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# “The Quiet Affection in Their Eyes”

## *Bernhard Plockhorst's Jesus as the Good Shepherd*

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### Abstract

Since the nineteenth century, Bernhard Plockhorst's *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* has enjoyed great popularity and is reproduced in a wide variety of media, appearing in American homes, schools, and churches and even Hollywood sets. Jesus as a Good Shepherd is traced to the early Christian period through the fourth century when he disappears from the iconographic lexicon. He regains popularity during the Protestant Reformation as a didactic tool. Resurging once again in the nineteenth and twentieth century, this Good Shepherd is markedly different from his historical iterations. Tracking visual comparanda and textual sources, the Plockhorst Good Shepherd emerges as a figure that engenders strong emotions of love, protection, and community only possible in a post-agricultural society.

### Keywords

Good Shepherd – Bernhard Plockhorst – early Christian – anthropomorphism – attachment – Philippe de Champaigne – Mary Baker Eddy

The image of the kind shepherd who tends his flock is so pervasive and so well loved that the history behind the image of *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* is rarely examined, nor is the question of the rationale for its popularity (fig. 1). When asked, church-going Americans often assume that he has always been there gently caring for his sheep since the beginning of Christianity. This particular depiction of the Good Shepherd likely comes to the mind of modern Christians when they recite or recall the words of Psalm 23 or the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt. 18:12–14 // Luke 15:3–7). After all, it hung on the walls of churches and homes since childhood or at least in their memories of their



FIGURE 1 Reproduction of *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* by Bernhard Plockhorst, c. 1889.  
Location of original painting unknown

grandparents' home. Garbed in a flowing red tunic and a white wrap, this Good Shepherd has long, reddish brown hair, wears a beard, and walks barefoot over the rough, thorny ground. He cradles in his arm a white lamb and holds a tall shepherd's crook. A nimbus of light surrounds his head, giving him a romantic persona against the failing light of the setting sun; rolling hills and streams of water make up the landscape that provides a bucolic backdrop. A flock of white sheep, with the inclusion of one black sheep tucked in the herd, gathers around the skirts of the shepherd's drapery. A white ewe, presumably the mother of the lamb, turns her neck to gaze on the shepherd holding her offspring. The impression is of a loving, almost motherly, Jesus who tenderly protects his flock, even the most vulnerable lamb he cradles in his arms.<sup>1</sup>

The artist's name is obscure and is known only in the most specialized circles of scholarship, but the painting of *Jesus as the Good Shepherd*, or rather one of its millions of reproductions, is known throughout the world. This soft-focused version is one of the most recent in a long history of Good Shepherds from the early Church through the Protestant Reformation and the rise of Evangelical Christianity in the United States, many of which are lost or little-known works of art that are the subject of arcane scholarship. This paper explores two aspects of *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* to probe how unusual and modern this representation is: its appeal to modern audiences beginning in the nineteenth century and its relation to its precursors.

Bernhard Plockhorst (2 March 1825–18 May 1907)<sup>2</sup> was a German graphic artist and painter who traveled and studied extensively. It is known that he studied with the painter Thomas Couture in Paris and in Stuttgart and also with Karl von Piloty in Munich. From 1866 to 1869 Plockhorst held a professorship in Weimar, finally settling in Berlin where he specialized in portraits and religious paintings. His name is loosely associated with the last phases of the Nazarenes, a group of mostly German artists who sought to return painting to what they believed were the spiritual and moral themes of medieval art (Grewe 100–116); almost by necessity, they rejected more modern experimental styles and embraced a deliberately archaic style. The idealism of the early Nazarenes to market religious art to the personal and private, which resulted in the reproduction of inexpensive prints, may also explain the popularity of what was labeled “kitsch” for its sentimentality (Grossman 15–17). Although Plock-

1 The whitening of Christ is the subject of a great deal of excellent research and publications. A good starting point is Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey's *The Color of Christ*, where the introductory chapter provides a historical background of the Nordic Christ.

2 Clara Ruge gives 1832 for Plockhorst's year of birth; Cornelius Gurlitt gives his birth year as 1825 and his place of birth as Brunswick, Germany (735).

horst is not a household name, his *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* has made deep inroads into popular religious art, particularly in Protestant America. Plockhorst's shepherd is found not only over a span of a hundred years but also a wide range of socio-economic strata of American society.

The variety of media that reproduces Plockhorst's shepherd is remarkable. In America wealthy parishioners commissioned stained glass windows for their local churches, often in a wish to emulate the windows Americans viewed while touring in Europe. One such example is *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* for the First Presbyterian Church, Delaven, Illinois, whose patron had seen either the original or a stained glass copy while touring with his bride in Germany (First Presbyterian Church, "History;" Raguin 1274–1282; Cheney, *Radiance and Symbolism*). The stained-glass windows were semi-public commissions that served several purposes: to beautify the structure, enhance the status of the building, and provide a vehicle for an appreciation and memorialization of the patron's largesse. Although there is no census on the number of stained-glass windows that either copied or emulated the Plockhorst painting, my own anecdotal experience indicates that his shepherd was a favored interpretation for church windows.<sup>3</sup>

Often, less expensive reproductions found their way into American classrooms and Sunday school classes, often displayed along with famous Americans or what were considered as tasteful works of fine art. The public schools in Connersville, Indiana, for example, displayed the Plockhorst reproduction beside a photograph of Abraham Lincoln and *Britany Sheep* by Rosa Bonheur (*Connorsville Public Schools Report* 119).<sup>4</sup> The Rev. Elmer A. Love, minister of the First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon, New York, used the picture to teach participants in his Pastor's Class in preparation for church membership, even gifting each student a copy of picture on completion of the course (Sollitt 4). *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* was featured in catalogs and marketed to schools and church Sunday schools and promoted as a pedagogically healthy way to teach impressionable young minds good taste, good morals, and good patriotism (Morgan 305–338).

By the end of the nineteenth century the American home was the center of moral instruction and the nurture of the good citizen. More accessible and

3 The Michigan Census of Stained Glass lists over 56 examples of the Good Shepherd as a window theme: [www.michiganstainedglass.org/](http://www.michiganstainedglass.org/). The first two decades of the twentieth century seems to have been the acme of mass-produced Victorian stained glass.

4 For more information see also, Beard, *Pictures*; David Morgan's "Protestant Visual Culture;" Morgan's *The Lure of Images*, 94–102; and "Thomas Kinkade and the History of Protestant Visual Culture in America."

for domestic use were the reproductions produced by a number of printing firms such as the Children's Bible Society who sold theirs for a mere fifty cents. The motherly aspect of the painting no doubt made it appealing to the education of young people and the marketing for domestic consumption.

The association with the American home is underscored by the Plockhorst Shepherd making its appearance in American films. It debuts in the 1931 film *The Public Enemy* in the bedroom of two brothers Mike, played by Donald Cook, and Tom, played by James Cagney. The print is part of the set design in the scene that shows the confrontation between Mike, who is packing to join the Marines in the last years of World War I, and Tom, who will pursue the life of a gangster and die in a hail of bullets. The set designer's intention seems clear: the virtuous brother Mike is guided by the Good Shepherd and looked over by a guardian angel.<sup>5</sup> A striking juxtaposition of a change in social attitudes can be seen when Plockhorst's shepherd appears in *Sling Blade*, where the lead figure Karl, played by Billy Bob Thornton, confronts his abusive father, played by Robert Duval, who sprawls in a dilapidated chair in front of a wall filled with cheap reproductions of religious art. In this scene, Karl reminds his father of the task given to him when he was six or eight years old to dispose of his premature, unwanted, newborn brother. The Christian beliefs espoused in the religious images are a visual reminder of the hypocrisy of the father who abused Karl so severely; he decided to bury the still-breathing newborn and "return him to the good Lord right off the bat." In both films, separated by 65 years, the set designers sought to create "authentic" lower-class, American homes of Protestant Christians and the type of artwork found in these interiors.<sup>6</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that the inclusion of the Plockhorst painting in the 1931 film suggests a moralizing tone, while its inclusion in the 1996 film set suggests a darker theme of false, even duplicitous, religiosity.

Reproductions were not limited to the American lower class but could also be found in the homes of wealthy Americans. For example, Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Church of Christian Science, received a gift of a painted tapestry after Plockhorst's painting (fig. 2). Eddy decided to hang the tapestry from a

5 A reproduction of Plockhorst's *The Guardian Angel* (1886) also hung in the bedroom. This painting rivaled the Good Shepherd as one of Plockhorst's most reproduced works of art.

6 In *So Big!* (directed by William A. Wellman, Warner Bros.), the movie that debuted in 1932 and starred Barbara Stanwyck, a large reproduction of Plockhorst's Good Shepherd can be observed in the scene of the church auction. More recently, the set designer included a reproduction in *The Three Stooges* (directed by Bobby and Peter Farrelly, 20th Century Fox, 2012) in the scene of The Sisters of Mercy Orphanage. Maureen Doyle McQuerry documents several pastoral terms popular among Evangelical Americans in "Some Terms of Evangelical Christianity."



FIGURE 2

Tapestry painting hanging in Pleasant View parlor. Daniel E. Fulz, oil on canvas, c. 1901. The original painting is now in the collections of Longyear Museum, Chestnut Hill, MA

PHOTO: MINNIE B. WEYGANDT

roller and add fringe along the bottom edge. To further illustrate the significance of the painting to her, she had a placard created to hang with the tapestry painting. Eddy wrote to Daniel Fultz, who gave her the reproduction, on July 28, 1901: "... I almost kneel before that shrine of my heart. I have hung above it a gilt frame with this lettering on it. The Christian Science Banner. 'His banner over us was love' ... All who visit my house are shown your painting" (Eddy, "The Christian Science Banner").<sup>7</sup> In her words of thanks to her benefactor, Eddy stresses how it moved her in a deeply emotional way, eliciting a wellspring of love. It was at her home, Pleasant View, that Ms. Eddy completed a major revision of her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, which ends with a paraphrase of Psalm 23. In a second letter Eddy writes, "... and the tender Christ take you in his arms and carry you to the fold of Truth—as gently as you depict this in painting." She gives an insight into how she identified with the lamb held in the arms of the shepherd, a sentiment that was a common reaction to the painting, as will be discussed below.

The popularity of the Good Shepherd for stained glass in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is bookended at the later part of the century with the large-scale terrazzo tile mural at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Roanoke, Virginia (fig. 3) (Cox). An interpretation of the Plockhorst shepherd looms large over a main-road artery of the city, a shining visualization of the church's welcoming statement: "We may be small in number, but our hearts are large and ready to welcome you into our church family. Come and check out what we can offer you through God's loving grace" ([www.gslcp.org/index.html](http://www.gslcp.org/index.html)). In sentiments similar to Eddy's, the church links the image of *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* to large and welcoming hearts of acceptance and the grace of God's love.

7 The letter is published in full on the website: "The Christian Science Banner," Mary Baker Eddy Library, [www.marybakereddylibrary.org/research/the-christian-science-banner/](http://www.marybakereddylibrary.org/research/the-christian-science-banner/).



FIGURE 3 The Good Shepherd, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & Preschool, Roanoke, Virginia. Byrd Terrazzo & Design, 1969

PHOTO: AMELIA VERKERK

To drive home my point how the Plockhorst shepherd has thoroughly permeated American culture, the Movie Poster Prints company offers a shower curtain imprinted with the Good Shepherd, indicating that the Plockhorst shepherd had conquered the commercial market of America.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent portrayals of the Good Shepherd have gained some popularity by artists such as Warner Salman and O.A. Stemler; however, these are variations on the theme laid out by Plockhorst: longhaired shepherd, crook, cradled lamb, flock, flowing robes, bare feet, and an idyllic landscape.

As this brief survey outlines, Bernhard Plockhorst's painting may now be lost and the artist's name all but forgotten; however, his rendering has become the image contemporary people associate with Jesus the Good Shepherd. From stained glass to plastic shower curtains, from Christian Scientists to Lutherans, from the Midwest to Hollywood, Americans know and have embraced this Good Shepherd. From the myriad choices of how the Good Shepherd was depicted for almost 2,000 years, this paper will explore the question of why this particular Good Shepherd became so beloved. To move forward and offer an explanation, it is informative to move backward in time to the earliest Good Shepherd, centuries before Plockhorst put brush to canvas (Jensen, *Understanding* 37–41; 210, 475–503). As will be demonstrated, the previous embodiments of the Good Shepherd are outward looking; they refer to an ideal life of the countryside or a didactic parable warning against heresy. The modern Good Shepherd is inward looking, unlike his precursors, drawing the viewer into a personal relationship.

The earliest Christians came from Judaism, which shunned an embodied portrayal of their God, preferring to visualize his intervention or guidance in human affairs as a right hand emerging from the heavens represented as clouds. When the new religion broke from Judaism and attracted members who came from the Hellenized Roman Empire where the tradition to give bodily form to the gods was of long standing, Jesus as the Good Shepherd makes his appear-

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8 See Fine Art America. "The Good Shepherd 1878 Bernhard Plockhorst Shower Curtain," [www.fineartamerica.com/products/the-good-shepherd-1878-bernhard-plockhorst-movie-poster-prints-shower-curtain.html](http://www.fineartamerica.com/products/the-good-shepherd-1878-bernhard-plockhorst-movie-poster-prints-shower-curtain.html). The company also offers a wide range of products with the Plockhorst reproduction: for example, beach towels, mugs, yoga mats, tote bags, portable battery chargers, etc. As best as this author has been able to determine, the date of Jesus the *Good Shepherd* is c. 1889, not 1878 as advertised by the company, and she also questions why the head of Jesus is cut off in the advertisement. The practice of placing religious images on common goods is not new. By the 1930s, for example, thermometers, heat-resisting mats, lamps, pencils, rulers, and the backs of mirrors with religious images were pedaled by companies such as Gospel Trumpet from Anderson, Indiana; see, Colleen McDannell "Christian Retailing."



FIGURE 4  
Hermes Kriophoros, bronze, c. 500 BCE. Boston  
Museum of Fine Arts, Henry Lillie Pierce Fund

ance. Of the earliest depictions to survive, the Good Shepherd was one of the most popular portrayals of Christ in the third and fourth centuries.<sup>9</sup> Christians did not invent this type; instead, they gave new meaning to a traditional figure associated with the pastoral life (Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 91–92) and as a *psychopomp*, or figure who guides the deceased into the afterlife. The eminent scholar Lewis Farnell traced the youthful herder to the Greek Hermes type found foremost in Arcadia, the pastoral, idyllic place of the primitive shepherd (Farnell 1–84; Wright 44–48). He is depicted as a young man, who wears a short, belted tunic, a pointed cap, sturdy boots, and once carried a caduceus (fig. 4).

9 For a discussion of the various portrayals of Christ, see: Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*.

Farnell describes the Hermes as follows:

As Arcadia has been from time immemorial the great pasture-ground of Greece, so probably the most primitive character in which Hermes appeared, and which he never abandoned, was the pastoral. He is the lord of the herds, *who leads them to the sweet waters*, and bears the tired ram or lamb on his shoulders, and assists them with the *shepherd's crook*.

FARNELL 10, *emphasis mine*

What is quite remarkable about Farnell's poetic description of the Greek Hermes is the slippages he makes in his description. Although Hermes is sometimes shown with a ram around his neck, more often it is efficiently tucked under his arm like a book. Also, the surviving sculptures do not include "sweet waters" or a shepherd's crook, leading one to believe that the image of *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* has infiltrated the mind of even such a preeminent classicist as Farnell.

Romans adopted the shepherd as well as its connotations of the tranquility of the country. The Roman Hermes more often shows the sheep or ram slung over the shoulders rather than tucked under the arm. This shepherd type is firmly rooted in an agrarian culture, where a shepherd with a sheep carried on the shoulders would have been a common sight.

The Greek and Roman association of the herder with the idyllic pastoral life and a *psychopomp* was carried over into Christian iconography (Taylor 47–59; von Himmelmann 124–137). It retained its bucolic ideals but could also refer to the passage in the Gospel according to John in which Christ said of himself: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11) and Psalm 23, which was a favorite for baptismal and funerary ceremonies (Verkerk, "The Font Is a Kind of Grave" 157–171). So close is the borrowing, that scholars find it difficult to distinguish between the Roman Hermes shepherd and the Christian shepherd; only the context of the find site can determine identity (Huskinson 80–97; Elsner 178–195). For example, the statue known as the Cleveland Good Shepherd (fig. 5), has been identified as a Christian shepherd rather than the Roman Hermes since it was found with sculptures of an *orans* (praying figure with upraised hands), Jonah swallowed by the sea monster, Jonah spewed out, and Jonah resting under a gourd vine. The Cleveland Shepherd is a beautifully rendered example that is thought to have been a wedding gift for a Christian couple who would have placed this in their home (Kitzinger 117–139; Wischmeyer 253–287; Weitzmann 406–11, nos. 363–368; Wixom 67–88). He shows similarities to the Plockhorst shepherd since he also has long flowing hair and a few sheep gathered around him; however, the



FIGURE 5 The Good Shepherd, marble, 3rd c. CE. Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund



FIGURE 6  
Sarcophagus, marble, c. 270 CE,  
Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome

differences are more striking. This is a young man ready for the rough and tumble of husbandry with his sturdy boots, his stout stick that can be used as a weapon, and short, belted tunic. On his back, he has slung his scrip, where he carries his food—bread, cheese, olives—for the long days in the wilderness.

A funerary rather than a domestic context was common, such as the sarcophagus where an *orans* and Good Shepherd flank the central figure of the philosopher reading from a scroll (fig. 6). These figures personified prayer, learning, and the pastoral life that were shared by elite Romans and their Christian counterparts as allegories of a good and moral life. The ensemble is Christianized by Jonah resting under a gourd on the left, suggesting a peaceful rest, and Christ's baptism on the right, reminding the viewer of the Christian's baptism or "first death" to the world. The artistic examples discussed put the Good Shepherd in the role of the pleasures and benefits of the pastoral life that will be extended into the next life. The early Christian shepherd does not inspire a warm, maternal relationship with him but rather refers to the aspirations of the deceased person's life and the afterlife.

Early Christian writers built on the concept of the shepherd motif as a metaphor for kingship; in other words, a hierarchical relationship between shepherd/king and flock/people.<sup>10</sup> The shepherd/flock metaphor was expanded to apply to the clergy and their congregants. The use of the title "Pastor" comes from the Latin, which means shepherd. Pope Gregory the Great (540–604 CE) codified this in his *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, a four-volume work outlining for bishops how to lead their churches and how to live moral lives. In the course of this wider application to describe the role of the clergy, the bucolic connotations of peace and learning give way to theme of a flock threatened

10 See Foster, "Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization" for an overview of the shepherd as king, governors and political authorities.

by the wolves of heresy. According to 1Peter 5: 1–4, the Chief Shepherd has turned over the care of his flock to the earthly shepherds, the bishops of the Church.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

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Although these shepherds/bishops are admonished not to "lord it over" the flock, Aleksander Gomola has described the relationship as it played out in the early Church, "The clergy were shepherds: active, knowledgeable, decision-makers. The laity were sheep and were expected to be obedient in matters of doctrine and discipline" (278). Gomola stresses that the shepherd/flock relationship could also involve coercion should the sheep stray and become the victims of heresy when the wolf menaces the flock. In summary, the pastoral motif could reference the joys of the bucolic life in the present and the hereafter, but it could also act as a reinforcement of the hierarchy where the bishops could instill discipline in the Christian flock with the authority of Jewish scripture. This theme will be revisited centuries later when the wolves of heresy were perceived to be menacing the flock once again.

Despite its popularity in the third and fourth century, the Good Shepherd disappears in the fifth century, with some scholars, viewing the mosaic in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, built between 425 to 450 CE, as the last surviving example (Mauskopf 74–84). His long purple and gold robes and his seated position led some scholars, such as Boniface Ramsey, to argue that the simple agrarian shepherd was just no longer viable for the ascendant Church (Jensen, *Understanding* 34–37). In the Latin Church the shepherd motif would be transferred to the bishops who would be the caretakers of the flock until the return of the Chief Shepherd; however, the pastoral care was one of hierarchy and discipline rather than a more familial loving bond (Verkerk, "Feed My Sheep" 157–179). By the end of the fifth century Jesus as the Pantocrator (all knowing judge), older, darker and more solemn, replaces the youthful shepherd. The Good Shepherd goes dormant for a long period time without any significant representation in the material culture of western Europe.

Early twentieth-century Americans were deeply curious about early Christian art, in part because of their interest in the catacombs where it was erroneously believed the earliest martyrs hid from persecution before being captured and executed in the Colosseum. Early Christian art was keenly studied in books, essays, and sermons that championed the first Christians and their art. One of the most notable institutions dedicated to early Christian material culture is the Bennett Museum of Christian Archaeology, established in 1908 at the Garrett Biblical Institute in Evanston, Illinois (D'Unger 24, Patton 3–32).<sup>11</sup> With the permission of the Italian government, the museum featured reproductions of catacomb paintings that included the Good Shepherd along with casts of inscriptions and sculptures. These recreations and reproductions were well received, but they did not make their way into the Christian home in any significant numbers. With many Good Shepherds from which to choose—from the youthful early Christian to the colorful and confident Champaigne to the lonely solitude of Dobson's shepherd—it is the Plockhorst shepherd that is fully embraced.

The Protestant Reformation was the next period when the Good Shepherd enjoyed a substantial revival, appearing on broadsheets, engravings and woodcuts that were created as propaganda against the Pope and the Catholic Church (Veldman 91–117). As Eva Janssens has discovered, the shepherd enjoyed such popularity among Protestants that the Catholic Church went so far as to ban the image of the Good Shepherd. In the 1570 edition of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Index of Forbidden Books), a list of banned books and images published by the Pope and the Congregation of the Index from 1559 until 1966, included illustrations of the Parable of the Good Shepherd with the words, “Ego sum Pastor bonus” (Rye 66–81). The narrative, found in the Gospel of John, was typically portrayed as taking place on a Dutch farm where thieves enter the stable through its walls and roof to steal the sheep (Sellink 18–19, nr. 146) (fig. 7).<sup>12</sup> In this illustrated version of the popular parable, a rather worried and elderly Christ with a large sheep around his shoulders stands at the door of the dilapidated barn surrounded by sheep and rough-looking peasants who are attempting to break into the ramshackle structure. The rather world-weary features of Christ make him seem remarkably oblivious to the ovine robbery taking place all around him (Janssens 174–175).

11 A brief history of the Garrett Biblical Institute and its merger with The Chicago Training School and the Evangelical Theological Seminary can be accessed at: [www.garrett.edu/about-us/our-history](http://www.garrett.edu/about-us/our-history).

12 The narrative appears in the Gospels of Matthew (18:12–14) and Luke (15:3–7); the account in John (10:1–21) is a lengthier pericope.

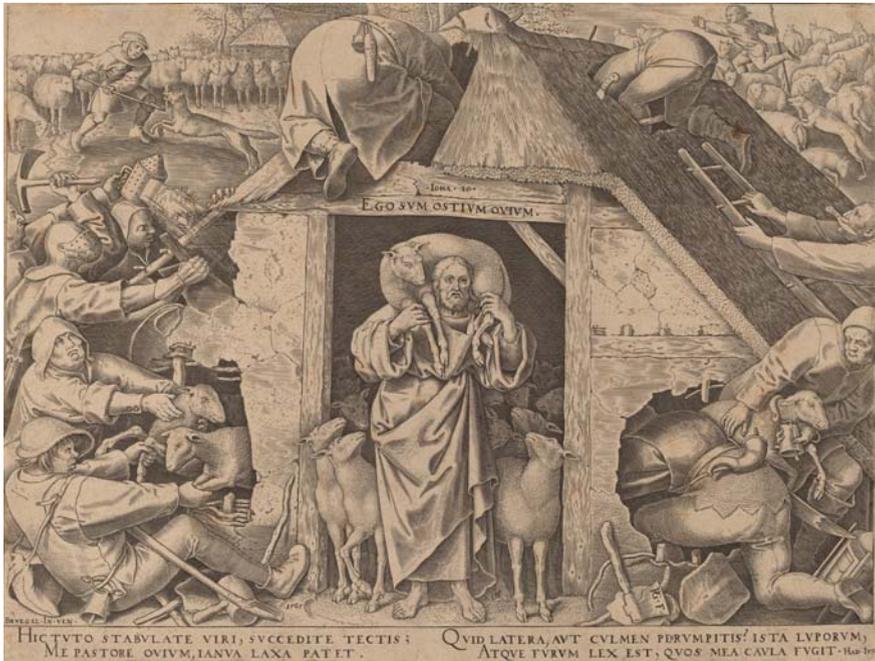


FIGURE 7 Philips Galle, after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Parable of the Good Shepherd*, 1565. Engraving. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Rosenwald Collection

Crude peasants tug at the reluctant sheep in an effort to steal them from the shepherd and the safety of the fold. In the upper left, a shepherd in rustic clothes protects his flock from an attacking wolf, while in the upper right a craven herder runs away leaving his flock in disarray. In sixteenth-century metaphor the Good Shepherd who was willing to lay down his life for his sheep was drawn as a counter-parallel to religious and political figures who were likened to the hired hand who ran away at the first sign of trouble. The wolves were the false teachings and injustices that faced the Protestant faithful and the thieves who entered the stable through holes in the walls and roof represented the abuses, particularly of priests, of the Roman Catholic Church. As prevalent as these were with a Protestant audience, they were designed to disparage the Roman Catholic Church and to teach a moral tale. They may have invoked laughter and derision, but an appeal to the tender mercies of the shepherd and the comfort of the fold they were not.

More closely allied to Plockhorst's Good Shepherd is the painting by Philippe de Champaigne (fig. 8).<sup>13</sup> It can be argued that Plockhorst knew this Good

13 See Dorival, *Philippe de Champaigne*. A version of Philippe's Good Shepherd was painted by his nephew Jean Baptiste de Champaigne (1631–1681).



FIGURE 8  
Philippe de Champaigne, *The Good Shepherd*,  
c. 1650–1660. Oil on canvas. Musée Des Beaux-  
Arts, Tours

BRIDGEMAN IMAGES: DEAGOSTINI LIBRARY

Shepherd, but with significant differences; those differences point to why the Plockhorst shepherd has had such appeal, while the Champaigne shepherd did not. In both paintings, Christ walks on a dirt path with vegetation growing in the lower left of the compositions. To the right, a river flows along this path. These Christs share long, reddish brown hair, haloes of light, long flowing robes and shepherd's crooks gripped in the left hand. There are some significant differences, especially the shift of the sheep slung around the neck in the Champaigne rendering to a lamb cradled in the crook of an arm in the Plockhorst rendering. The long robes and delicate sandals would suggest that this shepherd carries the sheep around his shoulders not as a common practice of herders but rather a reference to the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15, verses 4–6:

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, *he layeth it on his shoulders*, rejoicing.

And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

KJV, *emphasis mine*

Another difference explained by this parable is the single sheep rather than the flock of ninety and nine; this shepherd has found the lost sheep and is returning to his flock. Plockhorst was probably referencing Isaiah 40, verse 11: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." In *Jesus as the Good Shepherd*, Plockhorst has chosen to paint Christ as barefoot rather than in delicate sandals or sturdy boots. The Champaigne Christ and his sheep look directly at the viewer and openly engage the viewer outside the picture plane and into the viewer's space. It is as if the viewer is meeting Christ and the sheep while walking along the path; a few pleasantries may be exchanged about the weather and the success of finding the lost sheep but then the viewer moves on. In other words, the viewer is at eye level with the Jesus figure; a human being greeting another human as equals. The Plockhorst Christ and lamb, on the other hand, are completely self-contained and inward looking. Christ gazes down at the lamb in his arm, and the lamb stares up at Christ in a closed circle of visual exchange. The result is a picture of an intimate relationship between shepherd and lamb. The crowd of sheep press tightly up against the shepherd; either one can step aside to let them pass, or one can join the flock. Plockhorst used this technique in an earlier painting. Carrie Tirado Bramen has made the correlation between the nineteenth-century portrayal of Jesus' "niceness" in religious literature and Plockhorst's *Christ's Blessing the Children* ("The Christology of Niceness," 52; *American Niceness*, 161). She notes that rather than peering up into the heavens, Jesus fully engages with the children and mothers gathered around him. It is a warm domestic scene where loving gazes are shared between Jesus and the cherubic children. In *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* the children are substituted by the lamb and the mothers by the ewes that gather around Jesus. It is also instructive to imagine how the typical owner of a Plockhorst reproduction would experience the Good Shepherd. The reproductions were typically hung in the kitchen, the living room, or the bedroom where the occupant was probably seated or lying down, looking up to the image. This point of view would enhance the effect that the viewer is part of the flock that gazes up at the shepherd.

How did the Plockhorst shepherd come to the attention of the public who were not as privileged as Ms. Eddy or the anonymous donor of the Delavan stained glass who saw the image while touring in Europe? There were several ways to provide access to affordable reproductions outside of the inexpensive prints that were marketed to schools for educational purposes. Economical access to "fine art" was also found in books intended for gift giving and the special feature in the Sunday edition of the local newspaper. In the nineteenth century, Christmas picture books became fashionable for women of refinement

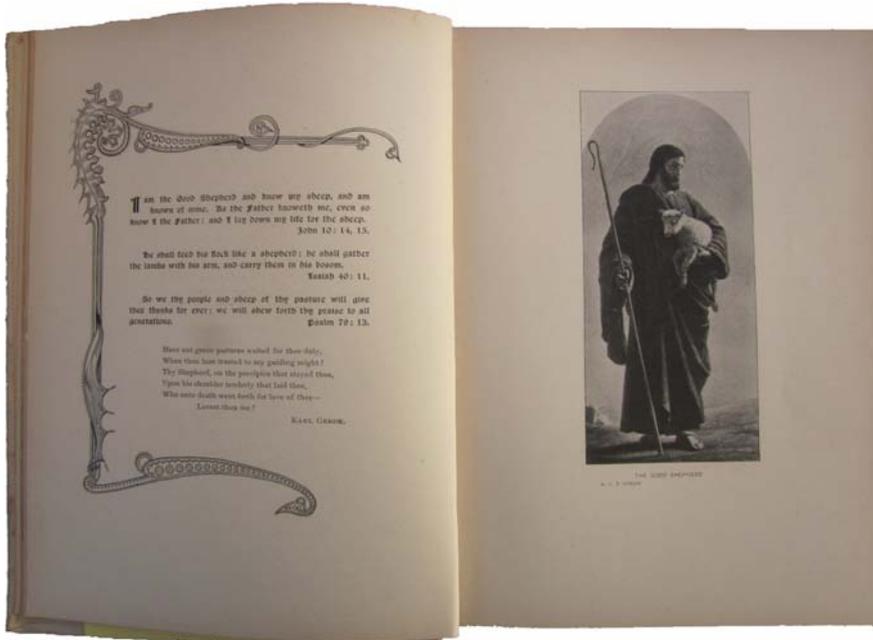


FIGURE 9 William Charles Thomas Dobson, *The Good Shepherd*, 1868. Reproduced in *Scenes from the Life of Christ Pictured in Holy Word and Sacred Art*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1892

and Christian sentiment.<sup>14</sup> *Scenes from the Life of Christ pictured in Holy Word and Sacred Art*, for example, was published in 1892 and was typical of the genre. The double-page spread is beautifully laid out: on the left page, quotations from scripture and contemporary poetry are framed by ornamental flourishes, while on the right page a reproduction of a Great Master work of art, such as Raphael, assures the reader of their cultured tastes. In addition to the Great Masters, black-and-white photographs of landscapes or cityscapes from the Holy Land, such as Bethlehem, are interspersed between the artworks. The photographs of historical places lend an authenticity to the fictions of the engravings of paintings. Plockhorst had several works reproduced in the book, such as his Annunciation to the Shepherds; however, the artist William Charles Thomas Dobson's version of the Good Shepherd was chosen for this publication (fig. 9).<sup>15</sup> A com-

14 See "Christmas Books." Plockhorst was also a prolific illustrator for books of poetry with religious themes: see, for example, John Hale Larry, *The Life of Christ in Poetry and Art*.

15 "The List of Illustrations" indicates Dobson was German. He was born in Hamburg in 1817 after his British father married in Germany. In 1826, the family moved to Britain where Dobson was educated and trained as an artist. Like Plockhorst he was influenced by the



FIGURE 10  
Louise James Bargelt, “The GOOD SHEPHERD from a painting by Plockhorst.” *The Chicago Sunday Tribune* March 31, 1918

parison of Dobson’s and Plockhorst’s shepherds is instructive for divining the appeal of the latter. Of course, one is black and white, and the other is reproduced in color. Both shepherds carry a lamb in their arms and hold a shepherd’s crook. The differences, however, are striking: with a low ground line, an empty sky frames the Dobson shepherd. He gazes downward and seems almost unconcerned about the lamb dangling from his arm. Barely visible in the lower left corner, the flock struggles up a steep hill to keep up with the solitary figure. The overall impression is rather cold and lacking any of the warm appeal of *Jesus as the Good Shepherd*.

The Sunday newspaper with special features on culture often featured an artist or a work of art. The *Chicago Tribune* was first published in 1847 and remains in publication today with a wide circulation. The March 1919 Sunday edition featured Plockhorst’s *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* (fig. 10). Although published in black and white, the art editor describes for the reader the aura of light around Jesus’ head, the blue of the skies, and the warm red of his robes. More typical of the time is her emotional reaction to the painting and the feelings she wants to convey to the reader.

In his arms He bears the wee lamb that was lost. It snuggles close against the warm red of His garb. About Him cluster His sheep, and the line which they form merges into the rolling hills behind Him. One brushes inquir-

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German Nazarene school and embraced the religious content of their paintings. His sentimental religious paintings enjoyed great popularity among the English audience. He died on 30 January 1898. For more information see Dobson’s biography in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. A color reproduction of his Good Shepherd painting can be accessed at: [artuk.org/discover/artworks/search/actor:dobson-william-charles-thomas-18171898](http://artuk.org/discover/artworks/search/actor:dobson-william-charles-thomas-18171898).

ingly near to Him. You can feel the soft, woolly texture of their coats and read the quiet affection in their eyes.

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Although it is a brief description, she has a curious discussion of the sheep. She attributes to them human qualities: the lamb snuggles, the sheep queue in line, one makes inquiries of the shepherd and affection shines from their eyes.<sup>16</sup> One can just as easily substitute the words baby and children for lamb and sheep to arrive at a coherent sentence. The writer has anthropomorphized the sheep. This was echoed in the words of Mary Baker Eddy who identified with the lamb cuddled in the arms of Jesus. Louise Bargelt gives agency to the sheep in a way that would probably surprise a shepherd. This point is worth taking a pause to dwell upon since it underscores how far removed this modern Good Shepherd is from the early Christian Good Shepherd or the Hermes Kriophoros (Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 73–97). The actual practice of husbandry would have been a more common sight in places such as Israel, Jordan, Turkey or Syria, where shepherding was common, especially when sheep were moved from the mountains to lower pastures along the state controlled droving-roads (*calles publicae*). Even modern shepherds sling a sheep over the shoulders as the most efficient way to transport the animal. For millennia, shepherds have worn sturdy clothes and shoes appropriate for the rough work of animal husbandry. I emphasize this to demonstrate how far removed the Plockhorst shepherd is from rural life. His bare feet and his voluminous robes are an impediment to actual shepherding but are far more romantic and accessible than muddy boots and rough tunics.

The newspaper article targeted an urban population far removed from actual animal husbandry with little to no knowledge of ovine behavior. The distance between the urban dweller and actual shepherding opens the door to anthropomorphizing the sheep, where the viewer can identify with the affection the sheep have for the shepherd. The conflation of human and sheep is the theme of an early twentieth-century exegesis on Psalm 23, where the ancient Jewish psalmist is described as the following: “In his own eyes, he is nothing but a poor, silly sheep, hungering for the green and beautiful pastures” (McFayden 15–19). Although there is no possible way to determine if the ancient psalmist thought of himself as a “poor, silly sheep,” the commentator has transferred modern urban thought patterns—the writer lived in Toronto—onto an Iron

16 Interestingly, as a recent restoration has shown, Jan van Eyck used this technique on the mystic Lamb on the Ghent Altarpiece, see: Siegal, “Up Close, There’s More to the Ghent Altarpiece Than the Lamb.”

Age poet. The untethering of sheep and shepherd from actual husbandry practice opened the door to an anthropomorphized way of interpreting the flock and the shepherd in a way not seen in the historical Good Shepherds of early Christianity and the Protestant Reformation.

Plockhorst has given the sheep a prominent role found in neither the early Christian nor the Protestant depictions when the Good Shepherd enjoyed popularity; these strong supporting roles allow the viewer to read into the sheep an emotional and spiritual life drawn from their own experience. The sheep are no longer victims of robbery or wolves—the one that was lost and now is found—nor entirely left out of the scene, nor even lowly animals struggling to keep up with the shepherd; they are now central to the theme of the painting. One notable aspect of this flock is the inclusion of a black sheep. To my knowledge, this is the first time a black sheep is included with the Good Shepherd, suggesting that the addition by Plockhorst is noteworthy. Although not prominent, the black sheep pokes her head up on the left side of the painting. There is little consensus about the origin of the “black sheep” trope, but it is suggested that black wool, the result of recessive genes, was less valuable than white wool since it cannot be easily dyed (Ammer 25). Whatever its origins, the connotations are typically negative: from a dysentery epidemic in children, to bad politicians, “fallen” women and their illegitimate children (the black lamb of the black sheep), to severely damaged newborns expected to die (Kershaw and Breen 645–646; Bannerjee 10–13; Frost 293–322; Redmond 9–13). The black sheep is an outcast, an outlier, a person who is not in the “in-group,” the uncle no one speaks about in the family. Family rejection of the black sheep can be particularly hurtful due to long shared histories (Hall 491–512; Fitness 263–276). The black sheep often suffers social isolation or rejection, often with negative tolls on the mind and body (Slavich, et al. 39–45). The outcast can experience self-referential feelings of “I am unwanted,” or “Other people don’t like me,” or “My family doesn’t want me.” Often the black sheep in the family is conflated with the Prodigal Son, who returns, broken and repentant, to his father’s house after learning the harsh realities of living in a cold and cruel world. In the idyllic pastures of Plockhorst’s shepherd, even the black sheep—the unwanted and unloved—is fully integrated back into the flock of sheep. She has reconnected to the flock and the protection of the shepherd.

As I have shown from my comparisons of Good Shepherds, there are some conclusions to be drawn. The painting is a sharp break from previous depictions in the romantic and warm familial grouping of shepherd and sheep. Plockhorst’s painting eschews the didactic, moralizing, and critical tones of the Protestant Parable Shepherd. The viewer can apply any of the myriad biblical verses or even poems that speak to them personally. The painting is open-

ended enough, free from specific references such as inscriptions or bible verses, to let the viewer interpret at will.

Secondly, the painting portrays a shepherd far removed from his agrarian roots, unlike the early Christian shepherd who personified the benefits of country life. By decoupling the shepherd from actual herding practice, Jesus can now cradle the lamb and gaze down with the eyes of love as a mother would to her child. The shepherd is not merely a reference to the joys of country living, but the viewer can become the lamb or the rehabilitated black sheep or the adoring ewe that sees Jesus caring for her child.<sup>17</sup> In a 2010 response to a blog that collected Good Shepherd images, an anonymous writer commented: "I've never ever seen anything more beautiful than this ... Truly ... when I seeing these pics ... I felt his arms around me ... Just the way he is holding the sheep close to his heart ... Oh ... Lord cant say how much I adore THEE ... I love u my KING!"<sup>18</sup> The key words here are "I felt his arms around me" that indicate the anonymous viewer has become the lamb cradled against Jesus' bosom where they find connection and love. The writer expresses in even more emphatic words the emotions generated in Mary Baker Eddy when she gazed upon the Plockhorst shepherd. This point is worth stressing since finding attachment is one of the single most imperatives of the human brain (Watt 191–221). John Bowlby developed in the late 1950s what today is the generally recognized idea that maternal connection was crucial to a child's healthy development and later adult ability to make meaningful social connections. Mental health specialists have expanded on his early ideas: "Humans, like other animal species, have an innate, evolutionarily driven, biological predisposition for social interaction. Infants actively and instinctively seek and maintain their caregiver's proximity and care" (Maltese et al. 1250).<sup>19</sup> Those children and adults experiencing pain from social disconnection—our black sheep—will often use mementos, images, or photos as reminders of an absence of a loved one. Additionally, those socially disconnected are often more likely to anthropomorphize animals, particularly pets, and assign human traits of comfort and acceptance (Epley et al. 864–88; King et al. 10–31). Although Plockhorst created his painting over 60 years before Bowlby's attachment theory was beginning to be for-

17 Carolyn Arends describes a childhood memory of becoming a part of the painting: "The first was a painting on my bedroom wall, Bernhard Plockhorst's *Jesus Blessing the Children*. After bedtime prayers, I would drift off imagining I was one of those children in Jesus' embrace" (64).

18 Anonymous contributor on "Are We There Yet?" <http://arewethereyet-davisfarmmom.blogspot.com/2010/04/good-shepherd-sunday.html>.

19 Bowlby began his work in the late 1950s; see, Jeremy Holmes for an accessible introduction to the theories of Bowlby and subsequent theories based on his work.

mulated, *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* gives visual expression to the notion of attachment leading to care and love so desperately needed in a rocky, thorny wilderness.

In conclusion, I would like to end with a quotation from Boniface Ramsey, who inadvertently wrote one of the best summations of the Plockhorst Good Shepherd. Ramsey argued that the early Christian Good Shepherd disappeared because he was not dogmatic or imperial enough for the newly emergent and transcendent Church and describes the Good Shepherd in terms not unlike the classicist Farnell: "The Good Shepherd was fundamentally an ethical figure, a symbol of love or humanitas, and also a symbol of salvation ... [He] is the protector and guardian of his sheep, of the 'little flock' which is given into his care and which must not fall into the hostile hands of the world" (376). Although Ramsey was discussing the early Christian Good Shepherd type as seen in the Cleveland example, I believe his words capture the essence of the appeal of Plockhorst's *Jesus as the Good Shepherd*. The viewer can become childlike, part of the "little flock," that finds a home, a connection, within the arms of the shepherd.

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