

PARADISO



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The Divine Comedy
Paradiso
By Dante Alighieri
(Abbé's Library)

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Paradiso: Canto I

The glory of the one who moves everything fills the universe and shines brighter in some places and dimmer in others.

I was in the heaven that receives the most light from Him, and I saw things that no one can describe or even understand, unless they come down from there.

Because when we get close to what we desire, our minds get so absorbed in it that we can't remember or fully grasp it afterward.

Whatever of the holy realm I could hold in my memory, that is what I will talk about here.

O Apollo, for this final task, make me a vessel of your power, just as the beloved laurel asks!

Until now, one peak of Parnassus has been enough for me, but now I need both to enter the other side.

Come into my heart and inspire me, as you did when you drew Marsyas out of his scabbard.

O divine power, lend me your strength so I can make visible in my mind the image of the blessed realm.

You'll see me approach your favorite tree and crown myself with the leaves that you and the theme will make me worthy of.

Father, so rarely do we gather these leaves, whether for Caesar's triumph or for a poet, (this is the fault and shame of human nature)

That the foliage of Peneus should bring joy to the joyous god of Delphi when someone truly thirsts for it.

A little spark can turn into a great flame; perhaps, after me, others will pray that Cyrrha may respond better.

To mortals, the world's light rises through different paths, but by the one that circles four and unites with three crosses,

It goes in a better direction, with a better star, and the world's wax is shaped more after its own nature.

That passage almost made it morning on one side and evening on the other, and one half of the sky was completely white, while the other was black,

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When I saw Beatrice turn to the left, gazing at the sun; never did an eagle focus so intently on it!

And just as a second ray always follows the first and ascends again, like a pilgrim longing to return,

So, through her action, my eyes and mind became fixed on the sun, beyond what I was used to.

There are many things that are allowed here, that would be forbidden to us on earth, because this place is made for human beings.

I couldn't handle it for long, but when I did, I saw it sparkle all around, like iron coming out of the fire,

And suddenly it seemed that day was being added to day, as if the one with the power had decorated the sky with another sun.

With my eyes on the eternal wheels, Beatrice stood focused, and I, looking at her, moved to a different place,

At her sight, I became inwardly like Glaucus, who, after tasting the herb, became a peer of the gods under the sea.

To explain this change in words is impossible; the example will be enough for anyone to experience it by grace.

If I am only what you newly created me to be, O Love who rules the heavens, you know it, because you lifted me with your light!

When now the wheel, which you make eternal, made me aware of it by the harmony you regulate,

Then it seemed to me that heaven was so lit by the sun's flame that no rain or river had ever made a lake so vast.

The new sound and great light stirred in me a longing for their cause, a longing I had never felt so strongly before,

And she, who saw me as I saw myself, to calm my disturbed mind, opened her mouth before I could ask,

And she began: "You've made yourself so dull with false ideas that you don't see what you should if you shake them off.

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You're not on earth as you think you are; like lightning fleeing its proper place, you're returning there.”

If I had been freed from my previous doubt by her brief words, more smiling than spoken, I became even more trapped in a new one.

And I said: “I had already been at peace from my great amazement, but now I'm amazed at how I surpass these light bodies.”

She, after a pitying sigh, looked at me as a mother looks at a delirious child;

And she began: “Everything, whatever it is, has order within itself, and this order is what makes the universe resemble God.

Here, the higher creatures see the footprints of the Eternal Power, which is the end where everything leads.

In the order I'm speaking of, all natures are inclined by their different destinies, more or less near to their origin;

And so they move forward to different destinations over the great sea of being, and each is carried by the instinct given to it.

This one bears fire toward the moon; this one is the motive power in human hearts; this one binds the earth together.

It's not just the created things without intellect, but also those with intellect and love, that are moved by this force.

The Providence that governs all of this makes heaven eternally peaceful with its light, where that which moves fastest moves.

And now, we are being carried to our destination by the power of that cord, which aims its arrows at a joyful target.

It's true that sometimes the form doesn't match the intention of the artist, because the material doesn't respond as it should,

Just as sometimes a creature with power can deviate from its course, even when it is impelled to move in a certain direction,

(Just as you might see fire fall from a cloud) if the first impulse is stopped by some false pleasure.

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You shouldn't wonder at your ascent any more than at a stream flowing from a high mountain to the lowlands.

It would be a marvel if, without hindrance, you were sitting below, as if on earth the living fire were quiet."

Then she turned her face back to heaven.

Paradiso: Canto II

You who are in your little boat, eager to listen, following behind my ship as it sails along, stop and look back at your shores. Don't go out to sea, because if you lose track of me, you might get lost yourselves.

The sea I'm sailing on has never been sailed before. Minerva guides me, Apollo leads the way, and the nine Muses point out the stars to me.

You few who are already lifting your necks to the bread of angels, the bread that you eat here and never get full from, you can sail into the deep sea, keeping my path ahead of you on the water that smooths itself again.

The people who sailed to Colchis were not as amazed as you will be when they saw Jason turned into a ploughman!

Our endless desire for the divine realm carried us forward, almost as quickly as you see the heavens move.

Beatrice looked up, and I looked at her. In the time it takes an arrow to fly from a bow and unlock itself from the notch, I found myself in a place that caught my attention. And Beatrice, who could see my thoughts, turning to me, happy and beautiful, said, "Focus your mind on God, who has brought us to the first star."

It seemed like a cloud surrounded us, shining, dense, solid, and bright, like a diamond when the sun strikes it.

The eternal pearl took us in, just like water takes a ray of light, without breaking it.

If I was a body, and we don't understand how one dimension can fit into another (which has to happen if one body enters another), the desire to see the essence where God and our own nature were united would burn even more strongly.

Here you will see what we believe by faith, not by reasoning, but as the first truth that man believes.

I replied, "Lady, I give thanks to Him who has removed me from the mortal world, as devoutly as I can. But tell me, what are the dark spots on this body, which on Earth lead people to tell the tale of Cain?"

She smiled a little and said, "If the opinion of humans is wrong where the senses can't unlock things, then the arrows of wonder shouldn't bother you now, because, following the senses, you see that reason has limited power. But tell me what you think of it yourself."

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And I said, “What seems different to us up here is caused, I think, by bodies that are rare and dense.”

She replied, “You’ll see your belief immersed in error if you listen carefully to the argument I’m about to present against it. The eighth sphere shows you many lights that differ in quality and quantity, with different aspects. If this dimness were caused by rarity and density alone, there would be only one kind of light, more or less spread out equally. Virtues must, by necessity, come from formal principles. And these, except for one, would be destroyed by your reasoning.”

“Also, if rarity were the cause of the dimness, this planet would either be entirely made of matter that’s thin like air, or, just as fat and lean alternate in a body, this planet would alternate between thick and thin. If it were the first, the sun’s eclipse would show light passing through it, like light passing through something thin.”

“That’s not the case, so we must examine the other possibility. If I can disprove this second idea, your opinion will be wrong.”

“But if this rarity doesn’t go all the way through, there must be a limit, beyond which its opposite stops the light from passing. The foreign light is reflected back, just like a color coming back from glass, which behind itself hides lead.”

“You may say that the sunbeam looks dimmer here than elsewhere because it’s reflected further back. You can test this yourself. Take three mirrors and place one more distant one between the two closer ones. Turn toward the mirrors, and place a light behind you to shine on all three mirrors, with the light reflecting back to you.”

“Even though the farthest image isn’t as bright, you’ll see that it’s just as radiant as the nearer ones.”

“Now, just like snow remains cold and the same color after the warm sun touches it, you will remain in your intellect, informed with such a living light that it will tremble in its appearance to you.”

“Within the heaven of divine peace revolves a body, whose power gives existence to everything it contains. The next heaven, with its many eyes, divides this existence into different essences, distinguished from it and yet contained within it.”

“The other spheres, by their differences, act and arrange all the distinctions inside them, leading them to their ends and effects.”

“Thus, these organs of the world, as you can see now, proceed from grade to grade, taking from above and acting below.”

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“Pay attention to how I’m coming to the truth you seek so you’ll know how to cross the river in the future. The power and motion of the holy spheres must proceed from the blessed engines, just as the artisan’s hammer makes a craft.”

“The heaven, made beautiful by the many lights, takes its shape from the profound Intelligence that turns it, and becomes a seal of that Intelligence.”

“Just as the soul expands through the different parts of your body, adapting itself to various faculties, so the Intelligence spreads its power among the stars, revolving in its unity.”

“A diverse power makes a different mix with the precious body it gives life to, in which, like your life, it is united.”

“From the glad nature it comes from, the mixed power shines through the body, just as joy shines through the living eye.”

“From this comes everything that appears different from light to light, not from dense and rare matter. This is the formal principle that creates the dark and the bright, according to its goodness.”

Paradiso: Canto III

The sun that had once warmed my heart with love had revealed to me the beautiful truth, showing me its sweet aspect through repeated proofs and reassurances. And so, in order to admit that I had been convinced and was confident, I lifted my head to speak.

But a vision appeared, so close that it drew my attention entirely, and I completely forgot about what I had intended to confess.

It was like seeing our faces reflected through polished glass or calm, clear water—clear but not deep enough to lose sight of the bottom. I saw many faces, eager to speak, so that I was thrown off, misunderstanding them. They appeared as reflections, and I mistakenly thought they were the true source of the love between man and fountain.

When I realized this, I turned my eyes to see who they were. But I saw nothing, and then turned my eyes back toward the light of my guide, Beatrice, who smiled and kindled a holy light in her eyes.

"Don't be surprised," she said, "that I smile at your mistaken idea. It's because your understanding is not yet grounded in truth, and you're turning toward emptiness. The true beings you see here have only come to give a sign of the celestial realm, which is the least exalted."

She continued: "This explanation is given in a way that your mind can grasp, since you can only understand what your senses can perceive. This is why Scripture accommodates human faculties, assigning God hands and feet and meaning something else. Holy Church represents Gabriel, Michael, and the one who healed Tobias, in a human form."

"What Timaeus says about the soul doesn't match what you see here because it seems like he means something different from what he says. He says the soul returns to its star, believing it was separated from there when nature formed it. Maybe his words have a different meaning that shouldn't be dismissed."

"If he means that the soul returns to the influence and consequences of its star, perhaps his theory touches on a truth. This misunderstanding once led the world astray, invoking gods like Jove, Mercury, and Mars."

"The other doubt, the one that bothers you less, doesn't lead you away from the truth. It concerns the justice of God seeming unjust to mortals, and that's a matter of faith, not heretical sin."

"But let me clarify this so you can fully understand. If someone suffers violence without cooperating with the one using force, they are not excused. Will never truly submits unless it wills to, but when it is distorted by violence, it still reacts as nature would in fire. If it yields

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more or less, it still cooperates with the force. These souls, having power to return to holiness, did so."

"If their will had been perfect, like Lawrence on the gridiron or Mutius burning his own hand, they would have been compelled to return to the path they were dragged from. But such a solid will is rare."

"Now that I've explained this, I've refuted the argument that was troubling you. But there's still another question to consider. It's not something you can easily understand on your own."

"I've made sure to put into your mind that a beatified soul can never lie because it's close to the primal truth. Now, you might have heard Piccarda say that Costanza, who loved the veil, contradicts what I've told you. But remember, sometimes people do things out of reluctance to avoid greater harm."

"Think of Alcmaeon, who was forced by his father to kill his mother. He should have admitted wrong, rather than making things worse by keeping his vow. Similarly, Agamemnon, the great Greek leader, had to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia, causing much grief."

"Christians, be more serious in your actions. Don't be like feathers blown around by every wind, and don't believe that every water will cleanse you. You have the Old and New Testament and the guidance of the Church. Let this be enough for your salvation."

"Don't let an evil appetite lead you astray. Be like men, not foolish sheep, so that those who mock you won't succeed."

"Don't be like the lamb that leaves its mother's milk, foolishly fighting with itself."

Beatrice spoke these words to me, and then turned back to the place where the world is most alive.

Her silence and change in expression made me silent, as my eager mind was filled with new questions. Like an arrow hitting its target before the bowstring has settled, we moved into the next realm.

There I saw my Lady so joyful that, as she entered the brightness of that heaven, the planet seemed to shine even more brightly.

And if the star itself was changed and smiled, how much more did I, who am naturally so changeable in every way!

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Just as in a peaceful pond, the fish swim toward what comes from outside, thinking it's food, I saw over a thousand shining spirits drawing near to us, each saying, "This is she who will increase our love."

As each one approached, the light around them became more filled with beatitude, shining brighter from them.

Think, reader, if this was all that was revealed, how desperately you would want to know more. You'll see how I, too, desired to know more as their true nature became clear before my eyes.

One of these holy spirits spoke, saying: "O well-born soul, you've been granted grace to see the thrones of eternal triumph. We are illuminated by the light that spreads throughout all of heaven. If you wish to know more, ask us freely."

Beatrice then spoke: "Ask, speak, and believe them as you would believe in gods."

I realized how you hide yourself in your own light, drawing it from your eyes, which shine when you smile. But you don't know who you are or why you're in the sphere that hides itself from humans in foreign light.

I said this to the light that spoke to me, and it became even brighter than before.

Just as the sun hides itself when there's too much light, so this saintly figure hid itself in its own radiance and answered me in a way that will be explained in the next canto.

Paradiso: Canto IV

"If I flame with love for you beyond what is seen on earth, so much that the strength of your eyes is overwhelmed, don't be surprised. This comes from perfect vision, which, as it comprehends something good, moves toward it naturally.

I see that the eternal light is already shining in your intellect, and when it is seen, it always sparks love. And if something else draws your love, it's just a reflection of that same light, misunderstood, shining through.

You want to know if, by doing another good deed, a broken vow can be compensated for, to keep the soul from further obligations."

Beatrice began speaking with these words, and continued her argument as someone who speaks without interruption:

"The greatest gift God gave in His creation, and the one most aligned with His goodness, is the freedom of the will. With it, intelligent creatures—human beings and angels—were endowed.

Now, if you reason from this, you will see the high value of a vow, especially when, in making it, you align your will with God's. When you consent, it's as if God consents with you, and a pact is formed between God and man. This pact is a sacrifice made with the treasure of the will, a sacrifice that is fulfilled by its own act.

Now, what compensation can be made for this sacrifice? Do you think you can undo what you offered by doing good with ill-gotten gains?

Now you understand the greater point, but because the Church has the authority to dispense with certain things, which seems to contradict the truth I've shown you, you still need to consider the matter further, because the food you've taken requires more understanding to digest.

Open your mind to what I reveal and keep it there. It's not enough to just hear something without truly retaining it.

In the essence of a sacrifice, two things come together: one is the act of offering, the other is the agreement made. The agreement is never invalidated unless it is fulfilled, and this has been discussed in detail above.

For this reason, the Hebrews were commanded to offer sacrifices, even though sometimes what was offered could be exchanged for something else, as you should know.

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The material offered can be substituted, but no one should shift the burden of the offering without first considering both the white and the yellow keys. If the substitute doesn't hold the same value as the original, then the substitution is foolish.

Therefore, whatever thing has such great value that it outweighs all others cannot be satisfied by anything less.

Let mortals never make a vow lightly. Be serious and faithful in your promises, as Jephthah should have been with his first vow.

Jephthah, when he made his vow, should have said, 'I've done wrong,' rather than making an even worse choice by sticking to it. Just like the great leader of the Greeks, who caused Iphigenia to weep, and her tears made both wise and simple people mourn for her tragic fate.

Christians, be serious in your actions. Do not be like a feather blown by every wind, and don't think that every water will cleanse you.

You have both the Old and New Testaments, and the guidance of the Church. Let this be enough for your salvation.

If an evil appetite leads you astray, be as men, not as foolish sheep, so that those who mock you may not succeed.

Do not be like a lamb that abandons its mother's milk, frolicking and fighting with itself without sense."

Thus Beatrice spoke to me, and then she turned back, eager, to the place where the world is most alive.

Her silence and the change in her expression silenced my eager mind, which already had new questions. Like an arrow hitting its target before the bowstring has stopped vibrating, we moved into the next realm.

There I saw my Lady so joyful, as she entered the brightness of that heaven, that the planet seemed to shine more brightly because of it.

And if the star itself changed and smiled, how much more did I, who by my nature am easily changed in every form!

Just as in a peaceful pond the fish gather to something coming from outside, thinking it's food, I saw more than a thousand shining beings drawing toward us, each saying, "This is she who will increase our love."

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As each one approached, the shade around them became filled with beatitude, illuminated by the light coming from them.

Think, reader, if this were the end, how desperately you'd want to know more. You'll understand how I desired to know more about them as they became clear to my eyes.

One of those holy spirits spoke, "O well-born soul, who has been granted the grace to see the thrones of eternal triumph, we are lit by the light that spreads throughout all heaven. If you wish to know more about us, feel free to ask."

Then Beatrice spoke: "Speak freely, and believe them as you would believe in gods."

I realized how you hide yourself in your own light, drawing it from your eyes, which sparkle when you smile. But you don't know who you are or why you're in the sphere that hides itself behind foreign rays.

I said this to the light that spoke to me first, and it became even brighter than before.

Just like the sun, which hides when there's too much light, when the heat overcomes the dense vapor, so the saintly figure hid itself in its own radiance and answered me in a way that is explained in the next Canto.

Paradiso: Canto V

“If in the heat of love I burn with such intensity that it surpasses anything seen on earth, to the point where the strength of your gaze is overcome, do not be surprised. This comes from perfect vision, which, as it comprehends something good, moves toward it with its full force.

I can already see that the eternal light is shining into your intellect, and this light, when seen, always stirs love. And if anything else draws your love, it's only a reflection of the same light, misunderstood, that shines through.

You want to know if, by doing another good deed, a broken vow can be made up for, in order to free the soul from further obligation.”

With these words, Beatrice began her explanation, and she continued without interruption, just like someone who doesn't pause in their speech:

“The greatest gift that God has given in His creation, the one closest to His own goodness and the one He values most highly, is the freedom of the will. It is the gift that endowed intelligent creatures, both human and angelic, with the ability to choose.

Now, if you reason from this, you will see the high value of a vow, especially when, in making it, you align your will with God's. When you consent, it's as if God consents with you, closing a pact between God and man. This pact is a sacrifice made with the treasure of the will, a sacrifice that is fulfilled by its own act.

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Paradiso: Canto VI

After Constantine, the eagle, turned away from the course of heaven, which it had once followed under the guidance of the ancient figure who took Lavinia, it remained in the farthest part of Europe for more than two hundred years. From there, under the sacred wings, it ruled the world, passing power from one ruler to another. Eventually, it settled on mine own shoulders.

I was Caesar, and now I am Justinian. By the will of the primal Love, I took from the laws that which was redundant or useless, and before I focused on this task, I believed in one nature in Christ, and with that belief, I was content.

But blessed Agapetus, the supreme pastor, showed me the way to a sincere faith through his words. I believed him, and now I see clearly, just as you can see the truth and falsehood of any contradiction.

When I joined the Church, God, in His grace, inspired me with this high task, and I devoted myself fully to it. I entrusted my army to Belisarius, the right hand of heaven, and with that, I took a rest.

Now, having answered your first question, I must continue, as the nature of the question compels me, in order to show you why men act against the sacred standard, both those who claim it and those who oppose it.

Behold the great power that has made it worthy of reverence, starting from the moment when Pallas died and gave it sovereignty. You know that it made its home in Alba for over three hundred years, until the three to three battle began again.

You know what it achieved, from the Sabine wrong to Lucretia's sorrow, in the seven kings, overcoming the neighboring nations. You know what it accomplished, led by the Romans, against Brennus, Pyrrhus, and others.

Torquatus, Quinctius, Decii, and Fabii—those who received fame that I willingly honor—struck down the pride of the Arabians, who, following Hannibal, crossed the Alps, and they were victorious under the Roman standard.

Pompey and Scipio triumphed while still young, and the land where you were born seemed bitter at their victories. Then, when Caesar came by the will of Rome, it brought peace to the whole world.

What it achieved from Var to the Rhine, Isere, Saone, and the Seine, and every valley the Rhone touches, you know. When it left Ravenna and crossed the Rubicon, it was such a triumph that no tongue or pen could describe it.

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From Spain, it moved toward Durazzo, and Pharsalia, causing pain even to the Nile. It saw the places where it began—Antandros and Simois—and returned there, showing its power.

It defeated Juba, then turned back to the West, where it heard the Pompeian clarion. What it did with Brutus and Cassius led them to Hell, and Modena and Perugia mourned.

Cleopatra wept because of it, fleeing from it and meeting death by the serpent's bite. It continued with the next Caesar, bringing the world to peace and closing Janus's temple.

But what this standard achieved, before and after, would appear faint and dull in comparison to what the third Caesar did, under the living Justice. He made the wrathful standard serve to enact vengeance.

Now listen to my answer, for it continues. Later, it ran with Titus to avenge the ancient sin. When Lombardy bit the Holy Church, Charlemagne came to her aid and victoriously defended her.

Now, you can judge the crimes of those whom I accused, the cause of all your miseries. Some oppose the public standard with the yellow lilies, while others claim it for their own party, so it is difficult to tell who sins more.

Let the Ghibellines work under another standard, for trouble always follows those who separate it from justice. Let this new Charles not strike it down, nor let him and his Guelfs think they will be triumphant.

The sons have often wept for the father's crime, and let him not believe that God will change His banner for the lilies.

This little planet adorns itself with good spirits, who have worked to bring fame and honor after them. Whenever their desires reach upward, the rays of true love must also shine, but they lose their intensity as they ascend.

But in heaven, each soul's happiness corresponds to its merits, and we see them neither more nor less than what they deserve. This living Justice makes our affection sweet, so that it can never be twisted into iniquity.

The diverse voices make beautiful music, and so the different levels of heaven create harmony among the spheres. And here in this heavenly realm shines the light of Romeo, whose beautiful work was unjustly rewarded.

But those who worked against him, the Provencals, they have not laughed, and so the wrongdoers suffer. Romeo, a poor man and a pilgrim, had four daughters, each a queen. And when malicious words led him to summon this just man, he gave him seven and five for ten.

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And thus, he departed poor and stricken in years. If the world could know the heart he had, it would praise him more, though it lauds him now.

Paradiso: Canto VII

*"Hosanna, holy God of hosts,
Shining with your light,
Happy flames of these holy spirits!"*

Thus, returning to their melody, this substance, which had a double light, was seen by me to sing. The others, moving to their dance, veiled themselves from me with a sudden distance, just as sparks rush away swiftly.

I was filled with doubt, and within myself I said, "Tell her, tell her, speak to my Lady who quenches my thirst with her sweet light."

And yet, the reverence that governs my whole being, which is greater than any thought or feeling, bowed me down like someone drowsy.

Beatrice, seeing this, did not let me linger in this state for long. She smiled at me in a way that would make anyone happy even in the fire. She said:

"By the wisdom that cannot fail, you have wondered about how a just vengeance could be justly avenged, and it has made you think. But I will quickly untangle this for you; listen carefully, for these words of mine will give you an understanding of a great truth."

"By not enduring the force that restrains a person for their own good, a person who was never born to be, damning themselves, they have damned their entire offspring. The human race lay in error for many centuries until it pleased the Word of God to descend into it, where the nature that had alienated itself from its Maker was united with Him in person through His eternal love."

"Now, turn your mind to what I say: this nature, when united with its Maker, was pure and good. But alone, it was banished from Paradise because it turned away from the path of truth and life. Therefore, the punishment that the cross bore, measured by the nature assumed by Christ, was never as justly felt by any other, and none was ever as unjust, considering who the Person was that suffered, within whom such a nature had contracted."

"From that one act, there came many consequences. To God and to the Jews, the death was pleasing; Earth trembled, and Heaven was opened."

"It should no longer seem difficult for you to understand that a just vengeance was avenged by a just court."

"But now I see that your mind is still tangled in thought. You ask, 'I understand what I hear, but I don't know why God chose this specific mode for our redemption.'"

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"Brother, this is a mystery that is hidden to the eyes of everyone whose love is not fully mature in the fire of divine love. Truly, as one looks at this point for a long time and sees little, I will now explain why this method was the worthiest."

"Divine goodness, which is free from all envy, burns so brightly in itself that it radiates eternal beauty. Everything that comes from this is everlasting because it is never removed and always retains its original imprint."

"Everything that proceeds from this divine goodness is entirely free, untouched by the influence of new things. The more closely conformed it is, the more it pleases, because the blessed ardor that radiates through all things is most vibrant in what is most like itself."

"This divine goodness has been a great advantage to humanity; without it, humanity would fall from its noble state. Only sin can strip us of this, and that leads us away from the Supreme Good, leaving us dimmed by its light."

"Your nature, when it sinned, was cast out of these dignities, just as it was cast out of Paradise. It could not recover by its own efforts, unless it passed through one of two ways: either God granted pardon through mercy, or man made satisfaction for his folly."

"Now, fix your mind on the eternal plan, as far as you can, and listen carefully. Man, in his limitations, could not satisfy on his own. His pride in thinking he could rise, made him fall. For this reason, man has been excluded from the ability to satisfy by himself."

"Therefore, it was necessary for God, in His own ways, to restore man to his perfect state—either directly or through both methods."

"Because the action of the doer is more pleasing the more it reflects the goodness of the heart, Divine goodness was content to use every method to lift you up again. There has never been or will be such a grand act as this, whether through the first or second way."

"God, in His infinite goodness, was more generous in making man capable of lifting himself up than if He had simply pardoned him. All other methods would have been insufficient for justice, were it not that the Son of God humbled Himself to become incarnate."

"Now, I return to answer fully your question. You say: 'I see air, fire, water, and earth, and their mixtures, which come to corruption and endure only a short while. Yet, these things were created, so if what you say is true, why do they corrupt?'"

"Angels and the land you are in are created, just as they are in their full existence. But all the elements you mention and everything made from them are informed by a created virtue."

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"The matter they have was created, and so was the influence that informs them. The soul of every creature, whether brute or plant, draws the influence of the holy lights. But your own life immediately inspires the Supreme Beneficence, and it becomes so enamored with it that it desires it forever."

"From this you may also argue your resurrection. If you think again about how human flesh was created at the time when the first parents were made."

Paradiso: Canto VIII

The world used to believe in its peril that the beautiful Cypria, the goddess of love, radiated her power, turning the third epicycle. That's why the ancient nations paid her homage with sacrifices and prayers in their misguided beliefs. They honored both Dione and Cupid as her mother and son, claiming that Cupid had sat on Dido's lap. They took the name of the star that chases the sun, now following it, now preceding it.

I didn't realize that we were ascending to it, but I believed fully that we were in it, seeing my Lady, who seemed to grow even more beautiful.

Just as a spark within a flame or a voice within another voice can be heard when one is steady and the other moves, I saw other lights within that bright light moving in a circle, speeding up and slowing down, as if they were guided by their inner vision.

Even if the wind had blown down from a cold cloud, rapidly and invisibly, it would have seemed slower than the divine lights I saw coming toward us, moving faster than any earthly winds.

And behind the ones that were most in front, I heard a cry of "Hosanna!" so beautiful and filled with joy, I felt a longing to hear it again.

Then one light came closer to us and began to speak: "We are ready for your pleasure, so you may rejoice in us. We move with the celestial Princes, in one circle and with one thirst, just as you once spoke of in the world: 'You, who, intelligent, move in the third heaven.' We are filled with love, and a little rest will not make us less joyful."

After I had offered my eyes to my Lady, who had smiled and assured me, I turned my gaze back to the light, which had promised so much.

"Say, who are you?" I asked with deep affection.

How it grew with joy, shining even brighter when I spoke! It said to me: "The world possessed me for only a short time, and if it had been longer, much evil would have been prevented. My joy keeps me hidden from you, surrounding me like a creature wrapped in its own silk. You loved me well, and if I had stayed on earth, I would have shown you even more of my love."

Then it spoke of the lands and places it would have ruled if not for the violence of human desires. It mentioned several regions it would have governed, including the lands of the Rhone and the sea, and how they had been harmed by greedy rulers.

"If only my brother understood this," the light continued, "the greed of Catalonia would not have been a threat." The light seemed to feel for the plight of those who suffer under bad leadership, especially in places where power was misused.

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Then, with a calm that overflowed with joy, the light told me: "You will find what you seek here. Every good thing begins and ends with God. This fills me with joy, and makes me believe that you can see the truth as I do."

I responded, saying, "Now that I understand, I see it clearer. But I wonder, how can sweet things come from bitter seeds?"

The light responded: "If I show you the truth, you will understand. All things are directed by God's providence, and He governs with a wisdom that far surpasses our human understanding. The world's movements are not random, but guided by a greater plan."

It continued to explain that the divine intelligence behind these things is so powerful that everything falls into its rightful place. The flow of the world and the heavens are carefully controlled, and without this divine guidance, everything would collapse into chaos.

The light spoke of how human nature, limited as it is, can't satisfy its own needs but must rely on divine intervention. This is why God restored humanity through Christ, and why justice was necessary.

And then, in a final teaching, the light pointed out that if people followed nature's foundation and pursued it, they would lead virtuous lives. However, people often stray from this path, mistaking worldly power for divine guidance.

Paradiso: Canto IX

After Charles had enlightened me, he told me of the betrayals his descendants would face, but he added, "Be patient and let the years pass." And so, all I can say is that rightful sorrow will follow their wrongs.

The holy light we were in had already turned back toward the Sun, as everything good does, which gives life to all things. How deceived are souls who turn away from such good, and place their hearts in vain things!

Then, another light appeared, and it brightened outwardly, showing its will to please me. Beatrice, whose eyes were still fixed upon me with affection, reassured me with her approval.

"Please bring swift resolution to my question," I said. "Show me that what I think in you, I can truly see reflected."

The light responded, still fresh to me, from within its depths: "In that part of Italy between Rialto and the sources of Brenta and Piave, there rises a hill. On that hill, a torch once descended that greatly affected the region.

Out of one root were both I and that torch born. I was Cunizza, and I now shine here because the radiance of this star overtook me. But I forgive the cause of my fate, and I do not grieve over it, which might seem hard for you to understand.

Of this brilliant and precious jewel near to me in heaven, great fame remained, and before it fades, in a hundred years it shall be five times more. Look at man, and see if he should make himself excellent, so that he may leave behind a better life!

The current population, confined by the Adige and Tagliamento, shows no remorse. But soon Padua will change the water that bathes Vicenza, because the people are stubborn and resist duty.

And in Feltro, the crime of its unholy pastor will cause weeping—a crime so monstrous that it has no comparison. The Ferrarese blood, which would fill a great vat, will be a gift from a priest to prove his allegiance. Such gifts are given to match the people's desires.

Above us, there are mirrors, Thrones you call them, which reflect the judgment of God. This is why we find satisfaction in these utterances."

Then, the light became silent, as if turning elsewhere, by the same divine wheel that it entered.

The next joy I saw was like a ruby struck by sunlight, and I understood that joy shines above in the same way a smile brightens below, but here, the shadow darkens as the mind grieves.

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"God sees all things, and in Him, blessed spirit, your sight is clear," I said. "So nothing can be hidden from you. Why, then, does your voice not satisfy my longing? I would not need to ask if I were as you are in me."

The light began speaking again, explaining: "The greatest valley of the earth, except for the sea that encircles the world, extends so far that it once created the meridian where it had been the horizon. I once lived on the shore between the Ebro and Magra rivers, where my name was known."

"Folco, they called me. And now this heaven imprints itself on me, just as I once imprinted myself on it. No woman ever burned with more passion than I, except for those ancient lovers. But here, we do not repent. We smile, not at our mistakes, but at the power that made and foresaw everything."

"We see the art that adorns the good, which governs the world above, turning the lower world in its proper order."

"To satisfy your desire, I will explain further. You wish to know who is in this light beside me, shining like a sunbeam in clear water. That light is Rahab, who, when she helped Joshua, was taken into this heaven as the first soul of Christ's triumph."

"Her place here is deserved, as she favored the first victory of Joshua in the Holy Land, a victory that the Pope now forgets. Your city, which came from the one who first turned his back on his Maker, brings forth and scatters evil, leading both sheep and lambs astray by turning the shepherd into a wolf."

"For this, the Gospel and the great Doctors are abandoned, and only the Decretals are studied, showing their meaning only in the margins. This is the focus of the Pope and the Cardinals—far from Nazareth, where Gabriel unfolded his wings, and far from where the true calling of Peter's followers lies."

Paradiso: Canto X

As I looked into the Son with all the love that each of them eternally breathes, I saw the primal and unutterable power that governs everything.

Whatever exists in the mind or before the eye, with such perfect order, can only be enjoyed by contemplating this divine source.

Now, Reader, focus your vision with me on the lofty wheels, to that part where one motion meets the other, and begin to contemplate, with joy, the Master's work. He loves it so much that His gaze never strays from it.

From that point, the oblique circle branches off, the path that the planets follow, to fulfill the world's needs. Without this inflection, much of the power in the heavens would be wasted, and many powers below would cease to exist.

If the planets' paths were even slightly different, much would be missing from the balance of the world, both above and below.

Stay with me now, Reader, as I explain this, and think about what I've set before you, because I want you to experience joy, not weariness, in this contemplation.

I've presented the concept, so now feed your mind with it. All my focus is on the theme I've been given to write about.

The greatest of nature's ministers, the one who uses the power of heaven to shape the world and marks time with His light, was revolving along the spirals, joined to the higher part of existence.

I was with him, but I wasn't aware of the ascent, only like a person is aware of a first thought before it arrives.

And Beatrice, who moves from good to better, so quickly that time doesn't measure her action, must have been radiant in herself. And the light of the sun, which I entered, wasn't seen through color but through light.

Even though I call on genius, art, and practice, I can't describe it fully. Believe that it's possible to imagine, and long to see it for yourself.

If our imaginations are too small for such great things, it's no wonder, since no eye could ever see beyond the sun.

In this place was the fourth family of the high Father, who eternally satisfies Himself, showing how He breathes life and creates.

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Beatrice said: "Give thanks, give thanks to the Sun of Angels, who has raised you to this state by His grace!"

Never before had a mortal heart been so ready to worship, nor had it been so prepared to give itself completely to God, as I was at those words. All my love was absorbed in Him, and in my devotion, Beatrice faded from my thoughts.

This didn't bother her. She smiled at it, and the radiance of her smiling eyes made my mind split between many things.

I saw many lights, vivid and triumphant, creating a circle around us, more beautiful in sound than in their appearance.

This was like the daughter of Latona, who, when the air is thick, holds the thread that makes her ring.

In the court of Heaven, from which I return, there are many jewels so beautiful and precious they cannot be taken from this realm.

Their singing was the song of these lights. Anyone who doesn't have wings to fly up there will wait for their message in silence.

As soon as those burning suns had circled around us three times, they seemed like stars close to the fixed poles.

They were like ladies who, not leaving the dance, stop in silence, waiting until they've gathered the new melody.

Then one began: "When the radiance of grace, by which true love is kindled and grows by loving, within you becomes so resplendent that it guides you upward by the stair where no one can descend without reascending,

Who would deny the wine from his vial to your thirst, unless it doesn't descend to the sea?

Would you like to know with what plants this garland is adorned, which encircles the Lady who strengthens you for heaven?

I am one of the holy flock of lambs that Dominic leads down a path where those who don't stray are nourished.

The one closest to me on the right, my brother and master, is Albertus of Cologne. I am Thomas of Aquinas.

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If you want to be certain of the others, follow my words with your eyes, upward along the blessed garland.

The next brilliance comes from Gratian's smile, who helped both the Church and the Emperor in such a way that it pleased Heaven.

The one close to us that adorns our choir is Peter, who, like the poor widow, gave his treasure to Holy Church.

The fifth light, which is the fairest among us, shines from such a love that the world below is eager to know its news.

Within it is a lofty mind where knowledge was so deeply placed that, if the truth is true, no one has ever surpassed it.

Next, you see the light of the one who, in the flesh below, most examined the angelic nature and its ministry.

And in that other little light is smiling the advocate of the Christian centuries, whose rhetoric made Augustine wise.

Now, if you follow my praise from light to light, with your thirst already, you will come to the eighth.

By seeing every good, the sainted soul rejoices, which the deceptive world reveals to those who listen well.

The body from which it was hunted is lying in Cieldauro, and from martyrdom and exile, it came to this peace.

Look further on and see the flame of Isidore, Bede, and Richard, who was more contemplative than man.

The light from which your gaze returns is from a spirit who, in his meditations, found death slow.

It is the eternal light of Sigier, who lectured in the Street of Straw and analyzed the flaws in the truth."

Then, like a clock calling us to the time the Bride of God rises to meet her Spouse, one part urging the other, ting! ting! resounding with a sweet note that fills the spirit with love,

Thus I saw the glorious wheel move around, voices giving voice, in modulation and sweetness that cannot be understood,

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Except in that place where joy is made eternal.

Paradiso: Canto XI

Oh, how foolish are the concerns of mortal men! How inconclusive are the arguments that cause you to waste your time in such a downward flight!

One person follows laws, another turns to aphorisms, some pursue the priesthood, others try to rule by force or persuasion, some become thieves, others focus on state affairs. Some indulge in the pleasures of the flesh, exhausting themselves, while some choose comfort and ease.

But I, free from all these distractions, was received into the heavens with Beatrice, with such overwhelming glory!

Once each soul had returned to its rightful place within the circle, it stood like a candle in a candlestick, its light glowing brightly.

Then, from within the brilliant light that had spoken to me before, I heard a voice begin. It was smiling and became even more radiant:

“Just as I am kindled by the rays of the Eternal Light, I understand the cause of your thoughts. You doubt and want me to explain in simpler terms what I meant when I said ‘where well one fattens,’ and when I said ‘there never rose a second.’ It is important to distinguish between these points.

The Providence that governs the world with wisdom, where all created vision is defeated before it can reach the deepest understanding, appointed two Princes to guide it—one by ardent love, and the other by wisdom. I will speak of one of them because both are equally deserving of praise, as their work is aimed at the same end.

Between Tupino and the stream that flows from the hill of the blessed Ubald, there is a fertile slope of mountain. From this slope, Perugia feels both cold and heat through Porta Sole, and behind it, Gualdo and Nocera suffer under their burdens.

From this slope, where the steepness breaks, a sun rose upon the world, just as the sun rises from the Ganges. So, when speaking of this place, do not just say Ascesi; say Orient, for that is its true name.

This sun, not far from its rising, began to bring comfort to the earth with its mighty virtue. In his youth, this sun incurred his father’s wrath for a lady, to whom no one opens the gate of pleasure.

She, without a suitor for over a thousand years, waited until he came. Despite all the great trials and the fear caused by Amyclas, she remained unmoved. Even though Mary still remained below, she ascended with Christ upon the cross.

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But I must not go too far into this. Francis and Poverty were the lovers in this story, and their unity became the cause of holy thoughts.

Their love, their joy, their sweetness, and their devotion inspired so much that Bernard, the venerable, first bared his feet in awe, running with peace, feeling that he was too slow.

Giles and Sylvester followed behind, bare of foot, happy to follow the bridegroom's humble way.

Then came the father, the master, with his Lady and his family, who now wore the humble cord. His heart was not burdened by shame for being Peter Bernardone's son, nor by the world's scorn.

With firm resolve, he approached Innocent and received the seal of his order. His life, so admirable, was crowned with glory, and soon the order grew. Through Honorius, the Eternal Spirit crowned his holy purpose.

After preaching to the Sultan and finding the people unready for conversion, he returned to Italy, where he received the final seal from Christ, which he bore for two whole years.

When the time came, Christ, pleased with his good work, drew him up to the reward for his lowliness. Before his ascent, he entrusted his beloved Lady to his friars, urging them to love her.

Now think of the man who was fit to guide the ship of Peter across the high seas. This man, our Patriarch, led his flock with wisdom. Those who follow his commands will see that he is carrying good fruit.

But as the flock grows, it becomes harder to keep them together. The farther they stray from the shepherd, the less they return with good fruit.

Some remain close to the shepherd out of fear, but they are few, and their devotion is only a small portion of the whole.

If my words are clear, and if you have been paying attention, you will be satisfied. For you will see how the plant that has been pruned will flourish, and how the words "Where well one fattens, if he strays not" are true.

Paradiso: Canto XII

As soon as the blessed flame had spoken the final word and given it voice, the holy millstone began to turn, and before it completed a full revolution, another joined it, and motion joined to motion, song to song.

This song transcends our Muses and Sirens in its beauty, as primal splendor outshines what is reflected. It is like two rainbows stretched across a tender cloud, parallel and matching in color, as Juno commands her handmaid to create them. The first rainbow, born outside, is like the one that symbolizes the world after the flood, established by God's covenant with Noah.

In the same way, two eternal garlands of roses surrounded us, answering one another, the outer to the inner, completing a grand harmony of light and sound.

After the dance and other grand rejoicings—singing, and the fiery effulgence of light blending with light—the celestial motion stopped together, as eyes must close when the will directs them, or open in unison when commanded.

Then, from the heart of one of the new lights, a voice came, directing me towards the star it represented, like a needle pointing to its star.

The voice began: “The love that makes me beautiful draws me to speak about the other leader, by whom so much good has been spoken of here, just as we are united in our purpose. It is right to mention the other, so that, as they were united in their warfare, their glory may shine together.”

The Christian soldiery, which had cost so much to rearm, moved slowly, uncertain, and in small numbers. But the Emperor, who reigns forever, provided grace for the host, not because it was worthy, but by grace alone.

And as was said, He brought aid to His bride, the Church, with two champions, whose deeds and words gathered the scattered people.

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The place is not just Ascesi; it is Orient, if one speaks rightly. This sun began to make the earth feel its mighty virtue. In his youth, he incurred his father's wrath for a lady, to whom no one unlocks the gate of pleasure.

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This lady, abandoned and scorned, waited more than a thousand years until he came. Despite all the great trials, she remained unmoved. Even though Mary still remained below, she ascended with Christ on the cross.

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Paradiso: Canto XIII

Let the reader imagine what I saw and retain that image firmly in his mind. Picture the fifteen stars that light up the sky in their respective regions, their brightness so great it surpasses all the constellations we see in the heavens. Picture the Wain, the Big Dipper, whose movement never fails to guide the sky night and day, with its pole remaining steadfast in place. Imagine the mouth of the horn, the point where the axis begins, around which the primal wheel turns.

Now, picture the two signs in the heavens, formed like the ones Minos' daughter created, the moment when she faced death. One set of rays is inside the other, both spinning in opposite directions. This is the true constellation and the double dance that circled around the point where I stood. It is as much beyond our usual understanding as the swift motion of the heavens outpaces everything else.

Their song wasn't about Bacchus or Apollo, but about the divine nature of the Trinity, with one person who is both divine and human. The dance and song fulfilled their purpose, and those holy lights began to grow brighter as they became happier, moving from one state of joy to another.

Then, from within one of the new lights, a voice emerged, which made me turn toward it, just as a needle points to a star. The voice said, "The love that makes me beautiful draws me to speak about the other leader, by whom so much has been said here. It's right to mention the other, so that, as they were united in their mission, their glory may shine together."

This is the Christian army that was slow and small at first, but the eternal Emperor, by His grace alone, provided for it. He brought the Church's Bride to safety with the help of two champions, whose deeds and words gathered the scattered people.

Now picture the land where the sweet west wind rises to refresh Europe, where the fertile slopes of Calahorra lie. It was under the protection of this mighty shield that the "amorous paramour of Christian faith" was born, destined to be a great warrior for the Faith. His mind was filled with such divine energy from the moment of his birth that his mother knew he was destined for greatness.

Soon, the man, later known as Dominic, joined in holy matrimony with the Faith, and the woman, his bride, saw in a dream the great fruit he would bear. From the very beginning, his life was devoted to spreading the truth, and he became an essential part of the Church's mission.

As soon as the marriage was complete, he took the vow of poverty, as did his followers. They lived humbly, walking barefoot and devoting their lives to Christ. Dominic, unwavering in his faith, received the seal of his order from Pope Innocent, and the order grew rapidly.

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Later, when he preached before the Sultan, seeking martyrdom, he returned to Italy, where he received his final seal. In his last days, he entrusted his beloved Order to his followers, instructing them to love it as he did.

Now think of this man, who was fit to guide the ship of Peter across the seas. His life exemplified the virtues of the Catholic Church, and his followers would continue his mission, carrying forward the truth.

However, as the flock grew, they became more scattered, with many straying far from their true purpose. Some remain close to the shepherd, but they are few. Much like how the thorn may bear a rose in the end, we see how a ship can sail smoothly only to crash at the harbor.

Let no one assume they understand the divine judgment without caution. For it often happens that opinion leads us astray, and feelings bind the intellect in ways that mislead us. Those who search for truth without skill often end up lost, as many philosophers have done before.

We should not be overconfident in our judgments, as we can never know everything. Just as the thorn can bear a rose or the ship can reach its destination only to perish at the harbor, we should not be too quick to judge others. For in the divine judgment, things are not always as they seem.

Paradiso: Canto XIV

As soon as the blessed flame had spoken the final word, the holy millstone began to turn, and as it revolved, it was soon joined by another circle, creating motion and song that harmonized with each other. The song that we heard was far greater than the music of our earthly Muses and Sirens. It transcended all the sweetness we know, just as primal light surpasses reflected light.

Imagine two rainbows, side by side, with colors as brilliant as those formed by Juno's command when she created them for her maid. The two rainbows' colors reflect one another, and as they move, they give a sense of what was happening here. This dance of light, which I witnessed in Heaven, is far beyond anything we know on Earth, so much so that it could even surpass the swift movement of the Chiana River.

They sang neither songs of Bacchus nor Apollo but celebrated the divine nature of the Holy Trinity, singing with a perfect harmony that pleased all who heard. They sang three times, repeating the One and the Two and the Three, which is the eternal song of God's glory.

In the brightest of the lights, I heard a voice that answered me modestly, as if it were the Angel's voice to Mary: "As long as the joy of Paradise lasts, our love will shine through and adorn us with a glowing light. This light will be proportional to the love within us, and the love grows as we see more of God's truth."

When our bodies are reunited, they will be even more radiant and pleasing because of their completeness. The light will increase in us, reflecting the power and goodness of God, and it will make us capable of greater visions of Him.

But just as a coal can glow and send out flames, overpowering the coal itself, the new light of our glorified bodies will overpower the light of our current spiritual state. Our bodies, though, will be strong enough to bear that light and will not grow weary of it.

At that moment, the two groups of souls appeared to be in agreement, and I understood that they were not just longing for their own bodies but also for the families they had left behind on Earth—fathers, mothers, and loved ones who were dear to them. Then, all around them, a new brightness emerged, like an evening sky brightening as the night fades.

I saw new forms and circles appear, glowing with such intensity that it was almost blinding. Then, I saw Beatrice, more beautiful and radiant than ever. She smiled at me, and I felt a greater sense of joy and gratitude fill my heart. Her smile uplifted me, and my eyes became fixed on her, pulling me upward toward a higher level of heaven.

As I was raised, I could feel myself filled with love for God, the source of all beauty. I made an offering to God in the universal language of the heavens, a prayer of thanksgiving for the grace I

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had received. I was filled with such intense passion that the offering was accepted before I even fully realized it.

Then I saw two lights shining in the form of rays, one bright and one slightly dimmer, yet both equally glorious. They seemed to represent the radiant power of the Holy Trinity. As I watched, I saw the two rays intersect, creating a sign of Christ's cross, illuminating the entire area. This cross seemed to shine with the brilliance of the sun, and as the rays intersected, they made music, lifting me even higher into the heavens.

The harmony of this divine music filled my soul with such joy that I became lost in it. The divine harmony was so powerful that it captivated me, just as a melody played on a harp captivates the listener, making them lose track of time. The music made me yearn for more, and I was so deeply moved that I felt bound by its sweet influence.

Though I had gazed upon Beatrice and seen her eyes, which were my source of joy, the joy from this divine experience surpassed everything else. In my longing to understand the mystery, I was unable to look away from the new vision unfolding before me. This vision of divine love and light was the highest form of joy, and I felt it purify me, bringing me closer to God.

And so, this joy, which I can only describe in vague terms, transformed me, making me more attuned to the divine presence. It is a joy that purifies, elevates, and draws one closer to God, like the intense warmth of a fire that refines everything it touches.

Paradiso: Canto XV

A benevolent will, in which the love that justly inspires us constantly manifests itself, just as, in the iniquitous, we see a will driven by greed—this kind of force silenced the sweet song of the lyre, quieting the sacred chords that Heaven's right hand adjusts.

How could the celestial beings, those substances, be deaf to the just requests, when they had grown silent together to provoke my desire for their prayer?

It is truly sorrowful when a person laments their love for something that does not last, for such a love only leads them to lose it forever.

Just as, in the pure and calm evening air, a sudden spark of fire occasionally appears, moving the eyes that were fixed in place before, this fire seems like a star changing position. But in the place where it burns, nothing is lost, and it only lasts for a moment, so too did a star emerge from the horn that stretches to the right, from the foot of the cross, shining out from the constellation.

The star was not severed from its ribbon but moved down the glowing band, just like fire moving behind alabaster.

This reminded me of the shade of Anchises, if we believe the greatest Muse, when he saw his son in Elysium. He said: “O my blood, O grace of God poured into you, as to you, whom Heaven's gate was opened twice?”

I paid attention to that radiant light, and then turned my sight to Beatrice. I was left astounded, for in her eyes, I saw such a smile that it seemed I reached the very bottom of both my grace and my Paradise.

Then, pleasant to the hearing and the sight, the spirit joined its beginnings in such a profound way that I did not understand it at first. It wasn't hiding from me by choice but by necessity, for the concept exceeded what mortals can grasp.

And when the intensity of this burning love was relaxed enough to reach our understanding, the first thing I understood was: “Blessed be You, O Three in One, who have been so kind to my lineage!”

The voice continued: “You have satisfied your hunger from the study of the great book, from which no black or white can ever be changed. You have found peace in this light, which I now speak from, thanks to her grace who gave you the wings to fly so high.”

You think that your thoughts come from God, who is the First, as the single unit that radiates out into the five and six, and therefore you don't ask who I am, or why I seem more joyous than any other in this crowd of happy souls.

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You are right in this thought, because both the small and the great look into the mirror of this existence, where before you think, your thoughts are reflected.

But now, to better fulfill the sacred love, in which I watch with eternal sight, let your voice openly proclaim your wishes, for my answer is already set.

I turned to Beatrice, and she heard my thoughts even before I spoke. She smiled at me in a way that made my desire grow even stronger. Then I began: "Love and knowledge, when the first Equality appeared to you, became of equal value for each of you. In the Sun that illuminated and burned you, they are both equally present, so much so that all comparisons fall short."

But among mortals, will and reason are often different, for reason is more apparent to you than it is to us. I, being mortal, feel this inequality. So I offer my thanks in my heart for this welcome, but not in speech.

I ask you, O living gem, set in this precious jewel, to satisfy my curiosity with your name.

The voice responded: "O leaf of mine, from whom I derived pleasure, even while waiting, I was always yours. The one from whom your race is named, and who for over a hundred years circled the mount on the first level, was both my son and your great-grandfather. You should shorten the long fatigue for him with your good deeds."

Florence, once calm, temperate, and chaste, did not have gold chains or crowns, nor ladies with lavish footwear and jewelry, but it was a city that knew modesty. No longer did the daughter of Florence strike fear into her father, and the measure of her dower was fair.

No longer were houses without families, nor had Sardanapalus come to demonstrate the vices of the court. Men like Bellincion Berti lived humbly, dressed in leather and simple attire, with their wives making thread and flax.

Oh, how fortunate those women were! Each knew her place and none were left behind for the sake of France. Some mothers cared for their children, telling them stories of Rome and Troy, living contentedly.

Such a life would have been a marvel at that time. Even the most renowned names, like Lapo Salterello, Cianghella, Cincinnatus, or Cornelia, would have been seen with reverence.

Mary gave me a quiet and beautiful life, one of safety and peace, and I was baptized both Christian and Cacciaguida in your ancient Baptistry.

Moronto was my brother, Eliseo my wife, and from Val di Pado came my surname. Later, I followed Emperor Conrad, who adorned me with his chivalric order, and together we fought for justice.

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I battled against those who wrongly claimed ownership of your land, and through martyrdom, I was freed from the bonds of the world. Thus, I came to this peace.

Paradiso: Canto XVI

Oh, you poor nobility, if you make people proud of you here, where our feelings are weak, it won't surprise me. But in Heaven, where desires are pure, I am proud of you.

Truly, you are like a cloak that quickly shrinks. Unless we patch you up day by day, time will pass and quickly tear you apart.

With 'You,' which Rome was the first to accept (where her family doesn't stay strong), I once again start speaking.

Beatrice, who was standing a little apart, smiling, looked like the woman who laughed when the first failure of Guinevere's story was written.

And I began: "You are my ancestor, you give me the courage to speak, you lift me up so that I am more than I am.

So many small streams fill my mind with joy that it feels happy just by being able to handle this and not break.

Then tell me, my beloved ancestor, who were your ancestors, and what years were marked during your childhood?

Tell me about the community of Saint John, how large it was, and who in it was worthy of the highest seats."

When a wind blows, a coal turns into flame, and I saw that light grow brighter at my encouragement.

And as it became more beautiful to my eyes, it spoke to me with a voice sweeter and more tender than before, but not in modern language:

"From the time of saying the 'Ave' until the birth, when my mother, who is now a saint, gave birth to me, who had been her burden,

Until the fire returned to its Lion five hundred fifty times and thirty more to be reignited beneath his paw.

My ancestors and I had our birthplace where the last district of the city is, by the one who runs in your yearly race.

It's enough to hear this about my ancestors; who they were and where they came from is better left unsaid.

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At that time, those who were fit to bear arms between Mars and the Baptist made up a fifth of those who are living now.

But the community that now mixes with Campi, Certaldo, and Figghine, was seen to be pure even among the lowest artisans.

Oh, how much better it would be to have neighbors like the ones I'm speaking of, and have your boundary at Galluzzo and Trespiano, than in the town, bearing the stench of Aguglione's rude people, or the one from Signa who already has sharp eyes for trickery.

Had the people who degenerate the most in the world not been a stepmother to Caesar but a kind mother to her son, some people who now call themselves Florentines, trading and discounting, would have gone back to Simifonte, where their ancestors once lived as beggars.

At Montemurlo, the Counts would still be there, the Cerchi in the parish of Acone, and maybe in Valdiglieve the Buondelmonti.

Intermingling of people has always been the cause of trouble in cities, like food that causes excess in the body.

A blind bull plunges headfirst more recklessly than a blind lamb, and often a single sword does more harm than five.

If you look at Luni, Urbisaglia, and how they have disappeared, as well as Chiusi and Sinigaglia after them,

You'll see that it's not a new or surprising thing for races to fade away, since even cities have an end.

All things of yours have their mortality, just like you; but in some things, it's hidden for a while and lives are short.

Just as the moon moves across the sky, covering and uncovering the shores without stopping, fortune does the same with Florence.

So it shouldn't be surprising what I'm going to say about the great Florentines whose fame is hidden in the past.

I saw the Ughi, the Catellini, the Filippi, the Greci, the Ormanni, and the Alberichi, all of them still known even in their downfall.

And I saw, as mighty as they were ancient, the ones from La Sannella, Arca, Soldanier, Ardinghi, and Bostichi.

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Near the gate, which now bears such a heavy new crime that soon it will be thrown off the ship, were the Ravignani, from whom descended County Guido, and whoever took the name of the great Bellincione.

He from La Pressa already knew how to rule, and already Galigajo had gold on the hilt and pommel in his house.

The Column Vair, Sacchetti, Giuochi, Fifant, and Barucci were already mighty, as were Galli, and those who blush for the bushel.

The stock from which the Calfucci were born was already great, and the Sizii and Arrigucci were already chosen to sit in curule chairs.

Oh, how I saw those who are undone by their own pride! And how the golden balls of Florence shone in all their mighty deeds!

Similarly, the ancestors of those who, whenever your church is vacant, make money by staying in consistory.

The insolent race, like a dragon, follows whoever flees, and is gentle as a lamb to anyone who shows them their teeth or purse.

It was already rising from low people; so it did not please Ubertin Donato that his wife's father should make him their kin.

Already, Caponsacco had descended to the market from Fesole, and Giuda and Infangato were already good citizens.

I'll tell you something incredible but true: one entered the small circuit through a gate named after the Della Pera!

Anyone who bears the beautiful shield of the great baron, whose renown and name the festival of Thomas keeps fresh, received knighthood and privilege from him;

Though with the people, he unites himself today, the man who binds it with a border.

Already the Gualterotti and Importuni were there; and the Borgo would be quieter if it remained unfed with new neighbors.

The house from which your lamentation is born, through just disdain that death brought among you, putting an end to your joyful life,

Was honored in itself and among its companions. Oh Buondelmonte, how you fled from the wedding at another's prompting!

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Many would be rejoicing who are sad, if God had given you to the Ema the first time you came to the city.

But the mutilated stone, which guards the bridge, required Florence to provide a victim in her final hour of peace.

With all these families, and others with them, Florence I saw in such great peace that she had no reason to weep.

With all these families, I saw her people so just and glorious, that the lily was never placed upside down on the spear, nor vermillion made by division.

Paradiso: Canto XVII

Just like Clymene went to find out the truth about what she had heard against her son, I felt the same way. I realized I was like him, and so did Beatrice and the holy light that had first moved for my sake.

Therefore, Beatrice said to me, “Send out the flame of your desire, so that it comes out clearly with the stamp of your inner self. Not that our knowledge will be increased by your speech, but to help you learn to express your thirst, so that we may give you what you need.”

I replied, “Oh, my beloved tree (that lifts yourself up so high, so that no earthly mind can perceive, just as no triangle can have two obtuse angles), you see the contingent things even before they exist, focusing your gaze on the point where all times are present.

While I was with Virgil on the mountain that heals souls, and when I descended into the world of the dead, I was told some painful things about my future life. Even so, I feel strong enough to face the blows of fate. I would like to know what lies ahead, because foreseeing an arrow makes it come more slowly.”

I said this to the same light that had spoken to me before. And just as Beatrice willed, my will was confessed.

The light didn’t respond with vague words like the foolish people who once trapped themselves, before the Lamb of God was sacrificed to take away sins. It spoke clearly and directly, with the paternal love hidden and revealed through its smile:

“Contingency, which is outside of your material world, doesn’t exist in the eternal aspect. But necessity, which comes from the eyes, is like a ship sailing down a current. From this, just as sweet music comes from an organ, I see the time preparing for you.

As Hippolytus had to leave Athens because of his cruel stepmother, so you must leave Florence. This is already decided, and soon it will happen. The person who thinks it will make it happen, where every day Christ is bought and sold.

The blame will fall on the wronged party, as usual, but vengeance will prove the truth of it.

You will leave behind everything that you love dearly. This is the first arrow of exile shot at you. You will know how bitter the bread of others tastes, and how difficult it is to climb another person’s stairs.

The worst burden will be the bad and foolish company you’ll fall in with, for they will turn against you. But soon after, it will be them, not you, who will be ashamed.

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Their own actions will show their true nature, so it will be good for you to stand apart from them.

Your first refuge will be the kindness of the mighty Lombard, who carries the holy bird on the Ladder. He will show you such kindness that what is last with others will be first with him.

You'll see one who is marked by strength from birth, whose future achievements will be great. Although the people don't know him yet, only nine years have passed since he was born, but before the Gascon deceives the noble Henry, some signs of his virtue will show, as he won't care for money or hard work.

His magnificence will eventually be so recognized that even his enemies will have to speak of it.

Rely on him and his support; through him, many will be transformed, changing from rich to poor. You will remember him but will not speak of it—things that will seem unbelievable to those present.

Then the light continued: "These are the explanations of what was said to you. See the traps that are hidden behind a few turns of fortune.

But I wouldn't want you to envy your neighbors, because your life reaches into the future, beyond the punishment of their betrayals."

When the saintly soul became silent, showing it had completed its part in the weaving of the web I had set out, I began speaking, just like someone who yearns for advice and needs it, but isn't sure where to turn.

"Father, I see how time is bringing me a blow that will be hardest for those who resist the most. Therefore, it's wise to prepare, so that if the most precious part of me is taken away, I won't lose the others through my actions.

I've traveled through the world of infinite bitterness, and over the mountain from which my Lady lifted me, and through heaven, from light to light. I've learned things that, if I share them, will be hard for many to accept.

And if I'm hesitant in sharing the truth, I fear that I may lose my life among those who will later call this time the past."

The light that was smiling at me, my treasure that I had found there, suddenly flashed like gold in the sunlight. It then responded: "A troubled conscience, whether from its own shame or from another's, will find your words harsh at first, but in time, they will be a nourishing force.

Your cry will do like the wind, which hits the highest peaks hardest. This is a sign of honor.

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Thus, you will see within these circles, on the mount and in the valley of pain, only the souls known for their fame.

The spirit of the listener doesn't rest, nor does it confirm its faith by examples that are hidden and unknown, or reasons that aren't obvious."

Paradiso: Canto XVIII

Now, the blessed soul was rejoicing in its words, and I was experiencing my own joy, mingled with bitterness.

Beatrice, the Lady who was leading me to God, said: "Change your thoughts; consider that I am close to the one who frees everyone from wrong."

I turned toward the comforting voice and saw such love in her holy eyes that words can't explain. Not only do I distrust my ability to express it, but my mind can't even go back to that point without another guide.

I can say that, upon seeing her again, my heart was freed from all other desires. While the eternal joy that was shining on Beatrice from the divine light satisfied me with its reflected glory, she conquered me with the radiance of a smile and said to me, "Look around and listen; Paradise is not only in my eyes."

Just as we sometimes see the emotions of others in their gaze, if the emotion is so strong that it absorbs the soul, I saw the wish to speak to me in the holy light.

And it began: "In this fifth resting-place, on the tree that lives by its top, bearing fruit and never losing leaves, are blessed spirits who, before coming to Heaven, were so well-known that every Muse would be enriched by them.

So, look at the arms of the Cross. He whom I'm about to name will perform what is within a cloud of swift fire."

I saw a light pass across the Cross when the name Joshua was spoken, just as he did. I didn't notice the words before the act. Then, at the name of the great Maccabee, I saw another light begin to move, turning and spiraling in joy.

Similarly, I saw Charlemagne and Orlando, two figures I followed with my eyes, as the eye follows a falcon in flight.

Then came William, Renouard, and Duke Godfrey, and Robert Guiscard, whose light filled my sight. Each of these lights, moving and mixing, showed me how great an artist they were among the heavenly singers.

I turned to Beatrice, eager to see what she would say, and her eyes were so full of pleasure that they were more radiant than before.

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Just like someone who feels their virtue growing day by day, I felt my understanding expanding, and my vision of heaven became more intense. The miracle of this growth made me feel more and more enlightened.

Then, as a pale woman, after shedding her bashfulness, becomes aware of her transformation, I too realized the change in my vision, made possible by the clarity of the sixth star, which drew me closer.

Inside that bright, jovial light, I saw the sparkle of love that described our language clearly. And just as birds rise from the shore in celebration, forming groups that move in different shapes, so the holy lights flew in the same way, creating shapes like the letters D, I, and L.

They sang to their own music, and as they formed these shapes, they paused and became silent for a moment. Then, they displayed the vowels and consonants in a sequence, which I understood as part of the divine language.

The first words were "Diligite justitiam" (Love justice), and the last were "Qui judicatis terram" (You who judge the earth). The letters, arranged in this divine order, seemed to form the image of Jupiter, with silver and gold.

Then, more lights descended and rested at the top of the M, where they paused to sing about the good that draws them to itself.

Like sparks that fly up from burning wood, I saw more than a thousand lights rise and ascend in a manner determined by the sun. Each light rested in its place, and I saw the head and neck of an eagle depicted in the fire.

The artist who paints this scene is guided only by the divine, not by any external influence, as He is the one who remembers and forms the virtue for the nest.

The other beatitude, which first seemed to bloom a lily on the M, soon followed the imprint with a slight movement.

O gentle star! How many gems did you show me, demonstrating that all our justice is a result of that heaven which you illuminate!

I pray that the Mind in which your motion and virtue begin will recognize the smoke that clouds your rays, so that it may once again show wrath against the commerce in the temple that was built by signs and martyrdoms!

O heavenly soldiers, whom I observe, I ask you to pray for those who are on earth and have gone astray after bad examples!

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Once, wars were fought with swords; now they are fought by taking bread from the poor, whom the merciful Father provides for.

You, who write but erase, think of Peter and Paul, who died for this vineyard you are spoiling. They are still alive!

You can say with certainty: "My desire is so steadfast for the one who lived alone, who was led to martyrdom for a dance, that I do not know the Fisherman or Paul."

Paradiso: Canto XIX

Before me appeared the beautiful image with its wings spread wide. The souls within it were joyfully rejoicing, and each soul looked like a small ruby, where the sun's rays were burning so brightly that they reflected directly into my eyes.

What I am about to describe is beyond what has ever been spoken, written, or understood by imagination. I saw something and heard it as well—the beak speaking, uttering both “I” and “My,” when it was conceived as “We” and “Our.”

It began: “Being just and merciful, I am exalted here to a glory that no desire can exceed. On earth, I left a memory of myself, one that the evil-minded people still speak of, though they do not complete the story.”

Just as a single heat from many embers makes itself felt, so, from many loves, a single sound emerged from this image.

I then said: “O perpetual flowers of eternal joy, who make me perceive your manifold fragrances, break the long fast of hunger that I have endured. I know that if divine justice creates another realm in heaven, yours would not be hidden by any veil.”

“You know how attentively I listen, and you know the doubt that has kept me longing all this time.”

Just like a falcon, when it leaves its hood, moves its head and applauds with its wings, showing desire and making itself appear fine, I saw that standard—woven with divine grace—move in the air, filled with songs as if those inside were rejoicing.

It began speaking again: “He who turned the compass of the world, who within it devised both the occult and the manifest, could not make his power so impressively present across the entire universe that His Word would remain beyond excess.

This confirms that the first proud being, who was the model for all creatures, fell immature by not waiting for the light.

Therefore, each lesser nature is a limited receptacle for the infinite good that exists. Our vision, which is a ray of the intelligence that fills everything, cannot be so powerful that it doesn't recognize its origin far beyond what it can perceive.

Therefore, in eternal justice, the power of vision your world receives, as an eye sees into the ocean, penetrates. Though it may see the shallows near the shore, it cannot perceive the depths beneath, even though they are there, hidden by the depth.

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No light exists that doesn't come from the serene source, which never becomes clouded. All other light is either the shadow of the flesh or its poison."

"Now the cavern is opened to you, the one that has hidden the living justice that you so often questioned about."

You asked: "A man is born in India, and no one there speaks of Christ, nor reads, nor writes. He lives a good life by human standards, but dies unbaptized, without faith. Where is the justice that condemns him? Where is his fault if he doesn't believe?"

But who are you to sit in judgment from far away, with your limited vision? If the Scriptures were not over you, it would be an occasion for doubt.

O earthly creatures, O foolish minds, the primal will, which is good in itself, never moves away from the supreme Good. Everything is just as it aligns with this will. No created good draws it to itself; it causes that good by radiating outward."

Just as a stork flies around her nest after feeding her young, and the young look up at her, I lifted my eyes, and I saw the blessed image, whose wings moved, urged by many counsels.

The holy creatures sang and flew in a circular motion, forming shapes like D, I, and L. They sang to their own music and then briefly rested, becoming silent for a moment.

O divine Pegasus, who makes genius glorious and long-lived, illuminate me so I can bring forth the figures I have conceived! Let your power shine through these brief verses!

The lights then displayed vowels and consonants, in five times seven, and I understood the parts as if they had spoken to me.

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Paradiso: Canto XX

When the one who illuminates the world descends so far from our hemisphere that all the daylight is consumed, the heavens, which were once lit only by him, suddenly reveal themselves again through many lights, one of which shines most brightly.

This act of heaven came to my mind when the banner of the world and its leaders had fallen silent in the blessed beak. All those living lights, far brighter, began to sing, but the songs quickly faded from my memory.

O gentle Love, who cloaks yourself with a smile, how intense you appeared in those sparks, which only carried the breath of holy thoughts!

After the precious and clear crystals that adorned the sixth light I saw, silence was imposed on the angelic bells. I seemed to hear the sound of a river flowing clearly from rock to rock, showing the abundance of its mountain source.

Just as the sound of a cithern takes form on its neck, and as wind fills the pipe of a rustic flute, so too did the murmuring of the eagle rise along its neck, as if it were hollow.

It became a voice and issued forth from the beak in words that my heart had been waiting for, words that I had written.

It began: "The part of me that sees and carries the sun in mortal eagles must now be looked at with attention. For of the fires I make my form, the eyes that sparkle in my head are the highest of all their kinds."

The first to speak was the one in the center of the Cross, the one who once sang of the Holy Spirit, who carried the ark from city to city. Now he understands the merit of his song, based on the reward given for his counsel.

The next in line, closest to my beak, is the one who comforted the poor widow for her son. Now he understands how costly it is not to follow Christ, through the experience of both this sweet life and its opposite.

The one who follows, at the top of the circle, postponed death through sincere repentance. Now he knows that eternal judgment does not change, though worthy prayer makes tomorrow out of today.

The next one followed, and under the good intent that bore bad fruit, he became a Greek by submitting to the pastor. He now knows that the evil that came from his good action did not harm him, even though it might destroy the world.

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The one in the downward arc you see, Guglielmo, is mourned by the same land that grieves Charles and Frederick, still alive. Now he knows how heaven loves a just king, and in his brightness, he still reveals it.

Who would believe, down in the errant world, that the Trojan Ripheus, in this circle, could be the fifth of the holy lights? Now he knows enough about what the world cannot see of divine grace, though his sight may not reach the bottom.

Just like a lark that flies freely in the air, first singing and then silent with contentment from the sweetness of the final song, such seemed to me the imprint of eternal pleasure, by whose will everything becomes what it is.

And though I was like glass to the color that envelops it, I could not remain silent, but from my mouth came: "What are these things?" forced out by the weight of my own thoughts. At this, I saw great joy in the light.

Then, with my eyes more awakened, the blessed standard replied to me, keeping me from remaining in wonderment:

"I see that you believe these things because I say them, but you do not see how. Even though you believe, they are hidden from you. You are like one who understands the name of something but cannot grasp its essence unless shown to him."

"The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence from fervent love, and from the living hope that overcomes divine will. Not in the way that one man overcomes another, but it conquers because it wants to be conquered, and in being conquered, it conquers through kindness."

"The first life of the eyebrow and the fifth causes your astonishment, because you see the angels' realm depicted. They did not leave their bodies as you think, but were Christians with a firm faith in the feet that suffered and had suffered."

"Even one from Hell, where no one ever returns to good will, returned to his bones, and that was the reward of living hope. He believed in Him who had the power to help him, and, in believing, he was filled with such fire that at his second death, he was worthy to come to this joy."

"The other, through grace, set all his love on righteousness. Therefore, from grace to grace, God opened his eyes to our redemption yet to come. He believed in it and never again suffered from the stench of paganism. He reproved the perverse people for it."

"The three Maidens you saw at the right-hand wheel were unto him for baptism more than a thousand years before baptism."

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"O you, predestination, how far your root is from the sight of those who do not see the First Cause in its entirety!"

"And you, O mortals! Restrain yourselves in judgment, for we who look on God do not yet know all the elect; and sweet to us is this deprivation, because our good is made perfect in this good, and whatever God wills, we also will."

Paradiso: Canto XXI

Once again, my eyes were fixed on my Lady's face, and with them, my mind was focused entirely on her, withdrawing from everything else. She didn't smile, but began speaking to me: "If I were to smile, you would become like Semele, turned to ashes, because my beauty, which grows brighter the higher we ascend the eternal staircase, is so radiant that if it were not tempered, all your mortal strength would be overwhelmed by it."

"We are now elevated to the seventh heaven, where it is illuminated by the Lion's fiery heart, radiating its power downward."

"Fix your mind's attention on the direction of your eyes, and let them become a mirror for the figure that will appear to you."

If someone could have known what my eyes experienced in that blessed face when I shifted my focus, they would have recognized how grateful I was for the obedience to my celestial guide. It was as if one side balanced the other.

I saw a staircase, bright as gold, stretching upwards to such a height that my eyes couldn't follow it. Descending from this height were so many lights that I thought every light in heaven was there.

It looked like the rooks at dawn: some taking flight, others returning to where they started, while others stayed and turned in circles. That was how the lights appeared to me as they gathered at a specific step, moving together in that pattern.

And the light closest to us became so clear that I thought, "I can clearly perceive the love you show me, but the one from whom I await the how and when of speech and silence stands still. Therefore, I would do well not to ask, despite my desire."

She saw my silence and, knowing all things, said to me, "Let your warm desire loose."

I responded: "No merit of my own makes me worthy of a reply from you, but for her sake who grants me the request, I ask: You who remain hidden in your beatitude, tell me the cause that draws you so near my side. Also, tell me why the sweet symphony of Paradise is silent here, while it resounds devoutly below."

She answered me: "You have mortal hearing as you have mortal sight, so they do not sing here for the same reason Beatrice has not smiled. I have come down the holy stairway to welcome you with words and the light that surrounds me. It is not love that makes me more ready, for as much love as burns here, even more burns above, as the flames clearly show."

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“But the high charity that makes us servants ready to follow the counsel that controls the world assigns us here, as you can see.”

I said, “I see well, O sacred light! how love, free here in this court, is enough to follow the eternal Providence. But it seems hard to me to understand why you, among your companions, were predestined for this office alone.”

No sooner had I spoken these words than the light in the middle of the group became a center, spinning like a fast-moving millstone.

From within it, the love responded: “A divine light is focused on me, piercing through this light I am surrounded by. This light, when joined with my vision, lifts me so high that I see the supreme essence from which all this light is drawn.”

“This explains the joy I radiate, for I make the clearness of the flame equal to my sight as far as it is clear.”

“The soul in the highest heaven, the seraph who most directly fixes its gaze on God, could not satisfy this question of yours. It is so deeply embedded in the eternal law that no created sight can reach it.”

“Moreover, when you return to the mortal world, take this with you, so that it does not presume to move toward such a goal. The mind that shines here is clouded on earth. If you understand this, you will know why it cannot accomplish here what it cannot perceive in heaven.”

The light’s words set a limit to my questioning, and I humbly refrained from asking further. Instead, I asked who it was that spoke.

“Between two shores of Italy,” it began again, “there rise cliffs, not far from your homeland. They are so high that the thunders seem distant below them, forming a ridge called Catria. Beneath it is a hermitage dedicated to worship.”

“The place where I lived became so devoted to God’s service that I lived on nothing but olives, passing the heat and cold lightly, content in my contemplations. That cloister used to be full of heaven’s bounty, but now it is empty, and soon it must be revealed.”

“I was Peter Damiano, and Peter the Sinner I was at the house of Our Lady on the Adriatic coast.”

“Little remained of mortal life when I was called and taken into the Papacy, which shifts from bad to worse. Cephas, and the Holy Spirit’s Vessel, came meager and barefoot, taking food wherever it could find it.”

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"Now the modern shepherds need someone to support them, so heavy are they, and to hold their trains. They cover their horses with cloaks, so that two beasts go under one skin. O Patience, that tolerates so much!"

At this voice, I saw many small flames descending and revolving from step to step, and every revolution made them brighter.

They gathered around the figure, and a cry so loud was uttered that it couldn't be compared to anything I had heard.

Paradiso: Canto XXII

Overcome with amazement, I turned to my guide like a small child who always runs to the person they trust most for comfort. She, like a mother who immediately reassures her pale and breathless child with a voice that calms, said to me: “Don’t you know that you are in heaven? And don’t you know that heaven is holy, and everything here is done out of pure love?”

“Now that you have been startled by the cry, you can imagine how the singing would have changed you if I had smiled. The vengeance you will see before you die would already be clear to you if you had understood its prayers.”

“The sword above here doesn’t strike quickly or slowly; it seems so to those who fear or desire it. But now, turn your eyes toward the others. You will see very illustrious spirits if you look as I tell you.”

So I turned my eyes as she instructed, and I saw a hundred small spheres that radiated light, each one reflecting the others more beautifully. I stood there, holding back my desire to ask, feeling afraid to question too much.

Then, the largest and brightest of those spheres moved forward to satisfy my curiosity. I heard within it: “If you could see the love that burns among us, you would express your thoughts. But, so that you’re not delayed in reaching the high goal, I will answer the question you hesitate to ask.”

“The mountain where Cassino stands was once frequented by misguided people, and I am the one who first carried the name of Him who brought the truth to earth. So much grace shone on me that I led many towns away from the false worship that had deceived the world.”

“These other lights are contemplative souls, kindled by the heat that makes holy flowers and fruits grow. Here is Macarius, here is Romualdus, and here are my brothers, who stayed in their cloisters, steadfast in heart.”

I responded: “The affection you show me with your words, and the good expression I see in your faces, have increased my trust in you, as the sun causes a rose to bloom. So, I ask, if I may receive such grace, to see you with an unveiled face.”

The spirit replied: “Brother, your deep desire will be fulfilled in the highest sphere, where all desires are completed. There, every desire is perfect, complete, and always has been.”

“It is not in space, nor does it turn on poles; our stairway leads up to it, and from there it departs from your sight.”

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“Jacob saw it extending in its heavenly part when angels surrounded him. But no one can ascend it now, and my Rule remains below, wasted on paper. The walls that were once an Abbey are now dens of thieves, and the cowls have become sacks full of worthless flour.”

“Usury is not as displeasing to God as the fruit of monks who become insane in their desire. What the Church holds is for the people who ask for it in God’s name, not for one’s family or something worse.”

“Mortals are so fragile that good beginnings do not suffice on their own. Peter began with neither gold nor silver, and I began with prayer and abstinence, and Francis with humility. If you look at where each began and where they have ended, you will see how the white has become brown.”

“Even the Jordan river, and the sea parting at God’s will, are more miraculous than the decline we see in the world now.”

Then, after he spoke, he withdrew to his own place, and the band of spirits closed together, rising as swiftly as a whirlwind.

Beatrice, with a single gesture, urged me to follow them up the stairway, and her virtue made my nature overcome its limitations. It was as if my wings moved faster than any earthly motion.

As I continued, I saw the stars, and it felt like I had just glimpsed them as I reached the sign of Taurus. O glorious stars! What mighty force you possess, from which I understand my own inspiration.

With you, the father of all mortal life was born, and through you, I was destined to enter the heavenly wheel that turns all things. I pray that my soul, which now yearns for virtue, may gain enough strength to pass the difficult test ahead.

Beatrice said to me: “You are so close to final salvation, you should now have clear and sharp sight. Before you go any further, look down and see how vast a world you’ve already left behind. Let your heart rejoice as you approach the triumphant crowd that celebrates in this realm.”

I looked down through the seven spheres, and I saw the Earth in such a way that I smiled at its insignificance. That opinion which regards it as least is the one I agree with, for anyone who looks beyond can see its true smallness.

I saw the moon, and without the shadow that once made me believe it was dense, I now saw its true nature. I witnessed the movements of the sun, Hyperion, Maia, and Dione, and I understood the temperance of Jupiter between father and son.

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Then I understood the greatness and swiftness of the seven spheres, and how they reside in distant realms. The threshing-floor of our pride, seen with the eternal Twins, was now fully revealed to me, from the mountains to the harbors.

And with that, I turned my eyes toward Beatrice, the beautiful eyes I had followed all this way.

Paradiso: Canto XXIII

As a bird sits quietly on her nest through the night, surrounded by her sweet brood, hiding everything from us, waiting to see their longing eyes and find the food to nourish them, which she eagerly anticipates, so was my Lady standing—vigilant and upright, turning toward the place where the sun is slower to rise. I gazed upon her, and seeing her thoughtful and longing, I became as one who yearns for something and is at last soothed by hope.

But the wait was brief. From one moment to the next, I went from waiting to seeing the heavens grow brighter. Beatrice exclaimed, “Look at the hosts of Christ’s triumphant procession, and all the fruits of these rolling spheres!” It seemed as though her face was ablaze, and her eyes were so filled with ecstasy that I could not describe it.

Just like the moon, smiling among the eternal nymphs who paint the heavens, I saw above the countless lamps a Sun that lit them all, just as our sun does the heavenly bodies. And through the living light, so clear and bright, it shone into my sight that I could not bear it.

Beatrice, my gentle guide, said to me, “What overwhelms you is a virtue that no shield can protect you from. The wisdom and omnipotence that opened the path between heaven and earth, for which there was so much longing before, are here.”

As fire from a cloud bursts out, expanding so much that it finds no space within, and falls to earth against its nature, so did my mind, expanding among those delights, leave itself behind. What it became, I cannot remember.

“Open your eyes and look at what I am,” she said. “You’ve already seen enough that you’re now strong enough to bear my smile.”

I was like someone who still holds onto a forgotten vision, trying in vain to bring it back. When I heard her invitation, I knew it was a moment deserving of great gratitude, and I would never forget it.

If all the tongues of the Muses were to come together to help me express it, they would only capture a tiny fraction of the truth of the holy smile and the holy light that it illuminated. The sacred poem of Paradise must skip over many things, just like a man who finds his way blocked.

Therefore, if you think of the weight of the theme, and of the human limitations carrying it, don’t blame it if it trembles under such a burden.

This isn’t a passage meant for a small boat. It requires a strong ship and a pilot who won’t spare himself.

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“Why does my face so captivate you that you turn away from the beautiful garden that is blossoming under the rays of Christ?” Beatrice continued. “There is the Rose in which the Divine Word became incarnate; there are the lilies whose fragrance led the way to righteousness.”

I, always willing to follow her guidance, turned to face the next challenge.

As I looked at the sun shining through a broken cloud, I saw a meadow of flowers that had been shadowed before. So, too, I saw many lights shining from above, illuminated by burning rays, although I couldn’t see the source of the light.

O gracious power that imprints such beauty! You elevated me so my eyes could take in what they couldn’t before.

The name of that fair flower, which I invoke morning and evening, has captivated my soul, drawing me to gaze upon the greater fire. When my eyes reflected the glory and magnificence of the living star, I saw across the heavens a little torch descending in a circle, forming a crown around the star, spinning in place.

The sweetest melody on earth would seem like a cloud that suddenly thunders, compared to the sound of that lyre that crowned the beautiful sapphire, which gives the clearest heaven its sapphire hue.

“I am the Angelic Love that circles around the supreme joy, the joy that breathes from the womb which housed our Desire. I will circle, Lady of Heaven, as you follow your Son, making the highest sphere more divine as you enter it.”

The melody that circled around sealed itself, and all the other lights joined in, singing the name of Mary.

The majestic mantle of all the holy volumes of that world, alive with the breath of God, spread over us its inner border, so far away that I could not yet perceive it.

So, my eyes did not have the strength to follow the crowned flame that rose near its origin. And like a little child, reaching out to its mother after feeding, the lights moved upward in a show of deep affection, revealing their love for Mary.

Then they remained, singing “Regina coeli” with such sweetness that the delight has never left me.

What abundance is stored in those rich coffers, which had been well tended in sowing here on earth! They now enjoy the treasure gained while in exile, and they live in the glory of what was acquired through tears.

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There, beneath the exalted Son of God and Mary, in victory, both the ancient council and the new triumph. And He who holds the keys to this glory reigns forever.

Paradiso: Canto XXIV

"O company chosen for the great feast of the Lamb, who feeds you so that your desires are always satisfied, if by the grace of God this man should experience a glimpse of what falls from your table, before death decrees the time, direct your thoughts toward his great desire and give him some relief; you drink forever from the fountain that feeds his thoughts."

Beatrice spoke these words, and the blessed souls, transformed into spheres on steadfast poles, flamed brightly like comets. And just like the wheels in a clock that appear to move slowly to the observer, the first wheel seeming motionless and the last one spinning quickly, so did these celestial dances give me a measure of their movement, whether slow or fast.

From the one I noted as the most beautiful, a fire of such joy burst forth that none could surpass it. Around Beatrice, it circled three times, creating a divine song so powerful that my imagination cannot repeat it. Therefore, I will not attempt to describe it, for our thoughts and words are too limited to capture its brilliance.

"O holy sister, who implore us with such devotion, your passionate love frees me from that beautiful sphere!" The blessed fire then directed its breath to my Lady, who spoke in the manner I have described.

She said: "O eternal light of the great man to whom our Lord gave the keys, which he took with him from this joyful realm, examine this man carefully on matters both light and serious, especially the Faith by which you walked upon the sea. If he loves well, hopes well, and believes well, you see it clearly, for you have insight into everything."

"But since this kingdom has made citizens through true Faith, it is good that he speak about it."

Just as a baccalaureate does not speak until the master asks a question, so I gathered my thoughts while she spoke, preparing myself for the coming inquiry.

"Say, good Christian, manifest yourself. What is Faith?" At this, I raised my brow toward the light from which these words had come.

I turned to Beatrice, who gave me a sign to pour forth my response.

"May grace, which allows me to confess," I began, "enable my thoughts to be clear!"

I continued: "As your dear brother, the truthful pen, wrote of it—he who led Rome onto the right path—Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And this seems to me its true nature."

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I then heard: "You understand rightly, if you know why he placed it with substances and evidence."

And I replied: "The profound things that appear to me here are hidden from all eyes below. They exist only in belief, and on that belief is founded the great hope. This is why it takes the form of substance. And from this belief we reason, even without seeing more, and so it becomes evidence."

I heard again: "If doctrine below were understood this way, no subtle sophistry would find a place there."

Then the light responded: "You have already covered the weight and alloy of this coin very well, but tell me, do you have it in your purse?"

And I answered: "Yes, both shining and round, with no doubt in its stamp."

Then came a response from the profound light: "This precious jewel, upon which every virtue is founded, where did you get it?"

And I said: "The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which has been spread through both the old and new scriptures, proved it to me with such sharpness that compared to it, all other reasoning seems dull."

Then I heard: "Why do you accept these ancient and new postulates as the divine word?"

I responded: "The proofs that show the truth to me are the works that follow, which nature never touched—no hammer or iron could have created them."

The light asked: "Who assures you that these works were ever done? The thing itself that must be proved affirms nothing else to you."

"Were the world converted to Christianity without miracles," I said, "this alone would be enough. The others are not even a hundredth part of it. For when you entered the field poor and fasting, you sowed the good plant, which has become a thorn."

When I finished, the heavenly Court echoed through the spheres: "One God we praise!" and a melody rose that filled the heavens above.

Then the great spirit who had guided me, examining everything, spoke again: "The grace that plays with your intellect has opened your mouth up to this point. Now, you must express what you believe, and from where you received that belief."

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“O holy father, spirit who saw the truth and overcame it, you want me to manifest the form of my belief here, and also ask me for its cause.”

And I responded: “I believe in one God, eternal and sole, who moves all the heavens with love and desire, but is Himself unmoved. I have not only physical and metaphysical proofs for this faith, but also the truth that rains down from this place—through Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Gospel, and through you who wrote after the fiery Spirit sanctified you.”

“In the three eternal Persons, I believe in one essence, united both in ‘sunt’ and ‘est,’ which is the foundation of my belief, stamped in my mind by the evangelical doctrine. This is the beginning, the spark, which grows to a vivid flame, sparkling like a star in heaven.”

Just like a lord who embraces his servant with joy after hearing good news, the apostolic light encircled me three times, singing in approval of what I had spoken.

Paradiso: Canto XXV

“If it ever happens that the Sacred Poem, to which both heaven and earth have given their approval, which has made me lean for many years, should overcome the cruelty that keeps me out of the beautiful fold where I once rested as a lamb, an enemy to the wolves who war against it, I will return with a different voice and a different purpose. I will take the laurel crown at my baptismal font.

For through the faith that makes all souls known to God, I entered, and then Peter encircled my brow for her sake.

Then, a light moved toward us from the group where the first fruits of Christ’s vicarship were, and Beatrice, filled with ecstasy, said to me: ‘Look, look! Here is the Baron for whom Galicia is visited below.’”

Just as two doves express their love to one another in the air, circling and murmuring, so did I see two great princes greeting each other, welcoming one another, and praising the food eaten in heaven.

But when their greetings ended, each one stood silently ‘before me,’ so brightly that it overcame my sight.

Afterward, Beatrice smiled and said: “Illustrious life, who have described the blessings of our Basilica, make hope resound within this altitude. You know how often you personify it, as Jesus gave greater clarity to the three disciples.”

“Lift your head and be confident, for what comes here from the mortal world must be perfected in our light.”

This comfort came to me from the second light; so I lifted my eyes toward the hills, which had bent under the weight of the vision.

“Since, by His grace, our Emperor wills that you see Him face to face before your death, in the most secret chamber with His Counts, so that you may behold the truth of this court, and strengthen in yourself and others the hope that rightfully enamours below, tell us what it is, how it blossoms in you, and where it came from.”

The second light continued: “Say, good Christian, manifest yourself; what is faith?” At that, I raised my brow toward the light from which these words had come. Then I turned to Beatrice, who gave me a sign to pour forth from my heart.

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“May grace, that allows me to confess,” I began, “enable my thoughts to be clear! As your dear brother, the truthful pen, wrote about it—he who led Rome on the good path—faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And this is its true nature.”

Then I heard: “You understand correctly, if you know why he placed faith with substances and evidence.”

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"O holy father, spirit who saw the truth and overcame it, you want me to manifest the form of my belief here, and also ask me for its cause."

And I responded: "I believe in one God, eternal and sole, who moves all the heavens with love and desire, but is Himself unmoved. I have not only physical and metaphysical proofs for this faith, but also the truth that rains down from this place—through Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Gospel, and through you who wrote after the fiery Spirit sanctified you."

"In the three eternal Persons, I believe in one essence, united both in 'sunt' and 'est,' which is the foundation of my belief, stamped in my mind by the evangelical doctrine. This is the beginning, the spark, which grows to a vivid flame, sparkling like a star in heaven."

Just like a lord who embraces his servant with joy after hearing good news, the apostolic light encircled me three times, singing in approval of what I had spoken.

Paradiso: Canto XXVI

While I was still uncertain, my vision clouded, a breath came forth from the bright flame that had obscured it. This breath made me pay close attention and said:

“While you are recovering the sense of sight that you have lost by looking at me, it’s best that you speak and explain what your soul is aiming for, for your sight is not dead but bewildered. The Lady who is guiding you through this divine realm has the same power to heal as the hand of Ananias had.”

I said, “As she pleases, whether soon or later, let the cure come to my eyes that have burned with the fire she brought. The Good, which gives joy to this Court, is the beginning and end of all things, the writing that love reads in me, whether softly or loudly.”

The same voice that had taken the terror from me now spoke again, urging me to think deeply:

“Now, with a finer sieve, you must sift your thoughts. You need to explain who aimed your bow at such a target.”

And I replied, “Through philosophical arguments and the authority that descends from above, such love must have imprinted itself upon me. The Good, as far as it is good, when understood, ignites love in us, and it becomes even greater as it holds more goodness.”

“This Good must be aimed towards that Essence from which all good originates, for all things that are good are simply rays of its light. So, the mind must be drawn to it, and in loving it, it sees the truth.”

“This truth is revealed to my intellect by the demonstration of the primal love of all eternal substances. The voice reveals it to us in the truthful Author who says to Moses, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you.’ You also reveal it to me, starting with the Gospel, proclaiming heaven’s secrets to earth.”

I then heard, “By human intellect and by the authority it aligns with, reserve for God the highest of your loves. But tell me, do you feel other cords drawing you towards Him? Tell me how deeply this love affects you.”

I recognized the holy purpose of the Eagle of Christ, and I understood where he was guiding my confession. So, I continued:

“All of those things that have the power to turn the heart towards God have drawn me to charity. The being of the world, my own being, the death He endured so that I might live, and all the hopes of the faithful—these have moved me from a life of perverse love to a righteous one,

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placing me on solid ground. I love the leaves of the Eternal Gardener's garden as much as He has granted them good."

When I finished speaking, a sweet song resounded throughout heaven, and Beatrice, along with the others, exclaimed, "Holy, holy, holy!"

As when a person wakes from sleep because of a bright light, and in that moment they can't yet see clearly, so too did Beatrice's radiance chase away all darkness from my vision. I saw more clearly than before and, filled with wonder, I asked about a fourth light that I saw with us.

Beatrice answered, "That within those rays is the first soul who ever created the first virtue, gazing upon its Maker."

Just as a tree bends when the wind blows, then rises back up on its own, so I, amazed by her words, was moved to speak by a burning desire. I began:

"O apple, who alone were produced ripe, O ancient father to whom each wife is both daughter and daughter-in-law, I pray that you speak to me. You know my wish, and I speak it, though I am eager to hear it."

Sometimes an animal, struggling under a covering, makes its intent clear through the movements beneath it. In the same way, the primeval soul revealed to me, through its covering, its joy in giving me pleasure.

Then it spoke: "Without your uttering it, I understand your inclination better than you know, for I see it clearly in the truthful mirror, where all things are made clear."

"You desire to know how long ago God placed me in the lofty garden where this Lady has guided you. For 4,302 cycles of the sun, I dwelled in that garden. And the language I spoke was lost before those who worked on the tower of Babel began their task. For the world, through human pleasure, which is ever-changing, could not maintain reasoning."

"A natural action is for man to speak; but nature leaves the art of speech to you, to shape as you wish. Before I descended to the infernal realms, 'El' was the name for the Chief Good, and this is the root of all the joy that surrounds me."

"'Eli,' He was called, for men's actions are like leaves on a branch: one goes, and another comes. Upon the mount that rises above the waves, I was, in either a pure or sinful life, from the first moment to the second."

"As the sun changes its quadrant, to the sixth."

Paradiso: Canto XXVII

“Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!” all of Paradise began, and the melody filled me with such joy that it made me drunk.

What I saw seemed like a smile of the universe, for my joy entered through my hearing and sight.

O joy! O inexpressible joy! O perfect life of love and peace! O riches that are secure without desire!

Before my eyes stood the four torches, burning brightly. The first one began to shine even brighter, and it changed, becoming like Jupiter if he and Mars were birds and exchanged feathers.

That Providence which governs time and service imposed silence on the blessed choir.

Then I heard: “Do not be amazed if I change my color; for while I speak, you will see the color of all these change.”

“He who takes my place on earth, my place, my place, which has become vacant before the Son of God, has turned my cemetery into a sewer of blood and stench. The one who fell from here is appeased below by this.”

With the same color that the sun paints the clouds at evening or morning, I saw the whole sky filled with a hue.

And just as a modest woman, who is sure of herself, becomes afraid when she hears of another’s failing, so did Beatrice change her expression. And I believe that in heaven there was such an eclipse when the supreme Omnipotence suffered.

Afterward, his words continued in such a transformed voice that even his expression was not the same.

“The spouse of Christ has never been nourished by my blood, by Linus or Cletus, to acquire gold; but Sixtus, Pius, Urban, and Calixtus shed their blood for this blessed life.”

“Our purpose was never that our successors should seat the Christian people on either side, nor that the keys entrusted to me should be displayed on a banner that wages war on the baptized. Nor should I be used for privileges that are venal and false, for which I often blush with fire.”

“Wolves dressed as shepherds are seen above all pastures! O wrath of God, why do you still slumber?”

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“To drink our blood, the Caorsines and Gascons are preparing. O good beginning, how vile an end must you fall to!”

“But the high Providence, that defended the glory of the world with Scipio, will soon bring aid, as I believe. And you, my son, who will return to earth, open your mouth and do not hide what I have told you.”

Just as the frozen vapors fall to earth as snow when the celestial Goat touches the sun, I saw the ether in the opposite direction, filled with triumphant vapors, which had remained with us.

My sight followed these images until the medium of light exceeded and took my vision away.

Then Beatrice, seeing that I had stopped gazing upward, said: “Look down and see how far you have turned.”

When I first looked downward, I saw that I had passed through the entire arc of the first climate, from middle to end, and I saw the mad journey of Ulysses past Gades and almost to the shore where Europa became a burden.

The place of this threshing-floor was clearer to me, but the sun was below my feet, and I was further removed from the sign.

My mind, always in love with my Lady, burned more than ever as I turned my eyes to her.

And if either Art or Nature has created something to captivate the eyes and possess the mind, whether in human flesh or its portrayal, all of that would seem insignificant compared to the divine joy I felt when I turned to her smiling face.

The power of her gaze lifted me from the fair nest of Leda and propelled me into the swiftest heaven.

Its parts, full of life and height, were so uniform that I cannot say which one Beatrice chose for my place.

But she, aware of my desire, began to speak joyfully with such a smile that God seemed to rejoice in her face:

“The motion that keeps the center still while everything else moves begins here. And in this heaven, there is no other ‘where’ than the Divine Mind, where love turns it and the power rains down from it.”

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“Within a circle, light and love embrace it, just as this realm does, and He who surrounds it controls it alone. Its motion is not measured by another, but it measures all the others, just as ten is measured by its half and its fifth.”

“Now, I will explain how time has its roots here and leaves in other places. O greed, that draws mortals so, that no one can draw their eyes from your waves! Mankind's will flourishes, but without interruption, it turns into wild fruit, and the true fruit fails.”

“Fidelity and innocence are found only in children; later, they take flight before the cheeks are even covered with down. One who prattles and loves, when speech is perfect, immediately desires to see the grave.”

“Even so, the skin becomes darker and more swarthy, like the fair daughter of the one who brings the dawn and departs with the night.”

“Do not be surprised that no one governs on earth. This is why the human race goes astray.”

“Before January is fully unwintered, the tempest that has been awaited will roar through the supernal circles, and the fleet will run its course, and the true fruit will follow the flower.”

Paradiso: Canto XXVIII

After the truth about the present life of miserable mortals was revealed to me by her who enlightens my mind, I became aware of it. It was like seeing a candle's flame in a mirror when someone is behind it, before they are seen or thought of.

I turned around to confirm whether the reflection matched the truth, just as music matches its rhythm. In a similar way, I recalled how, when I looked into Beatrice's beautiful eyes, Love had captured me with its traps.

As I turned around and was touched by what appeared in the volume of that light, which we always observe when we gaze intently at its rotation, I saw a point that radiated light so intensely that the sight of it could not be sustained.

Any star that seems smallest here would appear to be a moon if placed next to it, just as one star is placed beside another. The light I saw at such a distance, which seemed like a halo encircling its light, was so swift that it exceeded any motion the world is used to.

This light was surrounded by another, then a third, and so on, until the seventh circle appeared, so large that even Juno's messenger could not encompass it. The eighth and ninth followed, moving slower, and the further they were from the first, the slower they moved.

The light closest to us, which shone most clearly, was the one with the least distance between it and the pure spark that seemed to be most filled with truth.

Beatrice, seeing that I was perplexed, said to me, "From that point, heaven and nature all depend. Behold the circle closest to it, and understand that its motion is driven by the burning love it has."

I replied, "If the world were arranged in the way I see in these circles, I would be content. But in the world of our senses, we can see that the further away the circles are from the center, the more divine they are."

"If my desire is to be fulfilled in this angelic temple, where only love and light reside, I still need to understand how the example and the exemplar do not follow the same path, because I am unable to comprehend it fully."

Beatrice responded, "It is no surprise if you find it difficult to understand such a knot, since it is hard to unravel without effort."

She continued, "The physical circles are wide or narrow depending on how much virtue is spread throughout. The greater the goodness, the greater the benefit, and the greater the body it can

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contain. Thus, this circle, which sweeps through the entire sublime universe, corresponds to the circle that most loves and knows.”

“Therefore, if you apply your measure of virtue to the circles, rather than their physical appearance, you will see how the more, the greater, and the less, the smaller, align in every heaven with its intelligence.”

Just as the air’s hemisphere remains clear and serene when Boreas blows from his mildest side, so was I, after Beatrice had provided me with her clear response. The truth was like a star in heaven.

Once she had finished speaking, the circles of light sparkled, and they sparkled so brightly that their number exceeded the number of squares in a chess game.

I heard them sing “Hosanna” in choirs, praising the fixed point that keeps them at their center, where they have always been.

Beatrice, who knew the doubts in my mind, said, “The first circles have shown you the Seraphim and Cherubim. These circles follow their bonds swiftly, to be as close to the point as they can, according to their vision.”

“The other Loves, which circle around them, are called Thrones of the divine countenance because they complete the first Triad. And you should know that they experience as much joy as their vision penetrates the Truth, where all intellects find their rest.”

“This explains how blessedness is founded in the ability to see, not in that which loves, and follows next. The merit of this seeing is the measure brought forth by grace and good will, which is how it progresses from grade to grade.”

“The second Triad, which germinates in this eternal spring, is not touched by the night. Perpetual hosannas flow from them with threefold melody, in three orders of joy.”

The three Divine Orders are: first, the Dominions, then the Virtues, and finally the Powers. The second order is followed by the Principalities and Archangels, and the last is entirely angelic.

These orders look upward, and they prevail downward, all attracted to God and drawing others to Him.

Dionysius, with great desire to contemplate these Orders, named and distinguished them, as I do. But Gregory later disagreed with him, and when he opened his eyes in this heaven, he smiled at himself.

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If a mortal presented so much secret truth on earth, you should not be surprised, for he who saw it here revealed it to him, with much more truth about these circles.

Paradiso: Canto XXIX

At the time when both the children of Latona, the sun and the moon, are crossing the sky, accompanied by the Ram and the Scales, creating a line around the horizon, as long as they stay balanced at the zenith before they disrupt the balance and change their positions, so too did Beatrice keep her face smiling in silence, looking intently at the point that overwhelmed me.

Then, she began: "I will speak, and I ask not what you wish to hear, for I have seen it where every moment and place is centered."

It is not to acquire some good for Himself, which would be impossible, but so that His splendor, in its radiance, may say, 'I am,' in His eternity, outside time and all other limits, as it pleases Him, that the Eternal Love unfolded into new Loves.

He did not lie dormant before; neither before nor after did God proceed upon these waters.

Matter and Form, unmixed and united, came into being without defect, like three arrows from a three-stringed bow. And just as a beam of sunlight shines through glass, amber, or crystal, without any interval between its coming and full being, so from its Lord, the trifold effect radiated all together, without distinction of beginning.

Order was co-created in substances, and at the summit of the world, those substances produced pure acts. Pure potentiality was at the lowest part; midway between potentiality and act was a bond that can never be undone.

Jerome wrote to you about angels created long before the world was made, but this truth is written in many places by writers inspired by the Holy Spirit. You will see it if you look closely.

Even reason sees this to some extent, for it would not allow that the movers of the heavens could be so long in their imperfection.

Now you know both where and when these Loves were created, and how; already, three of them have been extinguished in your desire.

Not even one could count to twenty as quickly as one portion of these angels disturbed the elements of your world.

The rest remained and began this art, which you see with such delight, that they never cease from their circling.

The fall came from the cursed presumption of that one whom you have seen constrained by the burden of the world.

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Those whom you behold here were modest enough to recognize themselves as capable of such understanding, and for this reason, their vision was exalted by enlightening grace and their own merit, so that they have a full and steadfast will.

I would not have you doubt this, but be certain that it is meritorious to receive this grace, as the affection opens to it.

Now, much can you contemplate in this consistory, if you gather up these words, without further aid.

But since on earth, in your schools, they teach that the angelic nature hears, remembers, and wills, I will explain further so that you see clearly the truth that is confused below in such teachings.

These substances, since they were joyous in God's countenance, do not turn their sight away from that from which nothing is hidden.

Thus, they are not interrupted by new objects, and do not need to recollect through interrupted thought.

On earth, people dream not sleeping, thinking they speak truth when they do not, and the greater sin and shame lies in the latter.

Here below, you do not walk the same path philosophizing, but instead, you are led by appearances and your thoughts about them.

Even this above is endured with less disdain than when the Holy Scriptures are set aside or distorted.

They think not about the cost of spreading these beliefs and how it pleases God when humility keeps them close to the truth.

Everyone strives for appearances, making their own inventions. These are the subjects treated by preachers, while the true Evangel remains silent.

Some claim that the moon turned backward during Christ's Passion and blocked the sunlight, but they lie. The light hid itself of its own accord, and such an eclipse responded to Spaniards, Indians, and Jews alike.

Florence has more falsehoods like this than Lapi and Bindi, shouted from the pulpit every year, so that the lambs, who don't know any better, come back fed on lies, and the harm they cause is not excused.

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Christ did not say to his first disciples, ‘Go out and preach idle tales,’ but rather gave them a true foundation. This truth was so loudly proclaimed by them that they fought for the Faith, making shields and lances from the Evangel.

Now, men go out with jokes and tales, and if the people laugh, the preacher is satisfied, and nothing more is asked.

But there’s a bird hiding in the cowl of the preacher. If the common people were to see it, they would realize what they trust in, and how widespread the folly has grown on earth.

Saint Anthony fattens his pig with it, and many others, worse than pigs, pay with money but no true value.

But since we’ve digressed enough, let’s return to the right path, so that time is shortened.

This nature multiplies itself in numbers, beyond what speech or mortal imagination can reach.

If you pay attention to what Daniel revealed, you’ll see that there are thousands of numbers hidden in his prophecy.

The primal light, which irradiates all, is received in so many ways as the splendors with which it is mated.

Thus, since affection follows theceptive act, love’s sweetness is felt in varying degrees, either fervent or tepid.

Now behold the height and amplitude of the eternal power, since it has made itself so many mirrors where it is reflected, one remaining in itself as before.

Paradiso: Canto XXX

Perhaps six thousand miles from us, the sixth hour is glowing, and this world tilts its shadow almost to a level, when the mid-heaven begins to deepen, and here and there a star fades away, not shining as brightly as before. As the handmaid of the sun advances, the heavens close, light by light, until the most beautiful shines the brightest.

In a similar way, the Triumph that eternally surrounds the point that defeated me seemed enclosed by what it itself enclosed. Little by little, it faded from my sight. This made me turn my eyes towards Beatrice, but my sight could not find her, and my love was constrained.

If all that has been said about her were summarized into one single praise, it would still fall short of doing her justice. Not only does the beauty I witnessed transcend our understanding, but I truly believe that only her Maker can fully enjoy it.

I confess that I was overcome more by this moment than any poet, whether comic or tragic, has ever been by their theme. Just as the sun affects the sight of those who gaze upon it, the memory of that sweet smile deprived my mind of its very essence.

From the first day I saw her face in this life, to this very moment, the sequence of my song has never been interrupted. But now, I must stop following her beauty with my verse, just as every artist reaches the limit of their craft.

What I leave her to, will be a greater fame than any trumpet of mine could give. With voice and gesture, like a perfect leader, she began again: "We have come from the greatest body to the heaven of pure light. Intellectual light, filled with love; love of the true good, filled with ecstasy, a joy that transcends all sweetness. Here you will see the one host and the other of Paradise, and you will see them in the same forms you will witness at the final judgment."

As a flash of lightning disperses the sight, so that the eye is deprived of focus, so did a living light flash around me, enveloping me in such a veil of brilliance that I could not see anything.

"Ever the Love that calms this heaven welcomes into itself with such a greeting to prepare the candle for its flame."

As soon as these brief words entered me, I felt myself lifted above my own power. I was renewed with sight, so that no light, however pure, could overpower my vision.

I saw light flowing like a river, radiant between two banks, adorned with an admirable Spring. From this river, living sparks emerged and fell into the flowers like rubies set in gold. Then, as if intoxicated by the fragrance, they plunged back into the river, and with each plunge, another spark emerged.

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“The high desire that now moves you to understand what you see, pleases me all the more the more it grows. But before your great thirst is quenched, you must drink from this river.” These words came from the light of my eyes, and she continued, “The river, the topazes, and the laughter of the flowers are the foretellings of their truth.”

“It’s not that these things are difficult in themselves, but the difficulty lies in your side. You have not yet attained vision so exalted.”

No sooner had I dipped my gaze toward the water than it seemed to transform into a round shape before my eyes.

Just as a group of people, after removing their masks, seem different, so the flowers and sparks were transformed for me into greater glory, showing both courts of heaven.

“O splendour of God! Through You I saw the great triumph of the true realm. Grant me the power to explain how I saw it!”

There is a light above that makes the Creator visible to every creature, and in beholding Him, they find peace. It expands in a circular form so vast that its circumference would be too large to encompass the sun.

The appearance of this light is made of rays reflected from the top of the First Mover, which gives vitality and power.

Just as a hill mirrors itself in a still pool of water at its base, reflecting its beauty when abundant with greenery, so I saw all around the light mirrored in more ranks than a thousand, all those who have returned to us from above.

And if the lowest row contains such great light, imagine how vast the amplitude of this Rose in its highest reaches!

My vision, in its vastness and height, comprehended all the joy in its quantity and quality. In this realm, distances and positions are irrelevant; what matters is the direct rule of God, and natural law has no sway.

In the Eternal Rose that spreads and multiplies, breathing praise to the ever-spring Sun, Beatrice, like a silent bride who would speak, drew me near and said: “Behold the great expanse of the white robes. Behold the vast circuit of our city, so full that there are few places left unoccupied.”

Upon the great throne, where your eyes are fixed, the soul of noble Henry, the future Augustus, will sit. He will come to heal Italy before she is ready.

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Blind covetousness has made you like children who die from hunger while pushing away the nurse.

Soon in the sacred forum, a Prefect will arise who, openly or covertly, will not walk the same path as his predecessor. For long, God will not tolerate him in holy office; he will be cast down to the depths of hell, just like Simon Magus.

Paradiso: Canto XXXI

At that moment, the saintly host of Paradise appeared before me, like a snow-white rose, whom Christ had made His bride through His own blood. The other host, flying in the glory of Him who loves it and created it so noble, hovered like a swarm of bees, sinking into the flowers for a moment and then returning to the place of eternal love.

Their faces were like living flames, with wings of gold, and the rest of them was so white that no snow could compare. They moved gracefully from one bench to the next, carrying with them the peace and ardor they had gained through their movements.

Nothing could hinder the sight and splendor of this heavenly vision, for the divine light penetrates the entire universe in such a way that nothing can obstruct it.

This realm, secure and filled with happiness, was crowded with souls, ancient and modern, all focused on a single mark, all filled with love and devotion.

"O Triune Light, that satisfies the saints with your eternal presence, look down on our troubled world below!"

If the barbarians, coming from a far-off land covered by the stars of the northern sky, saw Rome and her noble works, they would be filled with awe—what must I, a traveler from Florence, have felt when I saw this divine spectacle!

As a pilgrim who delights in gazing at the temple of his vow, I turned my eyes around, observing all the ranks, now up, now down, now all around me. I saw faces full of charity, smiling in the light of God's grace, with postures adorned with every grace.

I had already comprehended the overall form of Paradise, but now my eyes turned with renewed desire to ask Beatrice about things my mind could not grasp.

I expected to see Beatrice, but instead, I saw an Old Man, clothed like the glorious people, filled with joy and compassion. "Where is she?" I asked, and he replied: "Beatrice has sent me to answer your questions. Look up to the third round of the first rank, and you will see her on the throne her merits have earned."

Without answering, I lifted my eyes and saw her, crowned with eternal rays. My sight, though, was so far removed from her that it seemed more distant than the farthest reaches of the heavens.

"O Lady, in whom my hope rests, and who endured to leave the imprint of your feet in Hell for my salvation, from all that I have seen, I recognize your power and grace."

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I pleaded, “You have brought me from slavery to freedom through all the ways and means available to you. Keep your magnificence toward me so that my soul, healed by you, may be freed from the body.”

Then the Old Man spoke again: “To fulfill your journey perfectly, follow my advice and look around this garden. Seeing will refine your sight and elevate you toward the divine light.”

As a pilgrim might come from Croatia to gaze upon the sacred Veronica, who never tires of her ancient fame, I too, as I gazed at the living charity of the man who had tasted of peace, wondered in awe.

“Son of grace, you will not know this blissful life by focusing only on the lowest place here. Look to the outermost circles and you will see the Queen of Heaven, to whom this realm is devoted and subject.”

I lifted my eyes and saw a part of the realm surpass the rest in brightness, just as the light from the east surpasses that of the setting sun. In the center, a pacific banner gleamed brightest, with wings spread wide, and more than a thousand jubilant angels danced and sang around it.

I saw a beauty smiling at their joy, a beauty that filled the eyes of all the saints. If I had the power to speak as well as I can imagine, I would not dare to describe the joy I saw.

Bernard, seeing my eyes fixed in wonder, turned his own to the Queen with such affection that it made my own desire to gaze upon her even stronger.

Paradiso: Canto XXXII

Holy words:

"The wound that Mary closed and anointed, she who is so beautiful, was opened and pierced by the one who sits at the feet of her beauty. In the order that the third seats create, Rachel is seated lower than the others, beside Beatrice, as you see her now. Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, and the woman who was the ancestor of the singer, who, in sorrow, said, 'Miserere mei' (Have mercy on me), can be seen descending from seat to seat, moving down in rank as I pass through the Rose, from one leaf to the next.

Descending from the seventh row, similar to the ones above, are the Hebrew women, each following their respective place, divided by the different levels of the flower. This is in accordance with how Faith in Christ was viewed, and these women form the partitions dividing the sacred stairways.

On this side of the Rose, where the flower is perfectly full with each petal, are those who believed in Christ before He came. On the other side, with gaps between them, are those who looked to Christ after He had already come. Just as the seat of the Lady of Heaven divides this flower, so too does the seat of the great John, who, holy in life, suffered desertion and martyrdom. Also placed there are figures like Francis, Benedict, and Augustine, and many others who follow in sequence.

Consider the divine providence at work here. Both aspects of the Faith—those who believed before Christ came and those who believed after—fill this garden equally. However, the placement of souls in the Rose is not based on their merit but rather according to another's influence. These are spirits that were redeemed before having made any true choice.

You can recognize this in their faces and voices, which still seem youthful, as though they have not yet reached maturity. You may doubt, but I will clarify for you: in this realm, no random occurrence can happen. Everything is governed by eternal law. So, in this realm, some souls are placed higher than others, not by their own actions, but because of the grace they were given from God.

The King, who governs all of this realm with such love and joy, creates every soul with unique grace. It is written in Scripture that even in the early times, before the world was made, the souls that were to become saints had already been assigned their roles in God's plan.

These souls, however, did not earn their place based on deeds but because of the grace given to them. They were appointed to their roles according to God's divine plan, just as the twelve tribes of Israel were marked with a divine purpose.

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In the same way, all souls in this heavenly realm are not positioned randomly but according to the loving will of God, which governs them all. The greatest of these souls are those closest to God, who sit at the top, and those further down are still exalted by God's grace, but at different levels of enlightenment.

In this sacred and eternal order, each soul is given a seat, a place of honor, based not on merit but on the divine grace they received. The closer they are to God, the more they share in His glory, and this is how the divine arrangement of Heaven functions."

Paradiso: Canto XXIII

The Virgin Mother, who is both the mother and daughter of her Son, stands higher and humbler than any other being in creation. She is the one who gave human nature such nobility that its Creator did not hesitate to become part of it. In her womb, love was reignited, the love that caused the flower of creation to bloom in the eternal peace of the universe. She is a torch of charity for us, and the living source of hope for those on Earth.

Lady, you are so great and powerful that anyone seeking grace and not turning to you will have their hopes dashed. Your kindness doesn't only respond to those who ask; it often anticipates the asking. In you, compassion, pity, magnificence, and all goodness unite. Now, this man, who has traveled from the depths of the universe, has witnessed spiritual lives one after another. He prays for the grace to lift himself toward ultimate salvation, and I, who desire this as much as he does, offer all my prayers to you, hoping that they don't fall short. I ask that you scatter the clouds of his mortality with your prayers, so that the greatest joy may be revealed to him.

I ask you, Queen, who can do anything you wish, to preserve the sound of this vision in his heart even after it ends. Let your protection guide his emotions and see Beatrice and all the blessed ones join their prayers to mine. The eyes of God, beloved and revered, turned toward the speaker, showing us how devout prayers are received with gratitude. Then, they looked toward the Eternal Light, which no creature can even hope to fully comprehend.

As I was nearing the end of my desires, Bernard gestured for me to look up, and I, with my vision purified, naturally turned my gaze toward the Divine Light. From that point forward, what I saw transcended anything that could be expressed with words. It was like waking from a dream, where the vividness of the vision stays in your heart but the details slip away.

The Supreme Light, far beyond mortal concepts, is the source of all creation, filling the universe with its essence. I could sense that within this Light, everything from substance to accident, from thought to action, was perfectly intertwined. It was a single, pure light—simple and all-encompassing. I realized that this unity was the key to everything, and I felt a profound joy in understanding even a small part of it.

The Light, which holds the entire universe together, is constantly in motion, yet everything is perfectly balanced and in its proper place. I tried to understand how it worked, but I could only see so much at a time, just like a mathematician trying to solve a complex problem. My mind was overwhelmed, but in the presence of this Light, I understood everything as it truly was, and I couldn't pull my gaze away.

I saw the Light divide into three circles, each a different color but of the same size. The second circle reflected the first, just as a rainbow's colors reflect one another. The third seemed like fire, radiating equally from both of the others. I was in awe, knowing that no words could capture the

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essence of what I was seeing. The Light is eternal, knowing itself, loving itself, and smiling on itself.

The circulation I witnessed within this Light seemed like a reflection of the perfect order of the universe. But just as a mathematician cannot fully grasp the solution to a problem just by thinking about it, I was unable to fully comprehend this vision. It was beyond me, but I was drawn to it with all my being. My desire to understand turned my mind and will, like a wheel, moving toward the Love that moves the sun and the stars.