



Letters to the Editor

Irving Lavin; Walter S. Gibson; Patrik Reutersward; Michael Godby; James F. O'Gorman

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Letters to the Editor

Sir:

In his article, "Michelangelo's Unfinished Works" (*The Art Bulletin*, LVII, 1975, 366-373), Juergen Schulz makes three substantive references to publications of mine, each of which gives a partial and distorted impression of my views.

P. 367, n. 4: "Pope-Hennessy . . . seeks to eliminate the problem [of the 'non-finito'] by suggesting that Michelangelo was more interested in the artistic idea than in the finished work of art. His reviewer, I. Lavin . . . praised the straightforwardness of this explanation. Yet, it is hard to reconcile with Michelangelo's expressed opinion on lack of finish, and with the efforts he could make on occasion to finish his own works . . ."

The contrast expressed here is fictitious. I made no reference to any suggestion that Michelangelo was more interested in the idea than the finished work; I simply welcomed Pope-Hennessy's salubrious insistence that the unfinished sculptures *are* unfinished.

P. 370: "[Michelangelo's technique] involved . . . perhaps even pointing from models [footnote reference to me]. Yet, constant revision seems to have been part of his method too."

Again, the contrast is fictitious. What I suggested was that Michelangelo may have used a proportional enlarging system in the case of the colossal *David*. I explicitly disavowed the implication that he pointed off in a modern way.

P. 373, n. 36: "Since Michelangelo did one or the other, or both from early on [i.e., make models and carve the block from one side at a time], I. Lavin has concluded that he actually used the technique . . . [of pointing off]."

I made no such argument and drew no such conclusion. I sought instead to focus on these two salient aspects of Michelangelo's procedure, and to show that they were related to each other and to the general development of sculptural procedure in the Renaissance. Professor Schulz's misconstrual indicates that he fails to grasp the element of "trial and error" that links Michelangelo's marble technique to his use of *bozzetti* and *modellati*. Moreover, I was, I think, the first to emphasize the importance of Vasari's explanation of Michelangelo's one-sided approach to the block as facilitating changes in the course of execution.

IRVING LAVIN
The Institute for Advanced Study

Sir:

In his review of my book (*Hieronymus Bosch*, New York, 1973) in the June 1975 issue of *The Art Bulletin*, Patrik Reuterswärd correctly questions my explanation of the gate and field in Bosch's *Wayfarer* in Rotterdam. The presence in the background of a pole topped by a wheel, employed for displaying the corpses of executed criminals, casts doubt on my interpretation of this part of the picture as a reference to John 10:9. This does not, however, invalidate my interpretation of the picture as a whole. Although I am grateful to Reuterswärd for pointing out my error, I regret to say that the rest of his review hardly lives up to the quality of this observation. He does scant justice to the main thesis of my book,

and his criticisms of specific points are generally irrelevant. My first impulse was to ignore this review altogether and only its appearance in a scholarly journal of major importance prompts me to write this letter.

Reuterswärd's chief objections to my book, it seems, are my rejection of Wilhelm Fraenger's theories and my attempt to demonstrate the religious orthodoxy of Bosch's art. As the result of the latter crime, at least, he finds my book "trivial" and "misleading." Reuterswärd's disappointment can be easily understood when we turn to his own study on Bosch published some five years ago (*Hieronymus Bosch*, Uppsala, 1970). As Mojmir Frinta very aptly says in his thoughtful review of this book, published in the March 1973 issue of *The Art Bulletin*, it reveals Reuterswärd as a "great admirer of Wilhelm Fraenger's research work," who "with a disciple-like zeal . . . repeatedly comments on the justice of many of Fraenger's insights and theses."¹ This same bias is also reflected in Reuterswärd's review of my book. Indeed, he seems as much concerned with an impassioned defense of Fraenger as he is with a critique of my ideas. He laments my "anti-Fraenger attitude"; he complains about my "superficial" treatment of Fraenger's writings. Several times he chastises me for not having cited Fraenger on particular points. These criticisms are climaxed by his uncharitable accusation that I have "only glanced through the American edition of [Fraenger's] *Das tausendjährige Reich*" (p. 287).

Reuterswärd can rest assured that I am, alas, all too familiar with Fraenger's speculations on Bosch. But if I did not refer to Fraenger's recognition of the similarity of the bridegroom in Bosch's *Marriage Feast at Cana* to the figure of John the Evangelist in his *St. John on Patmos*, it was because precisely the same point had already been made by Smit and Bax.² If, in the same painting, I did not mention Fraenger's interpretation of the scene in the rear chamber, or his identification of the object held by the figure within the shed in the Prado *Epiphany*, it was because I found them untenable. And if my overall treatment of Fraenger is "superficial," it is because, in my considered opinion, he contributes little to our understanding of Bosch's art.³

Reuterswärd's attack on my book is only the latest episode in a controversy that has persisted for almost thirty years, ever since the publication of Fraenger's *Das tausendjährige Reich* (Coburg, 1947). It was not his first study on Bosch, nor his only one, but its English translation (*The Millennium of Hieronymus Bosch*, Chicago, 1951, London, 1952) has made it his most notorious work. As is generally known, Fraenger proposed that Bosch belonged to a heretical group of Adamites in 's-Hertogenbosch, and that this sect commissioned his *Garden of Earthly Delights* as an exposition of its doctrines. In his later writings, Fraenger elaborated his ideas into a colorful scenario that had Bosch scurrying around producing pictures not just for the Adamites but for several other heretical groups that had appeared in his home town. In describing their secret rites, which apparently included sexual promiscuity and ritual castration, Fraenger drew material from a bewildering array of gnostic, alchemic, and other sources. The results are an im-

¹ *The Art Bulletin*, LVII, 1973, 145. I would agree with Frinta's further observation that Reuterswärd "is aware of the hypothetical nature of some of Fraenger's radical conclusions and occasionally he cautiously assumes a more moderate position." It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that he did not exercise a similar caution and moderation in criticizing my own handling of Fraenger's theories.

² K. Smit, *De Iconografie van de nederlandse Primitieven*, Amsterdam, 1933,

73; D. Bax, *Ontcijfering van Jeroen Bosch*, The Hague, 1949, 216.

³ Reuterswärd also reminds me "that Fraenger's vast writings offer a wealth of useful information, not just some Adamite theory" (p.287). While he rather overstates the case, I am quite aware of this fact, as Reuterswärd can see for himself if he consults my recent article, "Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man," *Oud-Holland*, LXXXVII, 1973, 214, n. 27.

pressive monument to Fraenger's industry and ingenuity, but their credibility is marred by serious shortcomings. There is absolutely no evidence that the Adamites existed in 's-Hertogenbosch during Bosch's lifetime. The last certain record of them is in Brussels in 1411, and a recent authority on this group, Robert Lerner, concludes that "the theory that the *homines intelligentiae* [or Adamites] continued to flourish for another century to influence the iconography of Bosch seems preposterous."⁴ And there is no concrete evidence that the other sects described by Fraenger ever existed outside of his imagination.

But if it cannot be demonstrated that 's-Hertogenbosch was a hotbed of heresy in Bosch's day, then Fraenger's major premise collapses and all his other speculations on the artist and his work must be read with considerable caution. Most art historians, in fact, have rejected his theories, including such major Bosch scholars as Tolnay, Baldass, and Bax.⁵ Especially revealing is Bax's detailed refutation of *Das tausendjährige Reich* and six other studies by Fraenger.⁶ Reuterswärd might be well advised to read them, if he has not already done so.

As might be expected, Reuterswärd does not reply directly to the specific criticisms of Fraenger that appear in my book. Instead, he cavils at my suggestion that Bosch's religious beliefs were probably orthodox. But why should he? Bosch's orthodoxy is indicated by everything we know about his life: the nature of his recorded commissions, the identity of the people who owned and collected his work in his lifetime and shortly thereafter, and, above all, his membership in a guild dedicated to glorifying the Virgin Mary. This last fact, of course, does not convince Reuterswärd, who tells us at one point (p. 286) that even though the many religious fraternities in 's-Hertogenbosch "may have been accepted socially, their spiritual practices are unknown to us, and for none of them can orthodoxy be actually proved, not even for the otherwise well-known Brotherhood of Our Lady"! We may not have documentary proof of their orthodoxy, but until evidence to the contrary is forthcoming, it would be wiser to assume that they generally conformed to the usual medieval institutions of their kind. To do otherwise is sheer perversity.

Reuterswärd's zeal to maintain Bosch's heterodoxy at all costs equally informs some of his other criticisms. He points, for example, to the beasts of prey in Bosch's Eden scenes as evidence of nonconformity. But Bosch was not the only artist who reflected the opinion of Thomas Aquinas that animals were corrupt even before the Fall of Man. For further details, Reuterswärd is invited to consult my recent article on the *Garden of Earthly Delights*.⁷

Reuterswärd's most serious indictment, however, is that I "tend to normalize Bosch and make him conform with the standard imagery and religious conceptions of the time" (p. 285). He means, I suppose, that I have interpreted Bosch's art according to my preconceived notions of what it should be, a curious charge, incidentally, to come from a follower of Fraenger! But there is no need to "make" Bosch conform to anything of the kind. His many relationships to late medieval art and thought will be obvious, I believe, to any unprejudiced viewer who examines his art within the context of his times. Reuterswärd, however, apparently puts little faith in such methodology, for he informs us that "it should now be about time to *relax, or even reverse*, somewhat the claim that the artist should be studied within his historical context" (p. 284, italics mine). He never clearly explains why he feels this way. Is it because the results produced by this approach to Bosch contradict Fraenger's theories? If so, it is easy to guess which approach he would install in its place. In view of his mistrust of sound

scholarly methods and his devotion to Fraenger's memory, I seriously question Reuterswärd's competence to judge objectively the merits of my book.

Reuterswärd's review, however, has one salutary effect. It makes us realize that although Fraenger has been dead over ten years, we are still haunted by the fantastic specter he created in the name of Hieronymus Bosch. Like Reuterswärd, I also welcome the forthcoming publication of Fraenger's collected writings on Bosch, which will contain a number of articles hitherto inaccessible to many scholars. Perhaps after they have been subjected to a thorough and objective re-examination, Fraenger's theories, by scholarly consensus, will finally be laid to rest.

WALTER S. GIBSON

Case Western Reserve University

Reply

Sir:

I can well understand why Walter Gibson decided to write his letter. I felt the same temptation after having read the review of my book on Bosch a few years ago (*The Art Bulletin*, LVII, 1973, 145-48). I do hope, however, that those who are seriously concerned with Bosch will not base their opinions on my review alone but that they will also read Gibson's book. Yet I cannot see that his additional remarks bring much that is new to the discussion. His main objection to Fraenger's theory is that "there is absolutely no evidence that the Adamites existed in 's-Hertogenbosch during Bosch's lifetime." Not only he but a long line of writers have said so before, perhaps beginning with Dirk Bax in 1948. It was, however, this very kind of reasoning that I wished to question in my review. The fact remains that we know very little of what was going on in Hertogenbosch in Bosch's lifetime. We certainly all look for documentary evidence, but where it is scanty, its use may be risky. To suggest that Hertogenbosch was a spiritually tidy Netherlandish Middletown may therefore be as erroneous as maintaining the contrary. In this light the famous so-called *Garden of Earthly Delights* becomes all the more a document *per se* that demands to be viewed and interpreted for what it shows.

Think of the frescoes of Castelseprio, which totally contradict the traditional view of Lombard art! Small places may produce extraordinary works of art and thought that do not fit the pattern we have for the whole region. Bosch's great triptych differs decisively from what was usual in the Netherlands at that time, a difference that reminds me somewhat of Amarna art in its Egyptian context. At Amarna, of course, a wealth of written documents were also discovered. But imagine that no inscriptions had been found - would the Egyptologists then have been compelled to make Amarna imagery conform to traditional Theban theology?

There is a utopian element in Bosch's great triptych, which Gibson apparently overlooks, as do all writers who follow the line of Dirk Bax. If we are to regard the birds and the manifold berries of the central panel solely as symbols of evil and lechery, how are we to account for their presence in the so-called *Paradiesgärtlein* - that charming picture at Frankfurt that admittedly predates the triptych by some eighty years? The time span is long, but there is also a long stretch of time from Bosch to Bruegel, who finally used elements from Bosch's triptych as downright *Luxuria* symbols. In Bruegel's allegory of *Luxuria*, however, the utopian element is totally absent, and as for his *Land of Cocaigne, or Plenty*, suffice it to say that it is situated light-years away from Bosch's *Garden*. To which world did Bosch belong when he painted his

⁴ R. E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1972, 162. Lerner also concludes that the beliefs and activities of the Adamites were not as sensational as generally supposed.

⁵ For a summary of Fraenger's theories concerning the *Garden of Earthly Delights* and their reception by scholars as well as the general public, see W. S. Gibson, "The *Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch: The Iconography of the Central Panel," *Nederlands kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 1973, 1-6.

⁶ D. Bax, *Beschrijving en poging tot verklaren van het Tuin der Onkuisheiddrieliuk van Jeroen Bosch*, Amsterdam, 1956, 135-185; see also his *Ontcijfering*, 297-305. Bax's critique of Fraenger is particularly valuable because of his superb knowledge of the Netherlandish literature and folklore of Bosch's time.

⁷ Gibson, "Garden of Earthly Delights," 16. This discovery was made too late to be included in my book on Bosch.

main triptych – to that of the Master of the *Paradiesgärtlein*, to that of Bruegel, or to a world in between?

I would rather not return to Gibson's simplifications of Bosch's Cana panel at Rotterdam. But his method of questioning my reliability, by depicting me as a fervent and devoted follower of Fraenger, deserves a comment. By the same right Gibson might be called a devoted follower of Bax, but I do not see the point of continuing a discussion with such arguments. All of us seriously seek to learn the truth about Bosch. In my case there is the possible difference that I now would like to see the job carried on by others rather than continuing myself. Once a writer has committed himself on Bosch, he runs the risk of defending his own case rather than Bosch's. As for the degree of my dependence on Fraenger, I refer to my postscript to the German publication of Fraenger's collected writings on Bosch, which was to appear before the end of 1975. Reading my book would also be a way, which Gibson does not seem to have tried, to judge from his readiness to refer only to my American reviewer. But there is also the language barrier to be considered – I have, after all, certain doubts as to Gibson's ability to read German.

PATRIK REUTERSWÄRD
Stockholm University

Sir:

Towards the end of his article "Parri Spinelli's *Annunciation*" published in *The Art Bulletin*, June 1975, Mark J. Zucker advances a convincing interpretation of the Aretine tradition of *Annunciation* iconography that the body of his paper succeeds in isolating. The present note is prompted by that writer's apparently tentative association of Piero della Francesca's treatment of the same theme in S. Francesco with that tradition: my intention is to confirm that Zucker's findings are relevant to Piero's fresco, and to elaborate on a few implications of the painting's new meaning in the context of its program. It will become apparent that the many typological and other interpretations to which the fresco has proved susceptible should be reconsidered within the framework of Zucker's explanation.

The interpretation of the Aretine *Annunciation* type, that "Even when the coming of Christ is initially heralded, his leaving is already indicated," may be successfully applied to Piero's depiction. In effect it is an amplification of the "elliptical allusion" to Christ's life through which Roberto Longhi sought to explain the apparent anomaly of the scene's inclusion in The Legend of the True Cross.¹ Longhi's refusal to recognize Gabriel's token as a palm, however, prevented him from realizing that a reference is made to the totality of Christ's life, and in particular to his death.² The importance of the palm symbol in Piero's fresco, as in the whole tradition that Zucker has published, is that it refers to the fact of the Crucifixion.³

¹ R. Longhi, *Piero della Francesca*, London–New York, 1930, *passim*, especially 51 and 60. This interpretation is generally followed by Longhi in his 3rd ed., 1963, 212.

² Mario Salmi, *Piero della Francesca: Le storie della croce (Forma e colore, xiv)*, Florence, 1967, unpaginated, followed by Alberto Busignani, *Piero della Francesca*, London, 1968, 20 and 34, recognized the token as a palm and, with the support of *The Golden Legend*, interpreted the scene as the *Annunciation of the Death of the Virgin* (see also Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings," *Art Bulletin*, xxvi, 1945, 175, n.). The youth of the Virgin, however, especially when contrasted with her aged appearance in the *Crucifixion of the Misericordia Polyptych*, and the irrelevance of the narrative in the program, should refute this identification. (This note cannot be concerned with the many different readings of Gabriel's token, nor with those connections of the fresco with the figure of St. Helena.)

³ Frederick Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art*, New York, 1969, 241f., saw reference to the Crucifixion in the cruciform design of the composition. The decoration of the door is perhaps more pertinent because one of the repeated motifs is a stylized cross. Whereas the other of three mouchettes, which has an exact parallel in the lectern of *Federigo da Montefeltro and His Son*, attributed to Pedro Berruguete, Urbino, Palazzo Ducale, most probably refers to the Trinity. Guidoccio Cozzarelli combined an *Annunciation* with a palm and a scene of flight, which John Pope-Hennessy, *Sieneese Quattrocento Painting*, London, 1947, pl. 66, inter-

This culmination of Christ's life is nowhere explicitly narrated in the frescoes, but it occurred on the Cross whose story is the subject of Piero's entire cycle. Seen in this light, the *Annunciation* is deservedly included in the program as the only scene capable of implying the complete cycle of Christ's existence on earth.⁴

A review of Piero's immediate sources establishes the full paths in his presentation of the tragic circularity of Christ's life. Spinello Aretino's fresco in the same church of S. Francesco and Parri Spinelli's more nearly contemporary tabernacle are similar iconographically and they both may be supposed to have influenced Piero's depiction. Both paintings include the ancillary scene of the *Charge to Gabriel* which, as Zucker notes, was rare outside Arezzo. Zucker does not, however, pursue the meaning of the episode. Each version seems to identify the figure of the Godhead delivering the palm to Gabriel with the second person of the Trinity. The full compositions thus read as Christ himself instructing the Archangel to announce his own birth and at the same time to predict his own death. The deliberate illogic of Spinello's *Annunciation* is continued in the "sculptured" prophet in the gable of the Virgin's loggia who, through appearance and gesture, may be identified as St. John the Baptist.⁵ In these and other Aretine depictions, the *Annunciation* theme becomes vehicle for a fatalistic interpretation of the Gospel by insistence on the inevitability, and perhaps even futility, of Christ's destiny.

Piero's omission of the *Charge to Gabriel* and his incorporation of God the Father into the terrestrial scene of the *Annunciation* rationalize the chronological confusion of his sources and, in so doing, approximate the local tradition to conventional iconography. His acceptance of that tradition, however, may be confirmed by comparison of Gabriel's token with St. Agatha's palm of martyrdom in the little roundel of the St. Antony Polyptych, and by contrast of the same detail with the lily held by the Angel of the *Annunciation of the Misericordia Polyptych*. Moreover, students of Piero should be impressed by the unique characterization of the Arezzo *Annunciate* in the context of the artist's other versions of the theme.

Three other representations of the *Annunciation* by Piero survive.⁶ The consistent appearance of the Virgin *Annunciate* in the *Misericordia Polyptych*, the St. Antony Polyptych, and in the tiny embroidered scene of the St. Augustine panel documents Piero's preference for the moment of Mary's submission to God's will which, as Michael Baxandall has shown, concluded her successive mental states of Disquiet, Reflection, and Inquiry in the course of the angelic colloquy.⁷ The condition of *Humiliatio* was portrayed through her bent neck and one or both arms folded across her chest. The passivity of this attitude among the several alternatives available to Piero was presumably congenial to this artist of solemn monumental forms. Fra Angelico exploited the same condition probably in order to render his *Annunciate* in

preted as the Flight into Egypt; in the absence of the Christchild, however, the picture probably represents the Journey to Bethlehem. This unusual association was probably intended to convey the subservience of the Holy Family to earthly as well as supernatural law.

⁴ Symbols of the Passion were often included in Madonna and Child groups, not least by Piero himself, but this scene lacks both the totality and the feeling of movement through time that the *Annunciation* achieves.

⁵ St. John would be identified as the last prophet in many trecento altarpieces.

⁶ Piero is known to have painted a banner for the Confraternity of the *Annunciation* at Arezzo, which has not survived; and the inventory of his heirs of 1515 mentions a painting of the Virgin *Annunciate*, which may have been by him (see Creighton Gilbert, *Change in Piero della Francesca*, Locust Valley, N.Y., 1968, 115). If this untraced painting may be associated in any way with Piero himself, it should confirm the theory implied below that the artist was aware of distinct interpretations of narrative sequence of the *Annunciation*, for it portrayed *Meritatio*, the laudable condition that immediately followed the colloquy.

⁷ M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Oxford, 1974, 51–55. Baxandall's explanation of the Arezzo version is on p. 35; he does not consider Piero's other treatments of the theme and so does not distinguish the unique quality of the fresco.

profound humility; in contrast to Angelico and to his other versions of the Annunciate, Piero's presentation of the figure at Arezzo is distinguished by a feeling of strong protest.⁸ The Virgin's arm is raised in inquiry, but the gesture communicates her profound disturbance rather than interrogation; the evasive twist of her body further demonstrates her initial reluctance to submit to the compassionate but compelling figure of the Father.

The idiosyncratic restraint of Piero's characterization of the protesting Annunciate at Arezzo should not conceal the content of her prophetic foreknowledge of Christ's destiny and so the fresco's relationship to the Aretine tradition. The solemnity of the Virgin's response to the angelic message may be compared to the radically different spirit of the fighting figures elsewhere in the program, but at the same time Mary appears psychologically more convincing than comparable figures in the pictures Piero drew upon.⁹ The recoiling movement of her figure asserts the tragic content of the Annunciation and establishes a reference to the Crucifixion. Supporting this explanation is the possibility that Piero intended to complement his fresco's iconographical reference by direct physical association of the *Annunciation* with an actual crucifix. Certain evidence, mainly concerned with the now dispersed furnishings of the choir, suggests that Piero thus made unequivocal allusion to the pivotal episode of the True Cross story. In the near future, I hope to be able to present a tentative reconstruction of the original appearance of the chapel in S. Francesco, and my inquiry, based upon independent arrival at Zucker's conclusion, may account for the extraordinary details of the fresco that have so far confounded most recent analysis.

MICHAEL GODBY

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Sir:

Marvin Trachtenberg and readers of his review of my *Architecture of the Monastic Library in Italy* (*The Art Bulletin*, LVII, 1975, 443-444) will want to know that I specifically excluded what he calls "the carry-over of the basilical-church image in the basilical library." At least, I intended to do so in the book, but was thwarted by an editor at N.Y.U. Press, who reversed the meaning of what I thought of as a punch line.

On the bottom of p.29 the present text concludes my discussion of Tolnay's statement connecting library and religious architecture with this sentence: "I believe that with this enough has been said in previous pages to correct the misconception that the basilical library was never conceived as a church."

It has been a constant source of surprise that no reviewer has caught this piece of nonsense. What my typescript said was: "I believe enough has been said in previous pages to correct the misconception that the basilical library was ever conceived as a church."

I appreciate this opportunity to correct a particularly irritating example of editorial butchery.

JAMES F. O'GORMAN
Wellesley College

⁸ The mood of the painting was correctly interpreted by George Goldner, "Notes on the Iconography of Piero della Francesca's *Annunciation* at Arezzo," *Art Bulletin*, LVI, 1974, 342-44.

⁹ Zucker, 187, quotes Vasari's description of Parri Spinelli's Annunciate of the destroyed tabernacle as "turning away all in terror" from the Archangel, but, in contrast, many of the Aretine and Siense figures that relate to the tradition appear rather limp.