiquity; it is included in Vaticanus (4th c.), Alexandrinus (5th c.), and Venetus (8th c.). The longer recension is also ancient, found first in Sinaiticus (4th/5th c.), and may well be the original. See Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 4-6. This portion of the text is not among the fragments found at Qumran (Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 10).

[3] Thus Sinaiticus. Robert Hanhart, *Tobit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) has ᾠδαί as in LXX: Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 135 n. 9.

cf. LXX (Rahlf's) Amos 8:10 καὶ μεταστρέψω τὰς ἑορτὰς ὑμῶν εἰς πένθος καὶ πάσας τὰς ᾠδὰς ὑμῶν εἰς θρῆνον

'I shall turn[4] your festivals into grief (*penthos*) and all your songs into lamentation'

The dominant model for interpreting scripture in the Book of Tobit as a whole is that of receiving divine commands to obey. The author emphasises that Tobit did that devoutly, indeed more devoutly than anyone else in Israel. It is also what he is doing at the start of this episode in the story: he is feasting for Shavuot, receiving the stranger and poor person in charity, and burying the dead, because these things are commanded. But in the closing moment of this vignette, we witness a different structure of relationship to God through scripture: here Tobit finds himself deeply immersed in the emotional experience of obeying the divine command; gives a name to it – he calls it 'pain' (*lupē*) or 'grief' (*penthos*); *then* recognises this experience as expressed in the words of the prophet Amos.

That moment of recognition is interesting for what it can tell us about the connection between the lived experience and the scriptural text that Tobit identifies. Tobit articulates it with the simple phrase, 'And I remembered.' He is not inviting a comparison: 'this is like what Amos says'. Nor is he articulating decisive fulfilment, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (cf. Luke 4:21). Nor does he portray himself as the interpreter who draws the meaning out of the text, or the experience. Rather, the experience prompts his memory of a scriptural text, and by simply recording that moment of 'remembering' after the experience that prompts it, he conveys that he finds significance in the resonance.

More precisely, what prompts his memory is the combination of moments in the emotional script. I want to unpack this in more detail in order to understand the place that the scriptural passage has in relation to Tobit's emotional response to the events that have befallen him.

[4] Tobit's version softens divine agency in this harsh act. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 135.

Scholars have studied emotions as 'scripts', characterised by three moments, of *perception, evaluation,* and *reaction*, which are closely united in emotional response.[5] Tobit, in this story, *perceives* what has happened, *evaluates* its emotional impact as *penthos* or *lupē,* adds a second layer of *evaluation* through the scriptural quotation, then *reacts* by weeping.

The immediate prod to his memory appears to be the emotional label that he gives to what he is feeling. In the longer Greek recension, he uses the word *penthos* to express his grief, which is the very term that is found in Amos' prophecy in the Greek Bible. The narrative presentation of his experience enhances the resonance. Amos succinctly highlights the transformation of festival into lamentation, which is also the structure of Tobit's recent experience. The term 'festivals' (*heortai*) appears both in the prophecy and in Tobit's story, and his personal story fills out the shape of the laconic prophecy with details that make it specific (such as *which* festival it was), explain it by adding a cause (*how it came about* that this festivity was turned to mourning), and give an account of its character (*in what way* it made him feel sad). Tobit emphasises the prophetic character of the scripture by attributing it explicitly to Amos, labelling him/it as prophet/prophecy,[6] and quoting verses that articulate in the future tense what he has just now experienced in the recent past. In his eyes, it signified not merely prediction of the future, but divine judgement. The whole experience intensifies his grief, and he weeps. We can infer some of the factors playing into that intensified emotion: the scripture elevates his experience into a more intimate connection to God and to the history, voices, and texts of the Israelite tradition. His personal experience finds a ready-made external form, which is embedded in a network of interpersonal relationships, which he already holds dear, both with his fellow Israelites and with God. Thus the resonance exalts his experience to a place within the tradition and vividly

[5] Robert A. Kaster, 'The Dynamics of "Fastidium" and the Ideology of Disgust,' *TAPA* 131 (2001): 148; Donald Lateiner and Dåemos G. Spatharas, 'Introduction: Ancient and Modern Modes of Understanding and Manipulating Disgust,' in: *The Ancient Emotion of Disgust* (eds. Donald Lateiner and Dåemos G. Spatharas; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4.

[6] Depending on which textual tradition we read.

confirms it, but the place it holds is a poignant one, both relationally, as it appears to affirm that he is inhabiting the harsh condemnation of God's judgement on his people, and experientially, as it shows that the shape of his experience, at just the moment when he was seeking with all his might to honour God, fulfils God's words by culminating in lament.

I find Tobit an interesting paradigm for a modern biblical scholar because of the way the text functions to amplify and contextualise what he has already experienced. The text matters, and it matters through personal emotional involvement in relationship to the people for whom it was written, and to God, whose words it contains.

Remembering and giving voice to the *form* of the text functions in a similar way to constructing sacred space, as described by Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane*. In Eliade's account, 'religious man' in constructing the space he is to inhabit reproduces the creative act of the deity and seeks to do so in a pure and holy way; thereby he constructs a place that is open between heaven and earth, where God and humanity can meet, and humanity can realise their own being 'as it was in the beginning'.[7] So too in not just vaguely recalling but expressing the *form* of the text, Tobit establishes a textual *locus* that functions like a sacred place; he recapitulates the speech-act that was given by God through the prophet and creates anew the verbal place of encounter between God and humanity, wherein humanity can be reconstituted in the relationship to God for which they were made. 'Remembering' is an intrinsically secondary, mimetic activity, in that it comes after the first iteration and represents it afresh: what God spoke, Tobit 'remembered', and in the act of remembering, he imitated the creative act of God in speaking these words, and created them as a 'space', a place in language, for himself to inhabit in relation to God and to his people.

One of the things a biblical scholar may be called on to offer to a wider community is to try to find the words and narrative paradigms from scripture by which their experience can be placed within the scriptural tradition, not in order to constrain it, but in order to help people to find

[7] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (tr. Willard R. Trask; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), ch. 1 on 'Sacred space and making the world sacred'.

ways to inhabit their experience through scripture. The *scholarly* dimension of that includes articulating a more explicit account of the narrative and emotional logic of the function of the text within the relationship, including its significance and limitations. Conversely, the call may be to find scriptural paradigms that can fruitfully *place* modern experiences of emotion and lift them into a Christian frame, placing them in relation to God and to the people for whom the scriptures are written, within the social epistemic context of modernity.

This essay offers a case study by 'remembering' the Temptation narrative in Eden as a textual *locus* in which to place the emotion of disgust before God through the scriptures in community. I will not include any personal narratives of temptation or disgust, as I rely on readers either to have their own, or to have enough empathy with fallen humanity to imagine it. From an intellectual perspective, the salience of 'disgust' arises through its prominence in modern theories of the emotions, where it emerged in the mid-18th century, and has become especially significant since the 1990s. This means that it is likely to be a category that resonates with our contemporaries, and through which people are likely to be able to articulate their own experience. The argument is presented in three steps. First, I highlight resonances between modern theories of disgust and the Temptation narrative, in order to show that this text can effectively provide a *locus* for certain kinds of experience of disgust. Then I sketch the contours of modern theories of disgust in order to show that the act of recognising *this* emotion in the scriptures places us in a community that is *already* intimately involved in dialogue and debate with secular modernity. This has to be part of how we receive the scriptural narrative in relation to self and others before God. Thirdly, I explore whether and how the act of recognising this emotion in this scriptural text may open up the possibility of restructuring our experience of disgust so as to be more receptive to the grace by which temptation is overcome. (This part, alas, is curtailed through both lack of space and lack of wisdom.)

A Modern Mimesis: Recognising Disgust with Eve in Genesis 3:1-13

Genesis 3 plunges us into a confused space of memories, echoes, and emotional responses to what God made, what he commanded human beings concerning it, and why. God is nowhere to be seen for now, and the man, together with his newly made 'helper', his wife, are left alone in Eden. The serpent suggests a memory of what God commanded about eating from the trees (Gen 3:2). Eve corrects him with a different memory, part of which she introduces with a quotation formula, although what she quotes is not a direct quotation but has already been restructured a little in her meditation or memory (Gen 3:2-3). The serpent suggests a different interpretation of what God intended by the command (Gen 3:4-5). And now Eve feels differently when she looks at the tree in the garden that has been forbidden to her. Suddenly it becomes attractive, in a personally involving way. It has the sense of a forbidden *pleasure*. It delights her senses, and it promises a new sense of self in relation to God (Gen 3:6a). She takes, eats, and shares with her husband (for they have become one flesh in this also). Their sense of self in relation to God *does* change, but not for the better: they realise that they are naked; they feel ashamed, and hide in fear when they hear him walking in the evening breeze only a moment later (Gen 3:6b-8).

Narrative Traces by which to Recognise Disgust in Genesis 3:1-13

My first claim is that this scriptural text allows us to 'recognise' the emotion that modern scholars study as 'disgust'. There is no label for 'disgust' in the passage; in that sense, it is not like Tobit remembering his 'grief' in Amos in the longer recension that used the same descriptive label for both (*penthos*). Nor is there even the portrayal of typical physical body language or verbal expressions associated with disgust: when the serpent first puts Eve in mind of the forbidden fruit, nothing in the text suggests that she recoiled, gagged, screwed up her face, or screamed 'Yuck!' On the contrary, her initial dialogue with the serpent seems eminently calm and rational.

My claim that one can recognise disgust here depends on two things: firstly, the very heterogeneous and capacious character of the category of disgust in modern theory; secondly, the hermeneutics of the epistemological act of 'recognising' an emotion in scripture. Regarding the

first, my claim is *not* that Eve's reaction to the tree is closely comparable with seeing vomit, pus, gore, excrement, rotting corpses, or other such standard elicitors of disgust. Rather, it depends on acknowledging that disgust is itself a highly heterogeneous category of strong aversive reaction, which can occur in many different styles and with clustered with many different emotions. The claim is that many of its distinctive characteristics are shared by those that we find in the Temptation narrative, including aspects of how it is structured, which domains elicit it, what its function is, which senses are involved, how it acquires an attractive and aesthetic dimension and what consequences that has. I shall trace out this comparison in this section.

The hermeneutical condition for recognising disgust in the Temptation narrative depends on receiving the text in dialectical interplay with personal experience, ecclesial tradition, and secular modernity. The most significant critical judgement is personally involved discernment of where exactly the serpents are lurking within that interplay. Because it is the interplay that matters, and the text is part of how that is constructed but not the final end of the investigation, a form of interpretive 'eisegesis' (e.g. reading disgust into the story) is not ruled out. The term 'eisegesis' is often pejorative in scriptural scholarship, where it is contrasted with 'exegesis', which is deemed more attentive to 'the text itself on its own terms' (whatever that is taken to mean...). But scripture is frequently laconic about emotions, and readers of scripture since antiquity have eisegeted them, not as a mark of disrespect for the text, but as personally involving imaginative appropriation of it, which is what scripture is *for*. The epistemological act of 'recognition' of disgust in Genesis 3 does involve a critical judgement on what the text says, but the act of recognition is completed in the construction of a space that is opened up through the text – a textual *locus* that can be emotionally inhabited in encounter between God, self, and others.

The first point of comparison between modern disgust and Eden lies in the way the narrative traces out the 'conversion' of a visceral aversive reaction into furtive allure, and then the transformation of emotional experience that results from eating the fruit into a form of self-disgust. I will begin by tracing out the textual signals for the nature of this experience. Then I will draw out the comparison with modern debates on disgust.

In Eden, Eve initially rejected completely the very idea of the forbidden fruit. She had no desire even to come close to it. Her version of what God had said to Adam not only gets the message about not eating it, but intensifies it – in her internalised version, they are not even to touch it (Gen 3:3, cf. 2:16-17). This resonates with modern accounts of disgust as a visceral repulsion from coming too close.[8]

The snake manages to convert her emotional reaction to the tree to one of delight and desire. This begins with an aesthetic attraction from the distance of seeing, but already as she sees she is imagining the self-involving incorporation of the fruit into her body and her self: after hearing the serpent speak, she 'sees' the tree as 'good to eat from, a delight to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise' (Gen 3:6). The sensory encounter by seeing here works very closely with the desire to consume in all sorts of other ways: by eating to incorporate the fruit into the body, by the lingering gaze of the delighted spectator, and by the spiritual growth of becoming wise. The fruit seems to promise everything. There is no textual signal that at this point she still remembers the repulsion from even touching the tree that she mentioned only a moment before, but from what happens next, we know that it was still present to her, just not emotionally salient to her at this point.[9] This moment of conversion of the repellent to the attractive, and the way it

[8] E.g. Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation* (tr. Howard Eiland, Joel Golb; State University of New York, 2003) 1.

[9] This is important for hearing the negative nuance of Adam and Eve's emotional reaction to the consequences of eating. In my view, the narrative presupposes that they retained respect for God's command throughout, it simply became less emotionally salient to them at this point in the story. My exegesis of the emotional sequence here is far more negatively nuanced than R. W. L. Moberly, 'Did the Serpent Get it Right?' *JTS* 39 (1988): 1-27, despite our fairly similar conclusions about the nature of the death that Adam and Eve experience as a consequence of Torah-disobedience, which affects their relationships with each other, with their sense of self, and with God (pp. 8-9, 17-18).

is effected through the sense of sight, which leads to the urge to consume, is again characteristic of disgust.[10]

No sooner have the woman and man eaten of the fruit than they realise that their eyes are opened and they know that they are naked, sew together fig leaves, then hear afresh the voice of God, and hide themselves in the garden. Adam and Eve's emotional reaction to swallowing the forbidden fruit seems to come in two stages, and the parallel in the actions underscores that the second emotional stage is an intensification and reorientation of the first: first, there is the shame that causes them to hide their bodies with fig-leaves (Gen 3:8, cf. 2:25), then the fear that causes them to hide themselves as fully as they can from before the face of God (Gen. 3:8, cf. 3:10).[11] The subsequent dialogue with God underscores the role that the commandment plays in this: God now gives his own paraphrase of what he said to Adam in Gen 2:16-17, and he picks out the bit that really mattered, '*I* commanded *you* not to eat of it' (Gen 3:11). The I-Thou relationship between God and Adam was structured through the command, and Adam has broken it. Adam shifts the blameworthy initiative to Eve; God challenges her, and she shifts it to the deceit of the Serpent. Their emotional turmoil arises because they *do* remember God's command, indeed they have internalised it to the point where they know that their sense of self depends on it. Just as disgust is the response to something one does not wish to get too close to, experienced closely with awareness that one has *already* got too close to it, it is *already* inside one,[12] so all that Adam and Eve do manifests their inner repulsion to what has *already* got inside them, not only physically, but in distorting their relationships to their bodies, to one another, and to God. Hiding from physical confrontation and hiding from interpersonal confrontation in

---

[10] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[11] Other interpreters emphasise the difference between fear and shame, and the fact that shame is not explicitly mentioned here, which enables them to sustain a more positive interpretation of Adam and Eve's emotion and psychology at this point, e.g. Moberly, 'Serpent,' 8-9.

[12] William L. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 26.

dialogue go together: by taking into themselves physically the forbidden fruit, they have also taken into themselves spiritually all that it means to break God's commandment, namely the reconstitution of their relationship to body and self, to one another and to God, in a new relationship that knows transgression and death.

This emotional sequence, from initial extreme aversion, to furtive attraction, to a new integration of the aversive-attractive response, resonates with modern descriptions of disgust. This structural similarity is an important basis for 'recognising' modern disgust in the scriptural narrative, but there is much more to the comparison than this.

Firstly, many modern theories of disgust regard it as rooted in oral ingestion;[13] so too, the narrative of the forbidden fruit is all about eating. Some modern theories give a prominent place to sexuality in explaining disgust, although this is not universal.[14] Similarly, the story of Adam and Eve's nakedness and new found self-awareness after they realise it has suggested to many interpreters that sexuality was integral to the Fall.

Secondly, theories of disgust emphasise that it has both physical and moral elicitors; sometimes the physical elicitors are called 'primary' and the moral 'secondary', but they are often closely connected. Scientists have devised experiments to discover elicitors of disgust that are common across different cultures and to seek to rationalise why the biological disgust mechanism exists. Things that seep, ooze, gush, or are otherwise excreted from the body are on the list of elicitors of disgust; along with anything that vividly presents sickness, death, decay, woundedness, or some forms of abnormality, especially deformity or the blurring of the human/animal divide. Disgust has been explained as a basic emotional reflex that protects

---

[13] E.g. Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt and Clark R. McCauley, 'Disgust,' *Handbook of the Emotions* (eds. M. Lewis, J. M. Haviland-Jones, and L.F. Barrett; 3rd edn.; New York: Guildford, 2008), 758.

[14] Freud pioneered this. See discussion in Miller, *Anatomy*, and Bunmi O. Olatunji et al., 'The Disgust Scale: Item Analysis, Factor Structure, and Suggestions for Refinement,' *Psychological Assessment* 19/3 (2007) 294.

people from approaching or ingesting things that could damage the body, or the body-and-soul whole, the 'self'.[15] Similarly in the Temptation narrative in Genesis, Adam and Eve are dicing with death; what threatens them works through both physical and 'moral' components, and it changes them body-and-soul in their embodied, interpersonal and spiritual sense of 'self'.

Thirdly, scholarship on the sensory component of disgust usually emphasises the priority of the more base, less intellectual senses, namely taste (which is given first place because of its connection with oral incorporation), smell, and touch. These are the senses where disgust is utterly reflexive; there is no pause between the perception and the ingestion, and the response is visceral and immediate. But those who study the aesthetic appreciation of disgust underscore the significance of vision also, which gives pause for contemplation and allows the other senses to be engaged imaginatively. This is how 'tasting' can be converted to 'savouring', and what is repugnantly 'disgusting' can become alluringly so. Disgust shifts to aesthetic enjoyment, and the food or drink that one at first rejected becomes an 'acquired taste'.[16] So too, Eve's reaction to the forbidden fruit begins with the visceral connection between taste and touch: she rejects the thought even of going near it to touch it, let alone taste it. When the Serpent speaks, however, his words frame the possibility of inhabiting the contemplative pause prior to ingesting the fruit. She learns to look and to savour, to behold and eat in the imagination. Her experience of disgust has been converted to furtive delight. At a sensory level, that happens by re-bonding taste not with touch but with vision.

Carolyn Korsmeyer's explanation of *why* disgust becomes aesthetically attractive emphasises the cognitive dimension of the emotion and its connection with death. Through aesthetic disgust, one is able to 'apprehend' the experience of our own mortality, and therefore gain personal insight into something about ourselves that we previously knew only in the

---

[15] For a summary, see Rozin, Haidt, and MacCauley, 'Disgust', and 'The Disgust Scale Homepage,' URL: https://people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/disgustscale.html (accessed 11th November 2021).

[16] Korsmeyer, *Savoring*.

abstract. She coins the term 'sublate' for the emotional experience of disgust, as a counterpart to 'sublime'. Whereas the 'sublime' translates fear at majestic grandeur into an aesthetic enjoyment, 'sublate' performs a parallel translation of disgust at signs of human sickness, deficiency, decay, and the expectation of death.[17] The resonance with Eve's experience of temptation by the Serpent is again striking. Not that Eve's experience stops at the aesthetic moment, or that she has full access to the 'sublate' prior to having tasted the fruit, but her experience of beholding then tasting it is built around the same structure of attraction to a self-involving, not-yet-terminal apprehension of personal mortality. The Serpent converted her fear of death into a promise of godlike knowledge of both good and evil. When she let her eyes and imagination linger on the fruit, she saw it first as good to eat and delightful to behold, but gradually also as desirable *for making one wise*. She and Adam do indeed gain insight through eating it, and it is a new apprehension of themselves that seems to interpret at a spiritual level God's warning that they would die on the day when they ate it. The perfection of their relationship to their body, self, and God is lost, and they are driven out of Paradise, never to return, because God resolves that in this state Adam must be physically debarred from eating of the Tree of Life (Gen 3:22-23). The knowledge they have gained *is* a form of personal insight into their own mortality, although it is more horrific than delightful for them.

Again and again, then, it seems that the scriptural narrative of Temptation confronts us with central elements of modern theories of disgust: how it is caused, why it exists, how it is structured, which senses it works through, how it relates body to morality and 'self', are all found there. Or, alternatively, modern theories of disgust confront us again and again with 'memories' of the Temptation narrative in Genesis. These memories, resonances, and comparisons between modern theories of disgust and the scriptural text do not in themselves amount to the Christian epistemological act of 'recognising' disgust in scripture; they do not in themselves constitute a mimesis of Tobit's epistemological act of 'remembering.' That depends on a prior personal

[17] Korsmeyer, *Savoring*, ch. 5. Kolnai 1998, 587, however, explains disgust as non-existential, by contrast with fear.

experience, which is apprehended through the scriptural narrative, which in turn should afford a gateway to structuring and restructuring the experience in relation to God and others. The next section interrogates how the apprehension of *disgust* as such involves this Christian act of recognition in wider post-Enlightenment discourse, which conditions the way the scripture is received in dialogue with others. The final section will try to peer through the scriptural gateway to a route beyond experiential entanglement in this style of temptation.

How does the Christian-Secular Interface Condition the Experience of Recognising Disgust in Scripture?

Notwithstanding the many obvious points of connection between the Temptation narrative and modern theories of disgust, the modern debate is constructed without explicit reference to the Temptation story. In the eyes of many scholars, disgust really 'arrived' on the academic scene in the 1990s.[18] Empirical psychologists compared disgust elicitors in different cultural contexts, categorised them in competing taxonomies, and whittled these down from 9 to 3 principal domains. They theorised the origin and purpose of disgust, which senses are most significant, the relationship between moral and physical disgust, the age at which disgust reflexes develop, the relationship between nature and nurture, and so on.[19] Scientifically, this discussion is important for our study because it underscores that disgust is *both* a biological given *and* socialised into distinctive forms, which means that it is both important to what it is to be human and susceptible to cultural formation that could be for better (pointing toward Paradise) or for worse (seduced by the Serpent). Culturally however, what we have is a debate that is fundamentally a secular, scientific conversation among psychologists and those who build on their research. The absence of Genesis 3 is not surprising, but from a Christian perspective it is a text that *needs* to be on the discussion table in discerning which routes point towards Paradise, and which to the seduction of the Serpent.

[18] Haidt, Rozin, and MacCauley, 'Disgust,' 758.

[19] For a concise entry point into the literature, see n. 15, above.

Looking beyond the science to debates on disgust in other fields, we find the same persistent absence of Genesis 3, since the psychologists' research has formed the theoretical foundation for studies in the arts also. Research on the history of the emotions or on the aesthetics of disgust has explored disgust in literary texts and visual art from antiquity to modernity, without finding it necessary to turn to Genesis 3.[20] Historical study of Christianity has drawn attention to Christian contexts in which disgust reflexes are overcome, such as in the cult of relics, or charitable service to the poor and the sick, or the cultivation of heroic feats of 'humility' demonstrated by doing things so disgusting that nobody could possibly revere people for it – the classic example is Saint Catherine of Siena who drank pus. But these are not the forms of disgust that resonate with temptation.[21]

Ethicists have also paid attention to disgust, especially since Martha Nussbaum's work on homosexuality and the law.[22] The principal debate here has been whether disgust is a reliable enough moral guide to base laws upon it. Nussbaum thinks not; she argues that those who want to make homosexuality illegal on the basis of disgust need to learn to feel differently, cultivating their empathic sensitivity toward humanity. There is a curious resonance with issues in Eden. In Eden, the law was the cause of disgust; in modern civil society, ethicists are arguing about whether disgust should be the cause of our laws. In Eden, sexuality is not obviously an issue, despite the anxieties of many later interpreters; the principal issue is eating a fruit. In the modern debate, sexuality has become the dominant issue, and some of the debate is about whether it

---

[20] Lateiner and Spatharas, *Ancient*; Korsmeyer, *Savoring*.

[21] Miller, *Anatomy*, ch. 7 (Catherine of Siena); Susan Wessel, *Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), ch. 3 (the poor); Morwenna Ludlow, *Art, Craft, and Theology in Fourth-Century Christian Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), ch. 3 (relics and the poor).

[22] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); eadem, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

merits that. Nussbaum draws on some Classical material but does not engage with the scriptural or Christian tradition, and given the social context she is writing for, she is probably wise not get into that. But it is striking how this modern centre of controversy sails so close to the problems in Eden, and yet the two pass each other without explicit contact, like ships in the night.

Conversely, temptation itself appears to have been largely overlooked as a theme in modern theological debate. A few years ago, the Pope signed off on a theologically motivated rewording of the Lord's prayer, so that 'Lead us not into temptation' was replaced by 'Let us not fall into temptation'. This is not what the text says, and therefore should have occasioned rather more theological debate than it did. 'Temptation' features in titles of pious pamphlets from bygone eras, but it is hard to find books on it today. Original sin has fared only a little better. Thus one of the emotions that is central to the Christian experience of temptation has been left in the hands of secular scientific theorists of emotion and those who draw on their work.

The worldview within which 'disgust' is articulated and debated today thus invites us to understand our selves and our experience without recourse to the Garden of Eden, and there is no rich theological discourse of temptation to engage with and respond to that. However, the convergence between the modern theories of disgust and the scriptural narrative of temptation also points to a deep relationship between the two, which can invite us into a historically conditioned social identity of dialogue and intimate connection between the secular and Christian strands of tradition. The rest of this section shows how disgust emerged as a significant modern emotional construct in the context of critically reacting to the Christian tradition.

'Disgust' first began to be theorised in the mid-18th century, at the same time as 'taste' became a newly dominant term in aesthetic discourse. That 'taste' acquired such an exalted status depends in part on a matrix of continuities, tensions, and transformations of Christian tradition;[23] as its etymological and conceptual negative counterpart, disgust (derived from the

[23] Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 108-34. See also Beatrice Caseau, 'Tastes of Danger and Pleasure in Early and Late

French, 'degoût') has an oblique relationship to this. By contrast with 'taste', which was extensively discussed in Britain and France already in the 18th-19th centuries, 'disgust' at this time was a distinctively German theme.[24] It functioned as a negative counterpart to many of the central ideas in aesthetics, and the way it was conceptualised depended on the negation of the Classical ideal of the human body, which was concurrently emerging in the world of art.[25] Kant devoted a paragraph to disgust in the *Critique of Judgement,* and referred to it on many other occasions in his work. For him, it fulfilled a vital role as a philosophical organon; disgust is what we recoil from 'consuming', in the sense of taking inside ourselves, whether physically, or in intellectual food for the soul. It gives us a negative understanding of what is wholesome for us, which discursive reason cannot deduce. Properly cultivated disgust is an important part of pedagogy; disgust is the proper mode of aversion (whereas hatred is the wrong mode), and it should be grounded in 'inner beliefs' not in fear of divine punishment, and should operate alongside a proper sense of 'self-respect and inward dignity' rather than 'dependence on others' opinions'.[26] In the following century, Nietzsche's profound disgust at Christian ideals of strength in weakness turned him into one of the most challenging intellectual critics that Christianity has had in modern times. David Bentley Hart can come up with no sharper lance to strike back at his arguments than to affirm in return that 'Nietzsche had atrocious taste.'[27]

The fact that Kant rooted disgust in the encounter with an object that is 'presented as if it were pressing us to consume it [*zum Genusse aufdrängen*], although this is just what we are violently

---

Antique Christianity,' *Taste and the Ancient Senses* (ed. Kelli C. Rudolph; London: Routledge, 2017), 228-43.

[24] My understanding of this is indebted to, and dependent upon, Menninghaus, *Disgust*, ch. 1-3.

[25] Menninghaus, *Disgust*, ch. 2.

[26] Menninghaus, *Disgust*, 108, quoting from Kant's *Pädagogik*.

[27] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grant Rapids, MA: Eerdmans, 2004), 125.

resisting'[28] recalls the central act of the story of Eden. Kant in fact does retell the Eden narrative in relation to disgust, more than once. One of these retellings appears in a footnote to 'The End of All Things,' where Paradise is portrayed as a world without need for toilets, from which Adam and Eve were ejected after they ate the wrong kind of fruit. Excretion is the essence of the Fall.[29] The more earnest retelling, however, appears in Kant's essay, 'Conjectural Beginning of Human History,' where he playfully experiments with offering a philosophical narrative to place alongside the 'historical' one that is found in scripture. He does not use the term 'disgust', but it is implicit in how he explains the divine voice. He posits that humanity was originally led 'by instinct alone, this *voice of God,* which all animals must obey', which plausibly consisted in nothing more than the sense of smell and taste that we have today also, which give us 'an ability ... to detect in advance the suitability or unsuitability of foods for consumption.' That is, it comprised our basic sense of taste and disgust. At some point, the first human chose to eat something that ran contrary to instinct; that act of *luxuriousness* showed him that he had the power of choice, which in turn opened up a vista of anxiety and fear, as he was of a sudden placed 'at the edge of an abyss', and no longer knew how to choose. Yet having discovered this freedom, he could not go back to 'the state of servitude (under the rule of instinct).'[30] In this version, disgust functions as the proper prohibition on what not to eat, but the negative emotions consequent upon eating are not characterised by disgust, but only by anxiety and fear at the possibility of choice. And yet, that in turn entails the awareness that we can make good choices for self-improvement. The moral of Kant's story (which he helpfully explains for us) is that we have only ourselves to blame,

---

[28] *Critique of Judgement* 48, quoted in Menninghaus, *Disgust*, 104.

[29] Immanuel Kant, 'The End of All Things,' in *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason And Other Writings* (ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 198-99, discussed in Menninghaus, *Disgust*, 57.

[30] Immanuel Kant, 'Conjectural Beginning of Human History,' in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History* (ed. Pauline Kleingeld; tr. David L. Colclasure; Yale University Press, 2008), 26-27.

as we would have made the same choice in the same circumstances; but conversely, that we can participate in the *improvement* of human history, content with providence and with making good choices for ourselves. In this Kantian narrative, the sense of self *does* change through the Fall, but it is not a devastating change in one's relation to God through the body, and even if it leads to guilt, it does not lead to self-disgust, but only to hopefulness in reliance on self and providence.

The prominence of disgust in this critical reaction to Christian tradition by some of the most influential thinkers of 18th and 19th centuries adds an extra layer of significance to its presence in modern theories of emotion. It shows that this is not just a significant contemporary emotion, but is one that matters in dialogue between Christian and post-Christian culture. Whereas Tobit's recognition of his emotion in scripture affirmed his distinctively Israelite social identity, to recognise the emotion of *disgust* locates us within a fractured modernity, in which we inherit deep spiritual, intellectual, and social connections to those whose frames of reference appear vastly different from ours, and whose disgust instincts may pull them away from some of the ways in which Christian visions of Paradise have been framed. Recognizing or 'placing' the emotional label of *disgust* in the scriptural *locus* of Eden may therefore open up constructive dialogue between secular and Christian traditions in searching for a shared memory of Paradise.

How does the Scriptural Locus Offer Direction upon Recognising Disgust?

The Christian hope, when one recognises one's own emotional experience in scripture is that it will also provide a way to structure it that reconstitutes one's relationship to God, self, and world in wholesome and meaningful ways. For Tobit, returning to his Shavuot feast from bringing in a dead body, this was a grief-stricken experience, but a deeply meaningful one nonetheless. The Temptation narrative is testing in a different way, because it articulates a primal human experience of the distortion of the relationship with God and self, which is all too easy to recognise. Stories of the *Urzeit* are stories of the present, and we recognise the story of the Fall because we still fall. Can the scriptural text direct us to something better? It would be preferable

to hear the answer of a saint to that question, rather than that of a fallen scriptural scholar; in the absence of the former, I will outline the shape of the problems and possibilities in light of emphases in this essay so far, combined with attention to the scriptural context and some of its traditional ecclesial co-texts.

The *problem* that the story of Eden leaves us with concerns the self: it portrays the ideal of what might be, and the devastation of losing it – or rather, of having already lost it. The analysis of its emotional dynamic in terms of disgust underscores that. As soon as Eve and Adam eat the fruit, the pure simplicity of the I-Thou relationship with God structured through his command is complicated; there is no getting away from it now, it has got under their skin and become a part of them; their sense of embodied self changes, in their relation to their bodies, to God, and to each other. From having felt disgust properly directed outwardly at approaching the tree that God forbade, their sense of disgust turns inward as they try to hide their bodies with fig leaves and themselves from God.

The role of the text in recognising and responding to this experience is not inevitably a positive one. In Tobit's case, the text intensified his grief; what happens if the text confronts one not with grief but with temptation? One risk is that reading the temptation narrative may simply confirm and accentuate a pre-existing sense of self as disgustingly Eve-like in giving in to temptation, which could entice people into merely re-inhabiting the model afresh. The inherent moral ambiguity of pedagogical models of how *not* to behave was well recognised in antiquity; *if* they act as a deterrent, well and good (cf. Clem. Al. *Paed.* III.viii); but they could just as well lead to 'an accumulation of great evil in the soul', as Plato feared, when he stipulated only good, healthy images for the nourishment of guardians (*Resp.* 401b-d).[31] Both possibilities are portrayed in the first and second narrative moments of Eve's own story: the aversive reaction, and the way it is converted into furtive allure. The story of Eve and the forbidden fruit thus seems to offer a narrative paradigm of how *not* to read her own story. She was initially reluctant

[31] Cf. Alexandra Walsham, 'Eating the Forbidden Fruit: Pottery and Protestant Theology in Early Modern England,' *Journal of Early Modern History* 24 (2020) 78-83.

to go near the death-dealing fruit-tree, but a pause for aesthetic contemplation allowed her disgust to turn to attraction, and afforded her the chance to imagine taking it into herself and apprehending new insight into her own mortality. There is a risk that as we in turn pause in contemplation of Eve's narrative, the initial repugnance at becoming like her may be transformed into a conviction that she is a version of our true self that we want to apprehend personally all over again, despite our awareness that it tastes of death.

To *overcome* temptation of this kind, what we need is not a story that shows us that we pluck forbidden fruit. We may do better with something that gives us a convincing sense of self that *does not* pluck it, or that takes us away from thinking about ourselves and into a more wholesome relationship with God and others, such that we stop being tempted at all. The two might be the same thing, or at least closely connected: modern theories of self emphasise that the self is thoroughly relational.[32] We also need a decent understanding of which fruit it is that we *ought* to be disgusted at plucking; this is a special problem in a Gentile Christian context where there are relatively few undisputed norms; it is also often the point at dispute between Christian and secular experiences of 'disgust'.

Scripturally, the portrayal of Paradise before the Fall gives some direction toward apprehending what it is that we are aiming for. There is a vivid focus on the primacy of the I-Thou relationship to God in constructing the perfection of a sense of self in relation to God, to the world, to the body, and to one another. It is not a spiritualised, disembodied, radically ascetic sense of perfection, nor a sense of relationship to God or to each other that is emotionally thin. Until they eat the forbidden fruit, they have the *whole* garden, *every* tree, and *unashamedly* naked bodies to enjoy (2:16-17, 25). The style of the narrator is characteristically sparing with emotional adjectives, but the portrayal is structured to emphasise fullness and depth. God's command in Gen 2:16-17 is permissive and generous: 'from *every* tree in the garden you shall eat' – the 'every' is placed at the start, and the emphatic form of 'you shall surely eat' is used (אָכֹל

[32] Susan Grove Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grant Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017).

תֹּאכֵל); God is portrayed as bounteously generous to his creature; the intention of his gift is for their good (Gen 2:17).[33] He also grants them a set of wholesome purposes to fulfil in relation to himself, his garden, and each other, to work and keep the garden, and to be good for one another (Gen 2:15, 18-24).

This richness and fullness of personhood is often forgotten in expressions of disgust *at* Christian ideals, which often impute some form of unwholesome diminishment as central to the Christian ideal, such as diminishment in freedom or in strength, and in doing so, may even be echoing some professedly Christian presentations of the Christian hope. But the emphasis on diminishment and curtailment is the strategy of the serpent, whose opening gambit recast God's abundant generosity as a straight prohibition (Gen 2:15 cf. 3:2), and whose next move was to discredit God's truthfulness and malign his motivation (3:4-5). By undermining the primary relationship to God, the serpent opened the door for a breakdown in relationships also to the self, the body, and to one another.

The routes that Christian tradition affords back to the Promised Land are not, I think, as simple as counterposing one narrative of self to another. The problem of Eve is not 'solved' by prescribing a different narrative exemplar in scripture that can model for us who we can become so as not follow in her footsteps. Scripture alone is not enough; and insofar as it contributes, it does not do so by narrative alone, much less by limiting the narrative options to one or two. The construction of a convincing sense of newer, better self in relation to God and others depends on a combination of a doctrine of redemption, which catches up history and anthropology in relationship to God; ways of receiving scripture that transform it into a wholesome form of interpersonal communication with others and with God, in part through a shared system of symbols; and sacramental practices of assembling and participating in mysteries that as far as possible perform the perfected structure of the relationship in liturgical time and space.

However, scriptural exemplars are important, even if they are not alone sufficient, and this essay was intended to seek through scripture how to inhabit scripture for the better, therefore I

[33] Moberly, 'Serpent,' 3-4.

close with brief comment on two of the more well-trodden scriptural paths back to Paradise. Such selectivity necessarily excludes some passages that have been ecclesially important counterparts to Eden, such as the narrative of Jesus' temptation in Matt 4 / Luke 4; it also eschews the treasury of scriptural resources for more individual needs that do not feature prominently as established co-texts for Eden in ecclesial tradition. By taking tradition as a guide, I intend to submit to the wisdom of our forebears as a starting point, and to write with wider relevance.

Of the two scriptural routes considered here, one travels through the letters of Paul, wherein the death in Adam is answered by life in Christ, and Paul presents himself as an example of how to inhabit this through discovering his sense of self through Christ's death and life (e.g. Gal 2:19-20). This has been prominent in some recent, professedly Protestant scholarship.[34] The other route is marked out through a typological relationship between Eve and Mary as the New Eve; this is found already in Irenaeus but in modern Western Christianity has been pursued only by Catholics. Both routes may elicit 'disgust' reactions from modern audiences, perhaps because Christ/Mary are perceived as too perfect to be inspiring for 'a wretch like Me'; or because they are associated with ecclesial communities that have tainted how they are perceived. Both have been entwined in a complex history of debate about 'original sin', which has aimed to explain what was lost in the Fall, what is effected through Christ, and how. Medieval theories of original sin gave metaphysical answers to those questions; twentieth century theologians have sought to give the discussion psychological and social depth, so that our contemporaries can recognise their own realities in these ways of speaking about the 'self'.[35] The comments here build on this to suggest how these scriptural routes might and might not work as paths toward Paradise.

---

[34] Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ* (Grant Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).

[35] Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (New York /Mahwah, NJ; Paulist Press, 2002).

The Pauline and Marian Christological avenues to restructuring the sense of self in relation to God point towards different styles of engagement with the scriptural text. The Pauline 'in Christ' lends itself to exploration through historical exegesis and systematic exposition of Paul's theology. The form of mimetic self-identification that it cultivates centres on a direct mimesis of Christ, who, however, is not communicated with much narrative content in Paul's letters, but rather the focus is on death, life, moral behaviour, and sacraments. My own 'disgust instinct' in the Kantian sense of visceral aversion to that which presses us toward consumption of something unwholesome is stirred by some presentations of this approach. My concern lies with scholarly overemphasis on Gal 2:19-20, lest the focus on 'not-I but Christ' lead to self-alienation, a 'divided self', and socially, lest it construct relationships to others through a persona or mask that is potentially damaging to both sides.[36] Exegetically, I also fear that it entices away from Paul's primary emphasis on *life:* '*I live* – no longer I, but *he lives* in me – Christ' (ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός, Gal 2:20) and lures people toward the self-destructive pressure to focus on the 'no longer I' (οὐκέτι ἐγώ). These may not be insurmountable problems, and I trust that this tradition *can* be inhabited unto life;[37] but I am among those who need more reassurance

[36] Cf. Macaskill, *Living,* 5-8, 41. However, I accept that masks are sometimes theologically and relationally important: Nancy Sherman, 'Of Manners and Morals,' *British Journal of Educational Studies* 53/3 (2005) 272-89.

[37] Emphatically, I do *not* intend to impugn the personal example of scholars who write about it, whom I profoundly admire. My concern lies with risks for a general audience. I am especially concerned with the scope of the assertion in Macaskill, *Living,* 39-40 that 'any account of the Christian moral life, any program of discipleship, that does not begin and resolve with Paul's words, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," is deficient and will eventually turn into a form of idolatry.' Similarly on p. 1, 'all talk of the Christian moral life must begin and end with Paul's statement "It is no longer who live, but Christ who lives in me.' I have recently published on related concerns elsewhere, in a very different idiom: Jane Heath, 'Imitatio Christi and Violence to the Self: Winnicott's True/False Self and Possible Health Risks of (Mis)Reading Paul,' *Journal*

about how this works, and the character of the Pauline textual edifice will shape how one gets there.

The Marian invitation to restructure the emotional relationship to Eve opens up different possibilities of scriptural style of engagement, and includes underexplored points of contact with Paul. The scriptures associated with Mary are less abstractly theological or moralising; they come from narrative portions of the Bible. Typological comparison with Eve spotlights the most extended Marian narrative, the annunciation, wherein Mary's trusting act of accepting God's word and will and receiving his seed into herself is portrayed, by contrast with Eve's transgressive act of taking the forbidden fruit inside her. To imitate Mary is different from a self-identification with Christ: it invites the act of *receiving* the word from God and allowing it to *take flesh* through embodied acts of generation (Luke 2:7), contemplation (Luke 2:19, 34, 51), and nurture (Luke 1-2). This insight is liturgically performed through recitation of the Angelus; it has a partial Pauline analogy in Gal 4:19; 1 Cor 4:14-16. Since the 11th century, it has been widely interpreted in art as figuring Mary as the ideal *reader* of scripture.[38]

Because of the way the Marian route has been constructed within ecclesial tradition, it also invites a layered imaginative, social, and liturgical response, which engages different aspects of relational personhood. Traditional Marian devotion has worked with a symbolic reception of scripture wherein the balance between what is received as fixed and familiar, both exegetically and theologically, and what remains open, admits of playful and prayerful imaginative habitation that is *both* interpersonally meaningful *and* fresh and individual.[39] The irreducibly ecclesial character of Marian devotion structures interpersonal and human-divine communion through the

---

of Disability and Religion, online publication 14 March 2022, DOI: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23312521.2022.2039838.

[38] Laura Saetveit Miles, 'The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation,' *Speculum* 89/3 (2014) 632-69.

[39] Craig Helms, 'Mary as the New Eve in Merton's Poetry,' *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 31/4 (1996): 477-502.

symbolic scriptural language, typological imagination, and sacramental structures of the church; the Pauline route to restored relationality reaches the ecclesial context in a different way, through exegetical attention to the prominence of baptism and the Eucharist.[40] In both cases, the Edenic sense of self, defined in relation to God and humanity, is restored not *only* through emotionally invested private reception of scripture, but *also* through embodied ecclesial life.

The ecclesial setting may, in fact, hold out the most important route back to Paradise through the transformation of disgust back into taste, not only in physiological terms, but also in the reconstitution of the self in relation to God and to others.[41] The Eucharistic imagery of eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood is at first encounter disgusting, and John 6 vividly portrays this reaction on the part of the multitude, who recoil from Jesus' teaching. But the Christian theological and ritual interpretation of the Eucharist transforms it into an act of consumption that is at once agreeable to the palette and incorporates the worshipper through consumption into a restored relationship to God and to the church, and through them, also to the world beyond. The temptation to renew the taste of one's own mortality through private attraction to sin begins to compete with yearning for the sweet taste of Eucharistic nourishment, wherein we 'taste' or experience our fallen frame reconstituted as redeemed, restored, and renewed in relationship to God, who feeds us by his own body and blood, his very self.

Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,

which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine.

from George Herbert, 'The Agonie'

[40] Macaskill, *Living,* ch. 3-4.

[41] Thank you especially to Grace Hibshman, David Lincicum, and Mike Rea, for drawing my attention this. The Eucharist was important in forming Christian discourse of taste, which in turn shaped the rise of 'taste' as a central evaluative term in the Enlightenment, cf. n.16, above.