

HIERONYMUS BOSCH
PAINTER OF THE SPIRIT

PAKI SMITH

1987



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"Mankind is perverse, and no one has understanding.

Among all who are, who knows anything ?

Whether they do evil or good, no one has

knowledge "

from A Babylonian Penitential Psalm

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

On starting this thesis I had no real perception of what reason I had for studying Hieronymus Bosch. My only basic thoughts were the feeling that what he was depicting in his work was informed by an intelligent and devout attitude to Christ. Initially this was only a feeling, and on reading the variety of different criticisms on Bosch it became clear that there were a number of radically opposed opinions on the matter. So in a sense, the thesis started as a questioning of this feeling - was Bosch a devout, true Christian? And if so, what reasons or facts were there to substantiate this belief?

Some authors argues that Bosch was a Rosicrucian, or an Adamite, a weird eccentric, mad and a heretic. It was also stated that it was possible that Bosch was taking hallucinatory drugs, leading to his devil cluttered images. Others have argued that he was a Catholic Christian. There are basfs for all the former, but not in fact, but rather in speculation. I side with those who argue that he is a Christian in all his aspects. However, the fact that he may be Christian in all truth, does not mean that the work is therefore limited. This is obviously not the case.

There is a tendency to pigeon-hole something in order to put it to one side, therefore "understanding" it. Once we say "Bosch was a Christian" or "Bosch was a Rosicrucian" the temptation is to believe one understands the true nature of his art.

Instead, it would be better to treat "Bosch as a Catholic" or "a Rosicrucian" as a key to answers concerning his work, rather than the end of all questions and answers.

This is the way I have tried to treat the initial feeling of devotion, that emanated from such works as "The Temptations of St. Anthony"

However, for all this, it would be impossible to study Bosch in a short work such as this, without over-simplifying the nature of the man and his work. The very lack of knowledge about Bosch, or his personal life and thoughts, tends to make one simplify aspects immediately with ease. We have few keys to the rich images in his paintings, so inevitably it is only sometimes possible to delve into a somewhat speculative account of a detail. There is thus much left out which, of necessity, must remain unaccountable.

The basis of this thesis, therefore, is on the thought that Bosch is a Christian painter, revealing his spiritual understanding of Christ's mystic way in his work.

The first three chapters of the thesis deal with Bosch's life, as far as we know it, his beliefs and the time and milieu of which he was part. Chapter four then deals with an accusation of heresy put forward by an author, William Fraenger.

Part two follows this, with Bosch's very strong concern for the saints in his work. Most particularly it deals with Bosch's connection with St. Anthony of Egypt. The main section of part two deals with one of Bosch's paintings of "The Temptations of St. Anthony".

PART ONE

PART 1

CHAPTER 1

The Life of Bosch,
The Brotherhood of Our Lady and
the "Devotio Moderna"

"Happy the man who is instructed by Truth itself,
not by signs and passing words, but as It is in Itself "

Thomas Á Kempis
The Imitation of Christ
on the Teaching of Truth

"It was because you caught glimpses of Heaven in the
earthly landscape. The success of your painting was
that it enabled others to see glimpses too
you loved paint only as a means of telling about
(God) light"

C.S. Lewis The Great Divorce p.74

"The Church is only perfectly pure under one aspect ;
when considered as a guardian of the sacraments.
What is perfect is not the Church ; it is the body
and blood of Christ upon the altars."

Simone Weil Gateway to God p.123

Very little can be said about the factual day to day life of
Hieronymus Bosch. Born the son of Anthonius Van Aken (died
c.1478), Bosch's name first appears in the municipal records of the
town of 's Hertogenbosch, a Dutch city not far from the present day
Belgian border. He is mentioned along with the names of two brothers
and a sister in 1474. One of his brothers is known to be a
painter also. In the early 1480's he was married to a lady, the
daughter of a rich pharmaceutical family. Her wealth may have
supported the couple comfortably through their lives. It is
supposed that Bosch was born sometime in the early 1450's.

's Hertogenbosch, Bosch's hometown, was a prosperous city.

It was one of the four largest cities in Brabant, which were part of the Duchy of Burgundy. The city was an important commercial centre, situated in an agricultural area, and had an important cloth industry which contributed to its trade connections with the rest of Europe and Italy in the south.

These trade connections and the progressive life of commercial success must have meant there were cultural ties with the rest of Europe. There were books, works of art, passing to and fro into such a city. However, 's Hertogenbosch did not have a court life like Brussels to the south, nor did it possess a university like Louvain. It was not a major ecclesiastical centre like the other cities of Brabant. Life was understandably, judging from the commercial and mercantile prosperity, predominantly a middle class one. This did not mean that there was not a thriving cultural life. 's Hertogenbosch had a famous Latin school, and by the fifteenth century had no less than five chambers of rhetoric, literary associations which presented dramatic and poetic performances on many public occasions.

In 1486-87 Hieronymus Bosch's name appears in the membership lists of the Brotherhood of Our Lady. The Brotherhood was founded in the early thirteen hundreds. It comprised both laity and religious, male and female. It was just one of the small sections of religious life that flourished in Brabant in the late fifteenth century.

As a religious centre, 's Hertogenbosch seems to have been flourishing. A number of monasteries and convents were situated in and around the city. One such group of worshippers were the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life. This Order had two houses in the centre of the city. Their aim was to return to a simpler and more personal form of religion. This attitude taken by both the Brethren of the Common Life and the Brotherhood of Our Lady was not an isolated one.

By Fifteen Hundred the established Church, headed by the Papacy in Rome, was becoming better known for its immorality, materialism and impiety than for its Holiness. Examples of this can be seen in the History of the Burgundian Netherlands at this time. The Church Hierarchy in this area have a very mixed record. There are a number of cases where political intrigues involved Bishops. In 1456, for example, Philip the Good wished to place his nephew, Louis de Bourbon in the Seat of Chapter of St. Lambert's in Liege, thereby making him a Bishop. This act led to a clash with the people at Liege. This clearly shows one type of politicising that was attached to the Church authorities at the time. ²

On a more down to earth level of Church life, "St. John's Hospital at Bruges experienced great difficulties with its pastors due to negligence, greed and drunkenness" ³

"The persistent absenteeism, the wave of immorality and the pursuit of material gain inevitably provoked strong reaction" ⁴

The reactions happened in a number of ways. First there was an increase in devotional and theological literature and an increasing interest in Mysticism. The most noted exponent of this return to devotional practice was the "Devotio Moderna". ⁵

The "Devotio Moderna" emphasized the practice of asceticism. It was not an order, but rather it was a concerted effort on the part of many individuals to pass on a message by example and practice, preaching that spiritual revival must come through the restoration of moral values and improved discipline in the churches and monasteries. The main instigator of the "Devotio Moderna" was Gerard Groote, born in 1340. Having spent some years in constant prayer, study and self discipline, Groote set out to evangelise around the Netherlands. "Such was the appeal of this brilliant Christian orator that thousands were moved to amend their lives " ⁶ His mission was so successful that he aroused the anger and jealousy of the clergy. He was thus suspended from preaching. However, a good many lay and religious people gathered around him and a society was formed, living under a Rule of poverty, Chastity and Obedience. This was the main basis for the "Devotio Moderna". Groote died in 1384, a victim of the fearful plague.

The means of passing on the messages of the "Devotio" were letters, treatises, sermons and confessional books. By the end of the fifteenth century the "Devotio Moderna" was epitomised by the "Imitation of Christ" of Thomas A. Kempis.

This book contains a series of practical, short and to the point notes on most aspects of the spiritual life that a Christian may encounter. The "Imitation" reveals a great deal about the forms of contemporary piety in the late middle ages - it is certainly the most famous book of its kind. Essentially the various treatises contained in it, concern the inner life, a guide for the Christian "who wished to accompany Christ through his own mystical exercises" ⁷

The names of the separate passages in the book are revealing :
 "Counsels useful for the Spiritual Life", "On inward consolation"
 or "On the Inner Life". In fact the book contains very little
 about the Church and its ministrations apart from a serious
 emphasis on the Eucharist.

"The Imitation of Christ" became popular as a "Guide to Paradise"
 for good Christians living in the world.⁸

The existence of printing very much promoted the distribution of
 the "Imitation" and other similar literature. It was translated
 into Dutch in 1428.

The other main reaction to the state of the Church was an increase
 in devotional practices among the general populace. Where the
 "Devotio Moderna" catered for the religious orders, and the pious
 intelligensia, the general populace returned to more grass roots
 devotion - that of Mass, the growth of charities, pilgrimages and
 devotion to the Holy Virgin.⁹

The Brotherhood of Our Lady was part of all this revival. The
 devotions of this group centred around a miracle-working image
 of the Virgin. The image was enshrined in the Cathedral of St. John
 in 's Hertogenbosch, a large Gothic edifice in the centre of the city.
 The Brotherhood of Our Lady kept a chapel in the Cathedral.

The Brotherhood, according to Walter Gibson, was large and wealthy
 "attracting members from all over the northern Netherlands and
 Westphalia." ¹⁰

The members engaged "singers, organists and composers to supply music for their daily masses and solemn feasts".¹¹

They also commissioned art works to embellish their chapel and in 1478 they constructed a new and larger chapel in the Cathedral.

It is interesting to note that the architect of this chapel,

Alaat du Hameel, later engraved some Boschian designs.¹²

It seems Bosch's family were very attracted to the Brotherhood.

They were employed by them on a number of occasions, often to gild and polychrome the wooden statues carried in the numerous annual processions. It may have been that Bosch's father acted as artistic advisor to the Brotherhood. "In 1476(Bosch's father) and his sons were present when the Deans of the Brotherhood discussed the commission of a large wooden altarpiece, completed in 1477 for their chapel"¹³

Bosch certainly recieved commissions from the Brotherhood. In 1493-94 for example, it is recorded that he made several designs for a stained glass window in the Chapel. In 1511-12 he received a commission from them for a crucifix. Seemingly he recieved very little payment for these and other works and one would judge that he did them as a benovolent gesture.¹⁴

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Was Bosch influenced by the ideas and attitudes of the "Devotio Moderna" ?

We have so little historical evidence of his life, no personal records of the artist, nor of his friends or relatives that we cannot say anything with certainty. However, judging by his active attachment to the Brotherhood of Our Lady, and also the depth of understanding, insight and meaning within his painting, he was far from ignorant of spiritual and mystical ideas. The fact that his wife was the daughter of a pharmacist may provide strong evidence given by some scholars concerning alchemical references in Bosch's work. He must have been well read, and very aware of the theological and spiritual ideas forefronted by the "Devotio Moderna". The attitude of the "Devotio Moderna" to art is hard to divine.

Geert Groote wrote a pamphlet "Contra turrim Fralectensum" against the building of the tower of Utrecht Cathedral. However, his protest was not aimed at the art, but rather at the vanity, pride and financial burden of erecting such a monument.

Thomas A. Kempis never actually made direct comments concerning art, its value or function. However, "Its practice was not neglected in the convents influenced by the Devotio Moderna"

In a sermon delivered at Haarem and Leyden in 1451, Nicholas of Cues made it clear that he welcomed works of art as a prop for that inner devotion, that imitative path which was the Devotio Moderna.

He commissioned subsequently an altarpiece devoted to the Passion of Christ for the Hospital of St. Nicholas at Bern Kastelcues.

This must be close to the attitude taken by Bosch and his fellow members of the Brotherhood of Our Lady to art.

CHAPTER 2

The Artistic Influences and
Origin of Symbolism in Bosch's work.

"It is the spirit that gives life,
The flesh has nothing to offer.
The words I have spoken to you are spirit
and they are life "

John 6 : 63

"Folk lore, especially when properly interpreted,
is found to contain a wealth of spirituality "

Simone Weil Gateway to God p.135

We have looked at one side of influence that may have affected Bosch, in his spiritual concerns. What were the artistic influences on him ?

The subjective qualities of Bosch, that of his ideas and imagery, often concern the viewer at the expense of the formal qualities. "The invention is admired, but little attention is paid to the manner of drawing and painting" ¹

Bosch is unusual, idiosyncratic and an original artist in the context of late middle ages Northern Europe. He belongs to the late Middle ages. His contemporaries in the Netherlands, from Pl 1,2 Hugo van der Goes to Hans Memling, are entirely different in their attitudes. Where these painters are directly related to the Northern Renaissance, Bosch is much more orientated to the Middle ages.

Pl.3 The very real substance of human form in a Rogier Van der Weyden piece, for example "The Descent from the Cross" contrasts sharply Pl 4,8 with the etherial human forms in scenes from "The Garden of Earthly Delights". This is not to say Bosch was not interested in form. In fact the opposite is true. But Bosch's form and composition are used in order to emulate the ideas and messages which to him seem very important. The form and composition in the images, coupled with the spiritual ideas and beliefs of the painter form an entity of his work.

Idea and image work together, are conceived together, to make a whole - the basic components of a good piece of art. When we study the ideas and beliefs of Bosch in his work, one cannot separate the way in which he handled these ideas in pictorial form from the ideas themselves. The form informs the idea and vice versa.



1. Hugo Van des Goes Portinari Altarpiece 1475-76
Oil on panel 8'3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 9'10 $\frac{5}{8}$ "
Uffizi, Florence



2. Hans Memling or Memlinc Altarpiece of the Virgin and Saints 1479
Oil on panel Bruges
67 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 67 $\frac{3}{4}$ " centre, 67 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ " each wing



3. Rogier van der Weyden The Descent from the Cross 1435-38
7'2 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 8'7 $\frac{1}{8}$ " Prado, Madrid



4.

Hieronymus Bosch

The Ethereal Figures from
The Garden of Earthly Delights

Centre panel

When Bosch used the human figure, its weight and individual details seem to be unimportant to him. He never makes great attempts to situate them in real earthly space. The figure has a value rather like a word. They are used as expressive contours, notes of music and a "link in the narrative chain".²

The people in the landscapes stand in front of the land, rather than within it. This can be seen clearly in the left wing of Pl 5 "the Haywain" triptych. Adam and Eve are not in the landscape, they are rather placed on it. However, this is enough for Bosch to describe to us in very clear terms, what is going on in the painting. Like many visionary artists, Bosch uses whatever he can to describe the idea that he wishes to offer.

His way of depicting various images on the picture plane, by division and often dual perspective, is something that reminds Pl 6 one instantly of medieval illuminated manuscripts. Bosch totally ignores the Renaissance use of perspective. We only have to consider Durer's detailed drawings where he considers perspective, to see that it was well known in the Netherlands in early fifteen hundred. Therefore, it may have been that Bosch was more interested in the book of Hours that flourished a century before, than in the contemporary concerns of the Renaissance.

Bosch may have been an eccentric, an oddity in Europe, he may have chosen to ignore the Renaissance concerns - but I think it would be more correct to say that he wished to describe his ideas and beliefs in the clearest possible way, that was both a balance between artistic mastery and intellectual and spiritual understanding.

5. Hieronymus Bosch

The Haywain

Left wing



6. Master of the House of Catherine of Cleves Saint Ambrose
from the Book of House of Catherine of Cleves 1434-40
Pierpoint Morgan Library N.Y.

He most likely chose to paint as he did because he wished to express a spiritual reality. He employed the simplest recognisable forms (for example, the ethereal human figures) to depict, like a sheet of music, his spiritual beliefs.

While his Netherlandish companions and his contemporaries in Italy, Michaelangelo for example, were concerned with expressing spiritual subjects in human earthly terms, reaching fantastic results in expressing material reality, Bosch chose to depict the spiritual in its own landscape, its own reality -

"The figures (Bosch's) lack the leaden heaviness with which the fifteenth-century Netherlanders weighed them down by intensive study of nature and careful modelling. A rapid smooth-flowing

Pl 4 line gives an etherial quality to his work."

The very linear quality of his work leads one to connect the work with literary sources. This is especially true of Bosch.

In Chapter 1, it was mentioned that there were 5 chambers of rhetoric in 's Hertogenbosch. Each year, the character of these chambers was exemplified in the dramatic and poetic performances that they put on, on regular occasions. One famous drama of this kind was "Den Spiegel der Selicheyt Van Elkerlyke" (The Mirror of S. Van Elkerlyke) This type of morality play, playing on the fooleries and vanities of man would have been very Boschian in spirit.

The literary content of his work is exemplified by the extensive
Pl 7 use of symbolism. In the painting "The Haywain", the very use of hay as a central theme to describe materialism echoes a traditional and contemporary song that went :

"In the end, it is all hay" 4



7. Hieronymus Bosch

The Haywain

Oil on panel

Centre panel $53\frac{1}{8} \times 39\frac{3}{4}$ " Prado, Madrid

On top of this hay cart is a devil and he is blue. The traditional colour of deceit is blue. This particular devil is deceitfully leading the sinners on the hay cart of worldliness and materialism to Hell.

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Dirk Bax, a Dutch author, looked carefully at "The Garden of Earthly Delights" in the light of old Dutch literature.

This led him "to identify many of the forms in the central panel - fruit, animals, the exotic mineral structures in the background - as erotic symbols inspired by the popular songs, sayings and slang expressions of Bosch's time".

The fruits nibbled and held by the lovers in the garden "serve as metaphors of the sexual organs : the fish which appears twice in the foreground occur as phallic symbols in old Netherlandish proverbs".



8. Hieronymus Bosch

The Garden of Earthly Delights

c 1510-15

Oil on panel

Prado, Madrid

86 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 76 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, centre, 86 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches each wing

Pl 9 The large hollow fruits and peelings in which people are seen seems to be a play on the Dutch medieval word "schel" or "schil" which signifies both the "rind" of a fruit and the word "quarrel" or "controversy". Thus to be in a "schel" was to engage in a struggle with an opponent, and this included the more pleasant strife of love. Furthermore, the very idea of an empty rind seems to spell out worthlessness. Also there cannot be a more appropriate symbol of a worldly sin considering that it was a fruit that led to the fall of mankind. Walter Gibson goes on to say that if he were to treat all Bax's findings it would "result in an encyclopaedia of Netherlandish folklore".⁶ This use of Dutch and German folklore and proverbs by Bosch is very important and opens up a whole area of interpretation for his work.

On a more intellectual level, he certainly used many of the popular and famous literary and poetical spiritual works that were
Pl 26 available at the time. Later, when considering the "Temptations of St. Anthony" Triptych from Lisbon, we can see his use of the "Golden Legend" of Jacob de Vorasine. Some of the images he uses are almost directly lifted from his work. For example, on the left hand panel Anthony is carried by his companions, having been beaten senseless by demons in one of their assaults.

In 1494, Sebastian Brant published the first edition of his "Ships of Fools". This work was a series of poems, satirising humanities failings and foibles.

Brant complained :

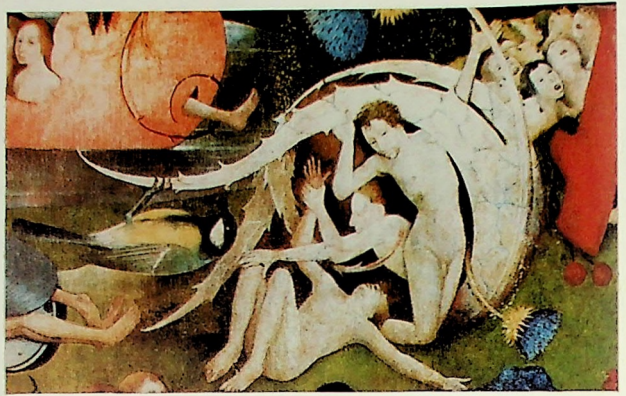
"The whole world lives in daresome night,
in blinded sinfullness persisting
while every street sees fools existing " 7

Brant was expressing a dim view of mankind. This series of poems has a similar feel to Bosch's own work. The idea of "The Ship of Fools" was a favourite theme in the Middle Ages. Bosch uses it
Pl 10 openly and harshly in his "Ships of Fools" painting.

Pl 11 Bosch's use of the circular design in "The Seven Deadly Sins" , which makes the eye of God that mirrors what it sees, may have come from, or was influenced by the "Vision of God" written in 1453 by the German theologian, Nicholas of Cues, who as mentioned before, was attached to the "Devotio Moderna". In this work, Nicholas "specifically likens the Divine Eye to a great mirror reflecting all creation" an imposing image which moves him to explain :

"O how marvellous is thy glance, my God ...
how fair and lovely it is unto all that love Thee !
How dread it is unto all them that have abandoned Thee ..." 8

One idea of the Mirror of God is evident in another literary work, an allegorical poem by Guillaume de Deguilleville entitled "The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man ". In this work, the pilgrim is shown the mirror of conscience. He sees then his own foul and horrible spirit, in the hope that he may be better from now on. Sebastian Brant thought of his "Ship of Fools" as a mirror also, "where each his counterfeit may see" 9



9. Hieronymus Bosch

Lovers in erotic fruits

Detail from the centre panel

The Garden of Earthly Delights

REFERENCE
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10. Hieronymus Bosch

The Ship of Fools

Oil on panel

21 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

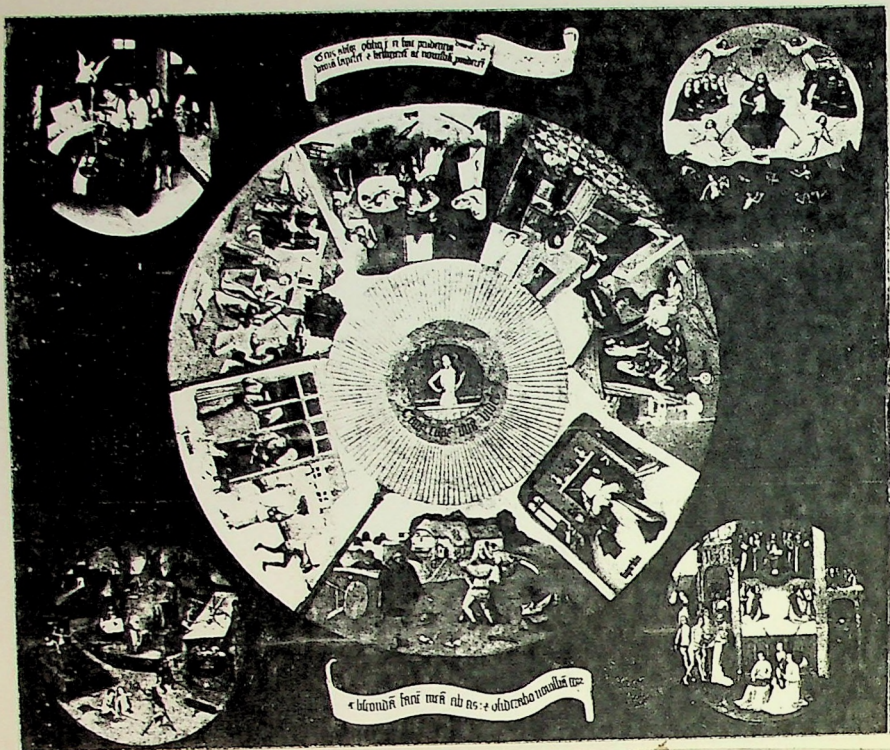
The Louvre, Paris

The literary influences and the way that Bosch uses literal sources so cleverly is easily seen. The relatively few references that Bosch shows to other artists are very small, however.

He does refer to Geertgen Tot Sint Jans who lived some years before Bosch in the mid-fifteenth century, but other than these there are no references to any art from the south, from Italy. It can be assumed therefore that Bosch did not travel, or certainly that if he did, he was not influenced or interested in what was going on in the Renaissance world.

- There is a painting by Geertgen Tot Sint Jans entitled "The
- Pl 12 Burning of the Bones of St. John the Baptist". There is a figure in the bottom left of this picture who is pointing at the fire. This figure is so similar to Bosch's depiction of a figure in the
- Pl 13 "Crowning of Thorns" from the National Gallery in London, Bosch has copied it almost literally from Geertgen's piece. Albert Chatelet
- Pl 14 also postulates that the "St. John the Baptist" by Bosch in the Prado, depends on the Haarlem artists depiction of St. John the Baptist.¹⁰ The theme is identical. Foliage in the picture by Bosch, which he rarely uses, is similar to Geertgen.

Other than these concrete comparisons, there is little evidence of individual artists as strong influences on Bosch. The most striking influences are shown in his general attitudes, whether to the "Devotio Moderna" manuscript illumination or the various literary works with which it is fairly certain he was familiar.



11. Hieronymus Bosch

The Seven Deadly Sins and the Last Four Things

Oil on panel

47½ x 59"

Prado, Madrid



12. Geertgen Ton Sint Jans

Burning of the Bones of St. John the Baptist

1484

Oil on panel

67½ x 54½"

Vienna



13. Hieronymus Bosch

The Crowning with Thorns

Oil on panel

27 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

National Gallery, London



14. Hieronymus Bosch

St. John The Baptist

Oil on panel

19 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Madrid

CHAPTER 3

The "Ars Moriendi" and

"The Last Judgement"

"Very soon the end of your life will be at hand
 consider therefore the state of your soul. Today a
 man is here ; tomorrow he is gone had you a
 good conscience, death would hold no terrors for you ;
 even so it were better to avoid sin than to escape death"

Thomas Á. Kempis The Imitation of Christ
 A Meditation on Death

"O wretched and foolish sinner, who trembles before the
 anger of man, how will you answer to God, who knows all
 your wickedness ? Why do you not prepare yourself
 against the Day of Judgement, when no advocate can defend
 or excuse you, but each man will be hard put to answer
 for himself "

Thomas Á. Kempis The Imitation of Christ
 on Judgement, and the Punishment of Sinners

"Hell is a state of mind - and every state of mind, left to
 itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon
 of its own mind - is to the end - Hell. But Heaven is not a
 state of mind. Heaven is Reality itself".

C.S. Lewis The Great Divorce p. 63

Another influence that would have been a major concern for anyone living in the fifteenth century was the prevailing attitude towards Death. Certainly no one has described death and the afterlife in painting with such fervour and understanding as Hieronymus Bosch.

The subject was one of the most frequently talked about, questioned and depicted by innumerable artists, writers and craftsmen. There survive little figurines or charms depicting lovers embracing. When you reverse these figures you will find rotting skeletons - reminding the owner of the charm that material life will certainly end. Death is the only real certainty in a man's life.

There are also numerous depictions of decaying corpses dancing, meeting the living, embracing them or lying on the tops of tombs. A phrase often attached to corpses in the fifteenth century reads :

"I was as you are now, you will be as I am " ¹

Thomas A. Kempis attitude to Death in "The Imitation of Christ" is one of preparation, for the continual existence of the soul in God's service : "You would not hanker after a pleasant time in this life, but rather be glad to suffer for God's sake. ... is not all labour to be endured for the sake of eternal life ? " ²



16. French. Late fifteenth century
Ivory Paris, Louvre

p1 17 Bosch painted the "Death of the Miser" to show his attitude to death. The painting describes the battle between Heaven and Hell at the death bed of a man who is described as a miser. Each antagonist in the age-old struggle between good and evil plan to take possession of the soul of the dead man.

At this time there was a very popular book of woodcuts called the "Ars Moriendi" or "the Craft of Dying". This handbook was printed very many times in Germany and the Netherlands. The "Ars Moriendi" shows how the dying man is "exposed to a series of temptations by the demons clustered around his bed" ³ During these varied temptations an angel consoles and strengthens him in his final moments. Ultimately the good side wins and the dead man's soul is carried to Heaven while "the devils howl in despair below". ⁴



17. Hieronymus Bosch

Death of the Miser

c1500

Oil on panel

36½ x 12¼"

Washington D.C.

Bosch takes this a step further in "The Death of the Miser". We can see that the outcome between good and evil is far from clear. In fact the hint that we are shown about the soul of the dying miser makes it seem that he is unwilling to give up his vice, in order to win Heaven. At the foot of the bed is an open money chest. An old man, the miser himself, puts money into a bag held by a little devil. This is the miser hoarding his money. His interest in the rosary hanging about his waist is lacking. Devils inhabit this panel, under the chest at the window sill, beside the bed. An angel tries to turn the dying man's eyes and sight to the Divine light and Crucifix in the window at the top left of the picture. This is in vain. Rather, the miser looks to the spectre of death coming through the door, and yet he reaches for the bag of gold that is handed to him by a demon who appears beside his bed.

Where the "Ars Moriendi" draws our attention to the hope of victory of good over evil, even the idea that come what may one will enter Heaven, Bosch turns the tables on this attitude. He draws our attention to the fact that while death is important, the horror is contained in the firm conviction that following the death of the body, the soul continues to exist, perhaps, depending on the dead man's choice, doomed to eternal suffering in Hell.

This attitude and occupation with Death is further exemplified by the subject of the "Last Judgement".

In Christian doctrine the final act in the history of mankind, which began with the fall, will be the "Day of Judgement".

On this day, "Time" will literally have run out and eternity will begin. Mankind will have had every chance, every decision in which to turn from his sin to God. His freewill will have run its course and now his conduct will reap its wages - whether to exist in eternal paradise, perfection with God, or eternal suffering in Hell.

This is substantiated by Jesus in the Gospel of St. Matthew -
 "Come you whom my Father has blessed, take your heritage the Kingdom has prepared for you, since the foundation of the world"
 and

"Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"

Matthew 25 : 34, 41

In the fourteen hundreds the sense of impending doom was particularly acute. There was a general feeling that the sins of men were so bad, so evil, that the Day of Judgement must surely be close at hand. Writers and artists represented the world on the edge of the final age that was prophesied in the Revelation of St. John. People were prepared to accept that plagues, famines, floods and countless disasters associated with Divine Wrath may soon have been visited upon them.

The times were watched eagerly for signs, some watched political events for the appearance of the antichrist. In 1515 Albrecht Dürer recorded a dream which he had. In this dream a huge column of water came crashing to earth in what he interpreted as the final catastrophe ⁵

Leonardo da Vinci in Italy made drawings of cities being swept away by floods - they were drawn with a scientific detachment. There is an abundance of literature and art works that dealt with the apocalyptic nature of the time. Thus people considered what the spiritual life would be like post death. Dante's "Divine Comedy" is a famous example of the afterlife experience of Hell, purgatory and Heaven, although this was written nearly two centuries before. In Northern Europe, an anonymous work, "The Vision of Tundale" is a famous record of the description given by the resurrected Lazarus of Purgatory. A Dutch translation of the "Vision of Tundale" was published in 1484 in 's Hertogenbosch.

The unending tormentsof the doomed were described in lurid details, on countless books and sermons while meditations on the last Judgement and Hell played an important part in various spiritual exercises, including those of the "Devotio Moderna" ⁷

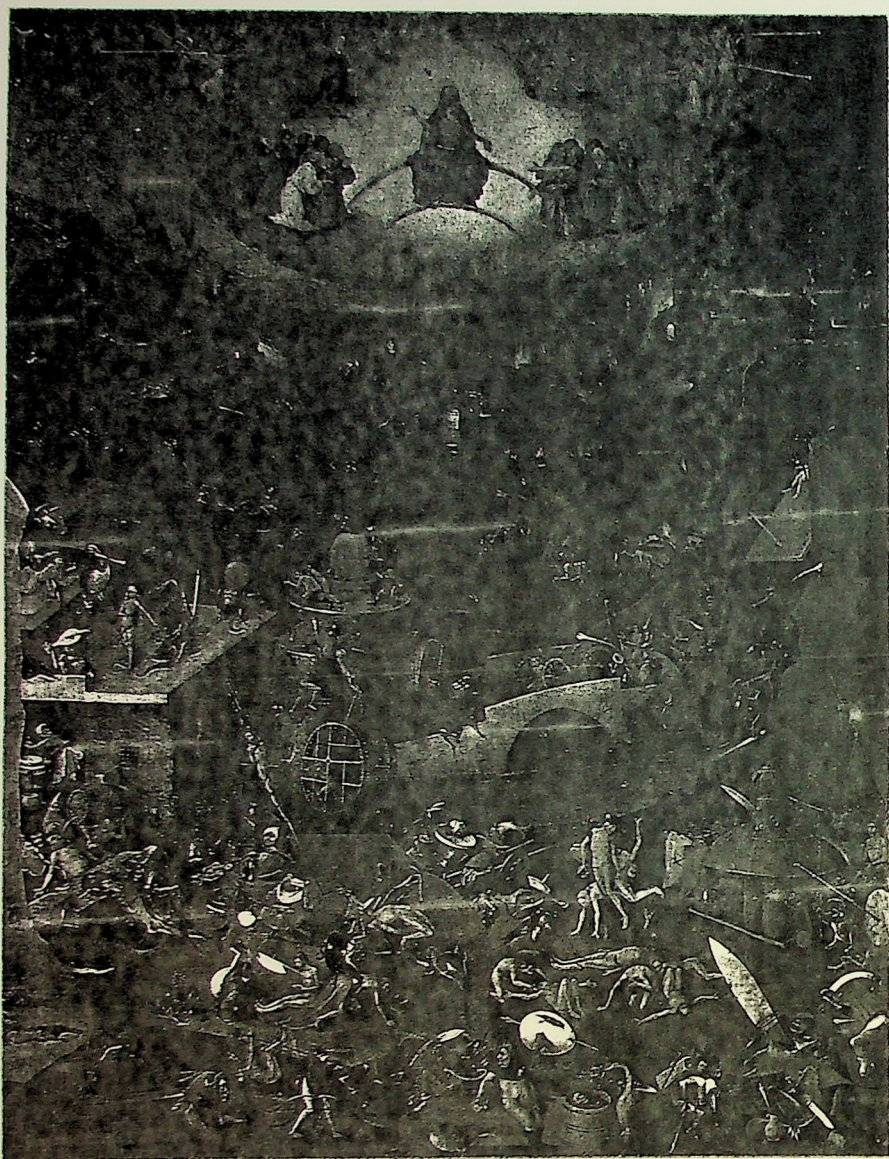
Thomas A. Kempis wrote :

"If you had more concern for a Holy Death than a long life, you would certainly be zealous to live better. And were you to ponder in your mind on the pains of Hell and Purgatory, you would readily endure toil and sorrow, and would shrink from no kind of hardship " ⁸

This preparation for the last Judgement was one of the chief concerns of the medieval church. They preached avidly what conduct would allow a man eternal bliss. They warned evildoers and sinners where they might expect to go for eternity - and what particular pains and suffering they would have to endure. Hieronymus Bosch was no less aware of this than any of his contemporaries. It is for his visual descriptions of the afterlife that he is most famous.

- Pl 18 In Bosch's triptych "The Last Judgement" we are shown both the first and last things. On the left hand inner panel we see the fall of mankind and the fall of the rebel angels. Over on the rest of the painting shows the Day of Judgement. The right panel is a horrific portrayal of the consequences of sin suffered in Hell. In these scenes, Bosch sets God and the Saints very much apart from all the Hellish scenes happening around them. On the left inner
- Pl 19 wing God is pictured in the far distance at the top. Similarly, in the centre panel he is set apart from the Hell below. The only time that God is in direct, hand to hand contact in any
- Pl 19 Boschian work is as Jesus, both God and Man. This we see on the left hand panel where Jesus creates Eve out of Adam.

It may be that Bosch has a point to make in rendering God so separate from mankind. It could be to do with Freewill. God has left man with Freewill, seen in the left hand panel, to disobey Him. This he does, and the other panels show us the distance that man is falling from grace, in his endless catalogue of sins.



18. Hieronymus Bosch

The Last Judgement

centre panel

Oil on panel

64^{5/8} x 50"

Vienna



19. Hieronymus Bosch

The Last Judgement

Detail of left wing

This doctrine of Freewill is a basic essential in Christian thought and Bosch describes it clearly by dividing God visually from Man.

Pl 20 This appears in the outer panels of "The Garden of Earthly Delights". The image is the Creation of the world. It is the third day of Creation, with light and dark separating in the firmament, and the earth heaving itself up in between. The transparency of the mists of this image is chillingly beautiful. God is tiny in comparison. He is "creating" in the upper left hand corner. He is removed, in a way, from his creation. The world that he is making contains already some rather uneasy objects. Along the shores of the newly made earth, appear some rather odd shaped spikey overgrown plants. They seem menacing, almost like invaders in God's created paradise. Why did Bosch put them there ? It is possible that he is telling us that in his eyes, creation may well have begun to fall as soon as God "imagined" it.

Back to the "Last Judgement" triptych, there is ample proof that Bosch was widely aware of the descriptions of Hell and sin that were published and available in the late fourteen hundreds. The anthromorphic Devils who appear in the work, such as the blacksmith scene of the central panel, occur in many earlier last Judgement scenes. The toads, adders and dragons which crawl in every nook and cranny, and gnaw at the private parts of their victims are traditional motifs.



20. Hieronymus Bosch

The Creation

Outer wing of The Garden of Earthly Delights

Oil on panel. Each wing $86\frac{1}{8} \times 38\frac{1}{8}$ "

Prado, Madrid

The idea that a sin will receive its own particular Hellish wage was not new. In about 1308, Dante Alighieri had written of this in the "Inferno" of the "Divine Comedy". The gluttonous lie wallowing in mud, drenched by perpetual rain and they are mauled by the three-headed dog Cerberus.

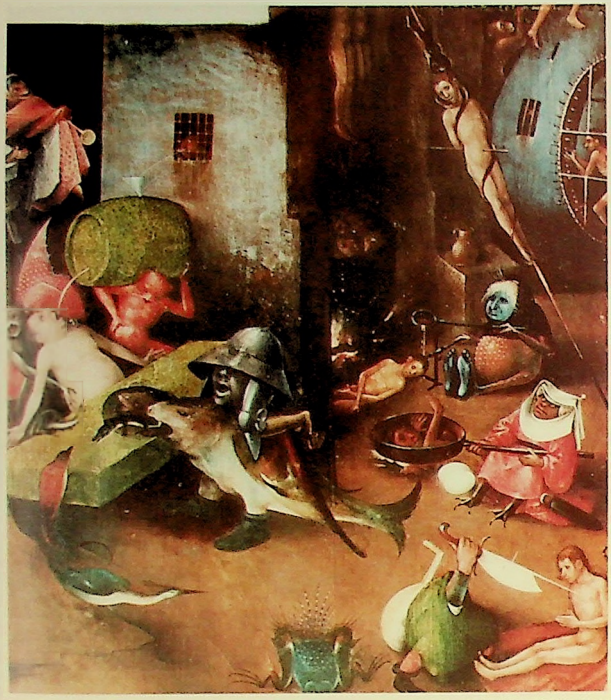
Dorothy Sayers, in the introduction to her translation of the "Inferno", says :

"Gluttony often masquerades on earth as a warm, cosy and indeed jolly kind of sin: here it is seen as it is - a cold sensuality, a sodden and filthy spiritual wretchedness". ⁹

In Bosch's "Last Judgement" some of the punishments can be identified with specific sins, similar to the victims in the

Pl 21 "Inferno". A fat glutton in the central panel is forced by two devils to drink from a barrel. The source of this drink can be seen squatting in a window just overhead. A

Pl 22 lustful woman on the roof of this house has a lizard monster slithering across her loins, while she is serenaded by two musical demons. The gluttonous man and the lustful woman are thus punished in accordance with the type of sin they committed.



21. Hieronymus Bosch

The Gluttonous

detail from The Last Judgement centre panel

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22.

Hieronymus Bosch

Lust detail from

The Last Judgement

centre panel

It is hard for us now to really understand the meaning of Hell as Bosch and his contemporaries may have. The images presented by books, such as the "Vision of Tundale" or Dante's "Inferno" and Bosch's own work, would in all probability have had quite a sobering quality.

Judging by the late Middle ages attitude in Northern Europe to Death and Hell, the people may well have imagined Hell quite as clearly as Bosch described it.

It would be well to leave this chapter with a paragraph written by a German, Henry Fusso, in the fourteenth century :

"Alas, could we have a good desire, it would be this :
 were there a millstone the length and breadth of the whole world,
 and so large in circumference that it touched every inch of
 the firmament, and were a little bird to come after a hundred
 thousand years and peck from that stone, a piece one-tenth the
 size of a millet seed, and repeat this process once in every
 hundred thousand years, so that in a million years a particle
 the size of a millet seed would be pecked off that millstone,
 we would only plead that our punishment would come to an end with the end
 of that stone - and even this cannot be." 10

CHAPTER 4

Bosch and an accusation of Heresy

"In the beginning was the word :
the word was with God,
and the word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came to be,
not one thing had its being but through Him "

John 1 : 1-3

"Every Kingdom divided against itself is
heading for ruin, and a household divided
against itself collapses"

Luke 11 : 17

Before going into the final section of this work, concerning "The Temptation of St. Anthony", it would be right to consider the attitude of Heresy connected with Bosch's work.

Historic ally, it was not until the end of the sixteenth century that Bosch's works were regarded by some (in Spain) as tainted with heresy. This charge has been refuted by many scholars, and more importantly by a Spanish priest who studied Bosch's work in 1605, Fray José de Sigüenza. ¹

The revival of interest in Bosch's work in the twentieth century has led to a great many theses on his work. Perhaps the more important, or influential, case for Bosch as a heretic is postulated by Wilhelm Fraenger in his book "The Millenium of Hieronymus Bosch". (Heresy according to the Encyclopaedia Brittanica is "a theological Doctrine of System rejected as false by ecclesiastical authority")

Willhelm Fraenger claims that Bosch was a member of a heretical sect called the Brethren of the Free Spirit : This group flourished for a couple of hundred years after their appearance in the thirteenth century. Little is known about them, but their rituals involved sexual promiscuity ² They attempted to imitate the state of innocence of Adam and Eve before the Fall, hence they are often call Adamites. They worshipped without clothes (an imitation of so-called "innocence") discarding their inhibitions along with their dress.

Their heresy was to do with the fact that they denied the Doctrine of Original Sin, therefore striking at the very heart of Christianity . Fraenger claims that "The Garden of Earthly Delights" was painted for a group of Adamites in 's Hertogenbosch. He further postulates that the central panel is a depiction of the complex rites of the sect.³ This hypothesis by Fraenger has been widely influential, but has been condemned also by many scholars, basically because of lack of concrete evidence.

His theories are constructed around the claim that Bosch's images in his paintings rely on "convoluted sexuality, of temptation leading to magical hallucinations, of alchemy, symbolic architecturethe whole underlain by the ritual of initiation (to the Brethren of the Free Spirit) itself" ⁴

In historical fact, Bosch was never a member of the Adamites. The last recorded reference to the sect in the Netherlands was in 1411, quite a considerable number of years before Bosch's birth date in the 1450's. The very idea that heresy was involved in Bosch's work, let alone his life, seems wildly speculative. On the one hand, he was an active member of the respected Brotherhood of Our Lady, a quite different Brotherhood to the Adamites. On the other hand there is the evidence offered to us by later historical fact concerning his work in the collection of Philip II of Spain. Philip was a conservative, pious Catholic, by all accounts. He had a number of Bosch's works in his collection, including "The Garden of Earthly Delights".

It must be remembered that Spain in the mid-sixteenth century was under the auspices of the Inquisition. Had Bosch's work contained the least contamination of heresy, they would have been condemned very quickly. The very look of "The Garden of Earthly Delights" would seem to condemn them as at least suspicious, unless of course, the meanings of the images were plain to interpretation by Bosch's understanding audience. Had "The Garden of Earthly Delights" been a rendering of Amadite ritual and practice, as Fraenger claims, it would not have been, could not have been, displayed in Philip II's Spain.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 1

"The Saints"

" How countless and constant were the trials endured
 by the apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and
 all those others who strove to follow in the footsteps
 of Christ How strict and self-denying was the
 life of the Holy Fathers in the desert !
 How often they were assaulted by the Devil !
 How frequent and fervent their prayers to God !
 How valiant the battles they fought to overcome their
 vices "

Thomas A. Kempis. The Imitation of Christ,
on the example of the Holy Fathers.

" The Kingdom of God is within you "

Luke 17 : 21

Bosch painted a number of panels depicting saints :

- Pls 23 "St. Jerome at Prayer", "St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness"
 14
 24 "St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child", "St. John on
 25 Patmos", and various panels of "St. Anthony".

None of these paintings are innocent, lukewarm renderings of the saints. Each one is charged with the presence of evil. Bosch reminds us clearly that each man, a sinner since the Fall, has his own share of evil that he must abolish. The saints were as subject to this as any man, often in far more gruelling circumstances (the ultimate reason for their sanctity).

- Pl 24 In Bosch's "St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child", the saint crosses a river with Jesus on his back. According to legend St. Christopher had served a king and then the Devil himself in search of a worthy master. The search ended in his conversion to Christianity. In the panel we have various examples of evil at work. Behind the back of Christopher, there is a hanged man on a tree. He has been hoisted up there by another man who strains on the end of the rope at the foot of the tree. On top of another tree, on the right background of the panel, there is a tree house which is a wineamphora - more likely a devilish tavern. On the topmost branch of this tree, a figure shins upwards to rob a beehive. In symbolic language this is a symbol of drunkenness. In the far distance on the other side of the river over which Christopher and his passenger have crossed, a swimmer is frightened by a dragon emerging from a ruined castle. The landscape which the travellers inhabit is far from innocent.

23 Hieronymus Bosch

St. Jerome at Prayer

$30\frac{1}{2} \times 23\frac{1}{4}$ "

Oil on panel

Ghent



24. Hieronymus Bosch

St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child

Oil on panel

$44\frac{1}{2} \times 28\frac{1}{8}$ "

Rotterdam





25. Hieronymus Bosch

St. John on Parnos

Oil on panel

Staatliche Museum, Berlin

24 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

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"It is likely that the pictures of the saints were intended to be contemplated in the quiet of the cloister or private chapel" ¹

The images of the saints present to us the crowning glory of human achievement, in terms of the monastic ideal, of attaining union with God, having travelled through the arduous landscape of the human world.

St. Anthony is perhaps the best example of the man who overcomes all the trials, tribulations, temptations on his journey to God. Bosch must have been particularly interested in this saint, for he painted him on a number of occasions. The most notable example of Bosch's work concerning the saint is the triptych. "The Pl 26 Temptations of St. Anthony," which is at present in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, Portugal.

St. Anthony is an almost perfect example of the true imitator of Christ. It may well have been for this reason that Bosch chose to use him. Anthony portrays the imitation of the patient suffering of Jesus, the obedience to the will of God that was sought after by the followers of the "Devotio Moderna". Anthony exemplifies that "The sole road to God is through the teachings of Jesus Christ, true God and true man : by subordination of nature to Divine Grace, and by self-discipline". ²

Bosch had a number of sources that were available at the end of the fifteenth century concerning the saint. They include "The Golden Legend" by Voragine, written in the thirteenth century : the "Vita S. Antonii" by St. Athanasius as incorporated in a Dutch book, the "Vaderboek", and also from some Hispano Arabic legends of the saint translated into Latin by a Dominican monk, Alphonsus Boni Hominis. ³

Before discussing Bosch's "The Temptations of St. Anthony" it would be helpful to outline the known factual life of St. Anthony.



26 Hieronymus Bosch

The Temptations of St. Anthony

Oil on panel, centre panel $51\frac{7}{8} \times 46\frac{7}{8}$ "

Each wing $51\frac{7}{8} \times 20\frac{7}{8}$ "

Museo Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon

ST. ANTHONY OF EGYPT

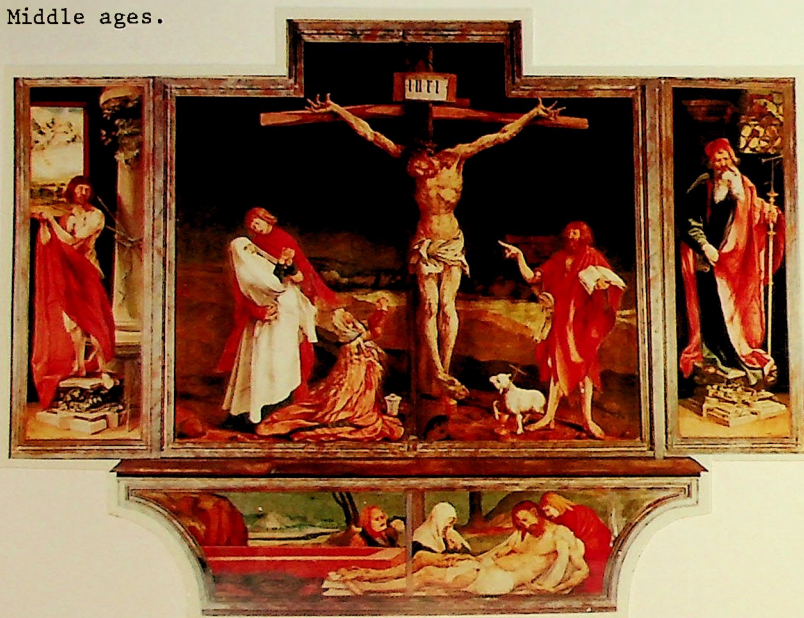
St. Anthony was born in Upper Egypt in 251 AD. He sold all his possessions at the age of twenty and went to live amongst ascetics in the Egyptian desert. For twenty years until 286 AD he lived in complete solitude in the desert surrounding Alexandria at a place called Pespier. Here he underwent a long series of temptations, which are usually associated with the hermetic life. Some of these will be explained in discussing Bosch's painting in the next chapter.

At the end of these twenty years he left the solitude of the desert and gathered disciples about him. In 311 he went to Alexandria where he lived by gardening and mat making. His character was both one of severe austerity, combined with an "emphasis on discretion and the love of God before all else. " 4

It is recorded that he was a miracle worker and he converted many to Christianity. Some writings by the saint still survive including letters to the Emperor Constantine of Rome and several to various monasteries. He died in 356 AD.

In 1100 the Order of Hospitallers of St. Anthony was founded in Alexandria. It became a major pilgrimage centre, especially for those who suffered from ergotism, or St. Anthony's Fire as the disease is known.

The first visual representation of St. Anthony appears on Irish and English High crosses between 750-1000 AD. The temptations of the saint were depicted by several well-known painters, including Matthias Grunwald on his Isenheim Altarpiece (which was painted for an Antonine community). It seems St. Anthony was a particularly popular saint in the Middle ages.



28. Matthias Grunwald

The Isenheim Altarpiece

CHAPTER 2

"The Temptations of St. Anthony "

"You must pass through fire and water, before you can
come into the place of rest, you will never overcome your
vices unless you discipline yourself severely"

Thomas A. Kempis

The Imitation of Christ on
Human Misery

"The war against our vices and passions is harder than
any physical toil"

Thomas A. Kempis

The Imitation of Christ
on the zealous amendment of our life

"Take hold, remove the doors, for behold the King of Glory
cometh down. And Hades said : O, woe unto me, for I
hear the breath of God"

Gospel of Bartholomew 1.15

translated by Montague Rhodes James.

"THE TEMPTATIONS OF ST. ANTHONY",

by Hieronymous Bosch

The Lisbon triptych of "The Temptations of St. Anthony" by Bosch is painted in oil on three panels. The centre panel is 131.5 cms x 119 cms, while the two outer panels are 131.5 cms x 53 cms each. There are five painted surfaces altogether - two outer images and three inner ones. The description here begins with the two outer panels that are seen when the triptych is closed. They lead into the inner panels, so it seems logical to describe them this way.

- Pl 27 These outer panels are images without devils or angels or other spiritual beings. Rather they are almost "historical" storyform images of the arrest of Jesus, and his death. They are painted in "grisaille" or grey tones. Grisaille was a particular form of painting, that made the image seem three-dimensional and sculptural. When an altar piece was closed, a trompe d'oeil effect of sculptured forms was created by the painting. Bosch's grisaille images on this work seem very unsculptural, however. Rather than using the grisaille to form a trompe d'oeil effect, he may have had a more spiritual reason for using it - the outerpanels lead into the inner ones. They are like the physical aspect of life, whereas the inner, polychrome images are the spiritual and the more real.



27. Hieronymus Bosch

Exterior panels of "The Temptations of
St. Anthony"

The left hand outer image

"Simon Peter, who carried a sword, drew it and wounded the High Priest's servant, cutting off his ear Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back in its scabbard : am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me ?' "

John 18 : 10, 11

This panel shows Christ's arrest in the Garden. It is evening and a *melée* of jostling and noisy people have come to take Christ before Ciaphas, the High Priest, and then before Pontius Pilate. The atmosphere in Bosch's image is one of adrenelin fired tumult and excitement. The figures around Christ tie him up, talk loudly, kicking Jesus. One soldier looks back, beckoning the rest of the soldiers and crowd into the scene to see what is happening. The noisome happenings contrast with Christ kneeling. He looks downwards, unheeding of the figure mockingly making faces in front of Him. He is calm, accepting. His tranquility and "oneness" with the moment tells us this. He is willing to accept the Divine will that he has chosen to follow, right into Death. The calm aspect of Jesus, here used by Bosch, is a very consistent theme in most of Bosch's work. We do not see the anguished Christ, suffering in pain, a real human pain of the cross

Pl.28 as in Grunwald's Isenheim Altarpiece. Instead we see the type of Christ passive amongst his tormentors as in the "Christ crowned

Pl.13 with Thorns" in the National Gallery of London, and in "Christ

Pl 29 carrying the Cross"



29. Hieronymus Bosch

Detail of St. Veronica
from Christ Carrying the Cross

In both he is calm, and in the former this seems to override his circumstances. He seems in total control of Himself.

Recent interpretation of "Christ crowned with Thorns" have identified Jesus's four tormentors with the four temperaments⁵ of man, as believed in the Middle Ages, as "choleric", "melancholic", "sanguine", and "phlegmatic". Or as fire, air earth and water. Christ, being the central figure is the perfect balance of these temperaments, therefore He is the Perfect Man and God. In "Christ Carrying the Cross", Jesus and St. Veronica are both by far the more still and composed figures in the composition. They contemplate inner visions and contrast very sharply with the leering and grotesque figures that fill the whole surface of the image. In the image of Christ in the Garden of the "Temptations of St. Anthony" this is clearly illustrated to us once more.

Bosch gives us in a straightforward visual image, serenity in the midst of evil and horror. At the bottom of this wing, there is the River Cedron which runs through the Garden of Gethsemane. This divides the picture in two halves. In the top half is Jesus' arrest. In the bottom, Peter cuts the ear from the High Priest's servant, Malchus.

The attitude of Christ is the passive strength of loving your enemy. St. Peter is clearly doing the opposite. He is being violent in contrast to Jesus' words :

"Love your enemy as yourself" (Matthew 6 : 44)

We see two contrasting messages - acceptance and resistance to the will of God. Bosch makes it clear to us what he chooses : around St. Peter are several symbols of Death. There are dead bones of animals and several shrikes. The shrike was a harbinger of Death for Bosch. Its other name being the "Butcher Bird". However, in the top half of the painting around Christ, aside from his fawning tormentors, is the Grail, symbolic image of the Fountain of Life, and the Eucharist, the symbol of Life. So Christ's acceptance of Divine Will leads to God and life. The violent resistance to Divine Will leads nowhere but to Death.

pl 27 The right hand outer image

"Then they took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place of the skull where they crucified him with two others, one on either side with Jesus in the middle"

John 19 : 17, 18

"but only lukewarm, I will spit out of my mouth"

The Revelation of St. John 3 : 16

Here we are shown Christ carrying the tall cross to Golgotha. He looks towards St. Veronica, who kneels to wipe the sweat and blood from His face. Behind them, Simon the Cyrene leans forward to help Him carry the Cross. This triangle, this trinity, formed by the three represent the three followers of God's Way. They share in the ordeal, in the suffering, selflessly.

At the bottom left hand of the panel, the Good Thief makes his confession to a priest. This represents his last minute repentance in turning to God. The bad thief, though making his confession, is blindfold, signifying that he is spiritually blind and together with the rest of the figures in the panel represents the unrepentant. The majority of the figures in the work indicate a kind of childish interest and stupidity. Bosch shows us an element of futility, that makes up the vast majority of mankind.

In the extreme centre left are figures sitting like people who are sitting at television or a circus. They spectate, not actively involved, but somehow lending their support to the terrible events by their very passive presence. The death of a man has little significance in their minds beyond some kind of detached entertainment. One of them holds a toy windmill which clearly shows that they regard such events as commonplace forms of entertainment.

Behind Simon the Cyrene stands a portly lady with two children. Again, she stands like some spectator who has stumbled upon something "interesting" that is happening. There is a kind of foolish interest involved. She is a symbol of no extremes, unable to really discriminate between good or evil - and so paddles in between the issues, neither giving allegiance to one nor the other. Christ passes, and this does not affect the woman. She does not comprehend the spiritual significance of one of the greatest moments in the History of Christianity that is happening before her. The soldiers and executioners have no comprehension of the gravity of what is happening either. The child on the woman's shoulders offer one of the soldiers an apple. He looks very much as if he does not know what to do with it.

The pig that hangs from a branch of a dead tree in the upper right hand corner of the panel represents perhaps the base natures of man and his lack of spiritual discrimination. The pig is like a standard or flag of the worst side of man's nature, a creature who (in man's eyes) wallows in mud and its own excrement.

The bird which stands on the branches of the dead tree with the hanged pig, beside the dead criminal at the bottom right and with the severed head on the branch at the centre of the panel, is the Shrike again, Bosch's Bird of Death. Bosch asks us once more to choose between Death and Life. Death is signified clearly to us, and the Trinity of Love is clearly shown too. Thus in this panel we have certain groups of people.

Firstly, there are the true followers of Christ : Simon who offers to share Christ's burdens, and Veronica who gives of herself to God. Secondly, there is the repentant spirit represented by the Good Thief, who turns to God in the last instance. Thirdly, and more abundantly we have the vast majority of mankind, futile, represented by the horror-hungry, detached spectators and executioners.

There is also the possibility of a fourth category, represented by the man standing to the left of Jesus, holding the scythe. He looks like a church dignitary. His scythe is like a standard, the standard of death. He points, giving instructions. This man may represent the evil force that concentrates to hand God over to Death.

Pl 26 The Centre Panels of "The Temptations of St. Anthony"

The centre panels of this work describe a number of diverse temptations that beset Anthony's soul as he prayed and meditated alone in his desert cell. The particular events are portrayed clearly, but Bosch takes these events into an understanding of the suffering and the eventual triumph of the saint over his temptations. As we have seen in the two outside panels, the arrest in the Garden and the carrying of the cross both serve to initiate us in the understanding that St. Anthony suffered in a spiritual and physical way similar to Christ in His passion. Anthony's life is being shown to us as an extreme example of the true imitation of Christ. He exemplifies the devotion of Bosch and his contemporaries religious devotees to the imitation of Christ and the *Devotio Moderna*.

Compositionally in the piece, Bosch continues the landscape across the three panels. There are three main divisions : in the foreground of the three panels is a river that flows to form a lake on the right hand panel across under a bridge on the left hand one. The temperature changes as it travels from our right to left, as it becomes icy enough for a hybrid bird figure to skate on in the left panel. The second division is the land itself, undulating with "action", filling the surface, and thirdly there is the sky. All of this is teeming with life, almost all of it unpleasant and mesmerising.

The landscape, which represents Anthony's soul, is both chaotic and cluttered with the varied and bewildering temptations that Satan subjected him to.

The left inner wing

In this panel, St. Anthony is carried by two Antonite Brothers and a third figure. This image is a direct image from the Golden Legend, where Anthony is left for dead by demons.

"When on another occasion he lay hidden in a coffin, an army of demons brought him to such a pass that his servant bore him off upon his shoulders for dead. As all who had gathered wept, Anthony returned to life before their eyes and bade his servant to return him to his coffin. Although he lay there stretched in pain, he demanded in the courage of his spirit that the demons should come forth and do battle with him. They appeared to him in the guise of animals and cruelly tore him with their teeth, horns and claws " ¹

The demons disappeared only when the Divine light of Christ appeared.

In the top of this panel, Anthony can be seen in prayer "riding"

Pl 31 on a group of demons in the sky :

The Golden Legend describes this episode

" Once he was borne into the air by angels, the devils came, prevented his flight, and showed him all his sins that he had committed since the time of his birth".

The toad on which he is lying has been interpreted as an image of sexuality. ² Depiction of toads grawing the genitals of individuals is a well-known image of the punishment of lust in the Middle Ages.



30. Hieronymus Bosch

The Crossbill Skater

detail from left inner panel of
The Temptations of St. Anthony



31. Hieronymus Bosch

Anthony borne aloft by demons

details from The Temptations of St. Anthony

The wolf-faced demon has been interpreted as Satan Ahrimero (a name that first appeared in Zoroastrian belief)

It seems that Anthony is being shown the state of his spirit. Above him an armoured demon knight is flying on a fish, carrying another fish like a jousting spear :

"In the Middle Ages men and women ... were often depicted with the tail of a fish. This was meant to be that they were not to be regarded as physical beings" The figure that is armoured may represent some kind of physicality riding the fish of the church. Possibly the battle between spirit and the flesh.

In this episode of Anthony borne aloft by the demons, Bosch may be showing us an image of Anthony's battle with his own physicality, exemplified by his human sexual temptations.

This image shows well how deeply Bosch considered his images, how much torment and understanding that is behind them. The range of small innuendos and precise meanings seems inexhaustible.

Below the bridge of the panel sits a monk and some mixed fauna reading a letter. A skating figure delivers this letter it seems, which is held in its beak. There has been a thought that Bosch's own name inscribed "Bosco" is on this letter that is being delivered,³ implying Bosch's identification with the trials and temptations of St. Anthony.

Pl 30 The cross bill skater has a freemason symbol on his coat. He also has an inverted funnel on his head, the thin end blocked by a twig. This signifies that the cross bill is unable to receive Grace from God above.

He is just a messenger, devoid of any real contact with God. The letter being read under the bridge most likely tells of Anthony's "death" (the one from which he revives) or else the "death" of his spirit. The dead sparrow lying on the frozen river in front of the bridge testifies to death.

The monk under the bridge reads the news to a devil and a nightjar. The presence of the nightjar may indicate death again. Also it is a night bird and may signify the "dark night of the soul" that christian mystics are said to experience. After this "Dark night of the soul" the saint often revives into stronger union with God. This may be the case with St. Anthony.

In conclusion the left hand inner panel may well describe St. Anthony's early life. The quote "The demons showed him all his sins that he had committed since the time of his birth" may be a clue to this. The top of the panel, where Anthony flies through the air on the back of the toad demon is where the demons show him his youth. In the middle of the panel there is the figure
Pl 31 of a man lying upon his knees with landscape as his body. This may well be the rich young Anthony before his conversion to Christ. He is burdened down by his worldly goods.

In the "Golden Legend" it is written that :

" When Anthony was twenty years old, he heard it read in Church :

' if you would be perfect, go and sell all that you possess, and give it to the poor', so he went and sold all he had, divided it amongst the poor and led the life of a hermit." ⁴

His conversion, the final episode of the panel, is at the bottom, where St. Anthony goes through the "Death of the spirit" and revives. Thus we move to the other two panels.

The right hand inner panel

It seems right to view this panel next, as the two outer panels lead finally to the centre one.

The main theme of this panel is St. Anthony's encounter with a Devil Queen who appears to him as he prays beside the Nile. As the story goes, the naked Queen appeared to Anthony twice and she asked him to come back to her city in order that she may show him her "virtuous ways". Anthony follows her to the city, where she performs a number of seemingly virtuous miracles. However, she then tries to proposition Anthony. This he refused and after a fierce battle with her demon army, he wins the battle and her city burns itself to the ground in its own "sinful rage." ⁵

Here again we are shown the inward temptations of St. Anthony's soul, this being a powerful sexual temptation.

Pl 32 In the centre left of the image, the Devil Queen stands in a murky bog, looking towards Anthony. She shields herself seductively. She is hidden partially by a rotting tree, draped in a scarlet robe. Various architypical demons crawl and screech around her, revealing her real nature to the viewer. On the right, Anthony holds a book and looks away from her. Unable to avert himself from the evils of his temptations, his sight is filled with an open air table where a devil-herald invites him to a demonic feast. The images of the scarlet cloth draped over the rotting tree, the seductive Queen, and the feast table seems to be a "parody of the traditional Garden of Love" ⁶

In the background, above a lake, we are shown the city of the Devil Queen. It looks quite innocent in a sense, but its true demonic quality is betrayed by the dragon in the lake, fighting with a tiny Saint Michael, and also by the flaming beacon that rages above the city's main gate. In this panel, as in the left hand inner panel, we are shown an assorted variety of hybrid animals and men, which all inevitably symbolise some temptation, weakness, or tribulation that is attached to St. Anthony's self, and over which he must come.

Bosch certainly would have intended them to have meaning. For example, what is the meaning of the couple riding on the fish in the sky above the Devil Queen's city ?

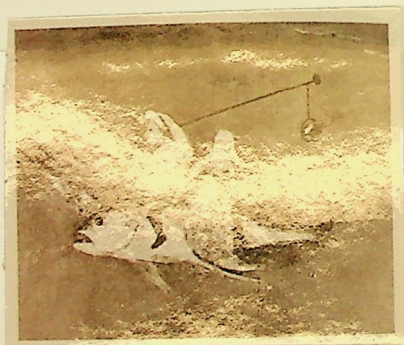
Pl 33 The potbellied man and his wife may represent Anthony's aspirations, had he not chosen the hermit life, with God. It is an almost self-mocking image, the two figures travelling to Heaven, potbellied and impure. The way to Heaven was understood by some that you could go with one's "dear wife" or "dear husband" by just sitting on the Church, symbolised by the Fish. But according to Clement Aymes, this is not so. "If we allow ourselves to be carried quite passively by that institution, without even transforming our potbelly" ⁷, we become changed for the worse. The potbellied husband carries a torch of burning pitch over his shoulder, like a banner or a flag, hoping for entry to the celestial paradise. But in Dutch, the Devil is called "Joosje Peck" ⁸ which means "Pitch". Thus, carrying a torch of pitch logically is to be understood as a flag of Satan.



32. Hieronymus Bosch

The Devil Queen

detail from The Temptations of St. Anthony
right wing



33. Hieronymus Bosch

Detail of right inner panel of
The Temptations of St. Anthony

pl 26 The centre panel

pl 34 The diabolic enterprises of the two outer panels, reach a climax in the middle panel. Devils of all kinds, both human and animalistic, converge from all directions, by land, water and air on a ruined tomb in the centre. This tomb, according to the Golden Legend was Anthony's hermetic cell. On a platform before the tomb an elegantly dressed couple dispense drink to their demonic companions. Beside this table kneels a woman wearing a fashionable headress, who offers a bowl of something to a figure opposite her. Beside this woman kneels an almost unnoticed Anthony. He is turned towards the viewer and his right hand is raised in blessing. He tells us "It is alright ! I am quite under control of the situation !" This gesture of blessing echoes that of Christ who stands hidden just above Anthony to the right, in doorway of the tomb. Anthony converted his tomb into a chapel.

Perhaps the elegant couple dispensing drink and food to their guests is some kind of Black Mass of devils and heretics. The main figure who holds the offered cup has a mitre on his head. He is attended by a priestess in white and a negress who brings in a paten holding a toad offering an egg-shaped host. This parody of the Holy Mass and its desecration is further enhanced by the Demon Priest in priestly vestments who reads from a Black Book to a pair of hybrid companions. He is to the lower right of the hermit. This unholy priest is standing in a swamp, and has decidedly animal features, complete with whiskers. The perverse and sterile nature of this false minister is made particularly repulsive by the bloody skeleton and viscera of his body visible



34. Hieronymus Bosch

The Black Mass

detail from The Temptations of St. Anthony

centre panel

through a rent in his vestments. 9

This satanic communion of sinners surrounding Anthony are converged upon by various horrific and odd demons who arrive from every point of the compass. The temptations of St. Anthony come endlessly pouring in. He is offered no rest whatsoever, and yet he is so in control of it all, giving us the confident blessing from the panel.

The various groups surrounding the tomb, converging upon it, represent various groups of people that Bosch wished to criticise. For example, the figures on the far right, represent the nobility
 pl 35 wearing Burgundian costumes, contemporary with Bosch's day.

They pay no attention to the goings on in the tomb at the centre. They do not care, for they only care for the hunt and the banquet. One figure on a horse-like Amphora, holds a falcon on his arm, a sure symbol of hunting. The Amphora depicts the obvious pleasures of banquet wine drinking.

In fact every type of depravity and degradation is depicted in the panel. In the distance the Devil Queen's city is raised to the ground, in sinful wrath, engulfed in Sodom-like Hellish fire. Perhaps the predominance of fire, refers to the suffering caused by "St. Anthony's fire", a disease rampant in the Middle Ages. It is called ergotism. It is interesting to note that one phase of this disease is characterised by the victim having hallucinations. In these hallucinations, the sufferer often believes he is being attached by wild beasts or demons. 10



35. Hieronymus Bosch

The Nobility

detail from The Temptations of St. Anthony
centre panel

It must be remembered, in viewing this work, as with all of Bosch's work, that the images describe the spiritual.

The images describe the sinful urges with which Anthony wrestled in his desert solitude for many years. Physically he was very alone, but mentally he was beset upon in a very crowded, and noisy, world. And he subsequently triumphs. In the Golden Legend, he speaks reassuringly, quoting Psalms 27 : 3 :

"Though a host be camped against me, my heart
shall not fear "

His confident gaze reflects the faces of Christ seen in the outside wings of the work, and in other works by Bosch.

In the centre panel, Christ is just perceived in the doorway of the tomb. In the Golden Legend, Anthony asks :

"Where were Thou a while ago, O Good Jesu ? Why didn't
Thou not come to me then, to help and heal my wounds ?"

Christ replies calmly :

"Anthony, I was here, but I wanted to see you fight,
and now you have fought the good fight, I shall spread
my Glory throughout the world" 12

The central panel depicts this moment of triumph. Jesus just appears, Anthony's eyes smile to us, summing up his timeless overcoming of the vast armies of Satan. For all the horrors, and sins, that are displayed before us by Bosch, the look of the hermit himself must offer a sure sign of hope and reassurance to the true Christian viewer.

As a final note to this section concerning Bosch's "Temptations of St. Anthony" it is interesting that in the late fifteenth century, the very values of reclusive monasticism were being questioned. Humanist thinkers were already writing that salvation was undoubtedly possible, by living in this world as well as in seclusion. Indeed in 1517, a year after Bosch's death, Martin Luther initiated the events that were to destroy much of the Old Order of Monasticism in Northern Europe, by nailing his ninety five theses to the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany.

It is almost as if, as Walter Gibson says :

"In Bosch's art, the dying Middle Ages flared to a new brilliance before disappearing for ever" 13

C O N C L U S I O N

Hieronymus Bosch was a painter of the spirit. He was intensely interested in, and had a lively knowledge of the spiritual credences important in the fifteenth century : of the Devotio Moderna, the Passion of Christ and the Christian doctrines of the Fall, The Redemption, The Last Day of Judgement, and of the saints, those perfect imitations of God.

Bosch's images were not referring towards heretical spiritual beliefs, contrary to Catholic Christianity, but rather they expressed a deep understanding of certain Christian beliefs. His paintings warn us of the results of sinful folly, of our sinful actions, but they also reveal other truths that are less obvious - like the question of freewill, or the mystic temptations of the Saint that led to his sanctity in union with God.

Having completed the last chapter of this work, I went and browsed through a book with large colour plates of Bosch's work. I had not seen this book for some months. Looking at the images, I was astonished and not a little worried as I realised how great a range there is to the masters use of iconography, and more importantly, how great a degree of understanding there is of the spiritual concerns behind that iconography.

I mentioned in the introduction that the thesis is about a restricted aspect of Bosch's life and more - and this has become clearer now. The paintings are not images to be looked at and glanced over. They are immensely complicated ; once you have found some kind of key to open up this complicated iconography, you are invited into the paintings, into the various levels and areas of comprehension.

Bosch's work can be viewed in a manner rather like the mystic views the New Testament : at first reading the words mean what they say, but later they unfold revealing new depths of perception, that go beyond the written word. Bosch's work can be viewed like a series of rooms that follow each other, ad infinitum. This thesis has crossed one of the smaller rooms in my awareness of Bosch's intricacies, but little more than that. There are a lot of rooms to be discovered.

Therefore my conclusions rest in the fact that Bosch was a Catholic Christian in the fuller and most deep sense of those words.

FOOTNOTES

PART ONE

Footnotes Chapter 1

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Footnotes Chapter 2

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|-----|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1. | Max J. Friedlander | <u>From Van Eyck to Breuge</u> | p.56 |
| 2. | ibid. | | p.57 |
| 3. | ibid. | | p.59 |
| 4. | Walter Gibson | <u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.70 |
| 5. | ibid. | | p.82 |
| 6. | ibid. | | p.83 |
| 7. | ibid. | | p.33 |
| 8. | ibid. | | p.35 |
| 9. | ibid. | | p.37 |
| 10. | Albert Chatelet | <u>Early Dutch painting</u> | p.177 |

Footnotes Chapted 3

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|-----|-------------------|--|-------|
| 1. | Walter Gibson | <u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.47 |
| 2. | Thomas A. Kempis | <u>The Imitation of Christ</u> | p.156 |
| 3. | Walter Gibson | <u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.46 |
| 4. | ibid. | | p.47 |
| 5. | ibid. | | p.49 |
| 6. | ibid. | | p.52 |
| 7. | ibid. | | p.57 |
| 8. | Thomas A. Kempis | <u>The Imitation of Christ</u> | p.54 |
| 9. | Dorothy L. Sayers | Introduction to Dante's <u>Inferno</u> | p.107 |
| 10. | Walter Gibson | <u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.61 |

Footnotes Chapter 4

1. Walter Gibson Hieronymus Bosch p.12
2. ibid. p.10
3. Peter S. Beagle The Garden of Earthly Delights p.30
4. ibid. p.30
5. Walter Gibson Hieronymus Bosch p.11

P A R T T W O

Footnotes Chapter 1

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|----|--------------------|--|-------|
| 1. | Walter Fibson | <u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.138 |
| 2. | Thomas A. Kempis | <u>The Imitation of Christ</u> | p.13 |
| 3. | James Snyder | <u>Northern Renaissance Art</u> | p.208 |
| 4. | David Hugh Farmer | <u>The Oxford Dictionary of Saints</u> | p.20 |
| 5. | Pamela Tudor Craig | <u>The Secret Life of Painting</u> | |

Footnotes Chapter 2

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|-----|---------------------------|---|-------|
| 1. | Clement A. Wertheim Aymes | <u>The Pictorial Language of</u>
<u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.49 |
| 2. | ibid. p.56 | | |
| 3. | ibid. p.51 | | |
| 4. | ibid. p.52, 53 | | |
| 5. | James Snyder | <u>Northern Renaissance Art</u> | p.210 |
| 6. | Walter Gibson | <u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.143 |
| 7. | Clement A. Wertheim Aymes | <u>The Pictorial Language of</u>
<u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.59 |
| 8. | ibid p.59 | | |
| 9. | James Snyder | <u>Northern Renaissance Art</u> | p.210 |
| 10. | Walter Gibson | <u>Hieronymus Bosch</u> | p.145 |
| 11. | ibid. p.149 | | |
| 12. | ibid. p.149 | | |
| 13. | ibid p.152 | | |

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" Words mean more than we mean to express when we use them :
so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the
writer meant : so, whatever good meanings are in the
book, I'm very glad to accept as the meaning of the book"

pg. 243 "A selection from the letters
of Lewis Carrol to his child
friends "

ed Evelyn M. Hatch 1933.