



The Amsterdam *Paradise* by Herri met de Bles and the Fountain of Life*

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One of the most intriguing early landscape paintings in the Rijksmuseum is *Paradise* by Herri met de Bles (fig. 1). The more closely the modern-day viewer examines this small panel with its extremely detailed scene, the more questions it raises. Several authors have consequently endeavoured to coax the work into giving up its secrets.

The panel is round and has a sawn bevelled edge. It was almost certainly originally contained in a carved round wooden frame that was later removed.¹ The composition is divided into concentric bands around a circular central section in which we see paradise; beside and behind it is a panoramic 'world landscape'. Paradise, densely wooded, is populated by animals of all kinds, the first humans and the Creator himself. Around the central scene runs a broad band of sky, with birds, clouds, the sun, the moon and the stars. The circle of sky is enclosed within a second band of waves in shades of blue and green. The artist has thus succinctly presented both the course and the result of the Creation, as it is described in the Book of Genesis: the division of the light from the darkness – not pictured – was followed by the division of the waters above the firmament from the waters below, the separation of water and land and the vegetation of the earth, the creation of the celestial bodies and then of the fish,

Fig. 1
HERRI MET DE BLES,
Paradise, c. 1541-50.
Oil on panel,
46.6 x 45.5 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. SK-A-780.

the birds, the creatures of the land and human beings.² The Creator made man a place to dwell, 'a garden eastward in Eden', with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and a river that watered the garden, then parted to become four branches. The artist shows us the two primal trees in paradise, and the source of the primal river in the form of an elegant fountain with four spouts.³

In this idyllic setting, which occupies roughly the lower half of the landscape, Bles pictures the tragic story of the Fall in four scenes, following the sequence of the days of the Creation: the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, God forbidding them to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve tempted by the serpent, and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.⁴ Spreading out behind paradise is the rest of the earth, the future dwelling place of the first people and their descendants. Amidst the green hills lies a cultivated field of wheat; beyond, the landscape is one of rough waters and rocks, dominated by a huge, mountainous rock towering above all.

Within a single composition the painting thus presents the cycle of the Creation in seven days and the story of the Garden of Eden, and does so in the form of a framed tondo. This combination is in itself highly unusual for the sixteenth century, and certainly in

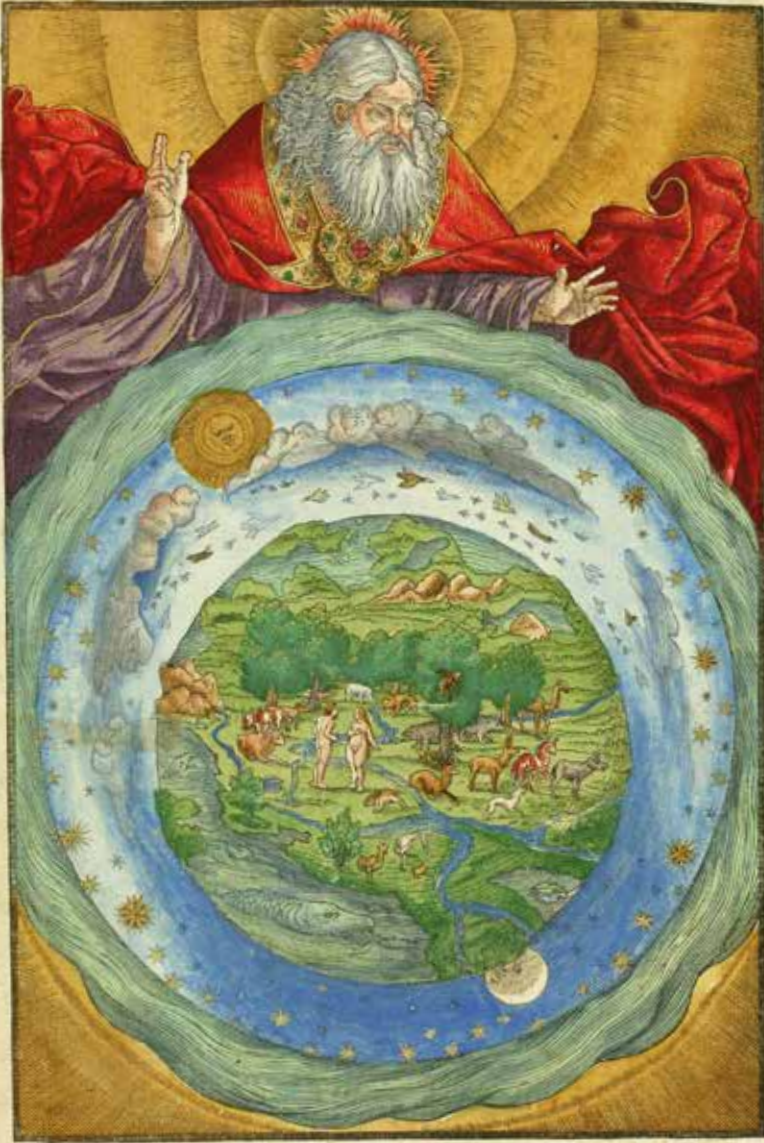


Fig. 2

MONOGRAMMIST MS (workshop of LUCAS CRANACH), *The Creation of the World*, woodcut on the title page of the Luther Bible, Heidelberg (Hans Lufft) 1534. Nuremberg, Stadtbibliothek, inv. no. 75 Solg. 85. 2°.

the oeuvre of Herri met de Bles. J.P. Filedt Kok has therefore suggested that the painting was most likely made for a private patron, who gave the painter a quite detailed description of the scene he wanted.⁵

Bles was first and foremost a landscape painter, so he composed the scene with the help of borrowings from other artists. In broad outline he followed *The Creation of the World*, a woodcut in the large Luther Bible of 1534 (fig. 2), but there are several significant differences. He omitted the figure of God the Father, surveying the results of Creation with a gesture of blessing, and he replaced the figures of Adam and Eve in the centre of the garden with the four narrative scenes, which he had derived from two sets of prints by Dürer and Aldegrever dating from around 1510 and 1540-41 respectively.⁶ He followed the iconography of these prints closely. In Bles, as in Aldegrever, it is God the Father who creates Eve from Adam's rib, but it is the Word – the logos, God the Son – who forbids the humans to eat from the tree.

Fig. 3

Detail with the Fountain (fig. 1).



The second major departure from the Luther Bible is the fountain. In Luther's Bible a spring bubbles up in the middle of the Garden of Eden; it becomes a narrow stream that flows out of paradise, where it divides into the four main rivers, Pison, Gichon, Euphrates and Tigris.⁷ This illustration thus adheres as closely as possible to the Bible text. In Bles's painting, however, at the site of the spring there is a tall, decorative fountain with four spouts from which flow small streams that lose themselves in four directions among the trees in the Garden (fig. 3). Bles likewise copied this fountain faithfully; I shall return to it later.

Landscape or Lecture

The question is, what did the painter intend when he made this composition, or in other words: what was the function of the work of art? W. Kloek sees Bles's wild landscape in very general terms as an image of the 'landscape of life'. Sitting before the painting, the viewer could meditate on the wonders of God's Creation and on the Fall of Man, and perhaps also reflect on his own arduous path through life.⁸ L. Hendrikman suggests that the panel was originally the central element in a sort of house altar, designed for private devotion.⁹ In an extensively documented model of visual close reading, M. Weemans recently interpreted the scene as a 'visual exegesis' of Genesis 1-3, considered down to the minutest details, which in fact was only accessible to the tenacious and at the same time theologically trained viewer.¹⁰ Other authors, however, regard such theological and devotional considerations as irrelevant. They see Bles as 'a landscape painter for whom Genesis is no more than an incentive' and the present painting simply as an 'ode to God's Creation', with the story of paradise as narrative staffage, an essentially secular picture which stands 'at the beginning of a series



Fig. 4
Adam and Eve Enter Paradise, in Ludolf of Saxony, *Dat boeck vanden leven ons lief heeren Ihesu Christi*, Antwerp (Claes Leeu) 1488. Woodcut, hand-coloured, 256 x 200 mm. Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, inv. no. BMH Warm 11263H9, f. 17v.

of independent paradise images that reaches its apogee in the paintings of Jan Brueghel and Rubens'.¹¹

The question is whether these divergent and seemingly conflicting interpretations rule one another out; in other words, whether the meticulous painting of paradise and the world landscape is not the attractive pictorial presentation of a genuine religious function. I refer in this respect not only to the narrative scenes, but in particular to the tree-high decorative fountain that is placed prominently in the middle of paradise and also roughly in the centre of the panel as a whole. At first sight, this fountain is a quite remarkable element in the composition. The Book of Genesis only mentions a river that flows through the Garden of Eden, not a spring and certainly not a massive sculpted fountain as an architectural marker of that spring. This is why Luther, who kept a very close watch on the illustrations for his translation, allowed nothing that remotely

resembled a fountain to be shown. Luther was so fearful of unfounded speculation that in his interpretation of the Bible he always worked from the bald, literal text and the factual account.¹²

But the Bible could also be read and illustrated in another way – a way in which the deeper, more metaphorical significance takes precedence over the literal and factual meaning. In the New Testament, both Christ himself and the evangelists repeatedly allude to people, events and sayings in the Old Testament that supposedly pointed ahead to the life of Christ and the content of the gospel that he proclaimed. The New Testament thus became the concrete fulfilment of the promise in the Old Testament, and Christ the Messiah announced by the prophets, the 'second' or 'new' Adam, whose death on the Cross redeemed the world from Adam and Eve's original sin. He had restored humankind – on condition that it believed in Christ's message – to its original state, free of sin, and at the same time – figuratively – to its original environment, not yet despoiled by sin: paradise.¹³ This is why print series with lives of Christ or the Passion, published in their own right or as illustrations in books, often begin with one or more scenes from Genesis 1. The many Dutch translations of Ludolf of Saxony's *Vita Jesu Christi* are typical examples of this (fig. 4).¹⁴

At the same time, though, the concrete, original paradise in the medieval depiction was present somewhere on earth, inaccessible to humanity in its fallen state.¹⁵ It was the place where the souls of the dead stayed, awaiting the Last Judgement at the end of days, when Christ as the supreme judge will decide which souls may enter heaven and which will be condemned to hell. And finally, people visualized the new earth and the new Jerusalem at the end of days, which John describes in Revelation, the last book of the Bible, as a new paradise, with the same

characteristics as the lost paradise in the book of Genesis.¹⁶

And yet there is a connection between these different concepts of paradise. Traditional Christian thinking was based on the assumption that humankind's various material and immaterial areas of experience correspond to one another in their analogue structure: the primal state of man and mankind, the Old and the New Testaments, the Church, the life of the soul of the individual human being and the eventual perfect state.¹⁷ The concept of 'paradise' as a metaphor consequently expresses at one and the same time the ideal structure of the cosmos, of the Church as the community of the faithful and of the human soul.¹⁸

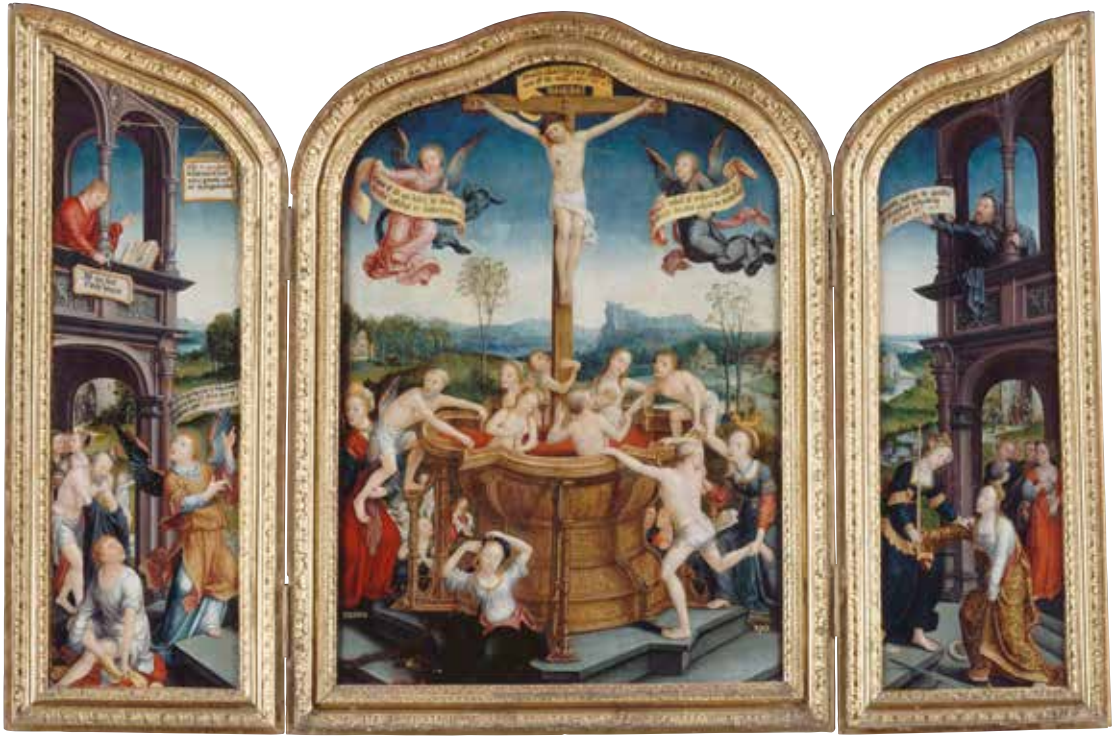
The Fountain as the Source of Life

But why did Bles represent the source of the four rivers of paradise so conspicuously in the form of a fountain? To answer this, we must consult not only the Book of Genesis but other passages in the Bible, where we find repeated references to flowing water or a source giving water in a metaphorical sense. Water can serve here as an image of God's life-giving powers, of Christ, who bathes the faithful with streams of mercy or inspiration, and of the cleansing power of faith.¹⁹ Sitting beside a well, Jesus says to the Samaritan woman: 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.' And elsewhere: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'²⁰ These texts could be supported with the stories of Old Testament prophets, in which the source of living water likewise served as an image of spiritual fortification. Thus God says to Isaiah: 'For I will pour water upon him that

is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.'²¹

Another tradition, which flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, linked the image of the spring with Christ's crucifixion, particularly the passage in which a Roman soldier pierced the dead Christ's side, whereupon blood and water flowed from the wound.²² Many mystical writers interpreted this happening as an allegory of Christ as the *fons pietatis* (the fount of spiritual piety) and the spiritual rebirth of the pious man through the death of Christ.²³ In his famous and repeatedly reprinted *Vita Jesu Christi*, Ludolf of Saxony, one of the most popular authors in the late Middle Ages, expressly made the connection to the spring in paradise: 'From the depth of Jesus's wounded side flowed in abundance as from a fountain the ransom for our deliverance. ... Bring your mouth to that pierced side to drink the waters from the springs of the Saviour. For this is the fountain flowing from the centre of paradise, that waters devout hearts and fertilizes and overflows the whole world.'²⁴ This allegory was made visible in art as a spring or fountain with the central figure of Christ, whose water and blood are collected in the basin so that pious souls may drink or bathe in them (fig. 5).²⁵ In its original form, the Well of Moses in the Charterhouse of Champmol was topped with a crucifix and was thus an allegorical image of Christ as *fons pietatis*.²⁶ An epitaph of 1547 in Bremen Cathedral unequivocally pictures the direct connection between Christ as *fons pietatis* and the Fall in paradise, because here Adam and Eve stand beside Christ in the basin while the serpent coils around the Cross (fig. 6).²⁷

In other cases, Christ as the 'fount of life' is associated with the new paradise at the end of days. The inspiration for this came from the last book of the



Bible, *The Revelation of St John the Divine*. In a vision, the author describes the appearance of a new heaven and new earth and a new Jerusalem, and he continues thus: 'And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.'²⁸ This vision, with all its theological associations, was pictured by Jan and Hubert van Eyck in *The Adoration of the Lamb*. The central theme of this polyptych is Christ in the form of 'the Lamb of God', whose bloody death on the Cross takes away the sins of the world (fig. 7).²⁹ The chalice in which the blood of the Lamb is received alludes to the communion cup that features in the Eucharist or Holy Communion service celebrated in front of this altarpiece every day.³⁰ In the Van Eyck altarpiece, this culminates in the paradisiacal new world conjured up in the passage in *Revelation* quoted

above, and in the foreground of the image rises the 'the fount of the water of life'.³¹ The upper outside shutters of the altarpiece are occupied by Adam and Eve, as a reminder of their sin in the 'old' paradise. This was, after all, the cause of God's wrath, which was only taken away by the death of Christ.

In the allegorical reading of the Bible, the source of the rivers of paradise was thus at one and the same time the fountain of life, the 'source of living water', which is both the image of God's mercy in the Creation and of Christ the Redeemer. To the best of my knowledge it was first depicted as such in Netherlandish painting by the Limbourg Brothers in the miniature of paradise in the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (fig. 8).³² Here it is actually the most prominent non-human motif within the walls of paradise. The painters make no attempt whatsoever to give a realistic, let alone three-dimensional representation of the

Fig. 5
JEAN DE BELLEGAMBE,
*Triptyque du bain
mystique*, c. 1510-20.
Oil on panel,
81 x 85 cm.
Lille, Musée des
Beaux-Arts,
inv. no. P.382.
Photo: © RMN-
Grand Palais/
René-Gabriel Ojéda.



Fig. 6
 ANONYMOUS,
*Epitaph for Segebade
 Clüver with the Fons
 Pietatis, the Serpent
 and Adam and Eve,*
 c. 1547.
 Sandstone, painted.
 Bremen, Dom-
 Museum.
 Photo: Stiftung
 Bremer Dom e.V.



Fig. 7
 JAN AND HUBERT
 VAN EYCK,
*The Adoration of
 the Lamb (detail),*
 fifteenth century.
 Oil on panel,
 340 x 440 cm.
 Ghent, St Bavo's
 Cathedral.
 Photo: © Lukas –
 Art in Flanders vzw/
 Hugo Maertens.



Fig. 8
 LIMBOURG BROTHERS,
*Paradise, in Les Très
 Riches Heures
 du Duc de Berry,*
 fifteenth century.
 Painting on paper,
 29 x 21 cm.
 Chantilly, Musée
 Condé, inv. no. ms65,
 fol. 25v.
 Photo: © RMN-
 Grand Palais (domaine
 de Chantilly)/
 René-Gabriel Ojéda.

story. The creation of the world and of Adam and Eve are not shown, nor is the ban on eating the fruit of the tree. They focus solely on the two key scenes in the story – the Fall and its consequence, the expulsion from paradise. This paradise is depicted as the ideal, round garden.³⁵ The central element in this garden is the fountain of life, which in its conspicuous presence refers without doubt to that other fountain, Christ, whose martyr's death would reconcile God the Father with humankind.³⁴ As a consequence, at the end of days true believers would

be able to enter again the ideal paradise of the new earth by way of the same monumental gate through which the first humans had to leave. And there they would find the same fountain of life that can be seen in the allegory of *The Adoration of the Lamb*. Paradise lost thus became at the same time a promise: it announced salvation and the creation of the second paradise, the new heaven and the new earth.

But, as we have seen, paradise had meanings on more than one level at the same time. In a parallel, but much more realistic composition, the lost paradise of Genesis was simply present in an inaccessible place on earth, so that it could serve the chosen people at the Last Judgement as an earthly vestibule for heaven.³⁵ Bouts's *Last Judgement* triptych, of which only the side panels have survived, is a well-known depiction of this notion (fig. 9).³⁶ And here, too, the fountain of life is a prominent feature as a linking element between the lost and the future paradise, with between them Christ as the fount of all mercy.³⁷

Bosch's Ominous Fountain

In all these compositions the history of the fatal sin in paradise is directly associated with the promise of a later reconciliation between God and man. But things could be very different. The late Middle Ages were a time of disaster and violence: the Hundred Years' War, the growing Turkish threat, the Black Death, the Great Schism and regional conflicts too numerous to count. Many religious people, whipped up by penitential preachers and pessimistic theologians, saw this doom as God's punishment for the general sinfulness of mankind. People began to think that since the Great Schism no one would ever attain paradise. At the same time there was immense fear of the approaching Last Judgement and the torments of hell. Many saw the history of humankind as one long agonizing journey between

Fig. 9
DIRK BOUTS,
Paradise (left
wing of an altar-
piece), c. 1450.
Oil on panel,
115 x 70 cm.
Lille, Musée
des Beaux-Arts,
inv. no. P.820.
Photo: © RMN-
Grand Palais/
Jean-Gilles Berizzi.





Fig. 10
HIERONYMUS BOSCH,
*The Garden of
Earthly Delights*
(left wing), Madrid,
c. 1500-05.
Oil on panel,
220 x 389 cm.
Madrid, Museo
del Prado,
inv. no. Po2823.
Photo: Florence,
Scala Archives.

creation of the woman. The only hope lies in the figure of God the Son as Christ, the *Salvator Mundi*, who, as he takes the newly created Eve by the hand, looks at the viewer and raises his hand in a gesture of blessing.³⁹

The left side panel of a lesser-known triptych of *The Last Judgement*, made in Bosch's workshop not long after Dirk Bouts painted his, shows – like Bouts's – paradise as the waiting room of the chosen souls (figs. 11a, b). This paradise, too, which is held in Bruges, houses a curious hybrid, but this time of benign vegetation; the faithful pass the time with music and leisure, led by angels, awaiting their future entrance

Fig. 11a
Detail of the left wing
(fig. 11b).



the Fall in the Garden of Eden and Judgement Day.³⁸

The artist who expressed this pessimistic view of life most vividly is Hieronymus Bosch. In his work only a few have any hope of redemption. In the triptych of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* the whole period between paradise and hellfire is one morass of sin and lust. Even paradise is not immune to the ever-present threat of evil (fig. 10). Plants, animals and mountains are terrifyingly deformed and even the fountain of life is a ghastly monster of hybrid vegetation. Here evil has evidently already taken possession of Creation with the



into heaven. As in Bouts's work, the fountain of life is a striking feature of the landscape.⁴⁰ This fountain – like that in the *Garden of Earthly Delights* – is very different in appearance from the Limbourg Brothers' fountain, the one in Bouts and the one in *Dat boeck vanden leven ons lief heeren Ihesu Christi* (see fig. 4). In designing their fountains they had undoubtedly taken their inspiration from the filigree-style Late Gothic town fountains and table fountains (fig. 12).⁴¹ The fountain painted by Bosch in the Bruges *Last Judgement*, by contrast, is an unusual model with a thick 'pillar' and glass or

Fig. 11b

WORKSHOP OF
HIERONYMUS BOSCH,
The Last Judgement,
c. 1450-1516.
Oil on panel,
98.7 x 110.7 cm.
Bruges, Groeninge-
museum, inv. no.
0000.GRO0208.I.
Photo: © Lukas –
Art in Flanders vzw/
Hugo Maertens.



Fig. 12

Table Fountain,
c. 1320-40.
Silver, parcel gilt
and translucent
enamels,
33.8 x 25.4 x 26 cm.
Cleveland,
Cleveland Museum of
Art, inv. no. 1924.859;
gift of J.H. Wade.

crystal spheres. It was probably conceived by the painter himself, but he may have taken his inspiration from a fantastical art object or a design for one. This could have been a silver table fountain, but also a monstrance and probably also a reliquary. Since the early Middle Ages drops of Christ's blood or splinters of the True Cross were brought back from the Middle East; they were usually contained in crystal reliquaries. The crystal bulbs acted as a window through which the viewer could see the precious object in the holder.⁴² The same is true to an even greater degree of the monstrance (fig. 13).⁴³ Aside from the formal correspondence, the express association with a monstrance could contain a reference for the viewer of the painting to the dead Christ as *fons pietatis*.

It is this curious fountain in Bosch's Bruges triptych that Herri met de Bles chose as the model for his own paradise fountain, although he made his own version much more slender.⁴⁴ It is possible that the meditative associations suggested above were the deciding factor. And yet this is a remarkable choice, because in the meantime various other Netherlandish painters had incorporated the theme of the fountain of life in scenes of either the earthly paradise or the mystical *fons vitae*, in which the forms were much closer to the style of contemporary fountains that actually existed.⁴⁵ The best-known of them is Jan Gossaert. Around 1510 he painted a *Holy Family in a Garden*, in which he placed an ornately decorated fountain as an allusion to the text in the Song of

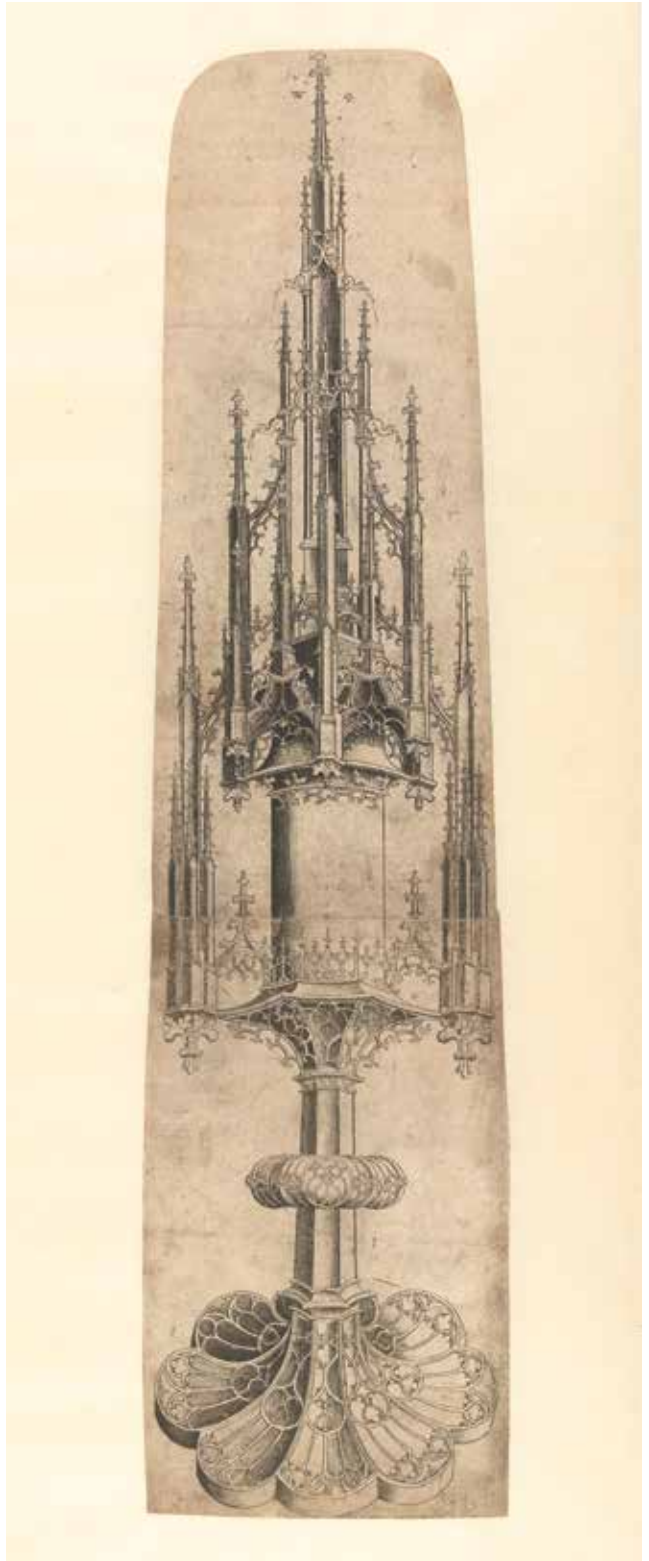


Fig. 13
 MASTER W WITH
 THE KEY, *Design for
 a Gothic Monstrance*,
 c. 1465-85.
 Engraving,
 c. 460 x 113 mm.
 Amsterdam,
 Rijksmuseum,
 inv. no. RP-P-OB-2163.



Fig. 14
 JAN GOSSAERT,
The Holy Family,
 c. 1507-08.
 Oil on panel,
 46 x 33.7 cm.
 Los Angeles,
 The J. Paul Getty
 Museum,
 inv. no. 71.PB.45.

Solomon: 'A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon' (fig. 14).⁴⁶ According to an old tradition, the fountain in a garden in the Song of Solomon did not, however, refer to paradise and Christ as the source of life, but to the Virgin.⁴⁷ The same image could therefore apply to both Christ and Mary. In this work of art both meanings seem to fuse into

a single image. Gossaert could consequently use the same fountain again without problems in his *Adam and Eve* in London (figs. 15a, b).⁴⁸ The first people are the primary subject here, portrayed in their human beauty, standing between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Furtively, Eve holds the apple in one hand; she has picked it at the

urging of the diabolical serpent in the tree, and is on the point of presenting it to Adam. This is the crucial moment that precedes the Fall and all that it brought about.⁴⁹ At first sight the message of this painting appears to be wholly negative, or at least admonitory. At the same time, however – and this seems to be typical of a new confidence in the positive value of the paradise story – Gossaert depicts behind the two, precisely on the axis of the composition, a view of the fountain of life as a portent of the redemption Christ will bring.

Like the town fountains that survive from this period, Gossaert's fountains are a strange mixture of Late Gothic and Renaissance architectural elements and hybrid figuration. Yet this icono-

graphic ambiguity does not detract from the tenor of the composition as a whole.⁵⁰ What matters is that, as the Limbourg Brothers had done before, Gossaert – all the differences in execution notwithstanding – linked the Fall iconographically by means of the fountain to the next step in the divine salvation plan, the sacrifice of Christ as the second Adam, and then to the eventual return of faithful Christians to the new paradise.

A Meditation in Paint?

Against the background of this rich iconographic tradition it is highly likely that Bles's painting had a more than purely aesthetic or historical narrative significance for its original

Fig. 15a

JAN GOSSAERT,
Adam and Eve,
c. 1520.
Oil on panel,
169.2 x 112 cm.
London,
Buckingham Palace,
inv. no. RCN 407615.
Photo: Royal
Collection Trust/
© Her Majesty Queen
Elizabeth II 2014.

Fig. 15b

Detail with the
fountain (fig. 15a).



owner. At first sight the work depicts the course of the Creation and the history of the Fall. But it is with good reason that the fountain of life is the striking focal point of the composition: in this reading it represents the core of the message that the painting conveys. Christ, who on the left of the fountain – as the representative of the Holy Trinity – tells Adam and Eve of the prohibition that they will soon break, with fatal consequences, is at the same time spiritually present in the form of the fountain of life. He thus announces metaphorically the salvation of humankind, brought low by the original sin, which he will only accomplish in the New Testament. As in Gossaert's painting of *Adam and Eve* in London – now, however, not half concealed in the background but prominently featured – it is not the fall from grace of the first humans that is the true subject, but the salvation that Christ offers all sinners who repent and believe in his redeeming word. Far from surprising, such content is actually to be expected at a time and in a city where this optimistic message was promulgated everywhere, inside and outside the church, in response to the fears that had dominated the period just passed.⁵¹

If we follow this line of thinking, the cultivated field and the towering rock formation, which to a significant extent define the area behind and 'above' paradise, have a substantive meaning in addition to their function in the landscape. These two pictorial landscape elements, like the fountain, are sited on the central axis of the composition. The field above the fountain refers to the historical sequel to the banishment from paradise: 'And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall I

bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.'⁵² The huge, towering rock behind the field in turn evokes associations with the age-old metaphor for Christ as the 'rock of our salvation'. A similar rock appears in the background to Gossaert's *Adam and Eve* in London.⁵³ And thus there also runs through these seemingly purely landscape elements both a compositional and a substantive line. It links the fountain of life with the punishment for the Fall and at the same time with the redeeming power of Christ.

Conclusion

On the basis of this interpretation we can formulate a cautious answer to the question with which this essay began, in the sense that within this composition the landscape in its various components, together with the historical and architectural elements, forms both an aesthetic compositional and a substantive entity. I would go so far as to say that that it is an extraordinarily powerful example of the way the world landscape could serve as a vehicle for personal meditation, in the manner that had been presaged by the Limbourg Brothers and Van Eyck, but was developed specifically by Patinir.⁵⁴

What is remarkable is that the message is announced here with the aid of metaphors that were no longer self-evident at the time the painting was made. In particular, the decision to give the fountain of life such a prominent and even central place in the iconography of the painting must have been quite old-fashioned when Bles painted it. Since the first quarter of the century, evidently as a result of the influence of both reformers and humanists loyal to the church, the emphasis on illustrations of Bible stories that were absolutely faithful to the text had become so general that the fountain was seldom if ever given a place in images of paradise, let alone in the centre of the composition.

One can, though, imagine that the first owner of Herri met de Bles's *Paradise* belonged to the broad circle of modern believers, who on the one hand were sensible of the positive aspects of the faithful illustration of the Bible, but on the other were disinclined to jettison the riches of traditional equivocal exegesis.

NOTES

- * This article is the extended version of the section 'A Sequel to Patinir: Herri met de Bles', in B. Bakker, *Landscape and Religion from Van Eyck to Rembrandt*, Farnham 2012, pp. 106-08. At the start of the research I received considerable support from J. Dobrinsky, particularly in regard to the French sources and literature; further from L. Campbell and R. Billinge (Gossaert) and E. Nygård (Goswijn van der Weijden). In writing the piece, I was grateful for P. van Dael's critical comments and enlightening additions. I should also like to thank M. Ubl for his comments on the first version of the text. For the earlier literature see E. Boeke, *Rondom het paradijsverhaal*, Wassenaar 1974, esp. pp. 67-164: 'Het paradijs van Herri met de Bles'; L. Serck, *Henri Bles et la Peinture de Paysage dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux avant Bruegel*, Louvain 1990 (unpubl. diss.), pp. 171-89; W. Kloek, 'Herri met de Bles, *Het paradijs*', in H. van Os et al., *Netherlandish Art 1400-1600*, Amsterdam/Zwolle 2000, pp. 184-85; J.P. Filedt Kok, 'Het Paradijs van Herri Bles', in J.E. Abrahamse et al. (eds.), *De verbeelde wereld. Liber amicorum voor Boudewijn Bakker*, Bussum 2008, pp. 104-11; L. Hendrikman, 'Herri met de Bles, *Het Paradijs*', in the digital catalogue *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; M. Weemans, "'The Earthly Paradise": Herri met de Bles's Visual Exegesis of Genesis 1-3', in C. Brusati et al. (eds.), *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400-1700*, Leiden 2012, pp. 263-312.
- 1 See Filedt Kok, op. cit. (note *), pp. 109-11.
 - 2 *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Genesis 1:1-27. Oxford World's Classics (1997).
 - 3 Genesis 2:8-10.
 - 4 Genesis 3:1-22.
 - 5 See Filedt Kok, op. cit. (note *), p. 111.
 - 6 *The Fall of Man* was taken from Dürer's woodcut, albeit in reverse (B. 17/M. 126; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-1321, 1357) in the *Small Passion Series* of c. 1510 and *The Expulsion from Paradise* was taken from the same series (B. 18/M. 127; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-1357). *God Forbidding Adam* is closest to Aldegrever's engraving (B. 2; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-2607) from his 1540 series of *The Story of Adam and Eve*, and is also shown in reverse in the painting. *The Creation of Eve* was based on two engravings by Aldegrever of the same subject: one in his 1540 series of *The Story of Adam and Eve* (B. 1; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-2606) and one in reverse from a *Dance of Death* suite of 1541 (B. 135; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-2753), to which the painter added an original detail: Eve's head is directly mounted on Adam's rib in God's hand. For the illustrations see among others Hendrikman, op. cit. (note *).
 - 7 Genesis 2:10-14.
 - 8 In his unpublished dissertation Serck, op. cit. (note *), refers to Bles's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* in Basel, where this is indeed the case. See Filedt Kok, op. cit. (note *), pp. 110-11, with fig. See further Kloek, op. cit. (note *), p. 184.
 - 9 See Hendrikman, op. cit. (note *).
 - 10 Weemans, op. cit. (note *).
 - 11 See Boeke, op. cit. (note *), p. 77; Filedt Kok, op. cit. (note *), p. 111.
 - 12 A. Skevington Wood, *Luther's Principles of Bible Interpretation*, London 1946.
 - 13 See for example Luke 23:43, where Christ says to the murderer who converted on the cross: 'Verily I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with me in paradise.'
 - 14 Other examples include Albrecht Dürer's *Small Passion* and the *Figures du Nouveau*

- Testament* by Bernard Salomon with texts by C. Fontaine, Lyon 1559.
- 15 For an early illustration see Maître de la Mazarine, *Paradise with the Fountain and the Four Streams*, in J. de Mandeville, *Voyages. Le Livre des Merveilles*, 1410-12. Paris, BnF, inv. no. Mss occ. fr. 2810, fol. 222.
- 16 In Ezekiel and Isaiah the images of the Promised Land and paradise overlap and are integrated.
- 17 See J. Daniélou, 'Terre et paradis chez les Pères de l'Église', in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 22 (1953), pp. 433-72, esp. pp. 450-55. For the continued existence of this tradition see H.W. Piper, *The Singing of Mount Abora: Coleridge's Use of Biblical Imagery and Natural Symbolism in Poetry and Philosophy*, London/Toronto 1987.
- 18 Paradise is a classic example of the traditional fourfold biblical exegesis – 'historical', 'allegorical', 'tropological' and 'anagogical' – developed by the Church Fathers. In the historical sense, paradise is the Garden of Eden with the four streams flowing from one riverhead; in the allegorical sense it is Christ and the Church, which is fed by the four gospels; in the 'tropological' sense it is humankind with (ideally) its four cardinal virtues, and in the 'anagogical' sense it is paradise regained at the end of time. See A.C. Esmeyer, *Divina Quaternitas: A Preliminary Study in the Method and Application of Visual Exegesis*, Assen 1978, p. 9.
- 19 See Ezekiel 47:1; Zacharias 13:1; *ibid.*, 14:8; Joel 4:18; Jesus Sirach 24:30 ff.; John 4:14, 7:37-8; Revelation 22:1.
- 20 John 4:14 and 7:37-8.
- 21 Isaiah 44:3. Cf. Isaiah 48:21; Joel 3:18b. Cf. also Psalm 36:8-9: 'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.'
- 22 John 19:34: 'But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.' See further R. Pernoud, 'De la Fontaine de vie au Pressoir mystique', in D. Alexandre-Bidon (ed.), *Le pressoir mystique. Actes du colloque de Recloses* (27 mai 1989), Paris 1990.
- 23 They could call for support on the text in John 7:38-39: "'He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'" But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.' For examples from medieval literature see É. Mâle, *L'Art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France*, Paris 1925, p. 112.
- 24 See J.P. Mabile et al. (eds.), *Vita Jesu Christi per Ludolphum de Saxonia*, Paris/Rome 1865, p. 675 sqq., quoted by D. Roggen, 'De "Fons Vitae" van Klaas Sluter te Dijon', in *Revue Belge d'archéologie et d'histoire d'art*[*Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Oudheidkunde en Geschiedenis* 5 (1935)], pp. 107-18, esp. pp. 110-11.
- 25 See M.-B. Wadell, *Fons Pietatis: Eine ikonographische Studie*, Gothenburg 1969. The text accompanying a Dutch woodcut dating from around 1500 (fig. 70) reads: 'Comt al ghemeyne, Toeter fonteyne/ Der ghenaden groot, Ghvort al reyne/ Groot metten cleyne Int bloets baden root'; see also C. Dodgson, *Woodcuts of the xvth Century*, vol. 1, London 1934, fig. 34, no. 4. In a *Fons pietatis* in the Göteborgs Konstmuseum attributed to Goswijn van der Weyden, the fountain is crowned by a sculpture of a nude woman, which may represent Eve Before the Fall or the Virgin Mary as the 'second' Eve. The fluid from her breast mixes in separate chalices, held aloft by angels, with the blood from Christ's side and the milk from Mary's breast.
- 26 See B. Cardon, 'De paradijsbron. Een meander in de beeldende kunst', in B. Baert and V. Fraeters, *Het wellende water. De bron in tekst en beeld in de middeleeuwse Nederlanden en het Rijnland*, Louvain 2005, pp. 145-55, esp. fig. 2.
- 27 See Wadell, *op. cit.* (note 25), pp. 122-23, cat. no. 118, pl. 66. The scene is surrounded by quotations from the Bible, shedding further light on the connection between the Fall and man's redemption by Christ. The epitaph was designed for the Protestant citizen Segebaldo Slüver, but does not differ in any respect from contemporaneous depictions.
- 28 Revelation 21:1-2, 6.
- 29 John 1:29: 'The next day John [the Baptist] seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.'
- 30 According to Roman Catholic doctrine, during the Mass the priest offers up to God the body and blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine, so that Christ's sacrifice of his own body on the Cross is confirmed and can be experienced anew by the faithful congregation.
- 31 For this image see also 1 John 5:7-8: 'For there are three that bear record [to Jesus] in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.' Around the rim of

- the fountain is written 'Hic est fons aqu[a]e vit[a]e procedens de sede Dei + Agni', a reference to Revelation 22:1: 'And he [the angel] shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.'
- 32 *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, Chantilly, Musée Condé, inv. no. Ms. 65, fol. 25v.
- 33 For the perspectival aspects of this miniature see B. Bakker, 'Conquering the Horizon. The Limbourg Brothers and the Painted Landscape', in R. Dücker and P. Roelofs (eds.), *The Limbourg Brothers: Nijmegen Masters at the French Court 1400-1416*, exh. cat. Nijmegen (Museum Het Valkhof) 2005, pp. 191-207.
- 34 According to a more or less parallel tradition, the wood of Christ's Cross came from or even was the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. See N. Fallon, *The Cross as Tree: The Wood-of-the-Cross Legends in Middle English and Latin Texts in Medieval England*, Toronto 2009 (diss. University of Toronto).
- 35 As early as the Old Testament prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah, the images of the Promised Land and paradise are integrated into a single scene. This integrated image is taken up by John in Revelation 21 and 22, where the return to paradise corresponds roughly with the creation of a new earth. But paradise or the Promised Land is also the (symbolic) place where the saved souls and resurrected people go. The Church Father Origen of Alexandria located this paradise somewhere on earth, as a gateway to the higher life. This image was adopted in the Middle Ages by, among others, Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, 1265-74, vol. 1, p. 102: paradise has never been discovered on earth; this is because it is enclosed within mountains, oceans and deserts). And then there is also the concept of the paradise where saved souls wait to be admitted to the new earth at the end of days. See Daniélou, op. cit. (note 17), pp. 438-48.
- 36 See M. Smeyers, *Dirk Bouts, schilder van de stilte*, Louvain 1998, pp. 66-74. Smeyers reports (without naming sources) that according to Dionysius the Carthusian, contemporary of Bouts and an influential adviser at the court in Brussels, paradise functions as a waiting room for the souls of the chosen after they have been freed from purgatory, until they are accompanied to heaven by angels. See also the anonymous *Epitaph of Florian Winkler* (the Nativity with Paradise and the Fall upper right), c. 1477, Wiener Neustadt, Stadtmuseum.
- 37 In secular medieval garden art, literature and fine art the fountain is a favourite motif, but then as the 'fountain of love'. Guillaume de Machaut's illuminated manuscripts are a prime example. Most can be found on the Internet through Gallica (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>; consulted September 2014); a fine, early example in Gothic form (but in a no longer traceable Machaut-hs.) is depicted in M. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XVII^e siècle*, vol. 5, Paris 1861, p. 532. See further among others Baert and Fraeters, op. cit. (note 26); M. Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire*, London 1998, figs. 46, 83-84; M.-M. Fragonard (ed.), *Sources et fontaines du Moyen Âge à l'Âge baroque*, Paris/Geneva 1998; P. Beck and A. van Buren/Hagopian, 'Reality and Literary Romance in the Park of Hesdin', in E.B. MacDougall (ed.), *Medieval Gardens*, Washington DC 1986, pp. 117-34.
- 38 See among others J. Delumeau, *Naissance et affirmation de la Réforme*, Paris 1965, pp. 48-59.
- 39 My thanks to P. van Dael for his analysis of this figure, who with his gesture of speech/ blessing resembles the *Majestas Domini* and the late medieval *Salvator Mundi*. For the interpretation of Bosch's oeuvre see R.H. Marijnissen (with contributions by P. Ruyffelaere), *Hieronymus Bosch: The Complete Works*, Antwerp 2007, with earlier literature. Also, in particular, P. Vandenbroeck, 'Jheronimus Bosch: de wijsheid en het raadsel', in J. Koldewij et al. (eds.), *Jheronimus Bosch: Alle schilderijen en tekeningen*, Rotterdam/Ghent 2001, pp. 100-93. A recent study of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is R. Falkenburg, *The Land of Unlikeness: Hieronymus Bosch, the Garden of Earthly Delights*, Zwolle 2011, esp. pp. 31-35 (on the paradise fountain).
- 40 Bosch painted a third triptych of the Last Judgement, of which likewise only the side panels have survived. They are in Venice. Again the two left-hand panels show the stay of the chosen in paradise and their assumption into heaven. Here too, we see the fountain of life, but this time as a double basin with a central pillar, in accordance with a model that was used for town fountains in Germany and France. For these see the following note.
- 41 For the fountain in Cleveland see B. Donzet and C. Siret (eds.), *Les fastes du gothique: le siècle de Charles V*, exh. cat. Paris (Galeries nationales du Grand Palais) 1981, pp. 236-37. A later example is the Southern German

- anonymous *Design for a (Table) Fountain*, c. 1470-1500, drawing on vellum, Cambridge (Mass.), Fogg Museum, inv. no. 1932.361. For Gothic table fountains and town fountains in Italy, Germany, France (Rouen) and England see K. Hoffmann-Curtius, *Das Programm der Fontana Maggiore in Perugia*, Düsseldorf 1968, pp. 74-81 and figs. 93-105; for Germany see also G. Lill, 'Brunnen', in O. Schmitt (ed.), *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1948, cols. 1278-1310, esp. cols. 1281-89. I do not know whether such artfully wrought Gothic town fountains existed in the Netherlands.
- 42 See for instance the reliquary cross of c. 1100-30 in the Domschatz of Sankt Petri Cathedral in Fritzlar.
- 43 See also the design for a monstace by Master W with the Key (Filedt Kok, 'Master with a Key', in J. Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, London 1996, p. 803).
- 44 Bles had probably seen Bosch's triptych for himself, since the work was most likely made for an Antwerp church. 's-Hertogenbosch was not far from Antwerp and was also part of the Province of Brabant. He could also have chosen an example much closer to home – the paradise fountain in the *Charon* by his own teacher Joachim Patinir. This – likewise imaginary – fountain is composed entirely of glass spheres. See A. Vergara (ed.), *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue*, exh. cat. Madrid (Museo Nacional del Prado) 2007, pp. 150-61, cat. no. 1, with detail fig.
- 45 See for instance (aside from Jan Gossaert) Jean de Bellegambe (c. 1470-1535), *Triptyque du bain mystique*, c. 1510, Lille, Palais des Beaux Arts; *ibid.*, *The Last Judgement*, c. 1525, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie; Goswijn van der Weyden (c. 1465-after 1538), *Fons Pietatis*, c. 1500?, Gothenburg, Göteborgs Konstmuseum; Jan Provoost (c. 1465-1529), *The Last Judgement*, Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts (his *Last Judgement*, Hamburg, Kunsthalle, features a Gothic fountain).
- 46 Song of Solomon 4:15. See M.W. Ainsworth (ed.), *Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart's Renaissance: The Complete Works*, exh. cat. New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) 2010, no. 4 (cat. entry by M.W. Ainsworth).
- 47 See among others P. Vandenbroeck, 'De Madonna bij de fontein: een icoon van tederheid', *Restauratie* 2 (2002), pp. 4-7 (on Jan van Eyck, *The Madonna by the Fountain*, 1439, Antwerp, Royal Museum for Fine Arts, inv. no. 411).
- 48 See Ainsworth, *op. cit.* (note 46), no. 2 (cat. entry by L. Campbell).
- 49 A remarkable inconsistency is that Adam and Eve have already covered their genitals, anticipating the shame that they will not experience until after the Fall.
- 50 In the London *Adam and Eve* the pillar is flanked by two figures that probably represent Adam and Eve, but on top stands an obscure figure in quasi-antique garb, wearing a helmet and holding a long spear. In the same way, the pillar in *The Holy Family* is flanked by three female nudes, in the open niche Moses stands with the scrolls of the law, and above we see a putto without further attributes. In both works Gossaert modelled the standing figures under a canopy after a woodcut in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of Francesco Colonna, published in Venice in 1499.
- 51 See C. Augustijn, 'Godsdienst in de zestiende eeuw', in P. Dirkse and S. Groenveld (eds.), *Ketters en papen onder Filips II: het godsdienstig leven in de tweede helft van de 16de eeuw*, exh. cat. Utrecht (Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent) 1986, pp. 26-40. Augustijn stresses that in this period it was still difficult to distinguish between 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' believers, since the most critical faithful were still seeking a means of giving this criticism institutional form. See also the literature cited in B. Bakker, 'L'incroyable développement du paysage "maniériste": le goût, le marché et la foi', in S. Vézillier-Dussart (ed.), *Splendeurs du maniérisme en Flandre 1500-1575*, Cassel (Musée de Flandre) 2013, pp. 37-51, esp. pp. 40-41, 'Le paysage et la foi'.
- 52 Genesis 3:17-19, 23.
- 53 See among others 2 Samuel 22:32-33 and esp. 47: 'The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation.' The Church Fathers subsequently applied this metaphor to Christ. See further, among others, G. Jászai, 'Fels', in E. Kirschbaum (ed.), *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, 8 vols., Rome and elsewhere 1994, vol. 2, cols. 24-25.
- 54 See esp. P. Vandenbroeck, 'Joachim Patinir en het ontstaan van de Vlaamse Landschapskunst', in H. Devisscher et al., *De uitvinding van het landschap: van Patinir tot Rubens 1520-1650*, exh. cat. Antwerp (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten)/Essen (Villa Hügel)/Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien) 2003, pp. 33-51.

