

Humanities 3

III. The Reformation



Lecture 8

Humanism and the Northern Renaissance

Outline

- The Northern Renaissance
- Bosch: Sin and Disorder
- Erasmus' Christian Humanism
- *A Complaint of Peace*

The Art of the Northern Renaissance

- Jan van Eyck (c. 1390-1441)
- Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516)
- Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

Van Eyck, *The Annunciation*, c.
1435



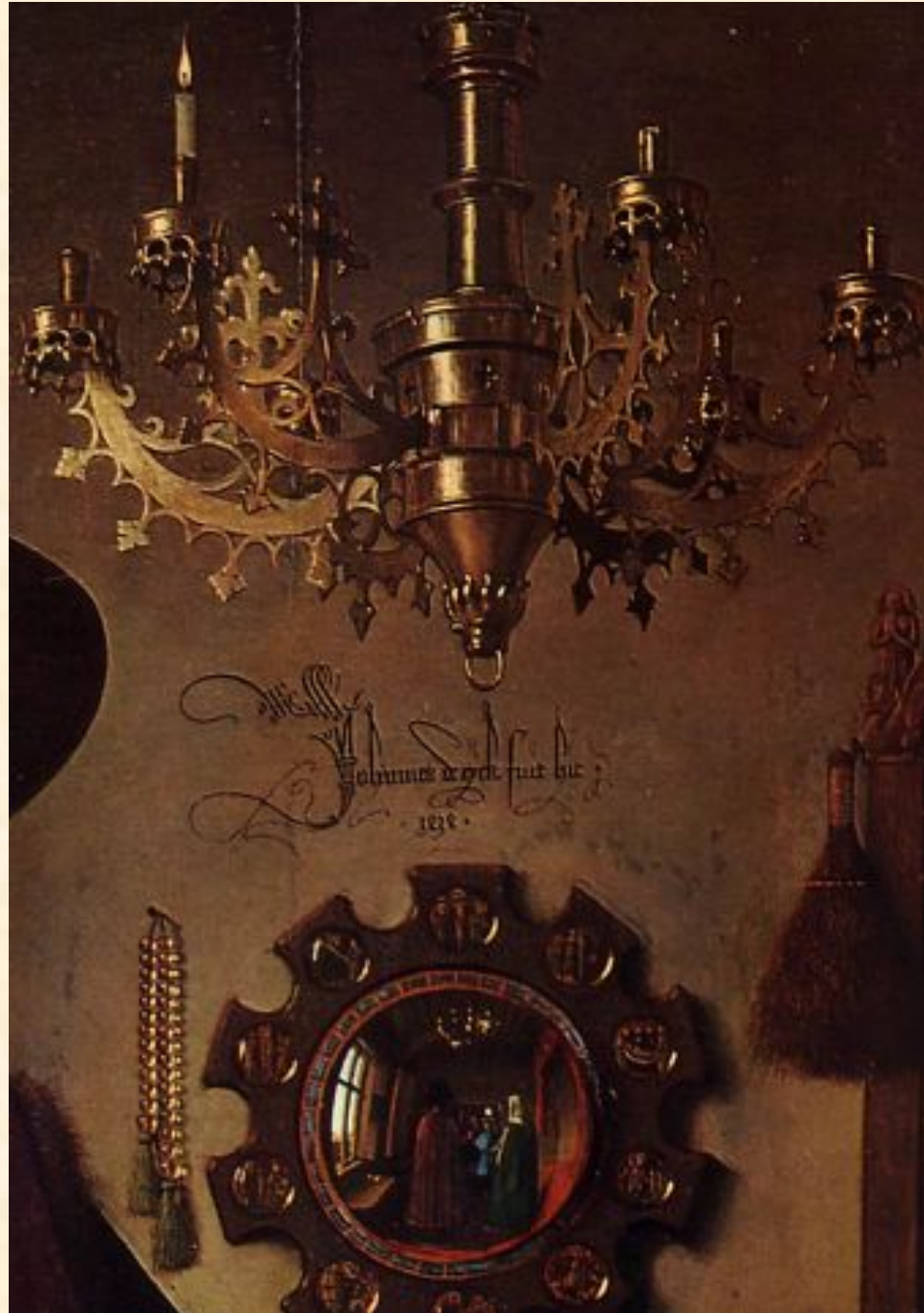
Van Eyck,
*The Virgin
of the
Chancellor
Rodin*, 1435



Van Eyck,
*Betrothal of
the Arnolfini*,
1434



Detail from
The Betrothal
(back wall)



Bosch, *Haywain*, c. 1485-90



Bosch, *Garden of Earthly Delights*, c. 1500



Left panel,
“Paradise”



Center
panel,
“Garden
of Earthly
Delights”



Right panel,
“Hell”



Detail from
right panel:
Bird-
Headed
Monster



Dürer, *Paumgartner Altarpiece*,
c. 1498-1504



Dürer,
*St. Michael's
Fight Against
the Dragon,*
1498



Dürer,
*Self-
Portrait
at 13,
1484*



Dürer,
*Self-
Portrait*
at 22,
1493



Dürer,
*Self-
Portrait*
at 26,
1498



Dürer,
*Self-
Portrait at
28,
1500*



Dürer,
*The Large
Turf*,
watercolor
on paper,
1503



Dürer,
*Wing of a
Roller,*
1512



Dürer,
Melencolia I,
1514



Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536)

- Illegitimate son of a monk (Gerhard)
- Educated in Holland and Paris
- Ordained as a priest but never serves a parish or joins a religious community
- Lives as an itinerant teacher and scholar in England, France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland
- Refuses to follow Luther in breaking with the Catholic Church

Erasmus' Humanism

- Educational reform: learning based on literacy and knowledge of classical literature rather than the trivial exercises of scholastic philosophy.
- Emphasis on eloquence and rhetoric rather than dialectic (but Plato and Pico are important influences).
- Scholarship: new editions of ancient texts, sacred and secular. Models himself on St. Jerome: knowledge of Christianity must be based on the best sources; prepares first reliable edition of New Testament in Greek in 1516.

Antonello da
Messina,
*St. Jerome in
His Study*, c.
1460



Erasmus and Sir Thomas More Hans Holbein the Younger (1523, 1526)



Erasmus' Christianity

- According to Erasmus, a life of learning and intellectual activity does not preclude a life of devotion to Christ: one can be a humanist scholar *and* a pious Christian.
- Yet Erasmus denies that piety is a product of learning or philosophical knowledge. In fact, Christianity is based not on wisdom, but on “folly.”

In Praise of Folly

- In 1511 Erasmus publishes his *Praise of Folly* (*Encomium Moriae*), which is dedicated to his friend, Thomas More
- Erasmus' conception of Christianity is strongly influenced by 1 Corinthians 1:17-27 (“the folly of the cross”)

The “Folly of the Cross”

- ““God chose to save the world through folly,’ since it could not be redeemed by wisdom.” (1 Corinthians 1:21)
- “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1:23-24)

From *Praise of Folly*

“All mortals are fools, even the pious. Christ too, though he is the wisdom of the Father, was made something of a fool himself in order to help <the folly of mankind>.... Nor did he wish them to be redeemed in any other way save by the folly of the cross.... This also explains why God the creator of the world forbade man to eat of the tree of knowledge, as if knowledge was poisonous to happiness.” (125-6)

Erasmus on Peace

- Erasmus sees peace (love, charity) as the essence of Christianity, symbolized by the person of Christ
- “The whole purpose of our religion is peace and unanimity.” (Letter to Archbishop Carondolet, January 1522)
- War is “the height of madness” and “so unholy a thing that it is the greatest immediate destroyer of all piety and religion” (*A Complaint of Peace*)

A Complaint of Peace (1517)

- Dedicated to Philip of Burgundy, bishop of Utrecht
- Peace, or concord, is the natural state of all creation
- In human beings this natural order has been corrupted by sin; “reason wages war with the passions” (the Fall)
- Christ offers the way back to a state of peace (inner peace is a precondition for outer peace)
- Yet present-day Christians (including the pope) are the worst offenders against peace

“How then can it be reconcilable to the profession of Christians, that those who call themselves his [i.e. Christ’s] vicars or viceregents, should excite the whole world to arms, and set kingdom against kingdom? They profess, as kings of Christian countries, that he is their great sovereign and reconciler; and yet they cannot be reconciled to each other by any arguments drawn from Christianity.... [T]he whole life of the greater portion of Christianity is employed in nothing so much as the concerns of war” (*Complaint*, pp. 34-5)

Rejection of Wars of Religion

“The most efficacious way of overcoming the Turks would be if they beheld that which Christ taught and exemplified shining forth in our own lives, if they perceived that we do not covet their empires nor thirst after their gold nor seek their possessions, but strive for nothing except their salvation and Christ’s glory.... And although the dice of war, ever uncertain, fall favorably, it will happen that the pope or his cardinals perhaps may rule more widely, but not Christ, whose kingdom flourishes at last only if piety, charity, peace, and chastity live.” (Letter to Paul Volz, August 1518; cf. *Complaint*, p. 50)