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Lost Sheep, Lost Coins, and Lost Meanings

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Abstract: In a previous issue of *BYU Studies*, John W. Welch explores the early Christian allegorical interpretation of the good Samaritan and argues that this parable "become[s] even richer when understood in terms of restored Latter-day Saint doctrines of God's plan of salvation." In a version of that article adapted for the Ensign, he further explains how understanding the parable in this way "adds eternal perspectives to its moral imperatives." The same is true of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, which, like the parable of the good Samaritan, were traditionally connected with Christ's incarnation. In fact, I argue that this is their primary meaning and that subsequent moral lessons are valuable but subordinate.

Lost Sheep, Lost Coins, and Lost Meanings

Jenny Rebecca Rytting

Three of the best known and most loved of Jesus's parables occur together in the fifteenth chapter of Luke as a response to the Pharisees' disapproval of Jesus's association with sinners: the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin (also known as the lost drachma or lost groat), and the lost (or prodigal) son.[1] In the teaching and preaching traditions of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, these parables (especially the first two) have primarily been interpreted as a call for missionary work, particularly reactivation. For example, President David O. McKay suggested that the three parables represent different ways of getting lost: the sheep stands for those who wander from the fold unwittingly; the coin, for those who are lost through the carelessness or neglect of leaders; and the son, for those who rebel.[2] In the

1. The Gospel of Matthew instead records the parable of the lost sheep in the context of God's love for little children (Matt. 18:12–14); the other two are unique to Luke. Brad H. Young (following Robert Lindsey and David Flusser) speculates that the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin originally appeared alongside the call of the publican Levi (later the Apostle Matthew) to follow Jesus. Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 188 n. 1, 190. Indeed, the questions posed in Matthew 9:11, Mark 2:16, and Luke 5:30 are nearly identical to the complaint recorded in Luke 15:2.

2. David O. McKay, in *One Hundred Fifteenth Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1945), 120–23. James E. Talmage had already written about the wandering of the sheep, the "custodian's neglect" of the coin, and the deliberate choice of the son. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1922), 298. See also J. F. McFadyen, who mentions ignorance, negligence, and free choice in *The Message of*

Ensign article "Rescuing the Lost: Counsel for Parents and Leaders," Roy Bean explains how these parables demonstrate "three separate options for *how* the rescue can be carried out."[3] And even the *Come, Follow Me—For Primary* manual asks the teacher to "testify that these parables teach that God wants us to help people who are lost come back to Him."[4] The charge to Church members, then, is to join those seeking diligently until the lost sheep and coins are found and to watch and wait with open arms and hearts for prodigals to return.[5]

However, in the April 2016 general conference, then-President Dieter F. Uchtdorf suggested that there may be another level of meaning to the parable of the lost sheep:

> Over the centuries, this parable has traditionally been interpreted as a call to action for us to bring back the lost sheep and to reach out to those who are lost. While this is certainly appropriate and good, I wonder if there is more to it.
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> Is it possible that Jesus's purpose, first and foremost, was to teach about the work of the Good Shepherd?

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the Parables (London: Clarke, 1933), 142; George A. Buttrick, who speaks of "weak will and heedlessness," "another's fault or the mischances of life," and "calculated self-will" in *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), 180; and William Barclay, who writes, "The coin was lost because someone lost it. . . . The sheep was lost because of its foolishness. . . . The son was lost because he quite deliberately took his own way," in *And Jesus Said: A Handbook on the Parables of Jesus* (1952; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 185, emphasis removed.

3. Roy Bean, "Rescuing the Lost: Counsel for Parents and Leaders," *Ensign* 47, no. 1 (January 2017): 59.

4. *Come, Follow Me—For Primary: New Testament 2019,* May 6–12, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/come-follow-me-for-primary-new-testament-2019/18?lang=eng. The older manual it replaces likewise says the object of this lesson is "to help each child have the desire to help those who are less active return to full activity in The Church of Jesus Christ." "Lesson 19: The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son," in *Primary 7: New Testament* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 63–65.

5. See Brent H. Nielson, "Waiting for the Prodigal," *Ensign* 45, no. 5 (May 2015): 103. Elder Mark E. Petersen similarly says, "The Savior expects that we will participate in a rescue operation." Mark E. Petersen, in *One Hundred Twenty-Fourth Semi-annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1953), 74. See also N. Eldon Tanner, "Search for the Wanderers," *Ensign* 1, no. 6 (June 1971): 59–61; Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Restoring the Lost Sheep," *Ensign* 14, no. 5 (May 1984): 39–41; Ben B. Banks, "Feed My Sheep," *Ensign* 29, no. 11 (November 1999): 9–11; Thomas S. Monson, "Ponder the Path of Thy Feet," *Ensign* 44, no. 11 (November 2014): 86–88; and Gary E. Stevenson, "Shepherding Souls," *Ensign* 48, no. 11 (November 2018): 110–13.

> Is it possible that He was testifying of God's love for His wayward children?
>
> Is it possible that the Savior's message was that God is fully aware of those who are lost—and that He will find them, that He will reach out to them, and that He will rescue them?[6]

The answer to these rhetorical questions is, of course, a resounding "yes!" In addition to President Uchtdorf's apostolic insight, this interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep in fact has a long tradition in patristic and medieval writings, as this essay will show. Jerome (c. 347–420) was the first to connect the parable with the title Good Shepherd from John 10:11–18, but Hilary of Poitiers (c. 310–67) and Ambrose (c. 340–97) had already established the allegorical reading of the parable with Christ as the man with one hundred sheep.[7] Looking at such readings opens up this parable, along with its sister parable of the lost coin, in new—or rather old but forgotten—ways.

As it happens, all of the biblical parables were read allegorically from at least the second century, as shown in commentaries by Irenaeus (c. 130–202), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), Origen (184/85–253/54), and others. Although Origen has been called the "father of allegorical

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6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "He Will Place You on His Shoulders and Carry You Home," *Ensign* 46, no. 5 (May 2016): 102. President Uchtdorf was by no means the first to make this connection: Elder David B. Haight said, "The Savior's analogy of the lost sheep vividly portrays the concern he has for all, but especially those that might stray. The Savior's mission is to try to save all." David B. Haight, "Feed the Flock," *Ensign* 5, no. 5 (May 1975): 12. Elder M. Russell Ballard adds, "Why did Jesus teach these parables [in Luke 15]? He wanted us to know that none of us will ever be so lost that we cannot find our way again through His Atonement and His teachings." M. Russell Ballard, "That the Lost May Be Found," *Ensign* 42, no. 5 (May 2012): 100. And a representative retelling for children says, "Jesus Christ is like the shepherd in the story, and we are like the sheep. . . . That is why the scriptures call Him the Good Shepherd." Margo Mae, "The Shepherd and the Lost Sheep," *Friend* 43, no. 6 (June 2013): 36. Also, while the Primary and Sunday School *Come, Follow Me* manuals focus on reactivation, the individual study guide notes both that "we all need rescuing" and that "we can all participate in the rescue." *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families: New Testament 2019,* May 6–12, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/come-follow-me-for-individuals-and-families-new-testament-2019/18?lang=eng. Furthermore, even talks that use this parable to focus on the rescuing role of Church members or leaders (as does Elder Haight's above) often combine it with references both to scriptural passages that identify the Lord as a shepherd, or *the* Shepherd, such as Psalm 23, John 10, and Alma 5, and to those that call on others to be shepherds, such as Ezekiel 34, John 21, and 1 Peter 5:2–4. See, for example, L. Tom Perry, "Bring Souls to Me," *Ensign* 39, no. 5 (May 2009): 109–12.

7. Stephen L. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 129.

interpretation in the Christian Church," he attributes many of his explications to church "elders," suggesting an already established exegetical practice.[8] Later patristic, medieval, and early modern writers built upon these allegorical interpretations and included them in glosses on the Bible (roughly the equivalent of the footnotes and Bible Dictionary in editions issued by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and in sermon collections meant both for preaching and for private study. It was not until the late nineteenth century that these readings fell out of favor.[9] The mid-twentieth-century biblical scholars Charles H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias went so far as to claim that the allegorical interpretations of the parables of the sower and of the wheat and tares recorded in the synoptic Gospels[10] were not in fact part of Christ's teachings but based on traditions that had developed after his death.[11]

However, the English word "parable" is essentially a transliteration of the Greek πάράβολή (*parabolē*), which means "comparison," "analogy," or "juxtaposition" (literally, "to set beside"), and suggests a correspondence of literal and symbolic meanings. In their study of New Testament parables, Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry affirm that the "principle of comparison is a major feature of Christ's parables" and that things, people, animals, and events in them "may serve as symbols of eternal

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8. M. L. W. Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900,* rev. ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957), 65; *Origen: Homilies on Luke, Fragments on Luke,* trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 94 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 138; Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 59.

9. The seminal work in rejecting the allegorical readings of biblical parables is Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu,* 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Sieback, 1888–99); he was followed by Charles H. Dodd, especially *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1948), and Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus,* trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Scribner, 1955). Matthew Black complains that Jülicher's total rejection of allegory "has dominated [biblical parables'] interpretation almost as tyrannically as the allegorical method of the earlier centuries." Matthew Black, "The Parables as Allegory," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 42 (1960): 275. Implicit in his complaint, however, is a tacit agreement that medieval allegorical exegesis was also "tyrannical."

10. Matthew 13:18–23, 36–43; Mark 4:13–20; Luke 8:11–15; compare Doctrine and Covenants 86:1–7.

11. Dodd, *Parables,* 2–3; Jeremias, *Parables,* 10–11, 52–70. Jeremias further blames allegorization for "centuries of distortion and ill-usage" that covered the parables with "a thick layer of dust" (16–17). For an overview of the history of parable interpretation, see Warren S. Kissinger, *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography,* ATLA Bibliography Series, vol. 4 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1979).

truths."[12] Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Richard Trench says that parables differ from allegories "in form rather than in essence" (in that the parable compares two things while allegory blends them together, though this difference seems trifling). Also, while Alexander Bruce objects to allegorization on the grounds that it robs parables of "human pathos" and real-life immediacy, the widely acknowledged allegory of the Good Shepherd pulls at the heartstrings with "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15).[13] Besides, whether called allegorical or not, nearly all parable interpretations are figurative in some way.[14]

Furthermore, moral and allegorical readings are not mutually exclusive; scripture was commonly interpreted on four different levels from the fourth through the sixteenth centuries: "*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.* (The letter shows us what God and our fathers did; / The allegory shows us where our faith is hid; / The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life; / The anagogy

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12. Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, *Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), xi. In the Greek Septuagint, the term *parabolē* is typically used to translate the Hebrew *mašal* (from a verb meaning "to be like," although Jeremias defines it as "riddle, dark saying" based on an Ethiopian cognate and the Hebrew synonym *hidha*); *mašal* is used to refer to everything from metaphors and bywords to derisive songs, prophetic oracles, and allegorical parables similar to those in the New Testament. In the Greek New Testament, *parabolē* also covers a range of meanings, from "proverb," "riddle," and "rule" to "parable" itself. Since the terms *mašal* and *parabolē* are so elastic, attempts to draw careful distinctions between biblical parables and related forms such as metaphors, similitudes, and allegories are not linguistically justifiable based on Hebraic or Greek usage. See Jeremias, *Parables,* 14 n. 21; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Parables of the Kingdom: A Course of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 1–2; and John Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 8–15.

13. Richard Chenevix Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord,* 5th ed., rev. ed. (1847; London: John W. Parker, 1853), 8; Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ: A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of Our Lord* (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1883), 279. The repeated plea "What could I have done more for my vineyard?" in the allegory of the olive trees (Jacob 5:41, 47, 49) seems equally poignant. Also, analogy ("Christ is like a shepherd") and allegory ("The shepherd symbolizes Christ") differ no more than simile and metaphor do.

14. For example, the coins and sheep in the parables from Luke 15 are not usually taken to signify actual coins and sheep, whether the interpretive approach is labeled allegorical or historical—except in an anomalous article that reads these parables as a lesson on taking risks because the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine behind to seek the one, while the woman uses costly oil to light her lamp while looking for the coin, and both chances pay off: "The kingdom became visible in the risky and unexpected action of an unexpected person." Ernest van Eck, "A Realistic Reading of the Parable of the Lost Coin in Q: Gaining or Losing Even More?" *HTS Theological Studies* 75, no. 3 (2019): 7, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5656.

shows us where we end our strife.)"[15] Though medieval sermons seldom develop all four levels, many contain allegorical readings relating to salvation history accompanied by more personal moral applications.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said that identifying the original context of a parable is crucial to its interpretation: "I have [a] Key by whi[c]h I understa[n]d the scripture. I enq[u]ire what was the question whi[c]h drew out the answer."[16] And this is just what most medieval sermons on these parables do. Speaking of the parable of the lost sheep, a sermon cycle known as the Middle English *Mirror* explains, "The Pharisees . . . complained against [Christ] that he who forgave sins came among the sinful. But he told them a parable that touched himself and them both: himself because he rescued the sinful and them because they should not complain."[17] And the *Northern Homily Cycle* says bluntly, "A parable to them he taught / To prove that they in the law knew naught."[18]

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15. Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible,* rev. ed. (1948; New York: Macmillan, 1963), 119, translation in original. The moral level is commonly known as tropological.

16. "Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 1, 21 December 1842–10 March 1843," [157], Joseph Smith Papers, accessed March 1, 2021, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-1-21-december-1842-10-march-1843/165. Admittedly he says this in the context of rejecting allegorical readings of the parable of the lost son that refer to "nations"—for example, Jews and Gentiles (p. [158]). (It is noteworthy that he knew of these interpretations, which have patristic origins and a long tradition.)

17. *The Middle English "Mirror": An Edition Based on Bodleian Library, MS Holkham Misc. 40* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 282–83. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. The *Mirror* was translated into Middle English prose in the fourteenth or early fifteenth century from Robert de Gretham's *Miroir,* a mid-thirteenth-century cycle of homilies rendered in Anglo-Norman verse and dedicated to the lady Aline, with the hope that she would find them to be more uplifting than her usual fare of secular romances and *chansons de geste.* K. V. Sinclair has identified "Aline" as Lady Elena of Quency; see "The Anglo-Norman Patrons of Robert the Chaplain and Robert of Greatham," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1992): 193–208.

18. *The Northern Homily Cycle: The Expanded Version in MSS Harley 4196 and Cotton Tiberius E VII,* ed. Saara Nevanlinna (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1972), 2:285 (lines 15300–301). The *Northern Homily Cycle* exists in three versions: the original (or unexpanded) version, an expanded version in a Midlands dialect, and a separate expanded version in a Northern dialect, quoted here. H. Leith Spencer tentatively suggests that the *Northern Homily Cycle* "may belong to that world of private biblical study by the laity." H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 154–55. Thomas J. Heffernan rather "believe[s] it was composed for oral delivery in church." "The Authorship of the 'Northern Homily Cycle': The Liturgical

In other words, since the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin counter criticism of Jesus's actions, it makes sense that their primary purpose was to clarify his own role as Savior. The basic situation, as given in Luke, can be summed up with a simple question-and-answer exchange: "Why do you eat with sinners?" "Because I'm here to save them."[19] In Matthew, the parable of the lost sheep follows Jesus's comments about little children, which were in turn prompted by the disciples asking, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1). In Joseph Smith's translation, the verse leading directly into the parable reads, "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost, and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them" (Joseph Smith Translation, Matt. 18:11). The connecting thread between the two parable settings seems to be the inherent worth of—and God's redemptive care for—all who are overlooked by those puffed up with self-righteousness. The typical missionary-minded application is not directly related to either situation; while still valid, it relies on extrapolation: Jesus seeks those who are lost; thus, so should we. Admittedly, this extrapolation is made easier by the rhetorical questions used to open the parables and the resurrected Christ's instructions to the Apostle Peter to "feed my sheep."[20]

Because liturgical calendars assign specific passages of scripture to each day of the year, medieval churchgoers would typically hear the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin at least annually. Luke 15:1–10 was the gospel reading for the third Sunday after Trinity (the eleventh after Easter) in both the Sarum and York Uses; in the Roman rite, it was used the previous week, for the third Sunday after Pentecost.[21] Some sermons

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Affiliation of the Sunday Gospel Pericopes as a Test," *Traditio* 41 (1985): 289, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0362152900006929.

19. Henry Calderwood imagines a similar exchange in *The Parables of Our Lord: Interpreted in View of Their Relations to Each Other* (London: Macmillan, 1880), 19. G. R. H. Shafto remarks that these parables "vindicate Jesus' friendship with the religious outcasts of His day against the sneers of Pharisees." G. R. H. Shafto, *The Stories of the Kingdom: A Study of the Parables of Jesus* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922), 63. And Hugh Martin adds, "These stories are Jesus' defense of Himself for keeping bad company." Hugh Martin, *The Parables of the Gospels and Their Meanings for Today* (New York: Abingdon, 1937), 160.

20. John 21:16–17. See also "How think ye?" (Matt. 18:12); "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them . . . ?"; "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece . . . ?" (Luke 15:4, 7).

21. Francisci Henrici Dickinson, ed., *Missale ad usum insignis et praeclarae ecclesiae sarum* (Burntisland, Scotland: E prelo de pitsligo, 1861–83), 467; Wailes, *Medieval*

based on this pericope explicate both parables; others focus just on the lost sheep.[22] This present article draws primarily from Middle English sermons, though the fact that most of these sermons were translated from either Latin or French suggests that the commentary they contain was widespread.

In a previous issue of *BYU Studies,* John W. Welch explores the early Christian allegorical interpretation of the good Samaritan and argues that this parable "become[s] even richer when understood in terms of restored Latter-day Saint doctrines of God's plan of salvation." In a version of that article adapted for the *Ensign,* he further explains how understanding the parable in this way "adds eternal perspectives to its moral imperatives."[23] The same is true of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, which, like the parable of the good Samaritan, were traditionally connected with Christ's incarnation. In fact, I argue that this is their primary meaning and that subsequent moral lessons are valuable but subordinate.

One Hundred Sheep

Most modern readers probably assume that all one hundred of the sheep represent people, with the ninety-nine as those who are righteous (or active in the Church) and the lost sheep as the sinner (or those who are less active or not members). However, in the early interpretations of the parable (beginning with Hilary of Poitiers), the ninety-nine sheep are most commonly seen as the angels in heaven, while the lost sheep is humankind,

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Allegories, 7. Sarum Use, which originated at Salisbury Cathedral, was the most commonly used liturgical calendar in late medieval England. Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages,* 22. Also, sermon cycles based on Sunday gospel readings are better attested than weekday collections, and the parable of the lost son (which remains outside the scope of this essay) was assigned to the second Saturday in Lent in all three of these rites.

22. This pattern also seems to hold in modern preaching, including that of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I have not found a single general conference talk that mentions the lost coin without also referring to one or both of the other two parables in Luke 15, while those two are often discussed singly.

23. John W. Welch, "The Good Samaritan: A Type and Shadow of the Plan of Salvation," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 73; John W. Welch, "The Good Samaritan: Forgotten Symbols," *Ensign* 37, no. 2 (February 2007): 47. See also John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2019). Their commentary on the parable of the lost sheep does not consider patristic sources, though their discussion of the parable of the lost son does (96–98, 102–9).

as in this influential explanation by Gregory the Great (c. 540–602):[24] "As one hundred is a perfect number, God had one hundred sheep when he created angels and men. But one sheep was lost: for man sinned and abandoned the pastures of life. But their shepherd left the ninety-nine in the desert: he left all those lofty choirs of angels in heaven. How can heaven be called a desert, unless it is because it is deserted? Man deserted it when he sinned, but the ninety-nine sheep remained in the desert while God went to seek the straying one here on earth."[25]

Gregory's homily, whether directly or indirectly, appears to be the main source of the lost sheep sermon in the Middle English *Mirror*: "God himself had a hundred sheep when he made angels and man. But he lost one when man sinned, when he forsook everlasting life for the lust of his flesh. . . . And when the number that God had made to his bliss was broken, in order to restore again that same fault, God came to earth to seek man. The man that was lost he sought on earth to fulfill the number that he had made. He sought man, in truth, when he became man for us."[26]

The doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints clearly has a different view of the Fall (which is recognized as part of God's

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24. Wailes identifies a handful of alternate interpretations but explains that this one gained the widest currency. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 128–29. Indeed, by the Middle Ages, this reading was nearly universal, appearing in every sermon indexed by Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul that explicates the ninety-nine sheep. Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul, *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons,* 4 vols. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007).

25. Pope Saint Gregory the Great, "Homilia XXXIV in Evangelia," in *Parables of the Gospel,* trans. Nora Burke (Dublin: Scepter, 1960), 124–25. To account for both versions of the parable, he adds, "But where Luke tells us, 'in the desert,' Matthew, in the same context, says: 'in the mountains,' as if to indicate that the ninety-nine which did not stray remained in the heights, that is, in heaven" (125). Here a significant discrepancy must be noted: in the Latin Vulgate, the phrase "in the mountains" clearly applies to the location of the ninety-nine sheep who were left behind ("nonne relinquit nonaginta novem in montibus, et vadit quærere eam quæ erravit"); in the Greek, its antecedent is ambiguous ("οὐχὶ ἀφήσει τὰ ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη καὶ πορευθεὶς ζητεῖ τὸ πλανώμενον"). *Biblia Sacra Vulgata,* The Clementine Text Project, updated December 15, 2020, http://vulsearch.sourceforge.net; *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Nestle-Aland), 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), https://academic-bible.com. Modern translations are split between attaching the phrase to the ninety-nine sheep and to where the shepherd goes to seek the lost one; the KJV does the latter. Joseph Smith moved the phrase "in the wilderness" in his translation of Luke 15:4 so that it also refers to the location of the lost sheep rather than that of the ninety-nine left behind. In addition, some later exegetes distinguish between Matthew's πλανηθῇ (strayed) and Luke's ἀπολέσας (lost). See Young, *Parables,* 190.

26. *Middle English "Mirror,"* 283.

plan) and of angels (who are pre- or postmortal people rather than a different class of beings). However, seeing the lost sheep as humankind as a whole accords with Church teachings about the universality of Christ's Atonement and its applicability to those who die without law or as little children (who are incapable of sinning).[27] This perspective is particularly germane to Joseph Smith's inspired addition to the parable setting in Matthew 18, which is reinforced by the verse directly following the parable, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14). The medieval interpretation also erases the false distinction among those who are accountable, between those who are "righteous" and those who are "sinners." Isaiah's words are especially apropos: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Recognizing that all are in need of being found by the Shepherd recenters the parable's focus on the Savior's rescuing mission.

In a less-common patristic interpretation of this parable, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) identifies the ninety-nine sheep as the proud and the one as the repentant.[28] Interestingly, this is similar to Joseph Smith's reading of the parable: "[Jesus] spoke this parable.— what man of you having an hundrd. sheep <&c> 100 saducees & Pharisees If you pharisees & saduces [Sadducees] are in the sheepfold. I have no mission for you sent to look up sheep that are lost will back him up.— & make joy in heaven— . . . [There is] joy in [the] presence of the angels over one sinner that repe[n]teth [The Pharisees and Sadducees are] so righteous they will be damned anyhow you cannot save them."[29]

Of course, the statement that any group of people is "so righteous they will be damned" must be taken ironically. Speaking of the three parables in Luke 15, James E. Talmage remarks, "There is no justification

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27. As in Mosiah 3:11, 16; Mosiah 15:19; and Alma 34:9; see also Jeffrey R. Holland, "Atonement of Jesus Christ," *Jesus Christ and His Gospel: Selections from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1994), 23–30.

28. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 130. The *Northern Homily Cycle* also depicts an individual lost sheep but without mentioning the ninety-nine at all: "This man that has one hundred sheep / Is Jesus Christ, who mankind keeps. / And of his sheep he loses one / When any soul with sin's undone, / When he can't know the Savior's voice / Or follow in Christ's law by choice, / But to the fiends then forth he strays / And so is lost through evil ways." *Northern Homily Cycle,* ed. Nevanlinna, 2:286–87.

29. "Discourse, 29 January 1843, as reported by Willard Richards–A," [158–59], Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 20, 2021, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-29-january-1843-as-reported-by-willard-richards-a/6.

for the inference that a repentant sinner is to be given precedence over a righteous soul who has resisted sin." But he also notes that some readers "catch [a] note of just sarcasm in the Master's concluding words"—that is, "just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).[30] Barring little children and others who are not accountable—which the Matthew setting of the parable seems to associate with the one lost sheep, not the ninety-nine—those "which need no repentance" simply don't exist, except, perhaps, in these Pharisees' and Sadducees' imaginations. One could plausibly expand Joseph Smith's comment to read, "[They think they are] so righteous [that they need no repentance nor Savior, and therefore] they will be damned anyhow."

One early sixteenth-century homily, without associating the scribes and Pharisees with the ninety-nine sheep, characterizes them in a similar way: "The scribes . . . [are] swollen with human knowledge which is more presumption than cunning: and have no knowledge of the spirit of god. And the Pharisees . . . [are] they that have their justice after the works and the traditions of men and have nothing of the justice of god, which is done by the spirit of god in faith."[31] While Augustine and Joseph Smith speak of individuals rather than all humankind, in both of their interpretations it would be better to be a lost sheep than one of the ninety-nine. In fact, whether the lost sheep is interpreted individually or collectively, all of these readings place the ninety-nine outside the scope of Christ's redeeming mission, either because they do not need it (the angels) or because they will not accept it (the proud).[32]

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30. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ,* 295, 298.

31. Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Epistres et Evangiles des cinquante et deux sepmaines de l'an, Readings from the Gospels and Epistles, Translated for Anne Boleyn by Her Brother George,* MS Harley 6561, fol. 131v, British Library, London, spelling modernized. See *Catalog of Illuminated Manuscripts,* The British Library, accessed December 28, 2020, http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8826&CollID=8&NStart=6561. Brad Young notes, however, that not all first-century Pharisees felt this way; there is a significant strain of rabbinic writing that, like this parable, celebrates the recovery of the sinner. Young, *Parables,* 189.

32. Two Middle English sermons make this explicit. Both identify the ninety-nine *sheep* as angels, but one extends that reading to the ninety-nine "just persons" (Luke 15:7), explaining, "The angels never sinned and needed no repentance" (MS Additional 40672, fol. 57r, British Library), while the other says, "These people signify not the saints but those who consider themselves righteous like the proud Pharisees" (MS 4, fol. 72r, Longleat House, Warminster, England), both summarized and translated in O'Mara and Paul, *Repertorium,* 469, 2549.

The Lost Coin (or Drachma or Groat)

In the most prevalent patristic and medieval interpretations, the lost coin is treated very much like the lost sheep, as a symbol for (fallen) humankind, while the other nine coins, as Gregory the Great says, represent "the ninefold order of angels." But even more interesting is Gregory's claim (based on Augustine of Hippo's writing) that "since the groat is a coin which bears an image, the woman lost the groat when man, created in the image of God, strayed by sin from this resemblance to his Maker."[33] A Middle English homily from the sermon cycle known as *Filius Matris* (*Son of the Mother*) further explains that the ten drachmas represent "nine orders of angels and man that he made after his own image. One he lost (that is to say man) when man by breaking of his commandment went away from the similitude of his creator. . . . And so the drachma that was lost before was found again when the similitude of our creator was found again in man by steadfast faith and admirable works."[34] While the concept of being created in the image of God is a simple restatement of Genesis 1:27, the idea that the similitude of God can be lost or found within a person resonates with Alma 5:14, which famously asks, "Have ye received his image in your countenances?" The subsequent verb "engraven" (Alma 5:19) suggests a metal surface such as a coin's face. Augustine notes that the lost coin's effigy belongs to "our emperor," while James E. Talmage speaks of it as "a genuine coin of the realm, bearing the image of the great King."[35]

This reading of the coin's significance is also interesting in light of a discourse by Joseph Smith. Commenting on the image of God in mortals in the context of Genesis 1:27, he said,

> After God had created the Heavens and the Earth. He came down and on the sixth day said let us make man in our own image. In whose image[?] In the image of Gods created they them. Male and female: innocent harmless and spotless bearing the same character and the same image as the Gods. And when man fell he did not lose his image but his character still retaining the image of his maker Christ who is

33. Gregory the Great, *Parables,* 127–28. The nine orders of angels are traditionally angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominions, thrones, cherubim, and seraphim.

34. Filius Matris, MS Royal 18 A xvii, fol. 124r., British Library. *Filius Matris* is a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Latin sermon cycle with four extant English manuscripts dating to the early fifteenth century.

35. Augustine, *On the Psalms,* trans. in Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 235; Talmage, *Jesus the Christ,* 295.

> the image of man [and] is also the express image of his Father[']s person. . . . And through the atonement of Christ and the resurrection and obedience in the Gospel we shall again be conformed to the image of his Son Jesus Christ, then we shall have attained to the image glory and character of God.[36]

It is notable that the image of God as spoken of in the medieval sermon quoted above appears not to be regained but rather rediscovered within the person.

The significance of the coin's image continued to be acknowledged well into the nineteenth century, even as allegorical interpretation was beginning to fall out of favor. Henry Calderwood, writing about a decade before Adolf Jülicher's anti-allegory tirades, writes that in the coin "has been uniformly recognized an allusion to the image of God in the soul of man." And he sees additional symbolic meaning in the coin's other attributes:

> A piece of money *does not lose its value,* though it be for a time lost to its owner. So the intelligent immortal spirit continues to be precious in the sight of God, even when separated from Him by all the distance which sin implies. Yet lost silver is soon *tarnished,* and is the more obscured the longer it continues in neglect. . . . But *lost money is useless while lost.* It continues of the same value; but while lost, its present usefulness is gone. . . . So does God lose the service which man was created to render, and which he would have rendered but for this separation from righteousness.[37]

Interestingly, modern commentators seem to focus more on the coin's value than medieval sermons do, and their understanding of that value varies widely. While some (like Calderwood) see the coin as being of high value intrinsically, to others, such as Alexander Bruce, it is rather the trivial amount of the coin's worth that demonstrates God's care for all his children, no matter how insignificant they may be in the world's eyes.[38] However they arrive at it, though, their point is ultimately the same: God values those who are lost—or, to put it in modern revelatory

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36. James Burgess, Notebook, July 9, 1843, in *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph,* ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), 231. My thanks to an anonymous reader for pointing out this quotation.

37. Calderwood, *Parables,* 33–34, 37, emphasis in original.

38. Bruce, *Parabolic Teaching,* 278. Although Bruce mostly rejects the traditional allegorical meanings, his bringing them up suggests they were still circulating widely.

terms, "The worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (D&C 18:10). Moreover, these commentaries demonstrate not only that many of the patristic readings had been handed down through the centuries but also that the allegorical method in general opens the parable up to a deeper understanding of the relationship between God and his children.

The Shepherd's Shoulders

Beginning with Ambrose in the fourth century, that the shepherd bears the lost sheep on his shoulders is often tied specifically to the Incarnation and Crucifixion, with the shoulders of the shepherd representing the arms of the cross.[39] Following this tradition, Gregory the Great writes, "He put the sheep upon his shoulders because, taking on himself our human nature, he bore our sins."[40] The lost sheep sermon in the Middle English *Mirror* says, "Upon his shoulders he laid man when he was crucified for our sin." The one from the *Filius Matris* collection further explains, "Christ's shoulders are the arms of his cross, on which he was pierced in both body and arms for the love of sinful man, . . . and by love [he] put [the sheep] upon his shoulders, which is to say suffered therefore many pains upon his body."[41] A sixteenth-century homily adds, "And truly he has set us on his holy shoulders when he has taken upon him all our sins on the cross . . . for to bring us unto the celestial flock."[42] This powerful visual image links the spiritual rescue described in the parable with the physical act of atonement. And the juxtaposition of lifting the lost sheep and being lifted onto the cross creates a striking symmetry that echoes the Book of Mormon: "And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me" (3 Ne. 27:14).

The Woman and the Lamp

Since the sheep and the coins signify the same things in most medieval and patristic interpretations, it is not surprising that the same is

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39. Saint Ambrose, *Exposito Evangelii Secundum Lucam,* Corpus Christianorum Series, vol. 14 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1957), 286–87; see also Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 128–31.

40. Gregory the Great, *Parables,* 125; intriguingly, this echoes Alma 7:13, which reads, "Nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people."

41. *Middle English "Mirror,"* 283; *Filius Matris,* fol. 123r.

42. Lefèvre, *Readings from the Gospels,* spelling modernized.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd, Carthage, Tunisia, fourth century, Bardo Museum, Tunis. Courtesy Kent P. Jackson.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd, Corinth, fourth century, Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens. Courtesy Kent P. Jackson.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd, Athens, fourth century, Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens. Courtesy Kent P. Jackson.

The similarity between these artworks highlights the consistency of artistic representation in the early Christian world. It is interesting that all of these images date to the fourth century, which is when Jerome first connected the parable of the lost sheep with the Good Shepherd passage, and that John 10 makes no reference to the Good Shepherd carrying the sheep on his shoulders as depicted in these sculptures.

generally true of the shepherd and the coins' owner. The *Filius Matris* homily says, "Just as Christ is represented by the shepherd so is he represented by the woman who had ten drachmas."[43] While a modern audience might find it odd to see Christ likened to a female figure, this comparison has biblical precedent: Jesus compares himself to a hen who "gathereth her chickens under her wings"—an image that is repeated in both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.[44] And a well-known passage in Isaiah (also quoted in the Book of Mormon) reads, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."[45] One medieval sermon makes this connection explicitly: Christ "compares himself to a woman" in this parable partly because he "loves humankind more than a mother loves her child."[46]

The Isaiah passage also gave rise to a Jesus-as-mother motif common in medieval devotional writing from the eleventh century onward, a motif made particularly famous by the late medieval anchorite and visionary Julian of Norwich, who connected the mothering Jesus with wisdom: "Thus in our very mother Jesus our life is grounded in the foreseeing wisdom of himself from without beginning, with the high might of the father and the sovereign goodness of the holy ghost."[47] However, one need not go through Julian or even through the image of Jesus as mother in order to get to the connection between Jesus and wisdom or the connection between wisdom and woman. When Gregory the Great says, "This woman [in the parable of the Lost Groat] and the shepherd

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43. *Filius Matris,* fol. 123v–124r.

44. Matthew 23:37; compare Luke 13:34; 3 Nephi 10:4–6; Doctrine and Covenants 10:65; Doctrine and Covenants 29:2; and Doctrine and Covenants 43:24.

45. Isaiah 49:15; compare 1 Nephi 21:15.

46. MS 4, fol. 71r, Longleat House, summarized and translated in O'Mara and Paul, *Repertorium,* 2549. The sermon adds that the figures of the (male) shepherd and the woman in these two parables further demonstrate that Christ "comes to save both men and women" (fol. 71v, trans. in O'Mara and Paul, *Repertorium,* 2549). Many modern commentators consider this pairing to be one of a number of New Testament "gendered doublets" (van Eck, "Realistic Reading," 6) with a purpose to show the universality of God's love and/or to include women as well as men in the intended audience. See Shafto, *Stories,* 63; Archibald M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 60.

47. Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love,* in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich,* ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 321, spelling modernized. The original reads, "Thus in oure very moder Jhesu oure life is grounded in the forseeing wisdom of himselfe fro without beginning, with the hye might of the fader and the sovereyne goodnesse of the holy gost."

have a common significance: for they both stand for God and God's wisdom," the Latin word he uses—*sapentia*—is a feminine noun, and such abstract feminine nouns were often personified as female figures in patristic and medieval writings.[48]

Yet another oft-repeated interpretation of this parable instead aligns the woman with another feminine noun—*Ecclesia,* or the Church, which was often personified as the bride of Christ (see Rev. 21:9). Ambrose, speaking of all three parables in Luke 15, says, "Who are these three, the father [of the lost son], the shepherd, the woman? Who if not God the Father, Christ, and the Church?"[49] This tripartite interpretation is picked up in the *Glossa Ordinaria* and in the *Filius Matris* homily, both of which record it alongside the woman-as-Christ reading. The latter says, "And so a shepherd, a woman, & a father are three full good remedies. Christ is the shepherd that brought again the sheep that is to say sinful man to the fold of bliss that it had lost. Holy Church is the woman that seeks the drachma that is to say man's soul by prayer and by preaching & by good example of deeds that betoken the lighting of the lantern and this father is God Almighty that receives each sinful man to grace if he would truly turn himself from sin."[50] The medieval audience did not seem bothered by apparent contradictions in meaning but rather allowed these multiple interpretations to stand side by side, each communicating something of value.

While in the preceding passage the lighting of the lantern is equated to actions taken by the Church, when the woman is seen as Christ and/or God's wisdom, the lamp she holds up is linked to the Incarnation. Augustine explains that the lamp itself is Christ's body, which is "made of clay but shines with the Word."[51] Gregory further compares the "lampstand of [Christ's] body" with the dried-up potsherd of the messianic twenty-second psalm, both representing flesh made of clay and hardened by suffering, and Gregory adds, "Here the light is the divinity made man. . . . God's eternal wisdom, shining for all to see in the miracles he performed on earth, repaired that sin by the light of his

48. Gregory the Great, *Parables,* 127.

49. Saint Ambrose, *Exposito Evangelii Secundum Lucam,* 87, trans. in Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 235.

50. *Filius Matris,* fol. 123r.

51. Trans. in Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 235; compare Mosiah 3:5: "The Lord Omnipotent . . . shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay."

bodily presence, as a lamp on a lampstand."[52] The *Filius Matris* homily says, "But God's son lighted a lantern to seek man that was lost when he took flesh and blood for man's sake and lighted his manhood quite clearly with the great brightness of his godhood."[53] This imagery is not unlike the restored gospel conception of the Light of Christ, which the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* defines as "the spiritual power that emanates from God to fill the immensity of space and enlightens every man, woman, and child."[54] While the Light of Christ exists independently of the Incarnation, both are elements of Christ's mission to redeem a fallen world and reconnect people with God.

Moral Lessons

Parry and Parry note that parables "contain multiple levels of meaning" that can be revealed to "the righteous who study those messages"; these multiple levels, far from being incompatible, often interlock and strengthen the parables' messages.[55] The restored Church's Bible Dictionary adds, "It is important to distinguish between the interpretation of a parable and the application of a parable. The only true interpretation is the meaning a parable conveyed, or was meant to convey, when first spoken. The application of a parable may vary in every age and circumstance."[56] Therefore, while the biblical context of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin leads clearly to the interpretation that Jesus came to earth to seek those who are lost through sin or ignorance, the parables may be validly applied in a variety of ways—as indeed they have been over the centuries.

The most common moral application given in medieval sermons is that all should repent. The Middle English *Mirror* says, "Consider, you who hear this lesson. Look how they who are in heaven come to Christ. We must forsake our sins and amend us, and come to God that we may make the angels glad, and that we may come to them and rejoice with them. But none may come to them but through repentance. . . . For God's love, we amend our lives. . . . Nor should we wait so long to repent that we

52. Gregory the Great, *Parables,* 127–28.

53. *Filius Matris,* fol. 124r.

54. C. Kent Dunford, "Light of Christ," in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:835.

55. Parry and Parry, *Understanding the Parables,* xiii.

56. "Parables," *Bible Dictionary,* The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bd/parables?lang=eng.

never come to him."[57] To this central message is often added the importance of having faith and living righteously. The *Filius Matris* homily, for example, explains that as "Christ's meek sheep" we should "hold ourselves innocent in living"; as "Christ's drachmas" we should "hold our full price" through "the foundation of true belief"; and (referring to the parable of the lost son) as "Christ's children" through true penance, "now is the time of turning again, now is the time of penance, and now is the time of amending."[58] The importance of real repentance is also underscored; this homily contrasts the sincere contrition of Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus with the flawed penance of Esau, Saul, and David, while Gregory the Great notes that the penitent must not only regret past sins but refrain from committing more.[59] As a group, these sermons depict the urgency of repenting and coming to Christ.[60]

Another common application found in these early homilies is that none should judge, though this is usually based on the parables' frame, where Jesus eats with sinners, rather than on the parables themselves: "Those who are motivated by a false sense of justice, usually despise others and have no pity for the weak. Through their presumption in thinking themselves sinless, they sink lower than those whom they disdain. The pharisees were men of this type."[61] Another homily asks, "Why should any complain that the simple, the poor sinners, and the publicans should receive this divine consolation? Truly our gospel will not in any wise that it should be so." And the Middle English *Mirror* poses a similar rhetorical question—"Is it right and fitting to refuse them that Jesus takes to himself?"—and then broadens this thought almost to the point of the modern missionary application: "But man ought to draw the sinful to do good first with love, not to love his deeds but to chastise him, not only to entice him to do good, but to preach to him and to feed him."[62] Here the reference seems to reach beyond Jesus's

57. *Middle English "Mirror,"* 284.

58. *Filius Matris,* fol. 124r.

59. Gregory the Great, *Parables,* 139–40; *Filius Matris,* fol. 123r.

60. One fascinating Middle English sermon for the first Sunday after the Octave of Epiphany, which uses Luke 2:42–52 as its primary text (where Mary and Joseph seek the boy Jesus and find him in the temple), includes an unusual role reversal: "Christ should be sought . . . as energetically as the shepherd for his lost sheep or the woman for her lost coin." MS 392, fol. 165r, Lambeth Palace Library, London, summarized and translated in O'Mara and Paul, *Repertorium,* 1543.

61. Gregory the Great, *Parables,* 123–24.

62. Lefèvre, *Readings from the Gospels,* fol. 132r; *Middle English "Mirror,"* 282.

eating with sinners to his feeding the multitudes in Galilee and beyond acquiescing with Jesus's actions to following them.

As mentioned above, the juxtaposition of the parable of the lost sheep with Jesus's plea to "feed my sheep" in John 21 makes it easy to extend the ministerial applications of the frame to the parable itself. This moral lesson may well have been influenced by Mary B. Wingate's hymn "Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd," which was first published in 1899.[63] Though Wingate herself was Baptist, the hymn was quickly adopted by both the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (now Community of Christ) and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: it appeared in the RLDS collection *Zion's Praises* in 1903 and was added to the second edition of *Songs of Zion,* published by the Missions of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in 1912.[64] Its first three verses put Christ in the role of the shepherd, but the focus is changed by Christ's question at the end of the third ("Will you not seek for my lost ones?") and the answer in the fourth verse ("Yes, blessed Master, we will! Make us thy true under-shepherds"). Karen Lynn Davidson writes, "Though it might be assumed that the hymn would conclude with a call to all straying sheep to return to the fold, it is instead a call to the followers of Jesus to seek out those who are lost."[65] The enduring popularity of this hymn within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may well simultaneously reflect and reinforce this particular moral application, so well attested in Church magazines and manuals.[66]

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63. W. J. Kirkpatrick, J. L. Hall, and H. L. Gilmour, eds., *Gospel Praises: For Use in Meetings of Christian Worship* (Philadelphia: Hall Mack, 1899), no. 100, https://hymnary.org/hymn/GPUM1899/100.

64. *Zion's Praises* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1903), no. 88; *Songs of Zion: A Collection of Choice Songs Especially Selected and Arranged for the Home and for All Meetings, Sunday Schools, and Gatherings of Elders and Saints in the Mission Field,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Missions of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1912), no. 243; see "Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd," SingPraises.net, updated December 23, 2020, https://singpraises.net/texts/221/dear-to-the-heart-of-the-shepherd. The hymn appears as number 221 in the hymnbook currently used by the restored Church. *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985). Mary B. (Rich) Wingate's obituary provides her dates (1845–1933) and her denomination. *The Springfield Daily Republican,* May 13, 1933, 4, GenealogyBank Historical Newspaper Obituaries, 1815–2011, *FamilySearch,* https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q5QL-98ZZ.

65. Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and Messages* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 233.

66. "Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd" does not appear in the current Community of Christ hymnal.

Some modern commentators, however, see the ministerial or evangelical moral exclusively in the parable of the lost coin. Henry Calderwood, for example, writes that the message of this parable (but not those of the lost sheep or lost son) is that "the common and constant task of His believing people" is to "seek to save others who were lost."[67] Calderwood distinguishes this parable from the others because the woman, unlike the shepherd or the father, bears responsibility for losing the coin and therefore cannot (in his view) represent Christ. Rather than simply reiterating the parable of the lost sheep, which is about Christ's saving mission, in this reading the parable of the lost coin speaks of the Church's role in continuing his work.[68] And while Halford Edward Luccock, writing in the early twentieth century, applies the evangelical lesson to both parables, he claims that "the Lost Coin adds the idea that we are not only necessary to God's love but also to his purposes." In describing the woman sweeping her house to look for the coin, he further calls attention to contemporary social issues, such as "the payment of wages below a living standard, the traffic in things which debase and debauch men," child labor, exploitative company stores, and other unfair working conditions.[69] Few commentators are as sociologically specific in their readings of the parable's housecleaning, but many agree that this action suggests significant effort and disruption.

In the same conference talk with which this essay begins, President David O. McKay seems likewise to differentiate between the parables in Luke 15, explicitly directing one-third of his remarks to Church leaders and the other two-thirds to the general membership, though with an emphasis on prevention rather than rescue. The one-third relates to the parable of the lost coin and leaders' responsibility to "guard these precious souls"; in applying the other two parables, he tells potential lost sheep and prodigal sons not to wander or to give way to riotous living.[70] It should be acknowledged, however, that both Luccock and President McKay reblur these boundaries elsewhere in their remarks.

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67. Calderwood, *Parables,* 40.

68. Calderwood, *Parables,* 38–42. The medieval interpretation of the lighting of the woman's lamp in the parable of the lost coin as the prayers, preaching, and good example of the Church also implies a moral application that values doing those things, even if the homily doesn't make that tropological move explicit.

69. Halford E. Luccock, *Studies in the Parables of Jesus* (New York and Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1917), 14, 16.

70. McKay, in *One Hundred Fifteenth Annual General Conference,* 122.

G. R. H. Shafto, on the other hand, rejects not only the distinction between these parables but also applications that redirect attention away from the central characters of the woman and the shepherd. He asserts that both parables focus on God's loss (rather than the sheep's or the coin's), *his* search, and *his* joy at the recovery of that which has been lost: "The pictures of anxious search disclose the fact of God's love for us, and that that love is personal. . . . Recovery of the lost brings its own joy; so the owner seeks for it—and does not expect or wait for the lost thing to seek him. The initiative rests with God. That is one explanation of the Incarnation."[71] Similarly, Gregory the Great says, speaking of the shepherd's comments to his friends and neighbors (which Gregory interprets as angels), "It is noteworthy that he does not say: 'Rejoice with the sheep restored,' but, 'Rejoice with me,' because his joy is our life and when we are restored to heaven, the fullness of his joy will be achieved." The Middle English *Mirror* and the *Northern Homily Cycle* (in both its expanded and unexpanded versions) also highlight the joy of both God and heaven at the sinner's repentance.[72] Intriguingly, modern revealed scripture seems to speak more clearly about divine joy than does the Bible (except in these parables), as expressed by the lord of the vineyard in Zenos's allegory of the olive trees and by the resurrected Jesus during his visit to the Lamanites and Nephites and in revelations to Joseph Smith, both in general ("How great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!") and in particular (speaking of Warren A. Cowdery).[73]

Interestingly, each of the three major strains of moral application discussed above aligns with the perspective of different characters in these

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71. Shafto, *Stories,* 66. Some medieval sermons similarly link the thorough search for the coin to Christ's humanity or crucifixion (MS Additional 40672, fol. 57r, British Library; MS G.22, fol. 7v, St. John's College, Cambridge, England; and MS 4, fol. 71v, Longleat House, all summarized in O'Mara and Paul, *Repertorium,* 105, 469, 2549). These sermons also reflect the frequent substitution of *evertit* (turn upside down) for *everrit* (sweep) in early Latin renderings of Luke 15:8 (Wailes, *Medieval Allegories,* 234).

72. Gregory the Great, *Parables,* 125; *Middle English "Mirror,"* 284; *Northern Homily Cycle,* ed. Nevanlinna, 2:287; and *The Northern Homily Cycle* (unexpanded version), MS Gg. v. 31 fol. 96v, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, England. The last of these can be (loosely) translated, "But if this man from sin arises, / And with penance becomes righteous, / Then Jesus finds his sheep, I think, / And for that find is tickled pink, / And calls his saints to gather round / And bids them make their joy resound." In the first two, the angels are double-cast as the friends and neighbors and the ninety-nine sheep.

73. Jacob 5:60; 3 Nephi 17:20; Doctrine and Covenants 18:13; 106:6. The worth-of-souls passage in Doctrine and Covenants 18 parallels these parables in that it progresses from the worth of souls to the Atonement and God's joy in the repentant (vv. 10–13). Only thereafter is the missionary application given (vv. 14–16).

parables, and each, given recent teachings on ministering, eliminating prejudice, and daily repentance, has particular relevance to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[74] The message to seek those who are lost takes the viewpoint of the shepherd and the woman, while the application of accepting all who repent into full fellowship fits the role of the rejoicing friends and neighbors (and opposes the position of the scribes and Pharisees who prompted the parables). Finally, putting oneself in the place of the sheep or the coin emphasizes the need for personal repentance. When combined with the allegory of the Good Shepherd—"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27)—it also reflects President Russell M. Nelson's constant call to "hear Him."[75] Moreover, all of these moral lessons rely on the Savior's saving mission, without which there would be no repentance, no ministering, and no joy in heaven (or on earth).

In short, these brief parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin—ten verses total—carry a multiplicity of meanings. Most of these varied applications, from the need to repent to the need to accept and seek out the repentant, are not only justifiable but valuable; however, the truest, most basic interpretation is the one that testifies that Jesus Christ is the Savior. Furthermore, the long tradition of allegorical explication that stretches from patristic and medieval writings into the nineteenth century and beyond does not detract from that basic interpretation but rather enriches it. The Middle English *Filius Matris* sermon provides a pair of clear and simple summaries: "Christ is the shepherd that brought again the sheep: which is to say sinful man to the fold of bliss that it had lost"; "and so the drachma that before was lost was found again when the similitude of our creator was found again in man."[76] Certainly these early interpretations

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74. See, for example, Russell M. Nelson, "Ministering," *Ensign* 48, no. 5 (May 2018): 100; Bonnie H. Cordon, "Becoming a Shepherd," *Ensign* 48, no. 11 (November 2018): 75; Stevenson, "Shepherding Souls," 110; Quentin L. Cook, "Hearts Knit in Righteousness and Unity," *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 18–21; Dallin H. Oaks, "Love Your Enemies," *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 28–29; Gerrit W. Gong, "All Nations, Kindreds, and Tongues," *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 38; William K. Jackson, "The Culture of Christ," *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 49; Sharon Eubank, "By Union of Feeling We Obtain Power with God," *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 57; Russell M. Nelson, "Let God Prevail," *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 94; Dale G. Renlund, "Do Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with God," *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 111; and Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better," *Ensign* 49, no. 5 (May 2019): 67–69.

75. Russell M. Nelson, "Hear Him," *Ensign* 50, no. 5 (May 2020): 88–92.

76. *Filius Matris,* fols. 123r, 124r.

of the parable of the lost sheep, with its dual images of Christ as loving shepherd and as suffering Savior, and of the parable of the lost coin, with its emphasis on the value of the individual soul, created in God's image, add to our understanding and appreciation of Jesus Christ's mission to save and redeem all of humankind.

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