



CANTO 19

Jupiter, continued: the Eagle: pilgrim's doubts about the just pagans—God's justice inscrutable—salvation always through Christ—denunciation of vicious rulers

- 1 Before me with open wings stood that image
 made by the joyous souls woven together in their
 sweet *frui*:
- 4 each was like a little ruby on which a sunbeam
 shone so brightly that it refracted the whole sun
 into my eyes.
- 7 And what I must now portray no voice ever
 spoke, no ink wrote down, nor was it ever
 conceived by any imagination:
- 10 for I saw and also heard the beak speaking,
 and the voice sounding both *I* and *mine*, though
 logically it was *we* and *ours*.
- 13 And it began: "For being just and merciful am I
 here exalted to the glory beyond all desire
- 16 and on earth I left such a memory of me that
 the wicked people there commend it, but they do
 not imitate the story."
- 19 As one heat is felt from many coals, so from
 many loves a single sound came forth from that
 image.

- 22 So I then: "O perpetual flowers of the eternal
Gladness, who make all your perfumes seem but
one to me,
- 25 satisfy, breathing on me, the great lack that
has kept me hungering for so long, not finding
any food for it on earth.
- 28 Well do I know that, if the divine Justice makes
some other realm of Heaven its mirror, yours
does not apprehend it through a veil.
- 31 You know how intently I ready myself to hear,
you know what doubt is such an old hunger in
me."
- 34 Like a falcon released from its hood, that
moves its head and applauds with its wings,
showing desire, and making itself beautiful,
- 37 so did I see that sign become, woven of
praises of God's grace, with singing known only
by those who rejoice up there.
- 40 Then it began: "He who revolved the
compasses about the limit of the world, and
within it distinguished so much, both hidden and manifest,
- 43 could not so impress his worth on all the
universe, that his Word did not remain infinitely
beyond it.
- 46 And this is proved by the first proud one, the
highest of all creatures, who for not awaiting light
fell unripe,
- 49 and hence it is clear that every lesser nature is
a shallow receptacle for the Good that has no end
and measures itself by itself alone.

- 52 Therefore your sight, which can only be one of
 the rays of the Mind with which all things are
 filled,
- 55 cannot by its nature be so strong that it does
 not discern its Beginning to be far beyond what it
 can see.
- 58 Thus into the sempiternal Justice the sight
 conferred in your world penetrates only as far as
 the eye does into the sea,
- 61 for, though close to shore you may see the
 bottom, on the open sea you cannot, and
 nonetheless it is there, but hidden by being deep.
- 64 There is no light unless it come from the
 Serene that is never clouded: otherwise it is
 shadow of the flesh or its poison.
- 67 Sufficiently open to you now is the lair that hid
 the living Justice from you, about which you
 made such frequent question,
- 70 for you would say: 'A man is born on the banks
 of the Indus, and no one is there to speak of
 Christ or read or write of him,
- 73 and all his desires and acts are good, as far as
 human reason can see, without sin in life or in
 word.
- 76 He dies unbaptized and without our faith:
 where is this justice that condemns him? where
 is his fault if he does not believe?'
- 79 Now who are you, who wish to sit on the bench
 and judge from a thousand miles away, with sight
 as short as a handbreadth?

- 82 Certainly for the one who matches wits with
 me, if the Scriptures were not over you, there
 would be wondrous cause for doubt.
- 85 Oh earth-bound animals! oh gross minds! The
 first Will, good in and of itself, the highest Good,
 has never changed.
- 88 That is just which is consonant with it; no
 created goods draw it, but it by radiating causes
 them."
- 91 As above its nest the stork circles about, after it
 has fed its young, and as the one fed gazes up at
 it:
- 94 so the blessed image did, and so I lifted my
 brow, moving its wings borne up by the counsel
 of so many.
- 97 Wheeling it sang, saying: "Such as my notes
 are to you, who cannot understand them, so is
 the eternal judgment to you mortals."
- 100 After those shining fires of the Holy Spirit grew
 still again in the emblem that caused the Romans
 to be revered by the world,
- 103 it began once more: "To this kingdom no one
 has ever risen who did not believe in Christ,
 either before or after he was nailed to the wood.
- 106 But see: many cry 'Christ, Christ!' who at the
 judgment will be much less *prope* to him, than
 someone who does not know Christ,
- 109 and such Christians will be damned by the
 Ethiope, when the two gatherings will be
 separated, one rich eternally and the other destitute.

- 112 What will the Persians be able to say to your
kings, when they shall see that volume opened in
which all their dispraise is being written?
- 115 There will be seen, among Albert's works, that
which the pen will soon record, by which the
kingdom of Prague will be laid waste.
- 118 There will be seen the grief caused along the
Seine by falsifying the coin, by him who will die
from the blow of the boar's hide.
- 121 There will be seen the thirsty pride that so
maddens the Scot and the Englishman that
neither can bear to stay within his bounds.
- 124 We shall see the lust and the soft living of him
of Spain and him of Bohemia, who never knew
worth or willed it.
- 127 We shall see the Cripple of Jerusalem marked
with an *I* for his goodness, while an *M* will mark
the opposite.
- 130 We shall see the avarice and cowardice of him
who rules the island of fire, where Anchises
ended his long life,
- 133 and to give you to understand how little he is
worth, his writing will be truncated letters, noting
much in little space.
- 136 And all will see the filthy deeds of his uncle
and his brother, who have cuckolded so excellent
a nation and two crowns.
- 139 And those of Portugal and Norway will be
known there, and he of Rascia, who saw to his
harm the coinage of Venice.

- 142 Oh happy Hungary, if it lets itself be abused no
 further! and happy Navarre, were it protected by
 the mount that girds it!
- 145 And we must all believe that it is a foretaste of
 this, that Nicosia and Famagosta complain and
 prattle about their beast,
- 148 who does not stray from beside the others."



CANTO 19

Parea dinanzi a me con l'ali aperte
la bella image che nel dolce *frui*
liete facevan l'anime conserte:
parea ciascuna rubinetto in cui
raggio di sole ardesse sì acceso
che ne' miei occhi rifrangesse lui.

E quel che mi convien ritrar testeso
non portò voce mai, né scrisse incostro,
né fu per fantasia già mai compreso:
ch' io vidi e anche udi' parlar lo rostro
e sonar ne la voce e *io e mio*,
quand' era nel concetto e *noi e nostro*.

E cominciò: "Per esser giusto e pio
son io qui essaltato a quella gloria
che non si lascia vincere a disio,
e in terra lasciai la mia memoria
sì fatta che le genti lì malvage
commendan lei, ma non seguon la storia."

Così un sol calor di molte brage
si fa sentir, come di molti amori
usciva solo un suon di quella image.

Ond' io appresso: "O perpetui fiori
de l'eterna Letizia, che pur uno
parer mi fate tutti vostri odori,
solvetemi, spirando, il gran digiuno
che lungamente m'ha tenuto in fame,
non trovandoli in terra cibo alcuno.

1

4

7

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13

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19

22

25

Ben so io che, se 'n Cielo altro reame
la divina Giustizia fa suo specchio,
che 'l vostro non l'apprende con velame.

28

Sapete come attento io m'apparecchio
ad ascoltar, sapete qual è quello
dubbio che m'è digiun cotanto vecchio."

31

Quasi falcone ch' esce del cappello
move la testa e con l'ali si plaudie,
voglia mostrando e faccendosi bello
vid' io farsi quel segno, che di laude
de la divina grazia era contesto,
con canti quai si sa chi là sù gaude.

34

Poi cominciò: "Colui che volse il sesto
a lo stremo del mondo e dentro ad esso
distinse tanto occulto e manifesto,
non poté suo valor sì fare impresso
in tutto l'universo che 'l suo Verbo
non rimanesse in infinito eccesso.

37

40

E ciò fa certo che 'l primo superbo,
che fu la somma d'ogne creatura,
per non aspettar lume, cadde acerbo,
e quinci appar ch' ogne minor natura
è corto recettacolo a quel bene
che non ha fine e sé con sé misura.

43

46

Dunque vostra veduta, che conviene
essere alcun de' raggi de la Mente
di che tutte le cose son ripiene,
non pò da sua natura esser possente
tanto che suo Principio non discerna
molto di là da quel che l'è parvente.

49

52

55

- Però ne la Giustizia sempiterna 58
la vista che riceve il vostro mondo
com' occhio per mare entro s'interna,
che, ben che da la proda veggia il fondo, 61
in pelago nol vede, e nondimeno
è lì, ma cela lui l'esser profondo.
- Lume non è se non vien dal Sereno 64
che non si turba mai, anzi è tenèbra
od ombra di carne o suo veleno.
- Assai t'è mo aperta la latebra 67
che t'ascondeva la Giustizia viva
di che facei question cotanto crebra,
ché tu dicevi: 'Un uom nasce a la riva 70
de l'Indo, e quivi non è chi ragioni
di Cristo né chi legga né chi scriva,
e tutti suoi voleri e atti buoni 73
sono, quanto ragione umana vede,
sanza peccato in vita o in sermoni.
- Muore non battezzato e sanza fede: 76
ov' è questa giustizia che 'l condanna?
ov' è la colpa sua se ei non crede?'
- Or tu chi se', che vuo' sedere a scranna 79
per giudicar di lungi mille miglia
con la veduta corta d'una spanna?
- Certo a colui che meco s'assottiglia, 82
se la Scrittura sovra voi non fosse,
da dubitar sarebbe a maraviglia.
- Oh terreni animali! oh menti grosse! 85
La prima Volontà, ch'è da sé buona,
da sé, ch'è sommo Ben, mai non si mosse.

Cotanto è giusto quanto a lei consuona:
nullo creato bene a sé la tira,
ma essa, radiando, lui cagiona."

88

Quale sovresso il nido si rigira
poi c' ha pasciuti la cicogna i figli,
e come quel ch' è pasto la rimira:
cotal si fece, e sì leväi i cigli,
la benedetta imagine, che l'ali
movea sospinte da tanti consigli.

91

Roteando cantava, e dicea: "Quali
son le mie note a te, che non le 'ntendi,
tal è il giudicio eterno a voi mortali."

94

Poi si quetaro quei lucenti incendi
de lo Spirito Santo ancor nel segno
che fé i Romani al mondo reverendi,
esso ricominciò: "A questo regno
non salì mai chi non credette 'n Cristo,
né pria né poi ch' el si chiavasse al legno.

100

Ma vedi: molti gridan 'Cristo, Cristo!'
che saranno in giudicio assai men *prope*
a lui che tal che non conosce Cristo,
e tai Cristian dannerà l'Etiöpe,
quando si partiranno i due collegi,
l'uno in eterno ricco e l'altro inope.

103

Che poran dir li Perse a' vostri regi
come vedranno quel volume aperto
nel qual si scrivon tutti suoi dispregi?

106

Lì si vedrà, tra l'opere d'Alberto,
quella che tosto moverà la penna,
per che 'l regno di Praga fia diserto.

112

115

Lì si vedrà il duol che sovra Senna
induce, falseggiando la moneta,
quel che morrà di colpo di cotenna.

118

Lì si vedrà la superbia ch'assetta,
che fa lo Scotto e l'Inghilese folle
sì che non può soffrir dentro a sua meta.

121

Vedrassi la lussuria e 'l viver molle
di quel di Spagna e di quel di Boemme,
che mai valor non conobbe né volle.

124

Vedrassi al Ciotto di Ierusalemme
segnata con un *i* la sua bontate
quando 'l contrario segnerà un emme.

127

Vedrassi l'avarizia e la viltate
di quei che guarda l'isola del foco,
ove Anchise finì la lunga etate,
e a dare ad intender quanto è poco,
la sua scrittura fian lettere mozze
che noteranno molto in parvo loco.

133

E parranno a ciascun l'opere sozze
del barba e del fratel, che tanto egregia
nazione e due corone han fatte bozze.

136

E quel di Portogallo e di Norvegia
lì si conosceranno, e quel di Rascia
che male ha visto il conio di Vinegia.

139

Oh beata Ungheria, se non si lascia
più malmenare! e beata Navarra,
se s'armasse del monte che la fascia!

142

E creder de' ciascun che già, per arra
di questo, Niccosia e Famagosta
per la lor bestia si lamenti e garra,

145

che dal fianco de l'altre non si scosta."

148

NOTES

1–21. Before me with open wings ... from that image: The skywriting in the planet Jupiter concludes in the form of the eagle of the Roman empire, of monarchy, and of the world (*mondo*; see 20.8 and note). For the eagle in the poem previously, see *Purg.* 9.21, 32.109–17 and notes; *Par.* 1.46–48; 6.1, 28–33; 18.107–8 and passim, and notes. For Justinian in Mercury, the eagle signifies the “living justice” that makes him speak (6.82, 6.88–90 and notes, and note to lines 11–12). As a visual image of how Jupiter influences its “children” to be just, the eagle is like the idea of justice (see *Conv.* 2.4.5–6, where Dante discusses Platonic “forms” or universal ideas). It also represents the assembly of the just, for right rule was for Dante historically embodied in the Romans (*Mon.* 2.3.1–3, 2.5.4–5, 2.6.11). Eagle, empire, and emperor are closely related; see 20.56–57 and notes, and *Mon.* 2.10.8 and 2.11.5–6.

The eagle speaks thirty-six terzinas in this canto as well as in the next, 216 lines in all: compare Justinian, who speaks the entire sixth canto (142 lines). For emphasis on the number six, see note 6.1–142; see also 20.31–78, 99, and 26.113–42 and notes. Silent in Canto 6, Beatrice is silent in this sixth planet also.

1–6. Before me with open wings ... sun into my eyes: Jupiter reflects the light of the sun, often mentioned in this sphere (at 18.105, 19.6, 20.1, 20.31; and cf. 14.46 and note), because the sun is “leader and moderator” of the universe (*SS* 4.2). The image of the eagle introduces the theme of the corporate unity of just souls, or the many and the one (repeated in 20.1–12); see Additional Note 2.

1. Before me with open wings: The image recalls the open arms of the cross (*Purg.* 3.119–23 and note; *Par.* 14.97–111 and notes); see also Ps. 16.8, alluded to at 6.4–9 (and see 20.37–39 and note). For the compatibility of the dominant images of the middle cantos of *Paradiso* (circle, cross, and eagle) see Additional Note 8.

Foster notes that the angelic hierarchy governing this sphere, the Principalities, was assigned by Dante to contemplate the Son, the Logos or Word of God, in himself (*Conv.* 2.5.7–11). See note to lines 40–45.

2–3. made by the joyous souls ... their sweet *frui* [fruition]: See Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 11.25 and *De doctrina christiana*, 1.8: “Fruition is to adhere in love to some thing for its own sake.” These blessed souls enjoy the object of their love, justice (see *Purg.* 18.32–33 and note), as counseled by the phrase inscribed in this heaven (18.91–93 and note). See *ST* 1a 2ae q. 11 a. 3.

4–6. each was like a little ruby ... sun into my eyes: Gems shine in the sun because they are diaphanous (prone to receive light); cf. *Conv.* 3.7.3. That each creature is a ray of the first cause (cf. *Ep.* 13.70) is often recalled in *Paradiso* (see 19.53, 19.90, 26.33 and notes). The

liturgy of the Common of Saints states that "the just shall shine like lilies" [*fulgebunt iusti sicut lilium*]; see 18.113 and note.

7–9. And what I must ... by any imagination: See 1 Cor. 2.9, where Paul, unfolding the "wisdom of God in a mystery," hints at what God prepares for the faithful: "But, as it is written [Isa. 64.4]: that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him. But to us God hath revealed them, by his Spirit."

10. for I saw and also heard the beak speaking: Latin *rostrum* [beak] is the etymon of *rostro* here. Dante could have read in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (*Etym.* 18.15) that the prows [*rostra*] of defeated Carthaginian galleys stood in the forum, the site of Roman legal and political oratory. The eagle speaks for the just (line 13), and, since the collective speaks as if it were a living individual, the eagle is an instance of *prosopopoeia*—personification. See VN 25 and 1 Cor. 2.9, quoted in the preceding note.

11–12. and the voice sounding ... it was we and ours: The grammatical singular represents the plurality of the just. Compare the corporate identity of the eagle to earlier instances of the body politic in the poem (see *Inf.* 28.35, 142 and notes, and *Inferno* Additional Notes 2, 12, 13) and in Dante's other works (cf. *DVE* 1.18.5). On the unity of wills in the ideal empire, see especially *Mon.* 1.16.

In Roman imperial tradition, the *lex regia* transferred legislative authority from the Roman people to the emperor (*Institutes* 1.1; *Digest*, Prologue). Although Dante held that the emperor drew his authority from election by God, the subjection of the whole world to Rome, as providentially decreed, meant that the emperor represented not only the Roman people, but all mankind: "Christ acknowledged by his action that the edict of Augustus [imposing the census], since he embodied the authority of the Romans [*Romanorum auctoritate fungentis*], was legitimate" (*Mon.* 2.10.8). This idea had consequences for Dante's view of the Atonement (see 6.82–90, 7.19–21, 40–45 and notes; also Kantorowicz 1957; Armour 1997).

13–18. And it began ... imitate the story: The "memory" of the eagle on earth is the glory that resulted from the Roman conquest of empire (*Mon.* 2.2–9, *Conv.* 4.4–5), and from the tradition of Roman law that Justinian compiled, inspired by the eagle (see 6.7–12). The corpus of laws is an instance of multiple voices (those of the Roman jurists) unified in one voice: the laws issued "from the mouth of the emperor" (*Institutes*, proem); they are his "art" or "work" on behalf of the whole world (see 6.12–13 and note); and see note to lines 40–45.

13. just and merciful: The shift from collective to individual is made again in the eagle's use of the singular: justice and mercy (or piety) are found in each individual, and in the collective as well. The majesty of the empire, Dante writes at *Mon.* 2.5.5: "is born from the fountainhead of mercy" [*de fonte nascitur pietatis*]" (see 32.117 and note). These virtues were embodied in Aeneas, the ancestor of Caesar (*Aen.* 1.544–45, cited at *Mon.* 2.3.8): "no man more just / in piety ..." [*quo iustior alter / nec pietate fuit*]); and by the emperor Trajan (*Purg.* 10.91–

93 and note). The exhortation at 18.113 was ritually spoken to the Holy Roman Emperor at his coronation: "May you love justice, compassion and right judgment" [*iustitiam, misericordiam et iudicium diligas*] (Elze 1960). For justice and mercy cooperating in the Atonement, see 7.103–20, and note to 7.52–120.

13. just: This is the first use of "just" in the canto, echoed at line 88. "Justice" is found at lines 29, 58, 68, and 77, and "judgment" at lines 99 and 107; "judge" is at line 80—nine uses in all, followed by five related terms in the next canto.

17–18. the wicked people ... imitate the story: The malicious praise Roman achievements but do not follow the example of Roman virtue and justice.

19–21. As one heat is felt ... from that image: A mixed-metaphorical simile: the middle term is the love radiating from the eagle, previously compared to the heat from many coals—which is felt—and subsequently said to produce a unitary sound (a voice) radiating from an *image*. Lines 22–25 bring in smell as well, leading up to the pilgrim's hunger (line 25); cf. 1 Cor. 2.9, quoted in the note to lines 7–9.

22–148. So I then ... beside the others: The balance of the canto, and the next one as well, takes up the question of whether virtuous non-Christians can be saved, a problem Dante returns to often in the poem (e.g. *Inf.* 4.34–42, 8.128–30, 12.41–43 and notes; *Purg.* 3.22–45, 21–22 and notes, and *Inter cantica* there).

22–33. So I then ... old hunger in me: "Lack" (line 25), "hunger" (line 33), and "hungering" (line 26) recall that the utterances of Wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 2.9–10 in note to lines 7–12) are a form of food (cf. Prov. 9.1–5; and see 2.10–12, 23.1–15 and notes; *Purg.* 13.27 and note; and see Durling 1981a).

28–30. Well do I know ... through a veil: Commentators take this as referring to Saturn, the sphere just above, governed by the angelic order of the Thrones (named the custodians of God's judgments at 9.61–63). For the association of the Thrones with judgment, see *ST* 1a q. 108 a. 6. For angels as mirrors, see *Ep.* 13.60.

34–39. Like a falcon ... who rejoice up there: The bird of justice is now like a hunting falcon, unhooded and keen to fly after its quarry. First a "beak" [*rostro*] of "souls woven together" (line 3), the eagle is now a weave of voices [*contesto*, line 38]; see note to lines 11–12.

40–66. Then it began ... or its poison: Before the pilgrim's question is voiced, the eagle circumscribes the understanding of mortals: as a mere single ray of the divine Mind (see *Ep.* 13.70, 72, cited in notes to 1.4), the human mind cannot penetrate the judgments of the first Principle (cf. *VN* 12.11–12). Foster 1976 points out that the passage deploys four syllogisms: the conclusion of the first, that God transcends his creation (lines 40–45), is the premise to the second, on the fall of Lucifer (46–48), and this to a third, that creatures are inadequate to

receive the infinite goodness of God (49–51), from which it follows that God's reality exceeds our understanding, and so also does his justice (58–63). The contrast between the shallowness of creatures and the depth of God is reiterated: God's reality is "hidden" (line 42), the Word is "beyond" (line 45); Lucifer is "unripe" (line 48) and creatures are "shallow" (line 50); the Origin is "far beyond" (line 57), and Justice hidden by the deep (line 63); the flesh is a "shadow" or "poison" (line 66). See Additional Note 2.

40–42. Then it began ... hidden and manifest: Dante employs the traditional image of God as architect, marking out the creation with compasses in the company of Wisdom, or the Word: that is Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, whom Augustine termed "God's art" ("ars quaedam Dei," *De Trinitate* 6.10). See Prov. 8.27, quoted by Dante at *Conv.* 3.15.16: "When he prepared the heavens, I [Wisdom] was present: when with a certain law and compass he enclosed the depths." "Impress" (line 43) implies the metaphor of the seal and the wax (see 13.67–69 and notes). Speaking elsewhere of history as the trace of God's will, Dante describes how a hidden cause (God, the seal) produces visible effects (the image in the wax, the world) (cf. *Mon.* 2.2.8).

The rule of the Roman Empire is also an "art;" see note to lines 13–18, and *Conv.* 4.9.10–14. Dante found support for the idea in *Aen.* 6.847–53, quoted in *Mon.* 2.6.9: "Your arts shall be: to impose the ways of peace, spare subject peoples, and subdue the proud." See also 16.51 and note, and Additional Note 2.

40. the compasses: The compass is called in Italian a *sesto* [sixth], because any extension of it (as the radius of a circle) will be the length of the sides of the hexagon inscribed in that circle.

42. distinguished so much, both hidden and manifest: The phrasing echoes the Nicene Creed: "I believe in one God ... maker of all things visible and invisible" (see p. 664, and 24.130–132, 139–44 and notes), referring to the visible reality of nature and the invisible world of the spirit; cf. *Mon.* 2.7.1: "Divine judgment in earthly affairs is sometimes revealed to men, and sometimes it remains hidden."

46–51. And this is proved ... by itself alone: Compare *ST* 1a q. 12 a. 4: "The created intellect cannot see God in his essence, unless God through his grace join himself to the created intellect." Had Lucifer awaited God's perfecting grace, he would have been the apex of creation; but rushing in his pride to seize it with his own power, fell "unripe" (for this adjective, see *Inf.* 25.18 and note). Cf. *DVE* 1.2.4: "The perverse angels did not wish to await divine help."

49–51. and hence it is clear ... by itself alone: Cf. *Conv.* 2.5.11: "The light that only itself sees itself completely" (cf. *Par.* 33.124–26); and 4.9.3: "The first goodness, which is God, which solely with His infinite capacity comprehends the infinite." See Aquinas, *CG* 1.69, and *ST* 1a q. 25 a. 5: "Divine goodness is an end which exceeds beyond proportion created things."

53–54. the Mind with which all things are filled: For Wisdom 1.7 and Jer. 23.24 as sources for this passage, see *Ep.* 13.62, and *Par.* 1.1–3 and note.

57. far beyond what it can see: The intellect grasps that the reality of God lies beyond what it can see and understand, indeed beyond the visible; the idea presupposes Romans 1.20, cited by Dante at *Ep.* 5.23 and *Mon.* 2.2.8, a passage that, in outlining how faith can arise, lays the basis for the ensuing discussion; see Additional Note 14. And see *Mon.* 2.7.4–5, cited in note to lines 70–78.

58–63. Thus into the sempiternal ... hidden by being deep: See Ps. 35.7: "Thy justice is as the mountains of God, thy judgments are a great deep." Cf. *Par.* 7.94, 21.94–95.

64–66. There is no light ... poison of the flesh: see Rom. 6.19, 2 Cor. 7.1, on the "infirmity" or "defilement" of the flesh. At *Conv.* 4.21.8 Dante writes of the need for the intellect to be "abstracted and freed from every corporeal shadow" (see Vasoli's notes); for "poison" see *Ep.* 6.22 ("cupidity ... flattering with poisonous whispering"); also *Mon.* 1.11.13, 3.16.4.

67–99. Sufficiently open ... judgment to you mortals: The eagle voices the pilgrim's question about virtuous pagans, and disqualifies him as a mortal of limited vision who engages in sophistries despite the guidance of Scripture; no discord between justice and the divine will is possible (see 3.70–87 and notes), but divine judgments exceed human understanding.

67–69. Sufficiently open ... such frequent question: In the eagle's comparison, the truth of justice dwells in a lair from which it must be drawn out (*latèbra* rhymes with *tenèbra*, "darkness"). Compare Dante's proposition for his exposition of monarchy: "I propose to draw it forth from where it lies hidden [*enucleare latibulis*]" (*Mon.* 1.1.5); see also 4.127 and note, and Additional Note 2.

70–78. for you would say ... he does not believe: At the center of the canto, Dante asks why a virtuous soul who lives beyond reach of the Christian message should be excluded from salvation because unbaptized. The problem is stated in the same terms at *Mon.* 2.7.2–5 (cf. *ST* 2a 2ae q. 2. a. 7, Additional Note 2). The predicament might apply to Dante's Virgil (apparently not saved) and to Cato (who is; see *Purg.* 1.31–109, 37–39 and notes, and *Purgatorio* Additional Note 1).

70–71. a man is born on the banks of the Indus: The Indus, which flows through present-day Pakistan, was in antiquity India's western border: Alexander the Great halted his conquests just beyond it; thus the river marks the easternmost reach of classical civilization. Western theologians in Dante's day did have some knowledge of the high ethical standards of the Brahmins; see Hahn 1977.

72. speak of Christ or read or write of him: The Gospel was communicated by preaching and by writings (see *Purg.* 22.79–81, *Par.* 24.91–96, with notes). A teacher is necessary because "faith then cometh from hearing [*fides ex auditu*]" (Rom. 10.17), and there can be no culpability in not adhering to a Gospel that is never heard (see Rom. 10.15: "How shall they hear, without a preacher?").

74. as far as human reason can see: Cf. *Consol.* 4.pr.6.32, cited at 20.67–72.

77. where is this justice that condemns him? The eagle poses the pilgrim's question in confrontational terms; cf. Rom. 9.19: "Thou wilt say therefore to me: Why doth he find fault?" Some commentators take the pilgrim's question to be impertinent, and the eagle's response (lines 79–84) appears to bear this out (recall the earlier mention of Lucifer's impatience). But in the next canto the issue raised by the pilgrim is granted more scope and its seriousness acknowledged.

79–82. Now who are you ... matches wits with me: See Rom. 9.19–20, in reproof of those who would challenge God's decrees. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? (see also Job 38.2: "Who is this who wrappeth up sentences in unskilful words").

85–90. Oh earthbound animals ... by radiating causes them: The apostrophe echoes *Consol.* 3.pr.3.1: "You too, earthbound creatures, dream an image, albeit faint, of your origin." Dante reproaches similar inquiries into the purposes of Providence at *Conv.* 4.5.9 and *Quaest.* 22.77. For the emanationist language (God creates the world with the outpouring of his creative Word into the universe) see 1.2–3 and note, and Additional Notes 10 and 11.

88–90. That is just which is consonant ... by radiating causes them: Cf. *Mon.* 2.2.5: "In the created world right is simply the image of the divine will; and thus it follows that whatever is not in harmony with divine will cannot be right, and whatever is in harmony with divine will is by that very fact right."

91–99. As above its nest ... eternal judgment to you mortals: The eagle is compared to a mother bird that has fed its young, and the pilgrim raises his head as fledglings do (cf. *Purg.* 25.10, also mentioning storks, and note; see also *Par.* 23.1–21 and note). The eagle's circling can be seen as a form of understanding (see Additional Notes 3 and 13), confirmed by the singing that accompanies the circling as the music of the spheres accompanies their motion. The eagle illuminates the pilgrim as the sphere of Jupiter does the cosmos, but its answer reiterates the rightness of divine judgments, without further justification.

91. As above its nest the stork: After eagle and falcon, a third bird species is mentioned (and see 20.73–78 and note). Storks were known to make a sound like speech by clacking their beaks (see *Inf.* 32.36 and note). As the supreme bird, the eagle comprehends other species, as higher orders of angels comprehend lower.

100–148. After those shining fires ... beside the others: The eagle reiterates that there is no salvation without faith in Christ (Heb. 11.6; see also Acts 4.12, and *ST* 3a q. 68 a. 1). But many who seem not to know Christ will be saved, while many who expect salvation will be rejected. Dante's fullest evocation of the Last Judgment before the Empyrean (see 30.37–45, 128–32 and notes) takes aim at secular rulers who have governed badly because of personal vices.

100–111. After those shining fires ... and the other destitute: The eagle's most profound revelation frames the Last Judgment, the final act of justice, in Biblical terms (see notes to lines 106–8, 109–11, 110–11). The name of Christ appears three times in identical rhyme to suggest his influence over past, present, and future—his saving act of justice, the Atonement, at the center of history, is foreseen by faith before it occurs (see note to lines 103–5), and he will come at the end of time to judge (lines 106–7). This is the third of four identical *Cristo-rhymes* in *Paradiso* (see 12.71, 73, 75, and 14.104, 106, 108 [as here]; see also 32.83, 85, 87, and notes, and Additional Notes 4 and 8); their frequency and placement reflects Philippians 2.9: "For which cause [the Incarnation and Crucifixion] God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names."

100–102. After those shining fires ... revered by the world: The eagle prefaces its answer with mention of the Holy Spirit, the Love that authorizes speech spoken in its name (cf. *Purg.* 24.50–52 and note), here dictating to the eagle of justice that made the Roman Empire worthy of reverence. *Mondo* [world] is another candidate for what is signified by the *M* concluding *terram* (18.94–96 and note; cf. the Roman Empire as "glory of the world," 27.61–66 and note). See 6.28–36 and note, and Additional Note 2.

103–5. it began once more ... nailed to the wood: Dividing the faithful into groups living before and after the Crucifixion [*pria... poi*], Dante applies a traditional gloss on Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21.9): that some preceded and some followed him signifies that the faithful would be found both before and after Christ. Reiterated at 20.103–5 (note identical line numbers) and 32.19–27, the distinction was anticipated by the acts of the Roman eagle in reference to the Crucifixion at 6.82–83 ("what the emblem ... had done earlier [*fatto*], and was to do [*fatturo*] later"), and again at 13.40–42 (see note), also referring to the Crucifixion. See Additional Note 4.

106–8. But see ... does not know Christ: Cf. Matt. 7.22–23: "Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and work many miracles in thy name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity." See also Matt. 8.11–12.

109–11. and such Christians ... the other destitute: Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, destroyed in 611 BCE. See Matt. 12.41–42: "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, for they repented at the teaching of Jonah [Jonah 2.1], and a greater than Jonah is here" (3 Kings 10.1–7). In the New Testament, Peter discovers exemplary faith in the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10.35): "In every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh justice, is acceptable to him"; see also Matt. 8.5–10.

Thought to be the southernmost habitable region (see *Inf.* 24.89, *Purg.* 26.21 and notes), Ethiopia was home to the eunuch "of great authority under Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians," converted by the apostle Philip in Acts 8.27–39, and also to Solomon's admirer the Queen of Sheba, associated in biblical exegesis with the "black but comely" spouse of Canticle of Canticles 1.4.

110–11. when the two gatherings ... the other destitute: Matt. 25.31–46, on the Last Judgment, quoted in part by the angel at the entrance to Eden (*Purg.* 27.58; cf. also note to *Purg.* 22.82–87), underlies the judgment scene here. The next canto includes a contrasting enumeration of souls saved.

112–48. What will the Persians ... beside the others: In the last dozen terzinas the book of God's judgments is opened; as the events mentioned took place after 1300, they are understood to be prophecies. The list is a political and geographic survey of Europe, beginning with the Holy Roman Empire and the French monarchy; Jerusalem is mentioned at the midpoint, followed by Sicily, the arena of Angevin and Aragonese ambition. Lesser, peripheral kingdoms follow, and Cyprus, an island like Sicily near the center, concludes the list.

112–13. What will the Persians be able to say to your kings: The Persian Empire returned the Jews to Jerusalem after their Babylonian captivity and helped to reconstruct the Temple (see Daniel 6.1–3, 9.1–2, 10–11; 3 Esdras 2.1–6). Wisdom 6.1–6 reiterates, in stronger terms, the counsel of Wisdom 1.1 inscribed in Jupiter (see 18.91–93 and note); it suggests what wise Persians might say (Carroll).

113–14. when they shall see ... is being written: See Apoc. 20.12: "And another scroll was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the scrolls, according to their works." Dante's lines include an echo of lines from the *Dies irae*, a sequence written in the mid-thirteenth century and attributed to the Franciscan Thomas of Celano, that became part of the Mass for the dead (Barnes 1995):

Liber scriptus proferetur
in quo totum continetur,
unde mundus iudicetur. (lines 13–15)
[The written book will be shown,
in which everything is recorded
from which the world will be judged.]

Dante treats the book of judgment as a ledger, a book format familiar to commercially minded Florentines. The vertical acrostic in lines 115–41 resembles the reiterated initial formulas for account-book entries; these also used abbreviations (see lines 133–35). Note the fiscal lexicon: the saved are "rich," the damned "destitute" (lines 111–12); coinage is twice mentioned (119 and 140), as is numerical notation (127–29) and the metaphor of the deposit (*arra*, line 145). See 24.83–85, 85–87 and notes, and Steinberg 2007.

115–41. There will be seen ... the coinage of Venice: The verse-head acrostic, read vertically, spells out an inscription (three instances of each letter beginning consecutive terzinas) of the word *LVE*, meaning "pestilence" (cf. the acrostic on the terrace of pride, *Purg.* 12.25–63 and note). The nine terzinas of the acrostic refer to thirteen sovereigns, of which Charles II, the chief living Angevin, is seventh and midmost; three more are implicit in the two

terzinas that follow.

115–17. There will be seen ... will be laid waste: First is Albert, the Holy Roman emperor attacked by Dante in *Purg.* 6.97–102 (see note). Envious of his brother-in-law Wenceslaus II, king of Bohemia (see line 125), Albert sought to make him renounce his claim to the throne of Hungary in favor of Charles Robert, eldest son of Charles Martel (see lines 142–44, 8.34–148, 9.1–9 and notes). The ensuing war devastated Bohemia in 1304.

116. that which the pen will soon record: The pen of God's recording angel, as in Ps. 44.2: "My tongue is the pen of a scrivener that writeth swiftly"; cf. 6.63.

118–20. There will be seen ... the boar's hide: Next is Philip IV, the Fair, the "plague of France" (*Purg.* 7.109 and note), never explicitly named by Dante but chief object of the invective at *Purg.* 20.85–93 (see note). After being defeated by the Flemings at Courtrai, Philip created hardship in his realm when he devalued the currency to finance further campaigns in Flanders (1302). He was killed in 1314 when his horse, startled by a wild boar running between its legs, threw him (Villani 10.66). See lines 136–38.

121–26. There will be seen ... knew worth or willed it: Pride and folly have caused the wars between Edward I of England and Robert the Bruce of Scotland (for "bounds" see *Purg.* 14.143–51 and note); Ferdinand IV of Castile and Wenceslaus II of Bohemia bask in ease and lechery (cf. *Purg.* 7.101–2).

127–29. We shall see the Cripple ... mark the opposite: Named for of his lameness, the "cripple" is Charles II of Anjou and Naples, who claimed the title of king of Jerusalem, though the city was retaken by Saladin in 1190. The title fell to Charles through inheritance from his father, Charles I of Anjou, who had secured it through purchase in 1272, after it fell to the Angevins upon forfeiture by the heirs of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. Dante reviles Charles II on several occasions (cf. *Purg.* 7.119–20, 20.79–81 and notes)

The initial *I* of Jerusalem [*Jerusalem*] tallies Charles's goodness, its final *M* his evil: sharp irony, considering Charles's hollow claim to the title.

130–35. We shall see the avarice ... much in little space: Small letters will record the fecklessness, and leave room to fit in the misdeeds, of Frederick II of Aragon (reigned 1296–1337), often denounced by Dante (cf. *Purg.* 7.119–20; *Conv.* 4.6.20, *DVE* 1.12.5). After the death of Henry VII in 1313, Frederick, whose ancestors had seized Sicily from the Angevins in 1282 (see note to 8.73–75), deserted the Ghibelline cause and made peace with Charles II.

131–32. him who rules the island ... ended his long life: Sicily is identified by its volcano, Etna (cf. 8.67–72 and note). After the death of his father Anchises (*Aen.* 3.707–10), Aeneas honored him with funeral games in Sicily (*Aeneid* 5), a show of reverence that shames the impiety of current sovereigns.

136–38. And all will see ... and two crowns: Frederick of Aragon's uncle, James, had

inherited the Balearic Isles in 1276 upon the death of his father, James I of Aragon. In 1284, to advance other claims, and in alliance with Philip III of France, James contended with his brother Pedro III of Aragon. James lost his throne, but regained it through a pact in 1295 involving his nephew James II of Aragon, Philip IV of France, and Charles II of Naples. The brother of Frederick II of Aragon was James II of Aragon, who yielded Sicily to Charles II; but Frederick held on and was crowned King of Trinacria (Sicily; cf. *Purg.* 7.119 and note).

137–38. who have cuckolded ... and two crowns: The crowns of Aragon and Majorca have been dishonored (see *Purg.* 3.112–16 and note). The coarse terms for “uncle” [*barba*] and “cuckolded” [*fatte bozze*] lower the level of style.

139. And those of Portugal and Norway: King Dionysus (Dinís) of Portugal (reigned 1270–1325) was a great king, the founder of the University of Coimbra (1290). The commercial ventures that curbed his crusading zeal, the civil war with his heir, Alfonso IV, or the profit he gained from suppression of the Templars in 1312 (cf. *Purg.* 20.91–93 and note) may have drawn Dante’s disapproval. Norway was an independent kingdom at this time; Dante refers to Hakon V (1299–1319) or perhaps his older brother Eric II (1280–1299).

140–41. and he of Rascia ... coinage of Venice: This refers to Stephan Urosh II, king of Rascia (1282–1321). Named after its capital, Raska, the country included parts of modern Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, and Dalmatia. Stephan profited from the similarity of Venetian silver currency to his debased coinage, forcing Venice to legislate against it (1282; see *Inf.* 30.73–74 and note). See also 31.103 and note.

142–44. Oh happy Hungary ... the mount that girds it: The acrostic complete, Dante suggests that better times await Hungary. The indicative mood (“lets itself”) means these hopes would be realized: at the death of Andrew III of Hungary in 1301, Hungary, which should have reverted by right to Charles Martel’s son, Charles Robert (see 8.64 and note), finally fell to him in 1308 after bitter struggles. Though similar, the construction used for Navarre is in the counterfactual subjunctive (*s’armasse* [were it protected]), meaning that hopes for that region would fail: though Navarre was well ruled from 1274 to 1304 by Jeanne, daughter of Henry of Champagne (see *Purg.* 7.104–11) and wife to King Philip IV the Fair, it was annexed to France by her son Louis in 1314 soon after his father’s death.

145–48. And we must all believe ... beside the others: What Navarre will suffer from annexation to France can be inferred from the fate of Cyprus (named here by its towns Nicosia and Famagosta) ruled by Henry II of Lusignan. Henry’s reign from 1285 to 1324 was marked by rivalry for the throne with his, brother Amaury, prince of Tyre, who gained the upper hand before being assassinated by one of his followers in 1310, after which Henry regained the throne.

148. who does not stray from beside the others: Henry runs with the other ruling “beasts” (line 147), a term that in the context of the Last Judgment evokes the beast of Apoc. 13.1 as the model for these rulers (*Purg.* 32.142–47 and notes).



CANTO 20

Jupiter, continued: the eye of the Eagle—Trajan and Rhipeus

- 1 When he who lights all the world descends
 below our hemisphere, and day on every side is
 consumed,
- 4 the sky, which earlier was lit by him alone,
 suddenly becomes visible again with the many
 lights in which one light is reflected,
- 7 and this act of the sky came to my mind, as the
 sign of the world and of its governors stilled its
 blessed beak,
- 10 for all those living lights, shining much more
 brightly, began songs that have lapsed and fallen
 from my memory.
- 13 O sweet love that mantle yourself with smiling,
 how ardent you seemed in those flutes that
 breathed only with holy thoughts!
- 16 After the precious, bright stones with which I
 saw the sixth star begemmed had imposed
 silence on their angelic tones,
- 19 I seemed to hear the murmur of a river
 descending clear from stone to stone, showing
 the fecundity of its summit.

- 22 And as the sound takes its form at the neck of
 the lute, and the wind that penetrates the sampogna
 at the finger-hole,
25 so, casting off delay, that murmuring in the
 eagle rose up through the neck, as if it were
 hollow.
28 It became a voice there, and issued from its
 beak in the form of words such as my heart
 hoped for, where I wrote them down.
31 "The part in me that in mortal eagles sees and
 endures the sun," it began to me, "now must be
 gazed on fixedly,
34 because, of the fires from which I form my
 shape, those by whom the eye sparkles in my
 head, they of all the others are the highest in degree.
37 He who flashes in the center, as the pupil, was
 the singer of the Holy Spirit who transferred the
 ark from city to city:
40 now he knows the merit of his singing—in so
 far as it was the effect of his counsel—by its
 reward, which is equal to it.
43 Of the five who make a circle for my eyelids, he
 who is closest to my beak consoled the poor
 widow for her son:
46 now he knows how dearly it costs not to follow
 Christ, by experience of this sweet life and of its
 opposite.
49 And he who follows, on the upper arch of the
 circumference of which I speak, delayed death
 through true penitence:

- 52 now he knows that eternal judgment is not
transmuted when worthy prayer assigns to
tomorrow what down there belongs to today.
- 55 The next who follows, with good intention that
bore evil fruit, made himself Greek, along with the
laws and me, in order to give precedence to the shepherd:
- 58 now he knows how the evil resulting from his
good act does not harm him, though the world
be destroyed thereby.
- 61 And the one you see in the lower arch was
William, mourned by the land that weeps for
Charles and Frederick being still alive:
- 64 now he knows how Heaven falls in love with a
just king, and by the brightness of his flashing
shows it still.
- 67 Who would believe, down in the erring world,
that Rhipeus the Trojan would be the fifth of the
holy lights in this round?
- 70 Now he knows much of what the world cannot
see of God's grace, although his sight does not
discern its ground."
- 73 Like a lark that first soars in the air singing,
and then falls silent, contented with the final
sweetness, which satisfies it:
- 76 so the image seemed contented with the
imprint of the eternal Pleasure, by whose desire
each thing becomes what it is.
- 79 And although, up there, I was to my doubt like
glass to the color beneath, it brooked no waiting
in silence,

- 82 but from my mouth: "What things are these?" it
 impelled with all its force, whereat I saw great
 rejoicings flash forth.
- 85 Then, with its eye more kindled, the blessed
 sign answered, so as not to keep me suspended
 in amazement:
- 88 "I see that you believe these things because I
 say them, but do not know how, so that, though
 they are believed, they are hidden.
- 91 You do as one who learns the name of a thing,
 but cannot see its quiddity if another does not
 set it forth.
- 94 *Regnum celorum* suffers the violence of
 burning love and lively hope that overcome God's will:
- 97 not as one man defeats another, but they
 conquer it because it wishes to be conquered
 and, conquered, conquers with its good will.
- 100 The first life of my eyelid and the fifth cause
 you to marvel that you see the region of the
 angels adorned with them.
- 103 They did not come forth from their bodies
 pagans, as you think, but Christians in firm faith,
 one in the feet that were to suffer, the other when they
 had already suffered.
- 106 For one of them returned to his bones from
 Hell, where none can will the good again, and
 that was the reward of lively hope,
- 109 of lively hope that gave power to the prayers
 made to God to bring him back to life so that his
 will could be moved.

- 112 The glorious soul of which we speak, returning
 briefly to its flesh, believed in him who could save it,
115 and, believing caught fire with such a flame of
 true love, that from the second death it was
 worthy to come to this joy.
- 118 The other, because of grace that flows from so
 deep a fountain that never creature's eye pierced
 to its first welling,
- 121 devoted all his love down there to righteousness,
 wherefore, from grace to grace, God
 opened his eyes to our future redemption,
- 124 and he believed in it, and suffered no longer
 the stench of paganism, but reproached those
 perverted peoples for it.
- 127 Those three ladies were his baptism whom you
 saw by the right wheel, more than a thousand
 years before baptizing began.
- 130 O predestination, how removed is your root
 from the sight of those who do not see the first
 Cause *tota!*
- 133 And you mortals, hold back from judging, for
 we, who see God, do not yet know all the elect,
- 136 and such lack delights us, because our good is
 refined in this good: that what God wishes, we
 wish, too."
- 139 Thus by that divine image, to clear my short
 sight, sweet medicine was dispensed to me.
- 142 And as a good lute-player makes the vibration
 of the strings follow a good singer, so that the
 song becomes more pleasing:

145 thus, while it spoke, I remember that I watched
the two blessed lights, as the blinking of two eyes
agrees,
148 moving their flames with the words.



CANTO 20

Quando colui che tutto 'l mondo alluma
del l'emisperio nostro si discende,
che 'l giorno d'ogne parte si consuma,

1

lo ciel, che sol di lui prima s'accende,
subitamente si rifà parvente
per molte luci in che una risplende,
e questo atto del ciel mi venne a mente
come 'l segno del mondo e de' suoi duci
nel benedetto rostro fu tacente,
però che tutte quelle vive luci,
vie più lucendo, cominciaron canti
da mia memoria labili e caduci.

4

7

O dolce amor che di riso t'ammanti,
quanto parevi ardente in que' flailli,
ch' avieno spirto sol di pensier santi!

10

13

Poscia che i cari e lucidi lapilli
ond' io vidi ingemmato il sesto lume
puoser silenzio a li angelici squilli,
udir mi parve un mormorar di fiume
che scende chiaro giù di pietra in pietra,
mostrando l'ubertà del suo cacume.

16

19

E come suono al collo de la cetra
prende sua forma, e sì com' al pertugio
de la sampogna vento che penètra:
così, rimosso d'aspettar indugio,
quel mormorar de l'aguglia salissi
su per lo collo, come fosse bugio.

22

25

Fecesi voce quivi, e quindi uscissi
per lo suo becco in forma di parole,
quali aspettava il core, ov' io le scrissi.

28

"La parte in me che vede e pate il sole
ne l'aguglie mortali," incominciommi,
"or fisamente riguardar si vole,

31

perché d'i fuochi ond' io figura fommi
quelli onde l'occhio in testa mi scintilla,
e' di tutti lor gradi son li sommi.

34

Colui che luce in mezzo per pupilla
fu il cantor de lo Spirito Santo
che l'arca traslatò di villa in villa:

37

ora conosce il merto del suo canto—
in quanto effetto fu del suo consiglio—
per lo remunerar, ch' è altrettanto.

40

Dei cinque che mi fan cerchio per ciglio,
colui che più al becco mi s'accosta
la vedovella consolò del figlio:

43

ora conosce quanto cara costa
non seguir Cristo, per l'esperienza
di questa dolce vita e de l'opposta.

46

E quel che segue ne la circunferenza
di che ragiono, per l'arco superno,
morte indugiò per vera penitenza:

49

ora conosce che 'l giudicio eterno
non si trasmuta quando degno prego
fa crastino là giù de l'odierno.

52

L'altro che segue, con le leggi e meco,
sotto buona intenzion che fé mal frutto,
per cedere al pastor si fece greco:

55

ora conosce come il mal dedutto
dal suo bene operar non li è nocivo,
avvegna che sia 'l mondo indi distrutto.

58

E quel che vedi ne l'arco declivo
Guiglielmo fu, cui quella terra plora
che piagne Carlo e Federigo vivo:

61

ora conosce come s'innamora
lo Ciel del giusto rege e al sembiante
del suo fulgore il fa vedere ancora.

64

Chi crederebbe giù nel mondo errante
che Riféo Troiano in questo tondo
fosse la quinta de le luci sante?

67

Ora conosce assai di quel che 'l mondo
veder non può de la divina grazia,
ben che sua vista non discerna il fondo."

70

Quale allodetta che 'n aere si spazia
prima cantando, e poi tace, contenta
de l'ultima dolcezza che la sazia:

73

tal mi sembiò l'imago de la 'mprenta
de l'eterno piacere, al cui disio
ciascuna cosa qual ell' è diventa.

76

E avvegna ch'io fossi al dubbiar mio
lì quasi vetro a lo color ch'el veste,
tempo aspettar tacendo non patio,

79

ma de la bocca: "Che cose son queste?"
mi pinse con la forza del suo peso,
per ch'io di coruscar vidi gran feste.

82

Poi appresso, con l'occhio più acceso
lo benedetto segno mi rispuose
per non tenermi in ammirar sospeso:

85

"Io veggio che tu credi queste cose
perch' io le dico, ma non vedi come,
sì che, se son credute, sono ascose.

88

Fai come quei che la cosa per nome
apprende ben, ma la sua quiditate
veder non può se altri non la prome.

91

Regnum celorum violenza pate
da caldo amore e da viva speranza
che vince la divina volontate:

94

non a guisa che l'omo a l'om sobranza,
ma vince lei perché vuole esser vinta,
e, vinta, vince con sua beninanza.

97

La prima vita del ciglio e la quinta
ti fa maravigliar perché ne vedi
la region de li angeli dipinta.

100

D'i corpi suoi non uscir, come credi,
gentili, ma cristiani in ferma fede,
quel d'i passuri e quel d'i passi piedi.

103

Ché l'una de lo 'nferno, u' non si riede
già mai a buon voler, tornò a l'ossa,
e ciò di viva spene fu mercede,
di viva spene che mise la possa
ne' prieghi fatti a Dio per suscitarla
sì che potesse sua voglia esser mossa.

106

L'anima gloriosa onde si parla,
tornata ne la carne, in che fu poco,
credette in lui che potëa aiutarla,
e credendo s'accese in tanto foco
di vero amor ch' a la morte seconda
fu degna di venire a questo gioco.

112

115

L'altra, per grazia che da sì profonda
fontana stilla che mai creatura
non pinse l'occhio infino a la prima onda,
 tutto suo amor là giù pose a drittura,
per che, di grazia in grazia, Dio li aperse
l'occhio a la nostra redenzion futura,
 ond' ei credette in quella, e non sofferse
da indi il puzzo più del paganesmo,
e riprendiene le genti perverse.

Quelle tre donne li fur per battesmo
che tu vedesti da la destra rota,
dinanzi al battezzar più d'un millesmo.

O predestinazion, quanto remota
è la radice tua da quelli aspetti
che la prima cagion non veggion *tota!*

E voi, mortali, tenetevi stretti
a giudicar, ché noi, che Dio vedemo,
non conosciamo ancor tutti li eletti,

ed ènne dolce così fatto scemo,
perché il ben nostro in questo ben s'affina:
che quel che vuol Iddio e noi volemo."

Così da quella imagine divina,
per farmi chiara la mia corta vista,
data me fu soave medicina.

E come a buon cantor buon citarista
fa seguir lo guizzo de la corda,
in che più di piacer lo canto acquista:
 sì, mentre ch'e' parlò, sì mi ricorda
ch' io vidi le due luci benedette,
pur come batter d'occhio si concorda,

118

121

124

127

130

133

136

139

142

145

con le parole mover le fiammette.

148

NOTES

1–30. When he who lights ... I wrote them down: The eagle falls silent (line 9) while the blessed who compose it sing (11–12); they fall silent in turn (line 18) as the eagle speaks (19–21), words that the pilgrim records in his heart (28–30). Note the ineffable music (line 12) contrasted with words retained (line 30; cf. 1.4–6, 7–9 and notes).

1–15. When he who lights ... with holy thoughts: A synesthetic simile, as at 19.19–21 (see note): the silencing of the eagle's voice, replaced by the chorus of voices, is like the shift at sunset from the single light of the sun to the many lights of the stars (cf. 23.28–30). The sunset simile echoes 14.70–72, also a transition.

1–9. When he who lights ... its blessed beak: Like 19.10–12, a figure of the one and the many. *Sol* is a traditional pun for the sun, the sole lord of the cosmos, though its light is distributed to lesser lights; the political implication is echoed by the eagle as the sign of the world's *duci* [leaders]. See *Purg.* 13.21; also *Inf.* 10.102.

13–18. O sweet love ... their angelic tones: The lights are first compared to flutes, after which their tones are compared to the bright gems composing the eagle; this sequence is inverted by the order of emphasis of lines 1–15 (lights) and 16–30 (tones).

13. O sweet love that mantle yourself with smiling: See Ps. 103.2: "Clothed with light as if a garment" [*amictus lumine sicut vestimento*]; see 8.52–54 and note.

16–30. After the precious ... I wrote them down: When the eagle speaks again, its voice is compared first to the sound of a river, then to the sounds produced by the *sampogna* (a type of bagpipe); these are the words the poet records.

16–18. After the precious ... their angelic tones: Acoustic and optical effects interact: the "bells" of the eagle, its singing voices, are silenced by the gems, its "lights," which sang in the first place (line 10). The rhyming of "flutes" [*flailli*], "little gems" [*lapilli*], and "bells" [*squilli*] is onomatopoetic; see Additional Note 8.

19–30. I seemed to hear ... I wrote them down: Spirit or breath becomes voice, then writing (see *Purg.* 24.52–54 and note). This is also an etiology of Dante's poetry of rectitude (cf. DVE 2.2.7–8), in which the poet's voice is the voice of justice (cf. 19.113–14 and note). Compare DVE 2.3.9:

whatever has flowed from the very summit of the heads of illustrious poets to their lips,
is found only in canzoni. [*quicquid de cacuminibus illustrium capitum poetantium profluit
ad labia, in solis cantionibus invenitur.*]

See *Inf.* 26.85–86, 27.58–59; and *Purg.* 24.37 and note

19–21. I seemed to hear ... fecundity of its summit: See Ezek. 43.2: "His voice was like the noise of many waters." Compare *Mon.* 3.16.15:

The authority of the temporal monarch flows down into him without any intermediary from the Fountainhead of universal authority; this Fountainhead, though "one in the citadel of its own simplicity of nature" [*Consol.* 4.pr.6.8] flows into many streams from the abundance of its goodness.

Justice draws speech from the fount of Wisdom, as does the poet (see note to lines 26–30 and Additional Note 2).

22–27. And as the sound ... as if it were hollow: Two analogies for the eagle's voice, one drawn from the lute, the other from a pipe. In stringed instruments the musical pitch is changed by stopping the strings on the fingerboard (the neck); in a pipe or flute, stopping its holes with the fingers alters the length of the air column, modulating the frequency. Dante echoes his own account of a pipe played to produce human speech in lines 39–40 of *Eclogue 4* to Giovanni del Virgilio:

verum, ut arundinea puer is pro voce laborat
—mira loquar, sed vera tamen—spiravit arundo
[but as the boy strove to draw voice from the reed
—I speak of marvels, but truly—the reed breathed forth]

Compare the analysis of voice production at *Inf.* 27.7–15, 13–18 and notes.

31–148. The part in me ... flames with the words: In the rest of the canto, in illustration of the principle stated at 19.103–5, the eagle names the six souls that make up its eye; in response to the pilgrim's surprise regarding two of them, it clarifies the reasons for their salvation, consistent with the same principle.

31–78. The part in me ... becomes what it is: The account of the blessed in the eye (lines 37–72), like that of unjust kings at 19.115–48, is twelve terzinas long. Each of the six pairs of terzinas states the soul's passage from former trials to present blessedness, marked by repetition of "now it knows" [*ora conosce*]. There is an implied correlation with the Roman numeral for this sixth sphere (VI; see note to line 99). The series is similar in its artifice to the skywriting of 18.91–93 and the acrostic of 19.115–41; see also Additional Note 2.

31–36. The part in me ... highest in degree: Eagles were supposed able to gaze into the sun (see 1.46–48 and note); in this case, the eagle's eye, organ of its supreme faculty, gazes on deep mysteries of justice, which the unaided human intellect cannot see. Note the relation to lines 1–15.

37–42. He who flashes ... equal to it: At the center of the eye is David, "high above the kings of the earth" (Ps. 88.28), renowned for justice (2 Kings 8.15: "David did judgment and justice to all his people"). By bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (line 39; see 2 Kings 6.1–12, and *Purg.* 10.55–69 and note), David established the city as the center of worship; he was traditionally thought to be the author of the Psalms, the basis of Jewish and Christian liturgy (Eccl. 47.7–11). David's position reflects his importance as the ancestor of the Virgin Mary and of Christ (Matt. 1.1–16); for Dante David's birth also occurred about the time Rome was founded (*Conv.* 4.5.6), so that the king was associated with the providential role of the Roman Empire. His central place as the pupil of the eagle also suggests that he sets the standard of merit and just reward (line 42; see *Par.* 6.118–20) and sees deeper into God's justice than other souls.

In lieu of his name he is identified as "singer" [*cantor*], as at 25.72 ("singer of the Holy Spirit"), a designation otherwise reserved in the poem for Virgil (*Purg.* 22.57) and Cacciaguida (*Par.* 18.51; see also 32.12 and note). For Augustine and Christian tradition, the Psalms were the words of Christ himself speaking through David; thus they speak to both the past and the future. That the psalms are many poems that express one voice may also be linked to the collective voice of the eagle (see 19.11–12 and note and lines below).

37. in the center, as the pupil: Because most esteemed by God; see Ps. 16.8, "Keep me, as the apple [*pupilla*] of thy eye," linked to 6.7, which also refers to Ps. 16.8; and compare 2.143–45 and note, and 3.15.

41. in so far as it was the effect of his counsel: The qualification distinguishes David's inspiration by Christ (see note to lines 37–42) from his authorial contribution to the Psalms (see 2 Peter 1.20–21, 2 Tim. 3.16), from which he derives merit. The degree of individual authorship attributable to biblical writers was intensely debated in Dante's day (see *Mon.* 3.4.11, Minnis et al 1988).

44, 50, 61. he who is closest to my beak ... on the upper arch ... in the lower arch: "Circle" (line 43) and *tondo* [round] (line 68) imply that the five souls named by David form the periphery of the eagle's circular eye, and thus are equidistant from David at the center, and not visibly ranked.

43–48. Of the five ... and of its opposite: Also identifiable in light of Dante's own account is Trajan (see *Purg.* 10.73–93 and notes); see note to 106–17.

49–54. And he who follows ... belongs to today: Also unnamed (but not previously mentioned by Dante) is Hezekiah, the most just king of Judah (4 Kings 18.5), granted an additional fifteen years of life by God after his imminent death had been prophesied by Isaiah (4 Kings 20.1–11); the biblical passage makes no mention of the king's penitence, only of his prayers. On the relevant question of the efficacy of prayer and its conformity with predestination, see *Purg.* 6.28–48 and notes, and *ST2a* 2ae q. 83 a. 2.

The early commentators noted that part of Hezekiah's lament when he feared for his life,

"In the midst of my days I shall go to the gates of Hell" (Is. 38.10), is echoed in the first line of *Inferno*, "In the middle of the journey of our life."

55–60. The next who follows ... may be destroyed thereby: Also indicated by periphrasis is the fourth-century emperor Constantine. Although his "donation" of the temporal power of the Western Roman Empire to Pope Sylvester (the "shepherd") was an eighth-century forgery, Dante accepted the document as authentic, but argued that the emperor's cession had been illegitimate (*Mon.* 3.10). The *pia intentio* of Constantine excuses him from blame. See also 6.1–3, *Inf.* 19.115–17 and notes, and *Mon.* 2.11.8; see also Additional Note 2.

55–57. made himself Greek along with the laws and me: The emperor, the empire, and the laws are closely identified (see note to 19.1–21).

Constantine made the empire Greek when he moved its capital from Rome to the site of ancient Byzantium, later known as Constantinople, on the Bosphorus in Asia Minor. "Greek" is disparaging, given Dante's feelings about Troy and Rome (adversaries of the Argives—that is, the Greeks), and because of the longstanding schism between the Roman and Greek churches. See 6.1–3 and note; *Inf.* 26.73–75 and note; 30.98.

60. world may be destroyed thereby: No hyperbole for Dante, for whom a monarchy or empire was necessary for the well-being of the world (and ideally coextensive with it; see *Mon.* 1.11.20, 12.13, 13.8, etc.); for the strong language about the Donation, cf. *Purg.* 32.124–29 and note. That Constantine tears the garment of the empire echoes the rending of the seamless tunic of Christ (John 19.23; see *Mon.* 1.16.3), and contrasts with David, who unified his kingdom (see *Purg.* 10.55–69 and note). See also *Inf.* 19.115–17, 27.94 and notes.

61–66. And the one you see ... flashing shows it still: Next in the eye is William II Hauteville of Sicily; the sole near-contemporary of Dante's to be placed there; as a Christian king he is close to Constantine, and close to Rhipeus in being explicitly named.

The son of William I, "the Bad", William II, "the Good," was king of Sicily from 1166 to 1189; for the dynastic struggles that followed his death, see 3.109–30 and note. Lines 64–65 reflect, even as they modify, the motto displayed by the heaven of Jupiter (18.91–93).

63. That weeps for Charles and Frederick being still alive: Charles II of Anjou and Frederick II of Aragon, whose misdeeds are recorded at 19.127–32; their presence links the two lists (see *Purg.* 3.112–16, 7.112–17 and note).

67–72. Who would believe ... does not discern its ground: The fifth soul around the pupil, and the second to be named, is Rhipeus, killed when Troy was sacked by the Greeks. See *Aen.* 2.426–28, with Aeneas narrating:

Rhipeus also fell, who was among the Teucrians most just [*iustissimus*] and most observant [*servantissimus*] of fair dealing.
To the gods it appeared otherwise [*dis aliter visum*].

Dante's inclusion of Rhipeus depends also on the allusion to him at *Consol.* 4.pr.6.32–34 (Carsaniga 1984, Scott 1989), where Cato (see *Purgatorio* Additional Note 1) is also mentioned. Lady Philosophy speaks:

To take up a few cases of divine profundity that human reason can grasp in the case of someone you think to be most just and most observant of the right [*iustissimum et aequi servantissimum putas*] to omniscient Providence it appears otherwise [*diversum videtur*]. And a member of our household suggests that the conqueror's cause pleased the gods, that of the conquered, Cato [*et victricem quidem causam dis, victam vero Catoni placuisse*]. Therefore whatever you see happen here contrary to your expectation is indeed right order in fact, though in your opinion it is topsy-turvy confusion.

67. Who would believe down in the erring world: A similar sense of scandalous disclosure attends the words of Cunizza. See 9.32–36 and note, with reference to *Consol.* 4.pr.6.31: "From this arises that remarkable wonder of the ordering of fate, when by him who knows, such things are done as the ignorant are amazed at."

The Church held, but did not emphasize, that God wished the salvation of all men (Rom. 11.32, 1 Tim. 2.4). Admission to the community of the faithful was possible only through baptism (see *Inf.* 4.35–36, 39 and notes), but theologians conceded that a baptism of blood (sharing in Christ's Passion) or a baptism of "desire" could open Heaven (*ST* 3a q. 66 a. 11, 3a q. 68 a. 2). Grace could also both reveal the truth of faith to those living before Christ (like the Sibyls and Job) and grant to pagans, whether living before or after the Incarnation, implicit faith (possibly the case of Dante's Cato), for which no visible sacrament was required. See *ST* 2a 2ae q. 2 a. 7: "If however some were saved, to whom no revelation was made, they were not saved without faith in the Mediator; because even if they did not have explicit faith, they had implicit faith in divine Providence."

70–72. Now he knows much ... his sight does not discern its ground: Rhipeus's will is now conformed to God's decree, though he does not fully understand it (see notes to lines 118–29, 133–35).

73–78. Like a lark ... becomes what it is: At the center of the canto, the simile of the lark concludes the anaphoric series (*ora conosce*) and expresses the eagle's satisfaction at rendering the mysterious pleasure—meaning the will—of God (lines 76–77). Dante might have known the famous simile at the beginning of a poem by the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn, or an imitation of it by the Tuscan poet Bondie Dietaiuti. The Provençal original is as follows:

Can vei la lauzeta mover
de joi ses alas contra' l rai
que s'oblid e.s lassa chazer
per la doussor ch' al cor li vai ...
[When I see the lark move
its wings in joy toward the sun

so that it forgets itself, letting itself fall
because of the sweetness that goes to its heart]

Dante omits the lark's characteristic fall, replaced here by bird ceasing to sing because it is satisfied (the troubadour poem does not mention its song).

76–77. so the image ... imprint of the eternal pleasure: God's intention (his will, his desire, his pleasure) imprints itself upon the angelic intelligences of the spheres, his instruments, which bring that intention to pass with their circling around the earth (see 9.103–8 and note); similarly, the eagle, which symbolizes the planet's function of imparting to rulers the love of justice, transmits the joy of the creator's providential intention, reflected through it in the appearance of lark-like joy. The complex period prepares disclosure of the eagle's deepest mystery.

78. by whose desire each thing becomes what it is: God's providential plan for each creature brings it to its fullest realization; this is the language of Aristotelian teleology, which describes how substances have an innate tendency (*entelechy*) that drives them to fulfill their intrinsic essence over time.

79–148. And although up there ... flames with the words: The eagle explains to the baffled pilgrim how the salvation of Trajan and Rhipeus conforms to the principles outlined in the previous canto.

79–84. And although up there ... rejoicings flash forth: "Color beneath" refers to the lead or tin backing of the mirror, or to a tint interposed between the glass and the backing; see *Conv.* 3.9.10. The pilgrim's doubt is transparent in his expression, but his voicing of that doubt is hastier still, and bursts out of him, delighting the eagle, which is forthcoming with clarification.

82. but from my mouth What things are these: The pilgrim's surprise echoes that recorded in Acts 2.12, at Pentecost, when the Apostles speak to foreigners in Jerusalem in their own languages; the foreigners react with "What meaneth this?" [*quidnam vult hoc esse?*].

88–93. I see that you believe ... does not set it forth: The pilgrim thus far merely assents to the meaning of the eagle's declaration; he still must have the essence of the eagle's revelation drawn out of its depths for him. "Quiddity," a scholastic noun meaning "whatness," answers the question *quid est?* [what is it?]

94–99. Regnum celorum [the kingdom of Heaven] ... conquers with its good will: Pagans can be saved because God's strict decree can be overcome by love and hope, a defeat that God himself wills; the paradoxes suggest this is a restatement of the Atonement, the act of divine love that cancels Adam's original sin and makes salvation possible (see 6.82–90, 7.19–52 and notes). Compare *Mon.* 2.9.2, another echo of the motto inscribed in the sphere of Jupiter:

To ensure that justice is not abandoned we must have recourse to him who so loved justice that, dying, he met its demands with his own blood; whence the Psalm (10.8), "the Lord is just and loves just things" [*iustias dilexit*].

94. *Regnum celorum* suffers the violence: Dante adapts the account in Matt. 11.12 of the attacks on John the Baptist and the prophets of Christ, "The kingdom of Heaven has been enduring violent assault [*vim patitur*]."

97. not as one man defeats another: Rome mastered the world through military conquest, precisely "as one man defeats another," but for the sake of justice, not to gratify anger (see *Mon.* 2.3.16 and 2.9.13). The Roman pacification of the world through conquest required force [*violentia*], but was providential in preparing the world for the Incarnation of Christ (see *Conv.* 4.5.8–12; *Mon.* 2.10.1).

99. and conquered conquers with its good will: The repeated related terms (*annominatio*) from Italian *vincere* [to defeat or conquer] (cf. 14.125) emphasize the principle involved, and seem to echo *Consol.* 4.pr.6.33 (see note to lines 67–72). The initial pair of letters *vi* appears nine times in lines 94–100, suggesting the importance of the sixth heaven (*V*) and the historical role of force (Lat. *vis*, but in the instrumental ablative, "by force" = *vi*): another form of the eagle's production of signs relating to the empire.

The questions regarding divine predestination and historical violence raised by the salvation of Rhipheus can be posed of the providential design of history: Aeneas's labor in founding Rome (see *Inf.* 1.73–74 and note) was imposed by the power of those above [*vi superum*] after the Trojans under King Priam appeared "unworthy to the gods above" [*Priami ... gentem immeritam visum superis*]. See the passage quoted in 6.1–3, with note.

100–105. The first life ... had already suffered: The eagle affirms that Trajan and Ripehus died as Christians, the latter believing in Christ to come, the former in Christ already come. Use at lines 114 and 124 of the same word for "believed" [*credette*] underlines that their faith was explicit (see note to line 67). The Latinate participles (*passi, passuri*) contrast the two aspects of faith, making a phrase that is symmetrical like salvation history itself (see 19.103–5 and note).

103–4. They did not come forth from their bodies pagans, as you think: See notes to lines 67–72, 109–11, and 133–35.

106–17. For one of them ... to come to this joy: According to legends about Gregory the Great, the pope, moved by the example of Trajan's justice in a work of art (perhaps Trajan's column in Rome), prayed for the emperor's release from Limbo, at which Trajan's soul returned to his bones, allowing him to assent to belief in Christ and be saved. Aquinas suggests that God had foreseen, but delayed, Trajan's salvation (*ST Suppl.* q. 71 a. 5).

106–7. For one of them returned to his bones from Hell: Carroll cites 1 Peter 1.3: "[Christ] according to his great mercy hath regenerated us unto a lively hope, by the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And see *ST Suppl.* q. 71. a. 5: "[Trajan] was by the prayers of the blessed Gregory recalled to life, and in this way grace followed." See also *ST* 1a 2ae q. 114 a. 6.

109–11. of lively hope ... will could be moved: "lively hope" [*viva spene*] echoes lines 85 and 108 (See 25.31, 53, 87 and notes). Hope is "certain expectation of future grace" (see 25.67–68 and note); along with faith, it sustained the just in Limbo. Gregory's hope for Trajan's salvation defied the expectation (and indeed the fact) that he was damned; it was something that "appeared otherwise."

109–16. of lively hope ... of true love: Abetted by Gregory's hope, Trajan's endowment with both belief and charity parallels the account in *Mon.* 3.3.10 of how souls come to Christ (the same pattern applies to Rhipeus; see lines 127–29 and note): "those who ... believed in Christ the Son of God (whether Christ to come [*venturum*] or Christ present or Christ already crucified [*iam passum*]), and who in believing hoped, and hoping burned with love, and burning with love became co-heirs with him" (see *Rom.* 8.17); cf. lines 100–105 and 19.103–5 and note; see also *Prov.* 16.5, *Acts* 10.34–35.

116. of true love, that from the second death: A second bodily death is meant here; the expression is normally used for the death of the soul, damnation (cf. *Inf.* 1.117 and note).

118–41. The other because of grace ... was dispensed to me: Six references to sight in eight terzinas: that of the creature (line 119); of Rhipeus (line 123); of mortals (line 130); of the blessed (line 134); the pilgrim's previous sight of the virtues (line 128), and finally, the pilgrim's "short sight" now "cleared" (139–40). See note to line 123.

118–26. The other because of grace ... those perverted peoples for it: Rhipeus's salvation, based for Dante on Virgil's superlatives and on Boethius's allusions to divine decrees (see note to lines 67–72), results from a love of justice rewarded by the act of grace. The liturgy of the common of martyrs praises them for having loved justice [*dilexisti iustitiam*].

118–20. The other because of grace ... to its first welling: See 19.62 and note; and compare 30.61–69, 88 and notes.

118. Flows from so deep a fountain: For the fountain of God's judgment, cf. 4.116, 24.9, 31.93, and see *Consol.* 4.pr.6.32, quoted in the note to lines 67–72 above.

121–26. devoted all his love ... those perverse peoples for it: Line 121 means Rhipeus heeded the first part of the directive radiating from this sphere (*diligite iustitiam*), his reproof of pagans (line 126) fulfilled the second part (*qui iudicatis terram*; see 18.113–15). Because Rhipeus fell for Troy, origin of the sacred seed of the Romans, his death was like that of other Roman martyrs of empire (see *Mon.* 2.5.8–17) and exemplifies the virtue of dying for one's country (*Mon.* 2.7.2–3; and cf. 15.145–48). Dante's canzone "Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venuto," written about 1305, testifies to the poet's own love of justice; see line 80: "To fall

with the good still merits praise" (see Martinez 2000 and note to lines 127–29).

123. God opened his eyes to our future redemption: Faith is like the acuity of the eagle's eye, allowing perception of a hidden truth (see lines 119–20, 130–33); in the Gospels, Christ opens the eyes of the blind (Matt. 8.3, John 9.6–7; see *Inf.* 33.148–50 and note).

127–29. Those three ladies ... before baptizing began: The three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, seen before the chariot of the Church at *Purg.* 29.121–29, and as the three stars that shine at night in Purgatory (*Purg.* 8.89–93 and notes). Their presence means Rhipeus was granted the grace of faith in Christ well before the Christian era (cf. *ST* 2a 2ae q. 2 a. 7). Faith was the ground for hope, and excited love (see lines 109–15 and note).

Though Boethius only alludes to Rhipeus, his prominence in Dante's poem probably grows out of the central circumstance of Boethius's book—the unjust imprisonment (ending in death) of the author himself. Dante, we know, identified profoundly with Boethius (see *Inf.* 13.97–100 and note; *Conv.* 1.2.13, 2.12.2), whose experience informs Cacciaguida's destiny, as well as the account he gives of the pilgrim's exile, already decreed (see 15.146–48, 17.52–54 and notes).

130–38. O predestination ... we wish too: Cf. Rom. 11.33: "O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways!" Cf. *Purg.* 3.32–44 and note.

130–33. O predestination ... the first cause *tota* [whole]: "When from the high watch-tower of his providence he looks out [*ex alta providentiae specula respexit*], he sees and takes note of what is suited to each, and arranges what he knows to be fitting" (*Consol.* 4.6.30). The image of the watchtower makes vivid the emphasis on sight in lines 119–20, 123, 132, and 135.

133–35. And you mortals ... know all the elect: Echoing the caution of 13.130–42 (see note and cf. 19.49–50), these lines transform Boethius's "to omniscient Providence it appeared otherwise" (see note to lines 67–72). The correction of easy assumptions about whether a soul is saved or damned is a theme of this canto, and several passages variously adapt this same Boethian formulation sharply distinguishing the view of mortals from that of Providence: see lines 70–72, 99, 103, and 109–11 and notes.

136–38. and such lack delights us ... we wish too: Although the souls in the eye are all exemplars of just dealing, each is also the beneficiary of a surprising act of grace: the prayers of sinners David and Hezekiah are heard; Trajan and Rhipeus are saved against expectation, one through human prayer, the other by a gift of Providence; Constantine is saved regardless of the destruction he wrought. William II seems to have required no extraordinary divine act, which points perhaps to the fact that all salvation is miraculous, the result of the sacrifice of Christ. Four of the six were first in Limbo before reaching Heaven.

139–41. Thus by that divine image ... was dispensed to me: That the solution to a theological doubt is medicinal evokes the language of Lady Philosophy at *Consol.* 4.6.29: "Who

else preserves the good and casts out the bad but the ruler and physician of men's minds, God?
[rector ac medicator mentium deus]."

142–48. And as a good lute-player ... flames with the words: The canto concludes with another synesthetic simile—the *visible* synchrony in the motion of the two lights, comparable to blinking eyes, is initially compared to the *audible* accord of an accompanying lute and a soloist's voice. The concord of wills in the eagle is itself a heavenly "music." Music is mentioned at the beginning (lines 1–18), middle (73–78), and end of the canto (142–48). See Additional Note 8.

147. as the blinking of two eyes agrees: Trajan and Rhipeus, the most surprising instances of grace, coruscate in unison to punctuate the eagle's speech.



CANTO 21

*Saturn: silence—the Ladder—contemplatives—saint Peter Damiani—predestination
inscrutable—denunciation of the popes*

- 1 Already my eyes were fixed again on the face
 of my lady, and my spirit, too, removed from
 every other object.
- 4 But she was not smiling, and: "If I were to
 smile," she began, "you would become like
 Semele when she turned to ashes,
- 7 for my beauty, which burns brighter, as you
 have seen, the higher we ascend the stairway of
 the eternal palace,
- 10 is so radiant, if not tempered, that your
 mortal power to its lightning would be a branch
 shattered by a thunderbolt.
- 13 We have risen to the seventh splendor, which
 now, under the breast of the burning Lion,
 radiates downward mixed with its power.
- 16 Probe with your mind, following your eyes,
 and of them make mirrors for the figure that will
 appear to you in this mirror."
- 19 Whoever knew what food my eyes found in
 her blessed face when I turned away to another

- concern,
- 22 would see how pleasing it was for me to obey
 my heavenly guide, balancing one side against
 the other.
- 25 Within the crystal that bears the name, as it
 circles the world, of that dear ruler under whom
 every malice lay dead,
- 28 I saw a ladder, the color of gold struck by the
 sun, erected upward so far that my light could
 not follow it.
- 31 And I saw coming down by its degrees so many
 splendors that I thought every light that shows in the
 heavens must be poured out from there.
- 34 As in their natural wont the magpies, when
 day begins, take wing together to warm their
 chilled feathers,
- 37 then some go away without returning, others
 return whence they moved, still others stay to
 wheel above the spot:
- 40 such seemed to be the manner there, in the
 flashings that came down together, as soon as
 they touched this or that degree.
- 43 And the one that stopped closest to us
 became so bright that I said, in thought: "I see
 clearly the love you signal to me,
- 46 but she from whom I await my *how* and *when*
 for speaking and being silent, is waiting, and I,
 despite my desire, do well not to ask."
- 49 Therefore she, who saw my silence in the
 sight of him who sees all things, told me: "Fulfill

your warm desire."

52 And I began: "My merit does not make me
worthy of your reply, but for her sake who
permits my asking,

55 O blessed life hidden within your gladness,
make known to me the cause why you have
come so near,

58 and say why in this wheel the sweet
symphony of Paradise is silent, which down
through the others sounds so devoutly."

61 "Your hearing is mortal, like your sight," it
replied to me, "therefore here we are not
singing, for the reason Beatrice has not smiled.

64 Down along the degrees of the holy stairway I
have come so far solely to welcome you with
speech and with the light that mantles me,

67 nor did greater love make me hasten more,
for more and equal love burns there above me,
as the bright flames make manifest to you.

70 But the deep love that makes us ready
handmaids of the Counsel that governs the world,
decrees lots here as you observe."

73 "I see clearly," said I, "holy lantern, how
untrammeled love suffices in this court to make
you follow eternal Providence,

76 but this is what I find hard to discern: why you
alone were predestined to this office among
those who share your lot."

79 Nor had I spoken the last word before the
light made of its midst a center, whirling like a

- swift millwheel;
- 82 then the love within it replied: "A ray of God's
light focuses on me, penetrating this in which I
enwomb myself,
- 85 and its power, joined with my own sight, lifts
me so much above myself that I see the highest
Essence from which it is milked.
- 88 Thence comes the gladness with which I am
aflame, for I make the brightness of my flame
equal to the clarity of my sight.
- 91 But that soul who is brightest in Heaven, the
seraph that most fixes its eye in God, could not
satisfy your wish,
- 94 because what you ask is so in the beyond of
the abyss of God's decree, that it is severed
from every created sight.
- 97 And when you return to the mortal world,
carry this back, that it may no longer presume to
move its feet toward so great a mark.
- 100 The mind that is bright here is smoky on earth,
consider then whether down there it can do what it
cannot do here though Heaven lift it up."
- 103 These words so prescribed a limit that I
abandoned my question and drew back to ask
humbly who he was.
- 106 "Between the two shores of Italy rise rocks,
not far distant from your fatherland, so high that
thunder sounds much lower,
- 109 and they make a hump called Catria, beneath
which there is a hermitage once devoted only to

- God's worship."
- 112 So he began his third speech to me, and
then, continuing, he said: "There I became so
fixed in the service of God
- 115 that with but the juice of olives I easily
survived heats and frosts, content in my
contemplative thoughts.
- 118 That cloister used to produce fertile harvests
for these heavens, but now it has become
so empty that soon it must be revealed.
- 121 In that place I was Peter Damiani, and I was
Peter the Sinner in the house of our Lady on the
Adriatic shore.
- 124 Little mortal life remained for me when I was
required and forced to that hat which is still
transferred from bad vessels to worse.
- 127 Simon came, and the great Vessel of the
Holy Spirit came, thin and barefoot, taking their
food in any hostel.
- 130 Now the modern shepherds need someone on each
side to hold them up and lead them, they are so fat, and
someone to lift them up behind.
- 133 They cover their palfreys with their mantles,
so that two beasts go beneath one skin: Oh
Patience that endures so much!"
- 136 At this word I saw numerous bright flames come
down from stair to stair and whirl, and every whirling
made them lovelier.
- 139 They gathered round this one and stopped,
and then uttered so loud a cry that nothing

could resemble it down here,
142 nor did I understand it, its thunder so overcame me.



CANTO 21

Già eran li occhi miei rifissi al volto
de la mia donna e l'animo con essi,
e da ogne altro intento s'era tolto.

1

E quella non ridea, ma: "S' io ridessi,"
mi cominciò, "tu ti faresti quale
fu Semelè quando di cener fessi,
ché la bellezza mia, che per le scale
de l'eterno palazzo più s'accende,
com' hai veduto, quanto più si sale,
se non si temperasse, tanto splende
che 'l tuo mortal podere al suo fulgore
sarebbe fronda che trono scoscende.

4

7

Noi sem levati al settimo splendore,
che sotto 'l petto del Leone ardente
raggia mo misto giù del suo valore.

10

13

Ficca di retro a li occhi tuoi la mente,
e fa di quelli specchi a la figura
che 'n questo specchio ti sarà parvente."

16

Qual savesse qual era la pastura
del viso mio ne l'aspetto beato
quand' io mi trasmutai ad altra cura
conoscerebbe quanto m'era a grato
ubidire a la mia celeste scorta,
contrapesando l'un con l'altro lato.

19

22

Dentro al cristallo che 'l vocabol porta,
cerchiando il mondo, del suo caro duce
sotto cui giacque ogne malizia morta,

25

di color d'oro in che raggio traluce
vid' io uno scaleo eretto in suso
tanto che nol seguiva la mia luce.

28

Vidi anche per li gradi scender giuso
tanti splendor ch' io pensai ch' ogne lume
che par nel ciel quindi fosse diffuso.

31

E come, per lo natural costume,
le pole insieme al cominciar del giorno
si movono a scaldar le fredde piume,

34

poi altre vanno via senza ritorno,
altre rivolgon sé onde son mosse,
e altre roteando fan soggiorno:

37

tal modo parve me che quivi fosse
in quello sfavillar che 'nsieme venne,
sì come in certo grado si percosse.

40

E quel che presso più ci si ritenne
si fé sì chiaro ch' io dicea, pensando:
"Io veggio ben l'amor che tu m'accenne,
ma quella ond' io aspetto il *come* e 'l *quando*
del dire e del tacer si sta, ond' io,
contra 'l disio, fo ben ch' io non dimando."

43

46

Per ch' ella, che vedëa il tacer mio
nel veder di colui che tutto vede,
mi disse: "Solve il tuo caldo disio."

49

E io incominciai: "La mia mercede
non mi fa degno de la tua risposta,
ma per colei che 'l chieder mi concede,
vita beata che ti stai nascosta
dentro a la tua letizia, fammi nota
la cagion che sì presso mi t'hai posta,

52

55

e dì perché si tace in questa rota
la dolce sinfonia di Paradiso
che giù per l'altre suona sì divota."

58

"Tu hai l'udir mortal sì come il viso,"
rispuose a me, "onde qui non si canta
per quel che Beatrice non ha riso.

61

Giù per li gradi de la scala santa
discesi tanto sol per farti festa
col dire e con la luce che mi ammanta,
né più amor mi fece esser più presta,
ché più e tanto amor quinci sù ferse,
sì come il fiammeggiar ti manifesta.

64

Ma l'alta carità, che ci fa serve
pronte al Consiglio che 'l mondo governa,
sorteggia qui sì come tu osserve."

67

"Io veggio ben," diss' io, "sacra lucerna,
come libero amore in questa corte
basta a seguir la Provedenza eterna,
ma questo è quel ch' a cerner mi par forte:
perché predestinata fosti sola
a questo officio tra le tue consorte?"

73

Né venni prima a l'ultima parola
che del suo mezzo fece il lume centro,
girando sé come veloce mola;
poi rispuose l'amor che v'era dentro:
"Luce divina sopra me s'appunta,
penetrando per questa in ch' io m'inventro,
la cui virtù, col mio veder congiunta,
mi leva sopra me tanto ch' i' veggio
la somma Essenza de la quale è munta.

76

79

82

85

Quinci vien l'allegrezza ond' io fiammeggio,
perch' a la vista mia, quant' ella è chiara,
la chiarità de la fiamma pareggio.

88

Ma quell'alma nel Ciel che più si schiara,
quel serafin che 'n Dio più ha l'occhio fisso,
a la dimanda tua non satisfara,
però che sì s'innoltra ne l'abisso
de l'eterno statuto quel che chiedi
che da ogne creata vista è scissa.

91

E al mondo mortal quando tu riedi,
questo rapporta, sì che non presumma
a tanto segno più mover li piedi.

97

La mente che qui luce in terra fumma,
onde riguarda come può là giùe
quel che non pote perché 'l Ciel l'assumma."

100

Sì mi prescrisser le parole sue
ch' io lasciai la quistione e mi ritrassi
a dimandarla umilmente chi fue.

103

"Tra ' due liti d'Italia surgon sassi,
e non molto distanti a la tua patria,
tanto che ' troni assai suonan più bassi,
e fanno un gibbo che si chiama Catria,
di sotto al quale è consecrato un ermo
che suole esser disposto a sola latria."

106

Così ricominciommi il terzo sermo,
e poi continüando disse: "Quivi
al servizio di Dio mi fe' sì fermo
che pur con cibi di liquor d'ulivi
lievemente passava caldi e geli,
contento ne' pensieri contemplativi.

109

112

115

Render solea quel chiostro a questi cieli
fertilemente, e ora è fatto vano,
sì che tosto convien che si riveli.

118

In quel loco fu' io Pietro Damiano,
e Pietro Peccator fu' ne la casa
di nostra Donna in sul lito adriano.

121

Poco vita mortal m'era rimasa
quando fui chiesto e tratto a quel cappello
che pur di male in peggio si travasa.

124

Venne Cefàs e venne il gran vasello
de lo Spirito Santo magri e scalzi,
prendendo il cibo da qualunque ostello.

127

Or voglion quinci e quindi chi ' rincalzi
li moderni pastori e chi li meni,
tanto son gravi, e chi di retro li alzi.

130

Cuopron d'i manti loro i palafreni,
sì che due bestie van sott' una pelle.
Oh pazienza che tanto sostieni!"

133

A questa voce vid' io più fiammelle
di grado in grado scendere e girarsi,
e ogne giro le facea più belle.

136

Dintorno a questa vennero e fermarsi,
e fero un grido di sì alto suono
che non potrebbe qui assomigliarsi,
né io lo 'ntesi, sì mi vinse il tuono.

139

142

NOTES

1–18. Already my eyes ... in this mirror: As in 18.54–69, the pilgrim turns to Beatrice, whose changed appearance is the sign of having risen to the next planet (as she announces in lines 13–15), in this case to the last, Saturn, with the largest sphere and the slowest motion of all. Dante had been preoccupied with the place of Saturn in his horoscope since the late 1290s, when the “Rime petrose,” his first experiments in microcosmic poetic structures, explored its power, both negative and positive (see Additional Note 12, Durling/Martinez 1990).

4–12. If I were to smile ... shattered by a thunderbolt: Dante is drawing here on the myth of Semele, a daughter of Cadmus, one of Jupiter’s lovers, who is tricked by the jealous Juno into demanding to see him in his actual godlike form, complete with thunderbolts. She is consumed instantly, but Jupiter saves the child in her womb, Bacchus, by carrying him to term in his thigh (*Met.* 3.253–315). The reference to the lightning and thunderbolt in lines 11–12 is part of the same complex of imagery: the pilgrim is not yet strong enough to be able to withstand the full assimilation to divinity of the souls here; Beatrice’s very smile would destroy him, as would the singing of the souls (cf. lines 58–63).

13–18. We have risen ... in this mirror: The formal announcement of their arrival in Saturn, couched in terms of its astrological position; for the astrological lore about Saturn, which is particularly rich, see Klibansky/Panofsky/Saxl 1979.

14–15. which now, under ... mixed with its power: Dante’s phrase “breast of the burning Lion” is a clear reference to α Leonis¹ (“Regulus” [little king]), the brightest star in the impressive constellation Leo, known as the “heart of the Lion” [*cor leonis*]. As the “house of the sun,” Leo, and especially Regulus, radiates heat that now mitigates the often dangerous cold radiated by Saturn. Leo was important also in Canto 16: Cacciaguida dates his birth by the number of synodic cycles Mars had completed by passing under Leo (550) since the Annunciation (16.34–39; see notes there and [fig. 11](#), p. 371).

16–18. Probe with your mind ... in this mirror: As in previous arrivals, Beatrice instructs the pilgrim to look away from her to the sight now presented to him, making his eyes “mirrors” (perceivers; cf. 18.2) of the “figure” that will appear (cf. “figure” in 18.78 and 86: we know that some wondrous new show will now begin).

19–24. Whoever knew ... against the other: The pilgrim and thus the poem now formally turn to the contents of Saturn. As any contemporary reader of Dante’s would know, contemplatives are prominent among the children of Saturn, and in the Middle Ages the contemplative life was typically pursued in monasteries. The silence and solemnity, and the ideal purity of the crystal (see the note on line 25), already prepare us.

25–42. Within the crystal ... this or that degree: The initial view of the planet Saturn, whose ladder is based on the famous episode of Jacob's dream, which takes place when he is on his way to seek a wife from among the daughters of Laban; he has just impersonated his brother Esau and received his father's blessing as firstborn (the right that Esau had sold to him):

[Jacob] went on to Haran. And when he was come to a certain place, and would rest in it after sunset, he took of the stones that lay there, and putting one under his head, slept in the same place. And he saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven: the angels also of God ascending and descending by it; And the Lord leaning upon the ladder, saying to him: I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou sleepest, I will give to thee and to thy seed ... And when Jacob awaked out of sleep, he said: Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And trembling he said: How terrible is this place! this is no other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven (Gen. 28.10–17).

In his Rule, Saint Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–ca. 547), founder of the great monastery of Monte Cassino and of Western cenobitic monasticism in general (we will meet him in Canto 22), made Jacob's ladder the fundamental metaphor for monastic life; based solidly on earth in its practicality, his ideal of the practice of humility and devotion formed a ladder of twelve steps (including fear of God, humility, silence, and obedience) that led upward to God. This formulation, like the Rule itself, dominated monastic conceptions and life well into the twelfth century, when saint Bernard of Clairvaux became the leading influence in the Cistercian movement that rivaled the Benedictines. His *Steps of Pride and Humility* became enormously influential; it was based on the twelve steps of saint Benedict's metaphor, defining the upward steps of humility with greater emphasis on the goal of mystical experience in this life, and adding shrewd psychological analyses of the corresponding downward steps of pride (see 31.94–102, with notes).

25–27. Within the crystal ... malice lay dead: Note again the circumlocution relative to the name of the planet (cf. 8.1–12, with notes). Saturn would have been a particularly just and successful king in Italy under whom violence was unknown (a euhemeristic explanation of the myth of the Golden Age and Saturn's stay in Italy; cf. *Purg.* 28.139–47, where they are treated as an inspired dream of Eden).

25. Within the crystal: The planet is compared to a crystal, probably because of the traditional coldness of Saturn, associated with monastic purity: crystals were thought to be ice that had been frozen a long time (on their lore, which fascinated Dante, see Durling/Martinez 1990).

28–33. I saw a ladder ... poured out from there: The sober account of Genesis 28 does not mention any color for the ladder, nor indicate the number of angels in any way (interestingly, both the Vulgate and the Hebrew text are ambiguous: in both, verse 12 can have either definite or indefinite meaning: "the angels of God" or "angels of God" (the exegetical

tradition leaned toward the former). Note that Dante omits the mention of the earth being the base of the ladder (but the systematic monastic references assume the fact, and cf. 22.68–74); also, he quantifies the length of the ladder as “so far that my light could not follow,” while Genesis has simply, “touching heaven.” Adapting the symbol to his cosmological conceptions (see Heck 1999), Dante is reserving Heaven and God for later (for the ladder as a basic symbol of the entire *Comedy*, see our introduction in *Inferno*, pp. 18–20).

28. the color of gold struck by the sun: Iconographically, gold represents eternity and Heaven (as in the gold backgrounds of icons, manuscript illuminations, and early paintings) and thus represents the origin and status of the ladder. (For gold struck by the sun, cf. 17.123.)

30. my light: A reference to the Platonic theory that the eye emits light (see the note on *Inf.* 4.11–12), vision occurring when it meets external light.

31–42. And I saw coming down ... this or that degree: The multitude descending the ladder are not or not only angels, as we soon find out, and the idea of re-ascent is at this first stage of description limited to its presence in the simile of the magpies (lines 34–39).

32–33. so many splendors ... poured out from there: The “splendors” (whether souls, angels, or both) seem to be as many as the stars in the sky (the stars of course lie behind the ancient notion of the heavenly host); but lines 64–72 seem to exclude the presence of angels.

34–39. As in their natural ... above the spot: This lively simile recalls the bird simile in 18.73–81, which also invokes the changing, multiple patterns of flight, and now the morning theme has become explicit. Magpies are notoriously noisy, a connotation that helps emphasize the silence of the planet.

40–42. such seemed to be ... this or that degree: The diversity of the movements of the birds (flying away, returning to origin, circling in place) is attributed, without further specification, to the souls/angels. The “flashings that came down together” refers to the entire multitude, but singly they seem assigned (at least for the moment) to “this or that degree,” in which they perhaps circle.

43–142. And the one that ... so overcame me: The rest of the canto is devoted to the encounter with a soul who is not named until line 121, a fact that increases the sense of mystery of the silent planet.

43–51. And the one that ... your warm desire: The soul who has come down the ladder closest to them shines so brightly with love that the pilgrim wishes to address it but hesitates, waiting for Beatrice’s signal.

44–51. I said, in thought ... your warm desire: The pilgrim knows that the blessed can read his thoughts in God, and addresses this soul silently, explaining his waiting for Beatrice’s

permission, which is spoken aloud, since he cannot read minds as the blessed can.

52–60. And I began ... sounds so devoutly: The pilgrim now speaks, asking two questions: why this soul has approached them, and why in this planet there is no devout singing, as in the others.

61–63. Your hearing is mortal ... has not smiled: The second question is answered first: Beatrice has explained her not smiling in lines 4–12.

64–72. Down along the degrees ... as you observe: The soul's only reason for approaching them, it says, was its desire to express gladness and welcome to the pilgrim (the pronoun is singular) with speech and love; it does not feel greater love toward him than others above him on the ladder, where the pilgrim can see both equal and greater brightness. It is the love of God and of his Providence ("the Counsel that governs" and "decrees lots" [assigns roles] to individual souls) that makes them gladly obey, as their behavior indicates.

73–78. I see clearly ... who share your lot: The pilgrim sees well the nature of their love but is puzzled: why was this soul in particular chosen to perform the task rather than some other among them? The pilgrim himself introduces the term *predestined*, making explicit the implication of the soul's reply (God's Providence chose him *ab aeterno* for the task), and predestination is indeed the theme all these questions have been leading up to. The question is particularly appropriate to Saturn, which, as the last planet, whose heaven encloses all the others and has the largest purview, is the ruler of boundaries, both beginnings and endings, sowings and reappings. The iconography of Saturn shows him holding a sickle.

79–102. Nor had I spoken ... lift it up: The soul's reply begins with his rapturous whirling, expressing the added joy of testifying to his vision of God. Then his answer has three parts: lines 83–90, on the particular mode of knowledge that led him to approach the pilgrim; lines 91–96, on the inaccessibility to human and angelic minds, of the reasons for God's predestination of individuals; and lines 97–102, a command that the poet speak out, when he has returned to earth, against the presumption that earthly minds can know God's reasons.

83–90. A ray of God's ... clarity of my sight: The first part of the soul's reply: his knowledge of being chosen for the task comes from special illumination that lifts his intellect so high that it sees into God as the angels do, reading in that "highest Essence" his providential task.

88–90. Thence comes the gladness ... clarity of my sight: As in 14.37–42, Dante has the soul insist on the primacy of intellect: the "flame" of his rejoicing reflects the clarity of his intellectual vision.

91–96. But that soul ... every created sight: The second part of the reply. Note the parallel of the phrasing with Beatrice's lines on the appearance of souls in the planets, 4.28–42. The "soul that is brightest in Heaven" is of course the Virgin Mary (cf. 4.30: "not Mary"), and

the Seraph that sees mostly deeply into God (cf. 4.28: "the Seraph that most engods itself") is the highest of the highest order of angels: no created mind can understand God's will or predestination.

94–95. because what you ask ... God's decree: What has to be lengthened out in translation to "is so in the beyond of the abyss" is compressed by Dante in another striking coinage: "s'innoltra ne l'abisso" (*innoltrarsi*, to go or be *oltre* [beyond, from Lat. *ultra*]).

97–102. And when you return ... lift it up: The third part of the reply. The injunction to speak out (lines 97–99), and the difference between earthly and heavenly understanding.

97–99. And when you return ... so great a mark: "To move its [the world's] feet" refers to moving intellectually toward an idea or conclusion (on the feet of the soul, cf. *Inf.* 1.30, with note). The injunction against presumptuous judging is parallel to 13.112–42 (cf. the metaphors of walking, 13.112–14 and 118–19; of sailing to sea and fishing for the truth, 13.121–23); the mystery of predestination is even higher and more abstract than predicting who is saved or lost (the subject of Canto 13).

100–102. The mind that is bright ... lift it up: In comparison with the clarity of mind of the soul in Heaven, its earthly understanding was like smoke; how can it hope to understand on earth what it cannot understand in Heaven when lifted up?

L'assumma is a subjunctive, depending on *perché* [though], of the verb *assumere* [to lift up, as in the Assumption of the Virgin]; the doubled *m* was not uncommon.

103–5. These words ... who he was: The soul has prescribed a limit, a boundary, to human speculation about predestination (appropriately enough; cf. the note to lines 73–78), and the pilgrim abandons his first question and asks the soul's identity.

106–25. Between the two shores ... endures so much: The soul begins by identifying his principal dwelling and his ascetic life, lamenting the present decadence; he names himself and briefly alludes to his tenure as cardinal. The rest of his speech is a denunciation of the luxury and corruption of the clergy, contrasting it with the poverty of the apostles.

106–11. Between the two ... to God's worship: The Camaldulensian Eremo [hermitage] of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana, at an elevation of 680 m. on the northeastern slope of Mount Catria, about twenty miles northeast of Gubbio, on the border between the Marche and Umbria (see map on p. 187). Like the hermitage of Camaldoli, it was one of the many foundations of saint Romualdo (see 22.49, with note), a severely ascetic combination of eremitic life (some of the monks lived in individual small buildings) and cenobitic (others lived in common under the Benedictine Rule); both groups obeyed the same prior.

113–26. There I became so fixed ... bad vessels to worse: A brief account of the soul's career: as an ascetic hermit in Fonte Avellana (in his time a place rich in virtues but now scandalously corrupt), and then a cardinal.

118–20. That cloister used ... it must be revealed: Dante must be referring to some well-known recent scandal, but no information about it has come down to us. Note the harvest metaphor (implicit in "render ... fertilemente" [lit., give fertile return]), which will become more frequent from now on.

121–26. In that place ... bad vessels to worse: Finally the soul names himself: he is the sainted Peter Damiani, a noted ascetic indeed. Born in Ravenna in 1007, he became a monk in 1035, and in 1038 settled definitely in the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, of which he was elected prior in 1043 (he succeeded in reforming the monastery, reducing somewhat the extreme rigor of the order).

122–23. and I was Peter the Sinner ... Adriatic shore: There has been much controversy over these lines, which have been taken to mean that the saint changed his name. The consensus today is that Dante seems to have conflated him with Pietro degli Onesti, a Benedictine monk who founded a monastery in Ravenna and referred to himself as "Peter the Sinner" (Frugoni 1973). Peter Damiani took the name of his older brother Damiano (the *-i* is a Lat. genitive of possession) to express his gratitude for the financing of his years of study.

124–26. Little mortal life ... bad vessels to worse: Cardinals wore a distinctive red hat, the badge of their office, also featured on their arms and seals. Peter Damiani was a leader in the important wave of reform of monasteries in this period and in 1057 was made a cardinal (but Dante is mistaken that this took place at the end of his life, for he lived until 1072, the last ten years back at Fonte Avellana). He was a voluminous writer (his writings include a life of saint Romuald), a vivacious and severe satirist of both the monastic and the secular clergy.

125–26. I was required and forced ... bad vessels to worse: It is true that he was reluctant to accept appointment as a cardinal and pleaded for years to be allowed to return to Fonte Avellana. The pope and cardinals are now the ones who "sell Christ daily" (cf. 17.49–51). There will be further denunciations in Canto 22 and later.

127–35. Simon came ... endures so much: The contrast between the poverty of the Apostles and the excesses of the corrupt modern clergy. Simon is saint Peter, the "great Vessel" is saint Paul (the "chosen vessel," Acts 5.19; Dante never mentions the fact that saint Paul always earned his own living, as a tent maker).

130–34. Now the modern ... beneath one skin: Lines 130–32 mock the way the obese modern prelates mount and ride on horseback—held up and kept from falling by a servant on each side, and lifted from behind into the saddle. Lines 133–34 comment on the luxuriously ample (silk or wool) mantles that cover both rider (and a fat one, too) and palfrey, climaxing with the scornful "two beasts go beneath one skin," the prelate's mantle being no better (indeed, considerably less useful) than the palfrey's skin.

135. Oh Patience that endures so much: An angry expression of the idea that God's patience certainly exceeds human capacity.

136–42. At this word ... so overcame me: At Peter Damiani's angry exclamation, a large number of the souls stationed on the upper degrees of the ladder come down, whirling on their way and enhancing their beauty, until they surround him and utter a cry echoing his anger, so loud that the pilgrim cannot understand it.



CANTO 22

Saturn, continued: saint Benedict of Nursia—corruption of the monastic orders—ascent to the fixed stars—invocation of the stars of Gemini—backward view

- 1 Stunned and bewildered, I turned to my guide
 like a little child that runs always where he most
 has confidence,
- 4 and she, like a mother who quickly helps her
 pallid, breathless son with the voice that has the
 power to calm him,
- 7 said to me: "Do you not know you are in
 Heaven? do you not know that Heaven is all holy,
 and that what is done here comes from good zeal?
- 10 How our singing would have transmuted you,
 or my smiling, you can think now, since the
 shout has moved you so,
- 13 in which, if you had understood its prayers,
 you would already know the vengeance that you
 will see before you die.
- 16 The sword of Heaven never cuts in haste nor
 late, except as seems to one who awaits it with
 either desire or fear.
- 19 But turn back now toward the others, for
 many illustrious spirits will you see, if, as I say,

you redirect your gaze."

- 22 As she pleased, I turned my eyes, and I saw
a hundred little spheres, together making each
other more beautiful with mutual rays.
- 25 I was like one who presses down within
himself the point of his desire and does not
venture to ask, he so fears excess,
- 28 and the greatest and most radiant of those
pearls came forward, to satisfy my desire by
giving itself.
- 31 Then within it I heard: "If you saw as I do the
love that burns among us, your concepts would
be expressed.
- 34 But so that you may not delay, by waiting,
your high goal, I will answer even the thought
that you keep to yourself.
- 37 The mountain that bears Cassino on its side was
once frequented, at the summit, by folk deceived
and ill disposed,
- 40 and I am he who first carried there the name
of him who brought to earth the truth that so
exalts us;
- 43 and so much grace shone down upon me
that I drew the surrounding towns away from the
wicked cult that had seduced the world.
- 46 These other fires were all contemplative men,
on fire with the zeal that gives birth to holy
flowers and fruit.
- 49 Here is Macarius, here is Romuald, here are
my brothers who fixed their feet within the

cloisters and kept their hearts firm."

- 52 And I to him: "The affection you show in
 speaking with me and the good appearance that
 I see and note in all your fires
- 55 have made my confidence blossom, as the
 sun does a rose when it becomes as open on
 its stem as it has power to do.
- 58 Therefore I beg you, father, to assure me
 whether I may receive so much grace as to see
 your countenance openly."
- 61 And he: "Brother, your high desire will be
 fulfilled up above in the last sphere, where all
 others are fulfilled, and mine as well.
- 64 There every desiring is perfect, ripe, and
 whole; there alone is every part where it has
 always been,
- 67 for it is not in space and turns on no pole, and
 our ladder is the bridge from here to there, and
 therefore flies so far beyond your sight.
- 70 the patriarch Jacob saw it extend its upper
 part all the way up there, when it appeared to
 him so laden with angels.
- 73 But now no one lifts his feet from earth to
 climb it, and my Rule has become a waste of
 paper.
- 76 The walls that used to be abbeys have
 become caverns, and the monks' cowls are
 sacks full of evil flour.
- 79 But heavy usury has never been exacted so
 contrary to God's will, as that fruit that makes

- the monks' hearts so mad,
- 82 for whatever the Church has in her keeping
belongs to the people that beg in God's name,
not to relatives or something uglier.
- 85 The flesh of mortals is so weak that a good
beginning does not last down there from the
birth of the oak to its bearing of acorns.
- 88 Peter began without gold and without silver,
I with prayer and fasting, and Francis his convent
in humility,
- 91 and if you look at each one's beginning and
then see where it has run awry, you will see
white has turned black.
- 94 Truly Jordan flowing backward and the sea
drawing back at God's will were more
marvelous to see than the remedy will be for this."
- 97 So he said, and then returned to his
colleagues, and that college gathered itself
together and like a whirlwind swept upward.
- 100 My sweet lady impelled me after them up that
ladder with a mere sign, her power so overcame
my nature,
- 103 nor down here, where we mount and
descend naturally, has there ever been so rapid
a motion as could equal my wing.
- 106 So may I return, reader, to that devout
triumph on whose account I ever weep for my
sins and beat my breast:
- 109 you would not any sooner have withdrawn
your finger from the fire and put it in, than I saw

- the sign that follows the Bull and was within it.
- 112 O glorious stars, O light pregnant with great
power, from which I acknowledge that all my
talent comes, whatever it may be,
- 115 with you was being born and with you was
setting he that is father of every mortal life,
when I first felt the Tuscan air,
- 118 and then, when grace was extended to me to
enter the high wheel that turns you, your region
was allotted me.
- 121 To you now my soul devoutly sighs, to
acquire power for the difficult pass that draws
me to itself.
- 124 "You are so close to the final salvation,"
began Beatrice, "that you must have your eyes
clear and sharp,
- 127 and therefore, before you enter it any further,
look back down, and see how much world I
have already placed beneath your feet,
- 130 so that your heart may present itself as
joyfully as it can to the glad triumphant throng
approaching through this rounded aether."
- 133 With my sight I returned through every one of
the seven spheres, and I saw this globe to be
such that I smiled at its base appearance,
- 136 and that counsel I approve as best which
prizes it least, and he who thinks of other things
can be called truly upright.
- 139 I saw the daughter of Latona aflame without
the shadow that caused me formerly to think of

her as rare and dense.

142 The sight of your son, Hyperion, I there
 sustained, and I saw how Maia and Dione move
 close about him.

145 From there I saw Jove's tempering between
 his father and his son, and from there was clear
 to me the varying they do of their *where*.

148 And all the seven showed me how large they
 are and how swift and how distant in dwelling.

151 The little threshing floor that makes us so
 ferocious, as I was turning with the eternal Twins,
 appeared to me, all of it from the mountains to
 the river mouths.

154 Then I turned my eyes back to her lovely eyes.



CANTO 22

Oppresso di stupore, a la mia guida
mi volsi come parvol che ricorre
sempre colà dove più si confida,
e quella, come madre che soccorre
sùbito al figlio palido e anelo
con la sua voce, che 'l suol ben disporre,
mi disse: "Non sai tu che tu se' in Cielo?
e non sai tu che 'l Cielo è tutto santo,
e ciò che si fa vien da buon zelo?

1

Come t'avrebbe trasmutato il canto,
e io ridendo, mo pensar tu puoi,
poscia che 'l grido t'ha mosso cotanto,
nel qual, se 'nteso avessi i prieghi suoi,
già ti sarebbe nota la vendetta
che tu vedrai anzi che tu muoi.

4

7

La spada di qua sù non taglia in fretta
né tardo, ma' ch' al parer di colui
che disïando o temendo l'aspetta.

10

Ma rivolgiti omai inverso altrui,
ch'assai illustri spiriti vedrai,
se com' io dico l'aspetto redui."

13

19

Come a lei piacque li occhi ritornai,
e vidi cento sperule che 'nsieme
più s'abbellivan con mutüi rai.

22

Io stava come quei che 'n sé repreme
la punta del disio e non s'attenta
di domandar, sì del troppo si teme,

25

e la maggiore e più luculenta
di quelle margherite innanzi fessi
per far di sé la mia voglia contenta.

28

Poi dentro a lei udi': "Se tu vedessi
com' io la carità che tra noi arde,
li tuoi concetti sarebbero espressi.

31

Ma perché tu aspettando non tarde
a l'alto fine, io ti farò risposta
pur al pensier, da che sì ti riguarda.

34

Quel monte a cui Cassino è ne la costa
fu frequentato già in su la cima
da la gente ingannata e mal disposta,
e quel son io che sù vi portai prima
lo nome di colui che 'n terra addusse
la verità che tanto ci soblima;

37

e tanta grazia sopra me rilusse
ch' io ritrassi le ville circunstanti
da l'empio cólto che 'l mondo sedusse.

40

Questi altri fuochi tutti contemplanti
uomini fuoro, accesi di quel caldo
che fa nascere i fiori e ' frutti santi.

43

Qui è Maccario, qui è Romualdo,
qui son li frati miei che dentro ai chiostri
fermar li piedi e tennero il cor saldo."

46

E io a lui: "L'affetto che dimostri
meco parlando e la buona sembianza
ch' io veggio e noto in tutti li ardor vostri,
così m'ha dilatata mia fidanza
come 'l sol fa la rosa quando aperta
tanto divien quant' ell' ha di possanza.

52

55

Però ti priego, e tu, padre, m'accerta
s'io posso prender tanta grazia ch' io
ti veggia con imagine scoverta."

58

Ond' elli: "Frate, il tuo alto disio
s'adempierà in su l'ultima spera,
ove s'adempion tutti li altri e 'l mio.

61

Ivi è perfetta, matura e intera
ciascuna disianza; in quella sola
è ogne parte là ove sempr' era,

64

perché non è in loco e non s'impola,
e nostra scala infino ad essa varca,
onde così dal viso ti s'invola:

67

infin là sù la vide il patriarca
Iacobbe porger la superna parte,
quando li apparve d'angeli sì carca.

70

Ma per salirla mo nessun diparte
da terra i piedi, e la regola mia
rimasa è per danno de le carte.

73

Le mura che solieno esser badia
fatte son spelonche, e le cocolle
sacca son piene di farina ria.

76

Ma grave usura tanto non si tolle
contra 'l piacer di Dio, quanto quel frutto
che fa il cor de' monaci sì folle,

79

ché quantunque la Chiesa guarda, tutto
è de la gente che per Dio dimanda,
non di parenti né d'altro più brutto.

82

La carne d'i mortali è tanto blanda
che giù non basta buon cominciamento
dal nascer de la quercia al far la ghianda.

85

Pier cominciò sanz' oro e sanz' argento,
e io con orazione e con digiuno,
e Francesco umilmente il suo convento,
e se guardi 'l principio di ciascuno,
poscia riguardi là dov' è trascorso,
tu vederai del bianco fatto bruno.

88

Veramente lordàn volto retrorso
più fu, e 'l mar fuggir, quando Dio volse,
mirabile a veder che qui 'l soccorso."

91

Così mi disse e indi si raccolse
al suo collegio, e 'l collegio si strinse,
poi come turbo in sù tutto s'avvolse.

94

La dolce donna dietro a lor mi pinse
con un sol cenno su per quella scala,
sì sua virtù la mia natura vinse,
né mai qua giù, dove si monta e cala
naturalmente, fu sì ratto moto
ch' agguagliar si potesse a la mia ala.

100

S' io torni mai, lettore, a quel divoto
triunfo per lo quale io piango spesso
le mie peccata e 'l petto mi percuoto:

103

tu non avresti in tanto tratto e messo
nel foco il dito, in quant' io vidi 'l segno
che segue il Tauro e fui dentro da esso.

109

O gloriose stelle, o lume pregno
di gran virtù, dal quale io riconosco
tutto, qual che si sia, il mio ingegno,
con voi nasceva e s'ascondeva vosco
quelli ch' è padre d'ogne mortal vita,
quand' io senti' di prima l'aere tosco,

112

115

e poi, quando mi fu grazia largita
d'entrar ne l'alta rota che vi gira,
la vostra region mi fu sortita.

118

A voi divotamente ora sospira
l'anima mia per acquistar virtute
al passo forte che a sé la tira.

121

"Tu se' sì presso a l'ultima salute,"
cominciò Béatrice: "che tu dei
aver le luci tue chiare e acute,

124

e però, prima che tu più t'inlei,
rimira in giù e vedi quanto mondo
sotto li piedi già esser ti fei,
sì che 'l tuo cor quantunque può giocondo
s'appresenti a la turba triunfante
che lieta vien per questo etera tondo."

127

Col viso ritornai per tutte quante
le sette spere, e vidi questo globo
tal ch'io sorrisi del suo vil sembiante,
e quel consiglio per migliore approbo
che l'ha per meno, e chi ad altro pensa
chiamar si puote veramente probo.

130

Vidi la figlia di Latona incensa
sanza quell' ombra che mi fu cagione
per che già la credetti rara e densa.

133

L'aspetto del tuo nato, Iperione,
quivi sostenni, e vidi com' si move
circa e vicino a lui Maia e Dione.

136

Quindi m'apparve il temperar di Giove
tra 'l padre e 'l figlio, e quindi mi fu chiaro
il variar che fanno di lor dove.

142

145

E tutti e sette mi si dimostraro
quanto son grandi e quanto son veloci,
e come sono in distante riparo.

148

L'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci,
volgendorom' io con li eterni Gemelli,
tutta m'apparve da' colli a le foci.

151

Poscia rivolsi li occhi a li occhi belli.

154

NOTES

1–21. Stunned and bewildered ... redirect your gaze: One notes the skill with which the ending of the previous canto suspends the reader in expectation and creates a sense of new beginning in this introduction to the new canto. Compare the earthquake and "Gloria" that end *Purgatorio* 20 and the suspense at the beginning of Canto 21.

1–6. Stunned and bewildered ... to calm him: Perhaps the most explicit declaration of the maternal aspect of Beatrice's relation to the pilgrim. In this respect Beatrice is a kind of personification of the Church.

7–18. Do you not know ... desire or fear: Beatrice calms the pilgrim's fears, reminds him of the nature of Saturn, interprets the shout of 21.130–42, and predicts the punishment of the corrupt prelates condemned there.

7–9. Do you not know ... from good zeal: The pilgrim should not have been troubled by the shout, since everything in Heaven is good. Strictly speaking, of course, the pilgrim does not reach Heaven (the Empyrean) until Canto 30, but these souls are "really" there and only appear to the pilgrim to be in Saturn.

10–15. How our singing ... before you die: Reminding him that the muting of song and of her smile in Saturn was an accommodation to the pilgrim's limitations, Beatrice suggests that the shout was less muted (line 12), presumably because the call for justice is in itself less transcendent than her beauty here. She explains that the shout was a prayer for punishment of the corrupt prelates ("the vengeance," in line 14, that will come "before you die": it is not known what, if anything, Dante had in mind here).

16–18. The sword of Heaven ... desire or fear: God's justice is fulfilled in the manner decreed in eternity; only those who are impatient to see the wicked punished find it slow, and only those who fear it find it swift.

19–21. But turn back now ... redirect your gaze: One notes the increase in explicit reliance on Beatrice's gaze (cf. 21.16–18, 22.124–32, 27.76, with notes.)

23–30. I saw a hundred ... by giving itself: These "hundred little spheres" are not said to make any particular "figure," nor are they said to surround the pilgrim and Beatrice; they are imagined *in front* of them, since one of them comes "forward" to address the pilgrim (cf. 8.16–30, 15.13–42). That we are to imagine the ladder of Canto 21 as still visible is indicated by lines 67–72.

25–27. I was like one ... so fears excess: Again the pilgrim's modest humility. The

"point" of desire is its felt sharpness; *attentarsi* (line 26) derives from Lat. *attempto* (*ad + tempto* [to attempt, seduce]): usually taken as meaning "to dare, to risk," it clearly includes the sense of not allowing oneself to be tempted by one's desire. The soul of course reads the pilgrim's wish in God (lines 31–36).

31–96. Then within it ... remedy will be for this: The speaker is immediately recognizable: the founder of the monastery of Monte Cassino is saint Benedict of Nursia himself (see the note to 21.25–42, Additional Note 5). He began his monastic career at Subiaco, in an eremitic foundation, but eventually moved to the summit of Monte Cassino, where there was an ancient pagan temple; after destroying the altars, he made it the nucleus of his monastery. The fame of his saintly life brought disciples to him, for whom, eventually, he wrote his famous Rule. Dante's claim that he converted the surrounding country folk to Christianity is based on the biography written by Gregory the Great (*Dialogues* Book 2), which contains much fabulous material.

After identifying himself and those surrounding him as faithful contemplative monks, naming only two of them, the saint assures the pilgrim, in answer to his question, that his face will be visible in the Empyrean; then, commenting on Jacob's dream (Gen. 28.10–28), he pronounces a severe condemnation of the state of monasticism in 1300, predicting that the remedy is close at hand.

49–51. Here is Macarius ... kept their hearts firm: Both eremitic and cenobitic forms of monasticism are credited by Dante's saint Benedict with having contemplation as their primary goal. This is something of an oversimplification, both because "contemplation" was an inclusive term (it included the study of the Bible and other important texts, the study of God as revealed in the universe, and the singing of the liturgy, as well as the ascent to mystical vision in this life), and because the economic self-sufficiency of abbeys, essential for withdrawal from the contamination of the secular, was central to the Benedictine tradition and the basis of the requirement that the monks work (most of them in the field); various compromises (including recruiting a lay workforce) were reached by the different orders in the course of the centuries: the eremitic orders and the Cistercians were the most uncompromising in making mystical ascent the principal activity.

49. Here is Macarius, here is Romuald: These are names of important leaders of eremitic monasticism, as saint Benedict was the dominant influence in the cenobitic form. There were several early Egyptian hermits named Macarius; Dante may have drawn on Iacopo of Varazzo's *Golden Legend*, which mentions only one, conflating the two earliest, Macarius the Ancient (ca. 200–ca. 290), credited with being the first anchorite in the desert near Thebes, and Macarius of Alexandria (perhaps a generation later), in the desert south of Alexandria. Saint Romuald (born in Ravenna 959, died 1007) was, with saint Bruno of Asti (the founder of the Carthusians), the leading influence in the eleventh-century Italian revival of eremitism (see the note to 21.106–11). The Egyptian founder of cenobitic monasticism, saint Anthony the Great, is mentioned by Dante (29.124) only in connection with the decline of his order. The monastic orders are to be distinguished from the mendicant orders (see Cantos 11–12, with

notes, and Additional Note 5). Though omitting the Greeks and the Cluniac reforms but including saint Bernard of Clairvaux in Cantos 31–32, Dante's survey mentions most of the highlights of the history of monasticism.

52–60. The affection you show ... your countenance openly: Since Justinian's face became veiled in his joy (5.133–39), until now the pilgrim has not asked to see the face of any soul (cf. the other instance in 25.118–29). The request and the eagerness it expresses are probably to be taken as measures of the great veneration Dante felt for the founder of western monasticism; the meeting with saint Benedict is part of the general rising back through time to origins (see the notes to Cantos 24–26 and Additional Note 14). It may be noted here that in a famous passage (*Conv. 4.28.9*) Dante expresses his respect for both monastic and mendicant orders but insists that the inner perfection of Christian devotion, especially appropriate in the fourth age of life, is open to lay persons, including married couples.

61–96. Brother, your high ... remedy will be for this: The saint's answer leads smoothly into the description of the ultimate goal, back to Jacob's ladder as leading to it, and then to the current decadence of European monasticism.

61–67. Brother, your high ... turns on no pole: The "last sphere" is of course the Empyrean, beyond space, reached in Canto 30. The saint omits the fact that even in the Empyrean beatitude will be perfect only after the Resurrection, when souls will be reunited with their bodies (what the pilgrim will see will be only an "appearance": 30.43–45; see Introduction, pp. 14–15; cf. 14.13–18 and 37–60).

65–66. there alone is every part where it has always been: This verse is difficult to interpret: it must be a reference to the eternal presence of all creation and history ("every part") to the mind of God.

68–96. our ladder is the bridge ... remedy will be for this: The saint returns to the ladder of Genesis 28. That it is "our ladder" is of course a reference to its special appropriateness to Saturn as the star of the contemplatives, but also—and primarily—because from saint Benedict on it had been the founding metaphor of monasticism. The return facilitates the transition to the condemnation of the current abuses: the monks no longer practice poverty and the mystical ascent but are exclusively concerned with the great wealth the monasteries have accumulated.

69. flies so far beyond your sight: A recall of 21.29–30, a departure from the biblical dream; cf. the note to 21.28–33.

70–75. the patriarch Jacob ... a waste of paper: In these two terzinas, Jacob's ladder provides the transition to the condemnation. The crucial verse is Gen. 28.12: "And he saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top of it touching Heaven: the angels also of God ascending and descending by it." The first terzina refers only to the upper part of the ladder (the second part of the verse); the second terzina, however, refers to the first part of the

verse, where the ladder stands upon the earth, especially within the monastery walls, where the monks no longer pay any attention to the Benedictine Rule.

76–78. The walls that used ... full of evil flour: The reference to the monastery walls becomes explicit: the abbeys having become caves [*spelonche*] is an allusion to Matt. 21.13 (the casting of the money changers out of the Temple): “Vos autem fecistis [domum meam] illam speluncam latronum” [You have made (my house) a cave of thieves] (a passage nearly identical in all the synoptic Gospels; natural caves were proverbial hiding places for outlaws). The monks’ cowls being “full of evil flour” may refer to the hiding of coin, or perhaps to the obesity denounced by Peter Damiani (21.130–36; and see below, lines 85–87); in the mention of *flour*, the underlying theme of harvest (see 21.118–20 and 22.151, with notes) becomes explicit here, but it is the wrong kind of harvest.

79–96. But heavy usury ... remedy will be for this: The passage begins and ends with reference to God’s will (lines 80 and 95), disobeyed by the monks, whose punishment will come. The abuse is now literally identified: the monks’ hearts are fixed on wealth, so intensely that no usury is worse; the harvest motif continues with the term *fruit* (on the idea of usury as unnatural in making money “bear offspring,” see the note to *Inf.* 11.110–11, Durling 1981a, Capitani 1976). The crisis of abuse that Dante refers to was the result of a number of factors: the intense appeal of the new Franciscan and Dominican movements, close to the population and based in the cities; a resultant decline in the prestige of cloistered life; the enormous wealth possessed by the monasteries and dioceses in lands, industries (e.g., mills), and chattel, more and more regarded by the laity as oppressive; and the increasing prosperity, urbanization, and mercantilization of society. Dante is not alone: the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries saw a major challenge to the wealth of the Church from the “spiritual” Franciscans, who advocated a return to the poverty of the Apostles; Dante shared many of their views. A quarter-century after Dante’s death, Boccaccio’s *Decameron* voiced many of the same criticisms and particularly satirized the monks’ and friars’ (and also the nuns’) sexual mores.

82–84. for whatever the Church ... or something uglier: Statement of principle: the Church (thus monasteries as well) is merely the trustee of wealth donated to it (or earned by it) and must use it in the interest of the faithful, especially the poor. It may not be given to relatives or “something uglier” (male favorites, concubines, or illegitimate offspring). Cf. *Mon.* 3.4.10, where Dante gives a famous definition of tyrants as those who “what is of public right do not pursue for the advantage of all, but attempt to force it to their own advantage.”

85–96. The flesh of mortals ... remedy will be for this: The saint attributes the universal decadence to the weakness of mortal flesh (Dante’s term *blanda* means “soft, unused to hardship”) and voices a rule that all beginnings turn bad in less time than it takes an oak tree to grow from an acorn to producing its own acorns. God must continually intervene.

88–93. Peter began without ... white has turned black: Saint Peter represents the papacy, saint Benedict monasticism, saint Francis the mendicant orders; all began in poverty (cf. 21.127–35), and all have become inordinately rich, and you can see where each went wrong

(*trascorrere* [to go astray], is parallel to Eng. *to transgress* [to step off the path]); cf. 11.118–39, and especially 12.106–20, the latter using both the metaphor of the track and an important instance of the harvest metaphor).

94–96. Truly Jordan ... remedy will be for this: Two examples of God's miraculous intervention. The "sea drawing back" refers to the opening of the Red Sea to permit Moses and the Israelites to pass dryshod (Ex. 14.13–31; cf. Ps. 113.1–8). As a past event, "Jordan flowing backward" (Ps. 113.3–5) was caused by the standing of the waters of the Red Sea, into which Jordan flows, at the Exodus (it was associated in the exegetical tradition with the Apocalypse). The lines mean that God's correction of the degeneration of Christian institutions will not be as spectacular.

97–99. So he said, and then ... whirlwind swept upward: The term *collegio* referred to any group bound together by a set of rules [Eng. *college*, from Lat. *collegium: cum/con*, together, + *lego*, to bind]. Most educational colleges (such as those at Oxford and Cambridge) were originally ecclesiastical foundations for clerics.

98–99. gathered itself ... whirlwind swept upward: Spinning has been repeated by the souls in Saturn as an expression of special joy (21.79–81, 136–38); cf. Elijah's mounting to Heaven (4 Kings 2.11); in the Old Testament, God speaks from the whirlwind (Job 38.1), and the prophets name it as signifying his anger (e.g., Is. 40.24, Jer. 23.19). The contemplatives sweep upward along the ladder, of course.

100–154. My sweet lady ... to her lovely eyes: The transition to, and first stage of, the sojourn in the sphere of the fixed stars (it will last until Canto 27).

100–105. My sweet lady ... equal my wing: Another miraculously swift ascent: one might perhaps expect the upward flight to reach Heaven (as presumably that of the contemplatives does), but that is not Dante's plan: two spheres in space remain to be visited: those of the fixed stars and of the *primum mobile*, the outer shell of the universe.

103–4. nor down here ... descend naturally: One cannot help thinking of the bitter stairways of 17.55–60; here, as in the text of Jacob's dream, mounting is mentioned before descending (a fact that, as Dante knew, saint Benedict and the later tradition regarded as significant, as referring to the faithful and then the rebellious angels).

106–54. So may I return ... to her lovely eyes: This first stage of the pilgrim's stay in the sphere of the fixed stars includes his arrival in his own native sign, Gemini, and his backward glance, at Beatrice's urging, down through the entire cosmos (based in part on the famous passage in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* [*Dream of Scipio*]; see the note to lines 133–53).

106–11. So may I return ... and was within it: The next-to-last of the six addresses to the reader (listed in the note to 2.1–18). The poet swears by his desire to return to Heaven (for the asseverative formula, see *Inf.* 16.129, 20.19–25; *Purg.* 8.112–17), as in *Purg.* 16.127–29

when he swears by his desire for the *Comedy* to have lasting favor.

106–8. that devout triumph ... beat my breast: The triumph is that of Christ and the Church Triumphant, which the pilgrim will soon see (it is anticipated in lines 131–32), and in several forms (see 23.16–120, 31.61–69). That the poet must continue to do penance for his sins indicates that the idea that he returns from his journey in a permanent state of grace, as is sometimes asserted, is profoundly erroneous: his dream inspired his poem, but penitence is not accomplished in a dream.

109–11. you would not any sooner ... and was within it: Another of the famous instances of *hysteron proteron* in the *Comedy* (cf. 2.23–24, with note), expressing simultaneity or the next thing to it. The “sign that follows the Bull” is of course that of Gemini; one notes that Dante does not clearly distinguish between the zodiacal signs and the constellations (see the diagram on page xiii of our *Purgatorio*).

112–23. O glorious stars ... draws me to itself: Invocation of the stars of Gemini, which Dante considered his natal sign: the poet first acknowledges (“riconosco” [I recognize]; cf. 29.58–60, with note) that all his “ingegno” [poetic talent] comes from them, because the sun (“the father of every mortal life”) was rising and setting with them at his birth and because they were assigned to be the part of the sphere of fixed stars (“the high wheel”) that he visits in his ascent (this is of course part of the pilgrim’s return to his origins, like his meeting with Cacciaguida). For the importance to Dante of his natal horoscope, see also Additional Notes 12 and 14.

121–23. To you now ... draws me to itself: This is an invocation, as if of a Muse, asking for help. His soul now “devoutly sighs” to the source of his poetic gifts because his power to describe his increasingly arduous imaginings depends on their active influence, *in the present*, on his talent. (This is a characteristic type of medieval astrological belief; for instance, Albert the Great writes that gems engraved with astrological signs must be carved while those signs are powerful—e.g., ascending—or while the sun or the planet that is their “ruler” visits them—and that their “virtue” will be effective only when the situation of their carving is repeated.) Dante may well have been writing this passage while the sun or Mercury was in Gemini.

124–32. You are so close ... this rounded aether: The first “event” here in Gemini, in the sphere of fixed stars, is that Beatrice invites the pilgrim to look back down through the spherical cosmos to the earth. She says he has now risen so far that his eyes are equal to the sight.

128–29. look back down ... beneath your feet: The commentators properly call attention to the important parallel with the *Dream of Scipio* in the downward gaze through the cosmos. But they have not called attention to the two texts Beatrice alludes to here. The first is Vergil, *Georgics* 2.475–92; the climactic lines are 490–92:

felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas

atque metus omnis et inexorable fatum
subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari.
[Happy he who has been able to know the causes of things,
who has placed beneath his feet all fears, inexorable fate,
and the clamor of greedy Acheron.]

Dante was clearly struck by the parallel with Psalm 8.6–8:

Thou hast made him [man] a little lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor: and hast set him over the works of thy hands. Thou hast subjected all things under his feet [*omnia subiecisti sub pedibus eius*].

Dante avoids Vergil's *subiecit* and the Vulgate's *subiecisti* for more neutral phrasing, but "sotto li tuoi piedi" [beneath your feet] is unmistakable. Note that this traditional metaphor for the moral/existential superiority to fate and the rest of the cosmos has nothing to do with the question of the presence of the pilgrim's body.

132. through this rounded aether: Unlike Plato, who supposed the heavenly bodies were made of the same matter as sublunar things, Aristotle wrote (*De caelo* 1.2–3) that their eternal lack of change made it clear that the planets and their heavens were made of a "fifth essence," transparent and impervious to change, which he dubbed *aether*, whence "etherial."

133–53. With my sight ... to the river mouths: As the commentators have pointed out, in this passage Dante has clearly in mind Cicero's famous description of the view down to earth imagined in Scipio's dream of meeting his father and his grandfather Africanus in the Milky Way (imagined as the abode after death of those devoted to the fatherland; cf. *Par. 4.49–63*, on Plato's idea, used here by Cicero, that the souls of the just return to their stars after death). Scipio is narrating:

As I gazed I saw that everything else seemed extremely bright and marvelous—for there were stars that from here we have never seen, and the greatness of all of them was such as we have never suspected them to be, and among them the smallest was the one farthest from the heavens and closest to the earth, shining with the light of another, and the globes of these stars easily surpassed the magnitude of the earth—indeed, already *the earth itself seemed so tiny to me that our Empire, by which we hold as it were a mere point of it, almost made me ashamed*.

Which when I kept gazing at, "I wonder," said Africanus, "how long you will fix your mind on the earth? Do you not see what temple you have entered? You can see that all things are joined together by nine spheres, of which one is the highest celestial sphere, embracing all the others, itself the highest god, protecting and containing the others, where are fixed those eternal courses of the wandering stars. Within them are held the seven that turn with a motion contrary to the heavens, of which one sphere is held by the star that on earth they call Saturn's; next is the brightness, prosperous and health-giving

to humankind, that is called Jove; then the ruddy star, frightful on earth, which you call Mars; then the sun obtains all the middle region, the leader and prince and moderator of the others, the mind and tempering of the world, of such magnitude that he cleanses and fills all things with his light. *Him as companions Venus and Mercury follow in their circuits*, and in the lowest sphere the moon turns, lit by the rays of the sun. But lower down there is nothing except what is mortal and deciduous, except for the spirits given by the gods to humankind, while above the moon all things are eternal. For the one that is in the midst, the ninth, Earth, never moves but is the lowest, so that all weights fall to it by their own inclination." (SS 3.7–4.3; italics added.)¹

One notes that Cicero has Scipio's gaze descend all the way down to the moon and then the earth in a first descent, and then has Africanus describe the spheres of the cosmos in descending order, from the fixed stars (the idea of the *primum mobile*, enclosing all the others, was unknown to Cicero) down to earth. So also Dante: first the pilgrim's gaze goes all the way down to earth (lines 133–38), ending with a smile at its baseness and a scornful remark (compare the first of the italicized phrases above; Dante's lines also draw on SS 7); the second phase (lines 139–48), like Cicero's, is a detailed list of all planets, with two differences: that the pilgrim's eye moves through the list upwards, and that Dante twice varies the ascending order by grouping the sun, Mercury, and Venus; and Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars (both groups in that order), a procedure almost certainly suggested by Cicero's close grouping of the lower three.

139–50. I saw the daughter ... distant in dwelling: The planets, in ascending order; all of them except Jupiter are named by their mythological parents, in Saturn's case as father of Jupiter (on Dante's periphrases regarding the planets, cf. the note to 8.10–12).

139–41. The daughter of Latona ... rare and dense: The side of the moon that is turned away from earth lacks the spots which in Canto 3 the pilgrim had thought were due to rare and dense material, until instructed otherwise by Beatrice. Dante's idea is probably that since the influence of the moon is always directed toward the earth, there would be no formal principle for such spots on the side always turned upward.

142–44. The sight of your son ... close about him: Dante's description leaps over Mercury and Venus to the sun, and then echoes the phrase italicized in the second paragraph of the quotation from Cicero. The son of Hyperion is Sol (the sun; cf. *Met.* 2.1, 4.192), Maia is the mother of Mercury (cf. *Met.* 2.685–86), and Dione of Venus (cf. *Aen.* 3.19, *Par.* 8.1–9, with notes).

145–47. From there I saw ... they do of their where: Again a leap to Jupiter from the sun, and another leap to Saturn (Jupiter's father) and then to Mars (Jupiter's son). These three planets have orbits larger than that of the earth, and all of them seem to move more slowly than earth; from the vantage of the fixed stars, the pilgrim can see the planets moving, but the phrase does not mean that he can grasp their complicated forward and retrograde patterns, which are realized very slowly.

148–50. And all the seven ... distant in dwelling: He saw the size (cf. Cicero) of the planets and how far away each is from earth and from the firmament. The eye again moves over the entire panorama.

151–53. The little threshing floor ... back to her lovely eyes: Again the eye twice moves down and up (line 151, down; line 152, up; line 153, down again; and line 154, finally back up to Beatrice).

151. The little threshing floor that makes us so ferocious: The inhabited earth is here thought of as a threshing floor; in antiquity threshing was typically done by having an ox tread the grain under foot, after which the chaff was fanned away and ultimately burned, while the heavier kernels were gathered and stored; there are many biblical passages, especially in the prophets and Gospels, concerning the process, often used as a figure of the Last Judgment; for instance: "Cuius ventilabrum in manu sua: et permundabit aream suam: et congregabit triticum suum in horreum, paleas autem comburet igni inextinguibili" [His threshing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire] (Matt. 3.12; cf. Is. 41.13; Jer. 23.28, 51.33); also famous is "Non ligabis os bovis terentis in area fruges tuas" [Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out thy grain upon thy floor] (Deut. 25.4; cited by saint Paul in 1 Cor. 10.9, 1 Tim. 5.18). That human beings are so ferocious for such a tiny plot as the habitable earth, all the while forgetting that they themselves are being winnowed and separated into the saved and the damned, is all compressed here into one of Dante's most brilliantly epigrammatic, ironic sayings (*aiuola* is the diminutive of *aia* [threshing floor, cf. Lat. *area*], as Buti points out; it is also used in 27.86). It is part of the large system of harvest references in the *Paradiso* that our notes have been following (cf. 23.19–21). One should remember that in Dante's time threshing was done by flailing the grain with long, heavy hinged rods (see the scene of threshing in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco of "Good Government" in the Sala della Pace in Siena, which emphasizes the violence of the activity and shows how much the threshing rods resemble weapons).

Doubt has been cast on this interpretation, first made explicit by Longfellow (but cf. Buti), on the supposed grounds that the Boethian passage that uses the term *area* of the smallness of the parts of earth where glory is sought (*Consol.* 2.7.5, itself based on *SS* 7) makes no mention of threshing, the term *area* being commonly used also for any small enclosed space. But note the very first use of the term in the *Consolatio* (2.1.16), where Philosophia explains: "Postremo aequo animo toleres oportet quicquid intra fortunae aream geritur cum semel iugo eius colla submiseris" [Finally you must accept with equanimity whatever occurs within Fortune's *area* once you have submitted your neck to her yoke]; occupied by the yoked ox, Fortune's *area* is unmistakably a threshing floor.

152. as I was turning with the eternal Twins: Strongly juxtaposing the pilgrim's vantage point with the distant earth, at a moment when he is about to turn away from the world of becoming, the line is also a reminder both of the astrological significance for the nature of his natal sign, and that (as we see in 27.76–87) what he can see on earth is changing

beneath him as the heavens turn.

153. all of it ... to the river mouths: All of the habitable earth is visible, from the mountains (presumably the Caucasus and the Alps) to the river mouths (of the Ebro, near Gibraltar, and the Rhone in the west, and the Ganges in the east: since antiquity the two extremes were the generally recognized limits of the *Oikoumenè* (the inhabited portion of the earth, in the classical conception; see the map of the *climata* on p. 379, and cf. *Purg.* 27.1–6, with note).

154. Then I turned my eyes back to her lovely eyes: We have been taught to imagine Beatrice's eyes as immeasurably more beautiful than anything on earth, more beautiful even than the serene and majestic spectacle of the entire cosmos. A more effective close to this canto could hardly be imagined.



CANTO 23

Fixed stars, continued: Triumph of Christ—his withdrawal—the Virgin Mary—the archangel Gabriel—ascent of Mary

- 1 Like a bird within the beloved foliage,
perched on the nest of its sweet offspring during
the night that hides all things from us,
- 4 as—in order to see their yearned-for faces
and to find the food to nourish them, in which
heavy labors are pleasant to it—
- 7 it anticipates the time upon an open branch
and with burning affect awaits the sun, gazing
fixedly for the first birth of dawn:
- 10 so my lady was erect and alert, turned toward
the quarter where the sun shows least haste,
- 13 so that I, seeing her in suspense and eager,
became as one who in desire wishes for
something else and is soothed by hope.
- 16 But there was little between one and another
when—of my waiting, I mean, and of my seeing
the sky grow brighter and brighter—,
- 19 and Beatrice said: "Behold the armies of
Christ's triumph and all the fruit harvested from
the turning of these spheres!"

- 22 It seemed to me her face was all aflame, and
her eyes were so full of joy that I must pass on
without expressing them.
- 25 As on a cloudless night of full moon Trivia
laughs among the eternal nymphs that paint the
sky in all its arcs:
- 28 I saw, above thousands of lanterns, a Sun
that kindled all of them, as ours does the sights
above,
- 31 and through its living light the bright
Substance showed so bright to my eyes
that they could not endure it.
- 34 Oh Beatrice, sweet, dear guide! She said to
me: "What overpowers you is might against
which there is no defence.
- 37 There is the Wisdom and the Power that
opened the pathways between Heaven and
earth, for which there had been such long yearning."
- 40 As fire is unlocked from a cloud, expanding
beyond containment there, and against its
nature downward enearths itself:
- 43 so my mind, made larger than itself amid that
feast, went out of itself, and what it became it
cannot remember.
- 46 "Open your eyes and see what I am: you
have seen things that have made you strong
enough to endure my smile."
- 49 I was like one who comes to himself from a
forgotten vision and struggles in vain to draw it
back to his mind,

- 52 when I heard this offer, worthy of such
gratitude as never shall be canceled from the
book that relates the past.
- 55 If now were to sound all those tongues which
Polyhymnia and her sisters with their sweetest
milk made richest
- 58 to help me, we could not come within a
thousandth of the truth, singing her holy smile
and how bright it made her holy face,
- 61 and thus, figuring forth Paradise, the
consecrated poem must leap over, like one who
finds his path cut off.
- 64 But whoever thinks of the ponderous theme
and the mortal shoulder that has taken it on, will
not blame it for trembling beneath the burden:
- 67 it is no voyage for a little bark, the one my
daring prow goes cutting, nor for a helmsman
who spares himself.
- 70 "Why does my face so enamor you that you
do not turn to the lovely garden blooming under
the rays of Christ?
- 73 There is the rose in which the divine Word
was made flesh; there are the lilies whose
perfume won people to the good path."
- 76 Thus Beatrice, and I, always prompt to her
counsels, gave myself once again to the battle
of the weak eyelids.
- 79 As by a ray of pure sunlight pouring down
through a torn cloud my eyes, protected by
shade, have seen a meadow of flowers:

- 82 so there I saw many throngs of splendors
 struck, as by lightning from above, by ardent
 beams, without seeing the source of the flashing.
- 85 O kindly Power that so stamp them, you
 withdrew on high to grant room for my eyes
 there, not strong enough to sustain you.
- 88 The name of the lovely flower that I ever
 invoke both morning and evening drew all my
 spirit to perceive the greatest fire,
- 91 and as my two eyes depicted for me the
 nature and greatness of the living star that has
 the victory up there as it did down here,
- 94 from within Heaven there descended a torch
 formed in a circle, in the guise of a crown, and it
 girded her and revolved about her.
- 97 Whatever melody down here sounds
 sweetest and most draws the soul would seem
 a shattered cloud thundering,
- 100 compared with the sounding of the lyre that
 crowned the beautiful sapphire with which the
 brightest Heaven is ensapphired.
- 103 "I am angelic love, wheeling about the deep
 joy that breathes from the womb that sheltered
 our Desire,
- 106 and I will wheel, Lady of Heaven, until you
 follow your Son and make brighter the highest
 sphere by entering there."
- 109 Thus did the circling melody seal itself, and
 all the other lights made the name of Mary
 resound.

- 112 The royal mantle of all the world's turnings,
 which burns most and is most enlivened in the
 breath of God and in his ways,
- 115 had its internal shores so far above us that its
 image, where I was, did not yet appear;
- 118 thus my eyes did not have the strength to
 follow the crowned flame that raised itself after
 its seed.
- 121 And like a little child raising its arms toward
 its mamma, after taking the milk, because of its
 grateful spirit flaming outwardly:
- 124 each of those incandescent fires stretched
 upward with its peak, so that the deep love they
 felt for Mary was visible to me.
- 127 Then they remained there before my eyes,
 singing "*Regina coeli*" so sweetly that the delight
 of it has never left me.
- 130 Oh how great is the abundance stored in those
 rich arks that were such good plowmen for the
 sowing down here!
- 133 There they live and take joy in the treasure
 that was acquired weeping in the exile of
 Babylon, where the gold was left behind.
- 136 There triumphs for his victory, under the high
 Son of God and of Mary, with both the old and
 the new consistory,
- 139 he who holds the keys to such glory.



CANTO 23

Come l'augello intra l'amate fronde,1
posato al nido de' suoi dolce nati
la notte che le cose ci nasconde,
che—per veder li aspetti disïati4
e per trovar lo cibo onde li pasca,
in che gravi labor li sono aggrati—
previene il tempo in su aperta frasca7
e con ardente affetto il sole aspetta,
fiso guardando pur che l'alba nasca:
così la donna mia stava eretta10
e attenta, rivolta inver' la plaga
sotto la quale il sol mostra men fretta,
sì che, veggendola io sospesa e vaga,13
fecimi qual è quei che disïando
altro vorria, e sperando s'appaga.
Ma poco fu tra uno e altro *quando*—16
del mio attender, dico, e del vedere
lo ciel venir più e più rischiarando—,
e Bëatrice disse: "Ecco le schiere19
del triunfo di Cristo e tutto 'l frutto
ricolto del girar di queste spere!"
Pariemi che 'l suo viso ardesse tutto,22
e li occhi avea di letizia sì pieni
che passarmen convien sanza costrutto.
Quale ne' plenilunii sereni25
Trivìa ride tra le ninfe etterne
che dipingon lo ciel per tutti i seni:

vid' i' sopra migliaia di lucerne
un Sol che tutte quante l'accendea,
come fa 'l nostro le viste superne,
e per la viva luce trasparea

28

la lucente Sustanza tanto chiara
nel viso mio che non la sostenea.
Oh Béatrice, dolce guida e cara!

31

Ella mi disse: "Quel che ti sobranza
è virtù da cui nulla si ripara.

Quivi è la Sapienza e la Possanza
ch' aprì le strade tra 'l Cielo e la terra,
onde fu già sì lunga disianza."

37

Come foco di nube si diserra,
per dilatarsi sì che non vi cape,
e fuor di sua natura in giù s'atterra:

40

la mente mia così, tra quelle dape
fatta più grande, di sé stessa uscìo,
e che si fesse rimembrar non sape.

43

"Apri li occhi e riguarda qual son io:
tu hai vedute cose, che possente
se' fatto a sostener lo riso mio."

46

Io era come quei che si risente
di visiōne oblita e che s'ingegna
indarno di ridurlasi a la mente,

49

quand' io udi' questa proferta, degna
di tanto grato che mai non si stingue
del libro che 'l preterito rassegna.

52

Se mo sonassero tutte quelle lingue
che Polimnìa con le suore fero
del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue

55

per aiutarmi, al millesimo del vero
non si verria cantando il santo riso
e quanto il santo aspetto facea mero;
e così, figurando il Paradiso,
convien saltar lo sacrato poema
come chi trova suo cammin riciso.

Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema
e l'omero mortal che se ne carca
nol biasmerebbe se sott' esso trema:

non è pareggio da picciola barca
quel che fendendo va l'ardita prora,
né da nocchier ch'a sé medesmo parca.

"Perché la faccia mia sì t'innamora
che tu non ti rivolgi al bel giardino
che sotto i raggi di Cristo s'infiora?

Quivi è la rosa in che 'l Verbo divino
carne si fece, quivi son li gigli
al cui odor si prese il buon cammino."

Così Beatrice, e io, che a' suoi consigli
tutto era pronto, ancora mi rendei
a la battaglia de' debili cigli.

Come a raggio di sol che puro mei
per fratta nube già prato di fiori
vider, coverti d'ombra, li occhi miei:

vid' io così più turbe di splendori
folgorate di sù da raggi ardenti,
sanza veder principio di folgóri.

O benigna Virtù che sì li 'mprenti,
sù t'essaltasti per largirmi loco
a li occhi lì, che non t'eran possenti.

58

61

64

67

70

73

76

79

82

85

- Il nome del bel fior ch' io sempre invoco 88
e mane e sera, tutto mi ristrinse
l'animo ad avvisar lo maggior foco,
e come ambo le luci mi dipinse 91
il quale e il quanto de la viva stella
che là sù vince come qua giù vinse,
per entro il Cielo scese una facella 94
formata in cerchio a guisa di corona,
e cinsela e girossi intorno ad ella.
- Qualunque melodia più dolce suona 97
qua giù e più a sé l'anima tira
parrebbe nube che squarcia tona,
comparata al sonar di quella lira 100
onde si coronava il bel zaffiro
del quale il Ciel più chiaro s'inzaffira.
- "Io sono amore angelico che giro 103
l'alta letizia che spira del ventre
che fu albergo del nostro Disiro,
e girerommi, Donna del Ciel, mentre 106
che seguirai tuo Figlio e farai dia
più la spera suprema perché lì entre."
- Così la circulata melodia 109
si sigillava, e tutti li altri lumi
facean sonare il nome di Maria.
- Lo real manto di tutti i volumi 112
del mondo, che più ferme e più s'avviva
ne l'alito di Dio e nei costumi,
avea sopra di noi l'interna riva 115
tanto distante che la sua parvenza,
là dov' io era, ancor non appariva;

però non ebber li occhi miei potenza
di seguirar la coronata fiamma,
che si levò appresso la sua semenza.

118

E come fantolin che 'nver' la mamma
tende le braccia poi che 'l latte prese,
per l'animo che 'nfin di fuor s'infiamma:

121

ciascun di quei candori in sù si stese
con la sua cima, sì che l'alto affetto
ch' elli avieno a Maria mi fu palese.

124

Indi rimaser lì nel mio cospetto,
"Regina coeli" cantando sì dolce
che mai da me non si partì 'l diletto.

127

Oh quanta è l'ubertà che si soffolce
in quelle arche richissime che fuoro
a seminar qua giù buone bobolce!

130

Quivi si vive e gode del tesoro
che s'acquistò piangendo ne lo essilio
di Babillòn, ove si lasciò l'oro.

133

Quivi trïunfa, sotto l'alto Filio
di Dio e Maria, di sua vittoria,
e con l'antico e col novo concilio,
colui che tien le chiavi di tal gloria.

136

139

NOTES

1–139. Like a bird ... the keys to such glory: The canto represents a single action, the approach and withdrawal of Christ and of Mary, accompanied by hosts of the blessed, concluding with a celebration of the apostle Peter. After keen anticipation (lines 1–15), Beatrice announces the arrival of all the souls harvested by Heaven (16–33); the pilgrim's sight is overwhelmed (lines 34–45), and she calls his gaze to her, but the poet is unable to describe her (lines 46–69); she directs his sight to Christ, now veiled, and to Mary, feted by an angel (70–111); the procession then recedes toward the *primum mobile*, leaving Peter, heir to Christ's victory (112–39), with other souls who remain until 27.75. The canto recapitulates the descent-ascent pattern of salvation history (cf. 7.19–148 and notes), including reference to the Advent, Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ, as well as to Marian feasts (see note to lines 88–111), but also Beatrice's mediation, since the *Vita nova*, of that pattern to Dante.

1–15. Like a bird ... soothed by hope: The simile of the bird, of unspecified species and gender, brings out aspects of Beatrice's relation to the pilgrim: line 1 by restating a verse of Guido Guinizelli's (see VN 20.3) in which Love is said to cleave to the gentle heart "as the bird in the wood repairs to the greenery" [*come lauzello in selva alla verdura*], recalling the lyric beginnings of the poet's devotion; in lines 4–6, Beatrice is nourishing and maternal; while lines 7–9, evoke, with the word *alba*, the Provençal lyric genre of that name about lovers parting at dawn (see 10.139–48 and notes). Compare verses 12–13 of the *alba* of Giraut de Bornelh:

Non dormatz plus, qu' eu aug chantar l'auzel
que vai queren lo jorn per lo boscatge.
[Sleep no longer, for I hear the bird sing
as it goes seeking the day amid the wood].

Juliet's "It was the nightingale, and not the lark," as she delays Romeo, is a later instance (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.5.2). See Picone 1989 and Additional Note 1.

The *alba* was also known in sacred versions (see note to 9.37–42), and Dante's simile reassigned the roles fixed for the genre; as the solicitous bird, Beatrice is both the beloved lady [Provençal *domna*] and the watchman [*guaita*], while the expected spouse, replacing the jealous husband [*gilos*], is Christ. Indeed, Beatrice's expectation in the simile is modeled on the expectation of the Advent of Christ, who comes as the rising sun (Mal. 4.2: "Unto you that fear my name the Sun of justice shall arise [*orietur vobis ... Sol iustitiae*]"; and see Perugi in *LDT*. The procession and pageant that follows recapitulates the coming of this sun; see also 32.16–27 and notes

1–2. Like a bird ... perched on the nest: Picone 1989 notes parallels with the simile introducing Paolo and Francesca (see *Inf.* 5.82–84 and note).

5. to find the food to nourish them: Out of metaphor, Beatrice imparts the food of wisdom (cf. 2.10–12, 10.22–27 and notes, and see line 43). Her solicitude contrasts with Ugolino's denial of spiritual food to his children (see *Inf.* 33.37–48 and Chapter 6 of Durling/Martinez 1990).

6. heavy labors: The phrase recalls Aeneas's petition to Apollo "who always pities the heavy labors [*gravis ... labores*] of Troy" (*Aen.* 6.56; cf. *Inf.* 2.1–3 and note).

7–9. it anticipates the time ... first birth of dawn: Commentators have seen here a reference to Lactantius's poem *De ave phoenice*, on the Phoenix, regenerated by the rising sun, especially lines 41–42: "Turned to the place where Phoebus is born it [the aged bird] awaits the new rays, the rising brightness."

10–12. so my lady was erect ... shows least haste: The tenor of the simile is finally identified as Beatrice.

11–12. the quarter where the sun shows least haste: When the sun crosses the meridian at noon, it appears to be moving more slowly across the sky. The pilgrim and Beatrice rose to the first sphere of heaven at noon, the moment that points to the timelessness of Heaven itself (see 1.44–45 and note); the passage here is thus an ideal conjunction of dawn and noon, first light and full light.

13–15. so that I, seeing her ... soothed by hope: Beatrice's anticipation stimulates the pilgrim's expectation, and his confidence in her erases any fear; contrast the anxious waiting under Virgil's guidance for the heavenly messenger at *Inf.* 9.7–9 (see note).

16–45. But there was little ... it cannot remember: "As the Romans, when they triumph, parade before the car the spoils taken from the enemy, so the author feigns that Christ comes with the prizes he took from the devil, both the holy fathers from Limbo, and the holy Christians saved by the Passion" (Buti). In the liturgy, this triumph is signified by Christ's entrance to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (*Rationale* 6.67), when the crowds preceding and those following represent the saved before and after the Crucifixion (see line 138), that is, all the saved, as here. This configuration was anticipated at 19.103–5 and 20.100–105 (see notes); see also 31.25–27 and Additional Note 4.

16–21. But there was little ... turning of these spheres: The perception of a brief interval of increasing brightness is juxtaposed, in six lines, to a much larger panorama: the legions of souls that receive the pilgrim and Beatrice: they are the final cause of the existence of the heavens, which are ordained to influence human lives according to the designs of Providence (see 8.94–137, 97–136 and notes).

16–18. But there was little ... brighter and brighter: The gradualness of the brightening and the sunrise analogy echo the first appearance of Heaven's angel at *Purg.* 2.13–39, the now remote first stage in the reception of souls; for emphasis on a brightening horizon,

see 14.67–69; on intervals of time, see 29.1–9 and note.

21. the turning of these spheres: The metaphor of harvested fruit makes this an image of the Last Judgment, with the harvesting done by the whirling of the spheres, both indicating their operation and suggesting the action of a scythe, the traditional reaping tool; cf. Apoc. 14.15. See note to lines 130–32, and see 22.151 and note; also 12.118–20 and note.

19–20: Behold the armies of Christ's triumph: The hosts of Heaven (chiefly human souls, but see 31.1–30 and note) testify to Christ's victory over death in the Resurrection, without which no human souls would be saved. The apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus represents the descent into Hell and defeat of Satan as a military expedition (see note to lines 16–45, and *Inf.* 4.52–63 and note), and the triumphal note is often heard in these cantos: see 22.106–7, 131; and 27.72. Coordinated with the descent-ascent pattern on the ladder (21.31–33, 27.67–72) the triumph here is in effect a procession down and up the ladder of contemplation, echoing both the defeat of Hell and Christ's entry into Jerusalem. See Additional Note 4.

25–33. As on a cloudless night ... could not endure it: Christ shines on the blessed like the full moon among stars; line 30 then compares him to the planetary sun as light, center, and ruler of the physical cosmos (cf. *SS* 4), lending its light to planets and stars ("the sights above"; see *Conv.* 3.2.5; also 3.12.7). That the moon "laughs" in a sky "painted" with stars depends on the unstated middle term of the moon as a flower in a field, which emerges explicitly at lines 70–75, at the midpoint of the canto (Perugi in *LDT*); the rhetorical figure employed is known as transumption.

25–27. As on a cloudless night ... in all its arcs: See Horace, *Epoche* 15.1–2: "It was night, and the moon was shining in the clear sky, among the lesser stars" [*Nox erat et caelo fulgebat Luna sereno / inter minora sidera*]. Stars representing the virtues were identified as nymphs in Eden (see *Purg.* 31.106–9 and note), and find a place here in the sphere of the stars. *Trivia* (cf. *Aen.* 6.13, 35) is the triple classical moon goddess Cynthia/Diana/Hecate (or Proserpina; see *Inf.* 10.79–81 and note). The anthropomorphic moon in the presence of Mary and Beatrice suggests the traditional identification of the moon with the Church, Christ's bride, or with Mary. Of the eighteen words in the terzina, nine contain the letter *i*, which appears thirteen times and is metrically emphasized in *pleni lunii* and *Trivia*; these constellate the verses with the letter as the stars do the sky.

28–29. I saw, above thousands of lanterns, a Sun: See Apoc. 22.5: "They shall not need ... the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them." Compare Beatrice in Eden as a veiled sun, in a "cloud of flowers" (*Purg.* 30.28; and see 30.22–33 and note); and note the rhyme at line 80.

Picone 1989 notes Dante's surprising allusion to the bathing Diana (who is also Cynthia, or the moon) espied by Actaeon (see *Inf.* 13.128 and note) as she looms above her protecting nymphs, in Ovid, *Met.* 3.181–82: "But taller than all by a head the goddess towered over them"

[*tamen altior illis / ipsa dea est colloque tenus supereminet omnis.*] The same passage is drawn on at 27.28–30 (see note).

31–33. and through its living light ... could not endure it: To speak of the unbearable brightness of Christ, here unnamed, Dante uses the philosophical term “substance,” understood as a unity of matter and form existing of itself, and having attributes though not itself an attribute. Thus Christ’s glorious body and soul shine through the “living light” of his divinity (for the relation of glorified bodies to the soul’s effulgence, see 14.52–57, 25.118–29). Other commentators take “substance” to be Christ’s divine nature, and “living light” his human one. Cf. *Purg.* 31.139, Beatrice as “splendor of eternal, living light.”

This second, fleeting glimpse of Christ in *Paradiso* (cf. 14.103–8 and note), anticipates the final vision (see 33.52–145 and notes, and cf. *Purg.* 31.118–26 and note). Later it is stated that only Mary and Christ have their bodies in Heaven (25.128).

34. Oh Beatrice: The twenty-seventh use of the name of Beatrice in *Paradiso* (of forty-four; there are sixty-three in the whole *Comedy*); only here is it preceded by the exclamatory apostrophe (cf. *VN* 23.13). The lack of a verb suggests the astonishment caused by the vision.

37–39. There is the Wisdom ... such long yearning: See 1 Cor. 1.24: “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” See also *Inf.* 4.53, *un possente* [a powerful one], also named here by Beatrice as the redeemer who opened the gates of Hell (*Inf.* 8.124–26 and note) and of Heaven (*Purg.* 10.34–36; *Par.* 7.48, 15.28–30 and notes), fulfilling the Advent expectation of souls in Limbo and of souls on earth (*Rationale* 4.5.1, 6.11.4–5); and see 15.25–27, 26.119–20 and notes. For the image of the way, see John 14.6, cited at 7.34–39, and Eph. 4.8–10. See note to lines 133–36.

40–45. As fire is unlocked ... it cannot remember: The descent of fire as lightning, postulated earlier as an illustration of unnatural movement (1.127–41 and note; cf. *Purg.* 18.28–32 and note). For the pilgrim’s obliviousness, see *VN* 41.6–7 and 1.7–8; see also *Par.* 33.58–62 and notes.

43–51. so my mind ... back to his mind: In Dante’s metaphor for the state of *excessus mentis* (cf. the vision of Peter, “an ecstasy of mind,” in Acts 10.10), the pilgrim’s mind is compared to lightning “unnaturally” escaping a cloud to strike the ground. Aquinas distinguishes Paul’s rapture to Heaven from “ecstatic visions” like that of Peter (*ST* 2a 2ae q. 175 a. 3). “Forgotten” [*oblita*] at line 50 echoes the Apostles’ ecstasy at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17.6, cited in *Ep.* 13.80.)

46–69. Open your eyes ... a helmsman who spares himself: Though the pilgrim is overwhelmed by the appearance of Christ, Beatrice suggests that he can now endure her smile, omitted in the sphere of Saturn with a cautionary comparison to the burning of Semele (see 21.4–12 and note). But though assisted by all the Muses, he must renounce recounting that vision, and so the poem, for the first time (not the last; see 24.25), “skips,” like a traveler leaping over an obstacle in his path. Note how the writing of the poem is correlated with

images of both land and sea journeys (lines 63, 67–69; cf. 2.18 and note).

46–48. Open your eyes ... to endure my smile: Dante's inability to endure Beatrice's or Lady Philosophy's smile is one of his constant complaints as a lyric poet ("Donne ch'avete," lines 55–56; "Amor che ne la mente," lines 55–62).

49–54. I was like one ... that relates the past: Beatrice's offer of her smile evokes the image of the "book of my memory" at the outset of the *Vita nova* (where her ineffable smile is recorded; see *VN* 1.1, 19.12, 21.4); gazing at Christ anticipates the final goal of the poem (33.139–45 and notes); thus the Alpha and Omega of the poet's career are again juxtaposed (see Additional Note 14).

52–53. worthy of such gratitude as never shall be canceled: Because it is indelibly written in memory; the phrasing recalls Guinizelli's gratitude to the pilgrim, *Purg.* 26.106–8 and note.

55–60. If now were to sound ... it made her holy face: The reference to Polyhymnia, muse of sacred hymnody, and the other muses refurbishes Virgil's invocation, already drawn on by Dante for *Inf.* 28.1–6 (see note there, and also Ovid, *Met.* 8.533–35); the hundred iron tongues of war are supplanted by the milk-fed tongues suitable to Heaven. In his *Eclogues*, Dante uses the same topos of Muses nursing (*Eclogue* 1.1–2, 31–32, and, in a transferred sense, 59–64).

64–66. But whoever thinks ... beneath the burden: Dante echoes Horace's *Ars Poetica* (lines 38–40); see the paraphrase at *DVE* 2.4.4:

First of all we say that each should suit the weight of the subject matter to his own shoulders, lest if he take on too heavy a load he fall into the mud: this is the advice of our master Horace when at the beginning of *Ars poetica* he says: *Sumite materiam* [Take up a matter].

(cf. also *Conv.* 2.13.10, *Ep.* 13.30, and *Purg.* 21.91–93 and note).

65. and the mortal shoulder that has taken it on: Commentators have seen a pun here on the word for shoulder (*òmero*) and the name of Homer (Omèro).

67–69. It is no voyage ... who spares himself: There is a reiteration here of the implied comparison of the poem to the Argo (see 2.1–3, 13–15). The unsparing helmsman evokes Palinurus, Aeneas's loyal but ill-fated steersman (*Aen.* 6.340–83); see *Purg.* 6.28–48 and note, and *Purgatorio* Additional Note 4.

70–111. Why does my face ... the name of Mary resound: At the canto's midpoint, Beatrice recalls the pilgrim's attention to the spectacle of Christ, Mary, and their retinue of saints (70–75), now tempered to his vision (76–87), and culminates with a representation of

the Annunciation (88–111), which made reaching Heaven possible. The order of events is reversed: the triumphal procession of all the blessed (16–21) precedes the allusion to Christ's opening of the way to Heaven (37–39); though first in causal sequence, the Annunciation is mentioned last (88–111). As the "morning rising" [*aurora consurgens*, Canticle of Canticles 6.9] the Virgin complements the dawn imagery that begins the canto (in the same passage she is "fair as the moon, bright as the sun," resonating with lines 25–30).

70–75. Why does my face ... the good path: In Beatrice's figurative language, the solar Christ shines over a garden (cf. Canticle of Canticles 5.1) resplendent with the rose, Mary, and lilies, the martyrs, whose good example ("perfume") drew others to the right path (see note above, to lines 67–69). Both flowers liturgically describe Mary, after Canticle of Canticles 2.1 ("the flower of the field, the lily of the valley") and Eccl. 24.18 ("I was exalted ... as a rose plant in Jericho"). The rose anticipates the Empyrean; see 31.1–3 and note. The white and red of lilies and roses are also traditional colors for the assembly of saints, including virgins, confessors, etc., who receive the souls of those who die in grace. The cult of Mary also helps explain the pairing of roses and lilies in vernacular lyric, as in the opening lines of Guinizelli's sonnet "Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare" [I wish to praise my lady in truth], where he would compare his lady to the rose and the lily (line 2: "asembrarli la rosa e lo giglio").

73–74. There is the rose ... was made flesh: See John 1.14, the most explicit mention of the Incarnation in the Gospels: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father)." See also note to lines 133–36.

75. perfume: See 2 Cor. 2.15: "We are the good odor of Christ unto God."

78. the battle of the weak eyelids: Dante focuses on the eyelid as what veils and protects the eye (metaphorically its "roof" or "eave"; see also 30.88 and note)—relevant here where his vision will be tempered and strengthened (see line 81).

79–87. As by a ray ... enough to sustain you: The pilgrim sees Christ reflected in his saints (the flowery meadow lit by sunbeams), while the source, too bright to gaze at directly, is veiled. This suggests how a hidden God is known through his creatures, his reflected "splendor" (see 1.2–3, 13.52–87, 29.13–48 and notes; cf. Rom. 1.20). The metaphor of the field is traditional (see 30.62–63 and note), but when Christ comes in judgment (his second Advent), he comes in a cloud: see Luke 21.27 (the Gospel reading for the second Sunday in Advent): "And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty"; see also Apoc. 14.14–15.

88–111. The name of the lovely flower ... the name of Mary resound: In eight terzinas, beginning and ending with her name, Dante unfolds a pageant of Mary attended by an unnamed angel (it is Gabriel): the anticipation of her return with her Son to Heaven (106–8) thus concludes the main action of the canto. The two principal Marian feasts, the Annunciation (March 25) and the Assumption (August 15), are evoked along with Christ's Ascension in lines

103–8 and 118–21, respectively.

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88–89. The name of the lovely flower ... morning and evening: A probable reference to the Ave Maria: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" [*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tu*s**]. The Ave Maria was conspicuous in Marian liturgies (at the feasts of the Annunciation and the Purification, for example, and in her Office). By Dante's time this prayer (additional verses became standard only later) was recommended as one of the four that all the faithful should know; the others were Ps. 50 (the *Miserere*, see *Inf.* 1.65, *Purg.* 5.24, *Par.* 14.88–90 and notes; also 32.11–12), the Nicene Creed (see 24.139–44 and note), and the *Pateroster* (Lord's Prayer; see *Purg.* 11.1–24, 26.127–132 and notes); hence Dante's reference to his devotional use here. See also 3.122 and note. The reference to Mary's womb informs lines 103–5.

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101–2. that crowned the beautiful sapphire ... is ensapphired: Sapphire is one of the stones of the breastplate of the Jewish high priest (Ex. 28.18, 39.11) and of the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Apoc. 21.19), but its significance here derives from the association of Mary with the ultramarine blue mantle she wears in medieval book illuminations; this costly pigment was made from lapis lazuli, confused with sapphire in the

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103–11. I am angelic love ... the name of Mary resound: Like antiphonal psalmody, where a soloist intones a verse of the antiphon followed by a psalm verse sung by the choir, the three terzinas that conclude the pageant register Gabriel's song and the response of the saints, which is to sing *Maria*; the beginning of each terzina marks the angel and his song as circling her (lines 103, 106, 109). This Annunciation reenactment digests into a single image the inspiration of Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of the angelic orders (who move the celestial spheres) in the Incarnation. Christ's birth occurred at a time of universal peace, prepared by Providence, and favored by the heavens (see the notes to 6.34–96 and 545–57; *VN* 29.2; *Conv.* 4.5.3–6; *Mon.* 1.16.1–2, 2.6, 2.11.6–7; *Ep.* 5.26); and see *Purg.* 22.70–72 and note; also *Conv.* 4.21.4–10 and Additional Note 2.

104–5. the deep joy that breathes ... that sheltered our Desire: Mary's womb is discussed at *Conv.* 4.5.5 as the dwelling that would receive the King of Heaven [*l'albergo, dove il celestiale rege intrare dovea*]; see also *Purg.* 26.137–38 and note, and *Inter cantica* there. The entry of the King of Heaven into Mary's womb is a topic of Advent and Nativity liturgy. Praise of Mary for having borne Christ returns in Dante's Empyrean rose (see 31.1–3 and note).

112–39. The royal mantle ... keys to such glory: In the canto's final tribute to Mary, the *primum mobile* is indicated as the direction toward which Christ and Mary ascend, while the hosts of the blessed incline toward her in desire but remain to sing a Marian antiphon and represent the Church Triumphant—the army of Peter, custodian of the keys of Heaven. Two avenues of grace are implied—through the intercession of Mary and through the sacraments of the Church.

112–17. The royal mantle ... did not yet appear: This refers to the "first moving" heaven, guided by the highest angels, the Seraphim (see 4.28–36, 28.98–105 and notes); it moves most swiftly because it is closest to its goal—the Empyrean, the sphere of intelligible light that is the "place" of the whole cosmos (see 1.2–3, 27.106–11 and notes). The proximity to the Empyrean of the *primum mobile* means it receives the divine breath (the Holy Spirit) directly (later it is seen reflecting the divine ray; see 30.100–108 and note). Compare the "breath of God" on the shell of the cosmos with the "joy that breathes from the womb," i.e., that of the Virgin Mary, in line 104.

112. The royal mantle of all the world's turnings: Dante's word for "turnings" [*volumi*] also suggests a scroll, which can be rolled up; the images of a scroll and of a mantle are superimposed. In the Bible the heavens are represented by both the scroll and the tent of skins (see Is. 34.4, "The heavens shall be folded together as a book" [*et complicabuntur sicut liber cael*i**]); Ps. 103.2, "Who stretchest out the heavens like a tent [*sicut pellem*]); both will be folded or rolled up at the Last Judgement; and Apoc. 6.14, "And the heaven departed as a book rolled up [*sicut liber involutus*]). Augustine compared the firmament to the Word of God stretched out above the earth to inform mankind (*Confessions* 13.15; see Additional Note 13).

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112–39. The royal mantle ... keys to such glory: In the canto's final tribute to Mary, the *primum mobile* is indicated as the direction toward which Christ and Mary ascend, while the hosts of the blessed incline toward her in desire but remain to sing a Marian antiphon and represent the Church Triumphant—the army of Peter, custodian of the keys of Heaven. Two avenues of grace are implied—through the intercession of Mary and through the sacraments of the Church.

112–17. The royal mantle ... did not yet appear: This refers to the "first moving" heaven, guided by the highest angels, the Seraphim (see 4.28–36, 28.98–105 and notes); it moves most swiftly because it is closest to its goal—the Empyrean, the sphere of intelligible light that is the "place" of the whole cosmos (see 1.2–3, 27.106–11 and notes). The proximity to the Empyrean of the *primum mobile* means it receives the divine breath (the Holy Spirit) directly (later it is seen reflecting the divine ray; see 30.100–108 and note). Compare the "breath of God" on the shell of the cosmos with the "joy that breathes from the womb," i.e., that of the Virgin Mary, in line 104.

112. The royal mantle of all the world's turnings: Dante's word for "turnings" [*volumi*] also suggests a scroll, which can be rolled up; the images of a scroll and of a mantle are superimposed. In the Bible the heavens are represented by both the scroll and the tent of skins (see Is. 34.4, "The heavens shall be folded together as a book" [*et complicabuntur sicut liber cael*i**]); Ps. 103.2, "Who stretchest out the heavens like a tent [*sicut pellem*]); both will be folded or rolled up at the Last Judgement; and Apoc. 6.14, "And the heaven departed as a book rolled up [*sicut liber involutus*]). Augustine compared the firmament to the Word of God stretched out above the earth to inform mankind (*Confessions* 13.15; see Additional Note 13).

Dante's sphere of fixed stars (cantos 22–27), which includes the examination of the pilgrim in light of the authority of Scripture and the Church, develops this cluster of images (cf. 25.70–78, 100–102; 26.17, 43 and notes).

115–17. had its internal shores ... did not yet appear: Invisible from earth, the *primum mobile* is homogenous and has a single movement; its unitary influence is diversified and distributed by the multiplicity of lights in the sphere of fixed stars (see 2.64–66, 70–72 and notes). The image of a shore implies the image of the heavens as a great sea or ocean (cf. 1.112, 19.58–63 and notes); the pilgrim is approaching the "horizon" of time and eternity.

118–20. thus my eyes ... raised itself after its seed: "Its seed" suggests Christ's human descent from the seed of David, Mary's ancestor (cf. *Conv.* 4.5.5–6). Mary disappears by wrapping herself in her "mantle."

121–26. And like a little child ... was visible to me: In a return to the idea that informs lines 1–9, the blessed are like babies, satisfied at the breast, who show their desire to ascend after Mary by stretching out their arms in gratitude and renewed longing; they act out the human tendency to return to the source of love and nourishment. That the souls are fires means that rising is their natural tendency; see *Par.* 1.127–41 and notes.

121. And like a little child ... toward its mamma: Dante's *fantolin* is one newly capable of speech, whose first word is *mamma*, one of the words suitable for small children (*puerilia*, *DVE* 2.7.4). Compare Ps. 8.3 (cited in *Conv.* 4.19.7): "From the mouths of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise."

127–29. Then they remained ... has never left me: The hymn is the Marian compline antiphon in the Easter season (see *Purgatorio* Additional Note 5); its *Alleluias* express joy at the Resurrection implied here, as at lines 37–39.

130–39. O how great ... keys to such glory: In the final part of the pageant, Dante celebrates the triumph of Peter, the custodian of Heaven, still attended by the harvest of the spheres (lines 19–21)—all the redeemed. Contrast the wealth of the saved and the poverty of the damned, "the two colleges" at 19.110–11 and note, and see note to line 138.

130–32. O how great ... sowing down here: The "rich arks" are the apostles and disciples, whose works on earth as "good plowmen" sowing and cultivating the seed of Christ's teaching (see Matt. 13.3–9, and cf. *Inf.* 13.97–100 and note) has returned them a hundredfold in Heaven (Matt. 13.8; Gal. 6.8: "For what thing a man shall sow, those also shall he reap").

Latinisms like *ubertà*, from Lat. *ubertas* [abundance]; and *soffolce* [stored], derived from Lat. *fulcire* [to sustain or hold up], add an element of excess and luxury (cf. Canticle of Canticles 2.5, "Stay me up with flowers" [*fulcite me floribus*]).

133–35. There they live ... was left behind: The exile of Israel in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem (see *Purg.* 23.28–30 and notes), but, allegorically, that of fallen man

during his exclusion from Eden, has, for those who resisted cupidity, kept faith, and mourned the loss of Eden, yielded the joy stored in the treasure-chests of Heaven (cf. Matt. 19.21); that is, partly within the blessed themselves. The meaning of the passage is intensely compressed.

134–35. weeping in the exile of Babylon: Ps. 136.1–2: "Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept: when we remembered Zion," as recited during Holy Week, associates the desolation of Jerusalem during the Babylonian captivity to the Church bereft of Christ (see *Purg.* 7.107–8, 19.50–51 and notes; *Ep.* 7.8, citing this psalm; and Martinez 1997). For Babylon as a figure of this world, see Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 16.4–5.

136–39. There triumphs ... keys to such glory: Peter's control of the keys after Christ's departure keeps open the ways that Christ first blazed (see lines 37–39). See 32.118–26, *Purg.* 9.117–27 and notes. The triumphs have come in descending order of rank: first Christ, then Mary, now Peter; next to be celebrated is Beatrice (24.19–24); later, the pilgrim himself (24.151–54); see next note.

136. There: This word is our rendering of Italian *quivi*, which is also in initial position at lines 37, 73, and 133, a pattern that attests to the unitary action of the canto (see note to lines 1–139). "There" first denotes the single light of Christ, then expands to include the "garden" of Mary and the elect illuminated by Christ, and finally signifies the whole sphere where Peter and the Church triumph. Its meaning also dilates in time: first associated with Christ's Resurrection, then with his nativity, it finally points to all salvation history, from the exile of Babylon to the two "consistories" (to be seen more directly in the Empyrean).

138. the old and the new consistory: Compare Adam at 26.120, "I yearned for this assembly" [*concilio*]. Virgil refers at *Purg.* 21.16 to Heaven as the "blessed council" [*concilio*]; contrast *Inf.* 23.122, of the Sanhedrin, "the council [*concilio*] that sowed so ill for the Jews."



CANTO 24

Fixed stars, continued: saint Peter—examination of the pilgrim: faith—definition—reasons for faith—form of the pilgrim's faith

- 1 "O company elect of the great feast of the
blessed Lamb, who feeds you so well that your
desire is always filled,
- 4 if through God's grace this man has a
foretaste of what falls from your table before
death assigns his time,
- 7 consider his immense yearning and bedew
him somewhat: you drink always from the
fountain whence comes his thought."
- 10 So Beatrice, and those happy souls became
spheres spinning on fixed poles, flaming, as
they turned, like comets.
- 13 And as the wheels in the mechanism of a
clock turn so that, to one who watches, the first
seems to be motionless and the last to fly:
- 16 so those carols, differently dancing, allowed
me to judge their richness, being fast and slow.
- 19 From the carol I thought the most loving I saw
a flame come forth, so happy that none it left
behind there had more brightness,

22 and three times it circled Beatrice with a
song so divine that my imagination cannot tell it
back to me.

25 Therefore my pen leaps over and I do not
write it, for our imagining has colors too
unsubtle for such folds, let alone our speech.

28 "O my holy sister, who beg us so devoutly,
your ardent love has unbound me from that
lovely sphere."

31 Having come to rest, the blessed flame
directed its breathing to my lady, speaking as I
have said.

34 And she: "O eternal light of the great hero with
whom our Lord left the keys, brought down with
him, to this wondrous rejoicing,

37 try this man with easy and difficult points, as it
pleases you, about faith, by which you walked on
the surface of the sea.

40 Whether he truly loves and truly hopes and
believes is not hidden from you, for your gaze
goes where each thing is seen depicted,

43 but because this kingdom makes its citizens
by means of the true faith, in order to glorify it, it
will be well for him to have occasion to speak of it."

46 As the bachelor arms himself but does not
speak until the master proposes the question,
and then to analyze, not to determine it:

49 so I armed myself with all reasons while she
was speaking, to be ready for such a questioner
and such a profession.

- 52 "Speak, good Christian, manifest yourself:
what is faith?" At which I raised my brow toward
the light whence this breathed forth;
- 55 then I turned to Beatrice, and with her ready
glance she encouraged me to pour forth the
water from my inward fountain.
- 58 "May the Grace that allows me to confess
myself," I began, "before the high commander,
cause my concepts to be well expressed."
- 61 And I continued: "As the truthful stylus has
written for us, father, of your dear brother, who
with you set Rome on the right path,
- 64 faith is the substance of things hoped for and
argument of those that do not appear, and this
seems to me its quiddity.
- 67 Then I heard: "You judge correctly, if you
understand why he placed it among the
substances and then among the arguments."
- 70 And I next: "The deep things that grant
themselves to my apprehension here, are so hidden
from our eyes down there
- 73 that their being is in belief alone, upon which
our high hope is founded, and therefore faith can
be called a substance.
- 76 And from our belief it is necessary to syllogize
without seeing more: therefore **faith is a kind of**
argument."
- 79 Then I heard: "If all that is acquired down there
as doctrine were understood so well, no sophist's
wit would find a place."

- 82 This breathed forth from that burning love;
then he added: "We have gone over the alloy and
the weight of this coin well,
- 85 but tell me if you have it in your purse." And I:
"Indeed I do, so shining and so round that none
puts me in doubt of its minting."
- 88 Then there came forth from the deep light that
was shining there: "This precious jewel on which
every other virtue is founded,
- 91 whence did it come to you?" and I: "The
plentiful rain of the Holy Spirit, poured out on
both the old and the new skins,
- 94 is a syllogism that has concluded it for me so
sharply that next to it every demonstration seems
dulled."
- 97 I heard then: "The old and the new
propositions on which you base your conclusion,
why do you hold them to be the speech of God?"
- 100 And I: "The proof that discloses the truth to me
is the resultant works, for which Nature never
heats the iron nor pounds the anvil."
- 103 I was answered: "Tell who assures you that
those works took place? The very book you wish
to prove, not someone else, swears it to you."
- 106 "If the world turned to Christianity," said I,
"without miracles, this one miracle is such that
the others are not a hundredth of it:
- 109 for you came into the field poor and hungry to
sow the good plant, formerly a vine but now become a
thornbush."

112 When I had said this, the high and holy court
resounded through the spheres with a "Praise we
God" in the melody that is sung up there.

115 And that baron who, examining me, had led
me from branch to branch so that we were
drawing near the last leaves,

118 began again: "The grace that woos your mind has
opened your mouth until now as it should be opened,

121 so that I approve what has emerged, but now
you must express what you believe, and how it
was offered to your belief."

124 "O holy father and spirit who see now what you
believed so firmly that you vanquished younger
feet toward the tomb,"

127 I began, "you wish me to make manifest here
the form of my ready belief, and you have
inquired also as to its cause.

130 And I reply: I believe in one God, sole and
eternal, who moves all the heavens, unmoved,
with love and with desire,

133 and for this belief I have not only proofs
physical and metaphysical, but that provided me
by the truth that rains down from here

136 through Moses, through prophets, and through
psalms, through the Gospel and through all of
you, who wrote when the burning Spirit
made you nourishers.

139 And I believe in three Persons eternal, and
these I believe to be an Essence so one and so
trine that it supports both *are* and *is*.

- 142 About the profound nature of God on which I
 touch now, my mind is sealed numerous times by
 the teachings of the Gospels.
- 145 This is the origin, this is the spark that
 expands then into a lively flame and like a star in
 the sky flashes within me."
- 148 Like the lord who listens to what pleases him
 and then embraces his servant, thanking him for
 the news, as soon as he is silent:
- 151 so, blessing me in his song when I fell silent, three
 times the apostolic light encircled me at whose command
- 154 I had spoken, so greatly in my speech I
 pleased him!



CANTO 24

"O sodalizio eletto a la gran cena
del benedetto Agnello, il qual vi ciba
sì che la vostra voglia è sempre piena,
se per grazia di Dio questi preliba
di quel che cade de la vostra mensa,
prima che morte tempo li prescriba,
ponete mente a l'affezione immensa
e roratelo alquanto: voi bevete
sempre del fonte onde vien quel ch' ei pensa."

Così Beatrice, e quelle anime liete
si fero spere sopra fissi poli,
fiammando, volte, a guisa di comete.

E come cerchi in tempra d'oriuoli
si giran sì che 'l primo, a chi pon mente,
quïeto pare e l'ultimo che voli:
così quelle carole, differente-
mente danzando, de la sua richezza
mi facieno stimar, veloci e lente.

Di quella ch' io notai di più carezza
vid' io uscire un foco sì felice
che nullo vi lasciò di più chiarezza,
e tre fiate intorno di Beatrice
si volse con un canto tanto divo
che la mia fantasia nol mi ridice.

Però salta la penna e non lo scrivo,
ché l'agine nostra a cotal pieghe,
non che 'l parlare, è troppo color vivo.

1

4

7

10

13

16

19

22

25

"O santa suora mia, che sì ne priege
divota, per lo tuo ardente affetto
da quella bella spera mi disleghe."

28

Poscia fermato, il foco benedetto
a la mia donna dirizzò lo spiro,
che favellò così com' i' ho detto.

31

Ed ella: "O luce eterna del gran viro
a cui nostro Segnor lasciò le chiavi,
ch' ei portò giù, di questo gaudio miro,

34

tenta costui di punti lievi e gravi,
come ti piace, intorno de la fede,
per la qual tu su per lo mare andavi.

37

S' ellì ama bene e bene spera e crede,
non t'è occulto, perché 'l viso hai quivi
dov' ogne cosa dipinta si vede,
ma perché questo regno ha fatto civi
per la verace fede, a gloriarla
di lei parlare è ben ch' a lui arrivi."

40

Sì come il bacciallier s'arma e non parla
fin che 'l maestro la question propone,
per approvarla, non per terminarla:
così m'armava io d'ogne ragione
mentre ch' ella dicea, per esser presto
a tal querente e a tal professione.

43

"Di, buon cristiano, fatti manifesto:
fede che è?" Ond' io levai la fronte
in quella luce onde spirava questo;
poi mi volsi a Beatrice, ed essa pronte
sembianze femmi perch' io spandessi
l'acqua di fuor del mio interno fonte.

46

49

52

55

"La Grazia che mi dà ch' io mi confessi,"
comincia' io: "da l'alto primipilo
faccia li miei concetti bene espressi."

58

E seguitai: "Come 'l verace stilo
ne scrisse, padre, del tuo caro frate
che mise teco Roma nel buon filo,
fede è sustanza di cose sperate
e argomento de le non parventi,
e questa pare a me sua quiditate."

61

Allora udi': "Dirittamente senti,
se bene intendi perché la ripuose
tra le sustanze e poi tra li argomenti."

67

E io appresso: "Le profonde cose
che mi largiscon qui le lor parvenza
a li occhi di là giù son sì ascose
che l'esser loro v'è in sola credenza,
sopra la qual si fonda l'alta spene,
e però di sostanza prende intenza.

70

E da questa credenza ci conviene
silogizzar sanz' avere altra vista;
però intenza d'argomento tene."

73

Allora udi': "Se quantunque s'acquista
giù per dottrina fosse così 'nteso,
non li avria loco ingegno di sofista."

76

Così spirò di quello amore acceso;
indi soggiunse: "Assai bene è trascorsa
d'esta moneta già la lega e 'l peso,
ma dimmi se tu l'hai ne la tua borsa."

82

Ond' io: "Sì ho, sì lucida e sì tonda
che del suo conio nulla mi s'inforsa."

85

- Appresso uscì de la luce profonda 88
che lì splendeva: "Questa cara gioia,
sopra la qual ogne virtù si fonda,
onde ti venne?" E io: "La larga ploia
de lo Spirito Santo ch' è diffusa 91
in su le vecchie e le nove cuoia
è silogismo che la m'ha conchiusa
acutamente sì che 'nverso d'ella 94
ogne dimostrazion mi pare ottusa."
- Io udi' poi: "L'antica e la novella
proposizion che così ti conchiude, 97
perché l'hai tu per divina favella?"
- E io: "La prova che 'l ver mi dischiude
son l'opere seguite, a che Natura
non scalda ferro mai né batte incude." 100
- Risposto fummi: "Dì, chi t'assicura
che quell'opere fosser? Quel medesmo 103
che vuol provarsi, non altri, il ti giura."
- "Se 'l mondo si rivolse al cristianesimo," 106
diss' io, "sanza miracoli, quest' uno
è tal che li altri non sono il centesmo:
ché tu intrasti povero e digiuno
in campo a seminar la buona pianta 109
che fu già vite e ora è fatta pruna."
- Finito questo, l'alta corte santa
risonò per le spere un "Dio laudamo" 112
ne la melode che là sù si canta.
- E quel baron che sì di ramo in ramo,
essaminando, già tratto m'avea
che a l'ultime fronde appressavamo, 115

- 118
- ricominciò: "La grazia che donnea
con la tua mente la bocca t'aperse
infino a qui come aprir si dovea,
sì ch' io approvo ciò che fuori emerse,
- 121
- ma or convien espremer quel che credi
e onde a la credenza tua s'offerse."
- 124
- "O santo padre e spirito che vedi
ciò che credesti sì che tu vincesti
ver' lo sepulcro più giovani piedi,"
- 127
- comincia' io: "tu vuo' ch' io manifesti
la forma qui del pronto creder mio,
e anche la cagion di lui chiedesti.
- 130
- E io rispondo: Io credo in uno Dio
solo ed eterno, che tutto 'l ciel move,
non moto, con amore e con disio,
- 133
- e a tal creder non ho io pur prove
fisice e metafisice, ma dalmi
anche la verità che quinci piove
- 136
- per Moïsè, per profeti e per salmi,
per l'Evangelio e per voi che scriveste
poi che l'ardente Spirito vi fé almi.
- 139
- E credo in tre Persone etterne, e queste
credo una essenza sì una e sì trina
che soffera congiunto *sono* ed *este*.
- 142
- De la profonda condizion divina
ch' io tocco mo, la mente mi sigilla
più volte l'evangelica dottrina.
- 145
- Quest' è 'l principio, quest' è la favilla
che si dilata in fiamma poi vivace
e come stella in cielo in me scintilla."

Come 'l segnor ch'ascolta quel che i piace
da indi abbraccia il servo, gratulando
per la novella, tosto ch' el si tace:

148

così, benedicendi cantando,
tre volte cinse me, sì com' io tacqui,
l'appostolico lume al cui comando
io avea detto, sì nel dir li piacqui!

151

154

NOTES

1–9. O company elect ... comes his thought: According to Canto 23, it is in the presence of the two "armies of Christ's triumph," "all the fruit harvested" (23.19–21), i.e., all the myriad souls of the Church Triumphant, saved both before and after the Incarnation of Christ, that Beatrice asks saint Peter to share with the pilgrim some of what he drinks from the eternal fountain; the terminology draws on both the idea of God's grace as like dew or rain (line 8; see lines 91–96, with notes) and the waters of eternal life of John 4.5–15 (line 9; cf. *Purg.* 21.1–3, with note).

1–6. O company elect ... assigns his time: The wedding feast of the Lamb (Christ), one of the most frequent figures of Heaven, often represented in the visual arts, is based on Apoc. 19.6–9:

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude ... saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come ... And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.

(Cf. also Jesus' parables, e.g., Matt. 22.2–14, Luke 14.7–11). Dante's symbol of the banquet at which the bread of the angels is served, the governing metaphor of the *Convivio* (1.1.7–15, etc.), derives from this tradition: the knowledge of philosophical truth in this life is a figure of the heavenly banquet, the Beatific Vision.

1. sodalizio eletto: *Sodalizio* [company] is from classical Lat. *sodalicium* [a group meeting periodically for religious or political purposes], part of the hieratic elevation of vocabulary; *elect* is part of the same vocabulary, referring to God's inscrutable predestination to beatitude.

2–3. who feeds you ... is always filled: Note the parallel with 2.11–12: "The bread of the angels, which one lives on here, though never sated by it," also a reference to the opening of the *Convivio*.

4–5. if ... this man has a foretaste of what falls from your table: The same image as in *Conv.* 1.1.10: "E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ma, fuggito da la pastura del volgo, a' piedi di coloro che seggono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade" [And I therefore, who do not sit at the blessed table, but, having fled from the food of the vulgar herd, at the feet of those who do sit there gather from what falls from them] (which he will then mercifully serve to the unlearned). Note the clear implication (insisted on many times in the *Comedy*, and especially here in the sphere of fixed stars and above), that the pilgrim's salvation is assured.

10–18. So Beatrice ... being fast and slow: Beatrice's request causes great rejoicing

among the throng (but the idea of thousands of souls, strongly operative in 23.19–21, 29–31, and 82–84, seems left behind in the interest of closer focus).

10–12. and those happy souls ... turned, like comets: The term *sphere* [literally, "spheres"] is used here to mean "circles" (as below, in line 30). Joy is manifested by the whirling of the souls, in addition to their brightness; the similarity to comets (implying the trailing of cometlike tails, the only possible reference) would be inconsistent with a stationary spinning of the individual souls.

13–18. And as the wheels ... being fast and slow: In the first clock simile (10.139–48), the image was applied to a single circle, and while the difference in pushing as opposed to pulling was mentioned, the differences in speed of revolution in clocks were not. Here a very large degree of difference of speed is invoked, and, as previously, brightness and speed are indications of degrees of beatitude (see Ageno 1982).

16–18. so those carols ... being fast and slow: Now a whole series of round dances is imagined, recalling those in Cantos 10–14 (which, however, turned synchronously). There is no mention of these being concentric. Although the derivation of *carol*, as of It. *carola*, is disputed, Dante obviously associates it with Lat. *corolla* [small crown], one of the most probable suggested origins of the term (cf. the note to 8.138–39).

16–17. differente-mente: Dante's splitting of the adverb between the two lines of verse calls attention to the original formation of adverbs in Vulgar Latin and surviving in all the Romance languages: it consisted of the noun *mens* [mind; in the ablative case, *mente*] modified by an adjective; thus Dante's phrase is formed on the model of "with different mind," and suggests an allusion to the primacy of intellectual vision in determining degrees of beatitude.

19–27. From the carol ... let alone our speech: The soul that now comes forward is the most blessed from the most joyous of all the round dances; it circles Beatrice three times (note the parallel with the conclusion of the canto, lines 151–54), singing a melody so beautiful it transcends the power of the pilgrim's memory to recall it.

25–27. Therefore my pen ... let alone our speech: Another inexpressibility *topos*, with a remarkable allusion to the new style of painting (Dante almost certainly has Giotto in mind here), whose techniques of mixing colors allowed unprecedented subtlety in the depiction of flesh and clothes (hence the "folds" [*pieghe*]) with a delicacy of nuance that is indescribable in words; the soul's song transcends our imagination (this would not be true of the shades of color in painting, or we could not perceive them).

28–30. O my holy sister ... that lovely sphere: See the note to lines 10–12.

32. its breathing: Dante's *spiro* [breath, spirit] is a pseudo-Latinism, a back formation from the verb *spirare* [to breathe].

34–36. And she: O eternal ... this wondrous rejoicing: Beatrice first identifies this soul: it is saint Peter, whose receiving of the “keys of the kingdom of Heaven” from Christ (Matt. 16.19) was regarded by the Roman Church as his appointment as the first pope (cf. *Purg.* 19.97–99, with note); Dante uses *viro* (from Lat. *vir* [man, as distinct from woman]); it is the root of the term *virtus* [valor]) for its solemn tone; it appears three times in the *Comedy* (*Inf.* 4.30, *Par.* 10.132, and here).

37–45. try this man ... to speak of it: Beatrice asks saint Peter to test the pilgrim on faith. Peter had such faith that when he saw Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee he asked to come to him, and given permission, walked on the water; but he grew afraid of the stormy waves and began to sink, whereupon Jesus saved him but reproached him affectionately as “of little faith” (Matt. 22–33).

40–45. Whether he truly loves ... to speak of it: In giving Beatrice this speech, Dante more or less acknowledges the paradox of an interrogation on faith when (a) the pilgrim’s entire journey is an expression of his faith, and (b) he has just seen Christ, the Virgin Mary, and their triumph, and he is in the presence of the chief of the Apostles: he is in the realm of certainty, of fulfillment of faith (cf. lines 70–78, with note, and Augustine, *Enchiridion de fide, spe et charitate* 8, on faith always being in the unseen; this view was taken over in the *Liber sententiarum*). Beatrice resolves the paradox by directing attention away from it, to (a) the assurance of the pilgrim’s salvation (lines 40–42), and (b) the supposed usefulness of “public” glorification of the virtue by which Heaven is earned (lines 43–45; cf. Rom. 3.21–31).

40–42. Whether he truly loves ... is seen depicted: Saint Peter sees all things in God, thus he knows whether the pilgrim possesses the three theological virtues (note that Beatrice mentions them in reverse order—of both the classic passage, 1 Cor. 13.13: “Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three,” and of the sequence of the examinations—a chiastic relation). The obvious implication is that the pilgrim does possess them and that—in his dream, at least—his salvation is assured. As will become clear at the beginning of Canto 25, these lines presage an examination on all three theological virtues; the three Apostles who typify them and who examine the pilgrim (Peter, James, and John) are also the only ones of the original twelve whose epistles are included in the New Testament.

43–45. but because this kingdom ... to speak of it: The reason that Beatrice offers is a mere official and ceremonial one, whose logic, furthermore, is anything but clear. The basic (and real) reason for the pilgrim’s profession of faith is the fact that the poem is a fiction and in the real situation (the poet is a man on earth imagining Heaven and testifying before the living) a formal (and technically correct) profession of faith is both meaningful and appropriate.

46–154. As the bachelor ... I pleased him: The examination of the pilgrim on faith, in five parts: (a) the definition of faith (lines 52–66); (b) explanation of the key terms of the definition (lines 67–81); (c) the pilgrim’s possession of faith (lines 82–87); (d) the rational ground of the pilgrim’s faith (lines 88–114); and (e) the specific “form” of his faith and its

source (lines 118–54). Each part is concluded with the expressed approval of saint Peter, and in one case (part d) of all present as well.

46–51. As the bachelor ... such a profession: As part a begins, Dante invokes the circumstances of a university oral (and public) examination, one in which the possessor of the bachelor's degree qualifies for the master's degree (which will license him to teach; Lat. *magister* means "teacher"); the bachelor would not yet have the authority to "determine" (make a ruling settling the question), the prerogative of a "doctor" but must show his worth in analyzing it (see Glorieux 1933).

52–53. Speak, good Christian ... what is faith: Part a of the examination: first the formal definition of faith.

53–57. At which I raised ... my inward fountain: Lines 53–54 suggest that the pilgrim has not yet looked directly at saint Peter. Even after doing so, he turns to Beatrice for instructions. On the implications of lines 56–57, see the note to lines 85–87.

58–66. May the Grace ... its quiddity: The pilgrim's reply to the first question, preceded by the invocation of God's grace.

58–59. May the Grace ... before the high commander: God's grace has accompanied the pilgrim on his entire journey, of course, but it is a special favor to encounter the chief of the Apostles. "The high commander" is our translation of "*l'alto primipilo*" [the high standard bearer]—the *primipilus* was the centurion leading the column in the Roman army (Benvenuto).

61–66. As the truthful ... its quiddity: Preceded by the identification of its author (according to tradition, saint Paul; the biblical text gives no indication of authorship, and there is no reference to the characteristic doctrines of the Epistle in the saint's other writings; modern opinion does not regard him as the author), the pilgrim quotes Heb. 11.1.

61–63. As the truthful ... on the right path: Saint Paul, traditionally called "the Apostle" par excellence, because of his impressive systematizing of the faith, frequently claimed the authority of an Apostle, implicitly equal to saint Peter (especially as "Apostle to the Gentiles"), although explicitly calling himself the "least of the Apostles" (1 Cor. 15.9; cf. Rom. 11.11, 1 Cor. 9.1, and many other passages). Both he and saint Peter were martyred in Rome; Acts 28.11–30 relates saint Paul's two years of unmolested preaching there. As the commentators point out, line 62 echoes 2 Peter 3.15: "as also our most dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom granted him."

64–65. faith is the substance ... do not appear: A literal translation of Heb. 11.1: "Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium" (most discussions do not account for the gerundive *sperandarum* [for which we must hope]).

66. its quiddity: Literally "its whatness"; the scholastic term was used primarily of

composites (substances consisting of both form and matter, the latter considered to be the *principium individuationis* [principle of individuation]) as a definition indicating its nature as an individual thing; here Dante uses it to mean "definition" (see *ED* s.v. "Quiditate"); the categories of form and matter in relation to faith recur in lines 82–87 and 124–29.

67–69. You judge correctly ... among the arguments: Part b: saint Peter requires an exposition of the terms of the definition. The Greek text has *hypóstasis* and *élegxos*, correctly translated in the Vulgate as *substantia* and *argumentum*, respectively, terms laden with Aristotelian and Plotinian connotations; as was well known to readers of saint Augustine, the *vetus latina* gave *convictio* [conviction] instead of *substantia*.

70–78. The deep things ... kind of argument: The pilgrim's answer, first explaining "substance" (lines 70–75), then "argument" (lines 76–78).

70–72. The deep things ... our eyes down there: These lines acknowledge the paradox mentioned in the note to lines 40–45, distinguishing between those things that are accessible to the human mind on earth and those the pilgrim "apprehends" up here (that appear to him; note the ambiguity of the term *apprehension*, which can refer to imaginative/sensory perception or intellectual grasp; see the next note, and the note to lines 43–45).

72. are so hidden from our eyes down there: Note the parallel here and in line 77 with Heb. 11.1: "those [things] that do not appear."

73–75. their being is in belief ... called a substance: The senses give no basis for belief in unseen things; only faith asserts their existence. Therefore "our high hopes" (for the next life) rest on—are supported by—faith, which can therefore be said to "stand beneath" (*sub* [beneath] + *stare* [to stand]).

76–78. And from our belief ... a kind of argument: The content of our belief is used as a basis of reasoning, of argumentation (*silogizzare* [to construct syllogisms]: the characteristic form of logical thought, according to Aristotle).

Some commentators (e.g., Sapegno) suppose that Dante here gives a simplified version of Aquinas's explanation of the two terms in his article on the definition of faith, an extended commentary on Heb. 11.1 (*ST* 2a 2ae q. 4 a.1). This is not at all the case. Aquinas argues that the first nature in any genus, as long as it virtually contains what is later actualized by form, can be called a *substance*, and that faith receives this name because it is the not yet fully actualized *beginning* ["inchoatio"] of the next life (Heaven) in us and is a gift of grace. Likewise, for *argumentum* Aquinas says that faith "requires the intellect to assent to what is unseen," i.e., that faith persuades the intellect, a view with which Dante's does not conflict but is far from identical to it. To Aquinas, Dante's explanation of *substance* would no doubt have seemed circular, as well as identical with his explanation of *argument*: the persuasion of the intellect (Aquinas's *argument*) is the basis of hope. Dante is taking *substance* to mean *foundation* (in the sense of *assumption*: it is a kind of catachresis) in much the same sense as he takes

argument; he psychologizes both terms. His saint Peter *is* satisfied, however.

83–85. We have gone over ... in your purse: The striking metaphor of faith as a kind of coin has important implications, as will appear. In the terms current in Dante's time, a coin contained a certain weight of metal; the florin, to which Dante so often refers, was legally defined as being of pure gold (24 karats); its imprint, on one side the Florentine lily, on the other saint John the Baptist, the city's patron saint, stood for a guarantee of the weight and purity (cf. the notes to *Inf.* 30.73–74 and 76–90). If faith is a kind of coin, its "weight" would correspond to the import of the terms of the definition; the "alloy" would correspond to its doctrinal purity or correctness.

85–87. but tell me ... doubt of its minting: The "purse" in which Dante treasures his coins of faith would be his heart (on the heart as the seat of faith, see the note to 13.691–96 and Durling 1981b). The pilgrim's answer invokes the criteria by which one might in theory distinguish counterfeit and genuine coins. The "shining" of the coin is a mark of its being gold; its "roundness" indicates that no profiteer has pared its edges (gold and silver both being soft, this was a common practice); what is striking here is that the pilgrim says that he estimates the genuineness of his faith by what in the coin are externals and in actual coins are notoriously unreliable; he says they do not bring the "minting" of his coin into doubt; the minting would correspond to the authority manufacturing the coin—in the case of the florin, the city of Florence; in the case of the pilgrim's faith, God himself. Thus, just as the public reliance on coinage is an act of reliance on the minting authority, so also the pilgrim—and Dante—must have faith that he has faith: in the last analysis, its existence depends on God. For the same sense of the individual soul as at a midpoint between what is external to the self and what is so deeply internal as to imply an inner as well as an outward boundary, cf. "my inward fountain," line 57: whence does this fountain spring? (On this entire complex of issues, see again Durling 1981a).

88–114. Then there came forth ... is sung up there: Part d of the examination: the source of his faith (this part overlaps with the second topic of part e; here the general question of faith in the Bible is discussed, there the basis of specific doctrines about the nature of God).

89–91. This precious jewel ... come to you: The question regards the source of the pilgrim's knowledge of the faith, and more fundamentally, the authority of the Bible.

91–96. The plentiful rain ... demonstration seems dulled: The "old and new skins" [parchments] are the books of the Old and New Testaments (later referred to also as the "old and new propositions"). The pilgrim refers only to his *reading* of the Bible, which he says has been a conclusive "syllogism" for him; already used in line 77, this term here probably refers to the figural relation between Old and New Testaments, drawing conclusions from their interconnections as if they were the premises of a syllogism. That their effect has been sharp (that is, distinct and compelling) is probably to be associated with the idea of precision as a mark of actualized belief (see lines 127–28; and cf. *ST* 2a 2ae q. 5 a.3 and q. 6 a. 1).

It is striking and no doubt significant that Dante does not mention preachers or preaching in this context, for in a celebrated passage (Rom. 10.14–17), saint Paul wrote what was taken to mean that the acquisition of faith required hearing the Word from living persons:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved" [Joel 2.32]. How then shall they call on him [in] whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe [in] him, of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher? ... Faith then cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of Christ.

Dante's condemnations of the current corruption of the clergy (27.40–66) and specifically of contemporary preachers (29.85–126) suggest that the omission of preaching here reflects his strongly anti-institutional views; perhaps also it is self-interestedly pro-reading, imagining the individual alone with the text (perhaps even an anticipation of Luther's "sola scriptura" [on the basis of scripture alone], his formula for deciding theological issues).

91–93. the plentiful rain ... and the new skins: The striking figure of the rain (cf. the note to lines 1–9) over the pages of text leaves out the human authors who are the literal recipients of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The juxtaposition of rain and the dried calfskin of parchments suggests a subterranean association with the miraculously flowering dried rod of the legend of the competition for the hand of the Virgin (Jacobus Voragine, Warner 1976, Elliott 1994, Fassler 2000).

91. rain: Dante's word for rain here is the Provençal *ploia* (cf. 20.62: *plora* [weeps]): in certain contexts Dante prefers to keep the *pl* kept by both French and Provençal, rather than the palatalization *l* of It. *pi-*, as in *piova* or *piange*.

97–102. The old and the new ... pounds the anvil: Saint Peter next asks why the pilgrim holds the Bible to be the word of God, and the pilgrim cites the miracles it narrates, obviously regarding them as historical fact.

97–99. The old and the new ... speech of God: Saint Peter accepts the analogy with the syllogism by calling Old and New Testaments "propositions" supporting the pilgrim's conclusion.

100–102. The proof ... pounds the anvil: Accepting the biblical accounts of miracles, events beyond Nature, which operates by material principles (represented by analogy with metal-working), leads to faith in their being produced by God.

103–5. I was answered: Tell ... swears it to you: Saint Peter raises the objection that the pilgrim's reasoning begs the question, since he is citing the Bible itself to prove the veracity of the Bible.

106–11. If the world ... become a thornbush: The pilgrim replies that given the humble beginnings of Christianity, its universal acceptance, if unsupported by miracles, is itself

a miracle far surpassing any in the Bible. The circular argument is avoided by the citation of a historical fact recognized by all. The argument was well established in the apologetic tradition (the commentators cite Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 2.5 (*PL* 5) and *De civ. Dei* 22.5.68–72; cf. 27–33: “And it is incredible that so few men of common origin, weak and uneducated, should so effectively have persuaded the world, and even the learned in it, of such incredible things”; cf. 1 Cor. 1.27–29). Dante was of course aware of the loss of the Middle East, North Africa, and much of Spain to the Muslims (cf. 29.91–92, with note), which Arnobius and Augustine did not foresee; the idea that the whole world has turned to Christianity is in Dante’s time already very Eurocentric. Why it is appropriate here for the pilgrim to mention the corruption of the Church (“now become a thornbush”) is worth considering.

112–14. When I had said ... sung up there: The justice of the pilgrim’s last statement is validated by all the members of the heavenly court. Presumably what they sing is the ancient hymn “Te Deum laudamus” (text in Raby 1959).

115–54. And that baron ... I pleased him: The last phase of the examination in faith, concluding with saint Peter’s symbolic crowning of the pilgrim by circling his head three times and conferring his blessing (see 25.1–12, with notes). The term *barone* [baron] is part of the system of courtly terminology (in which God is a mighty emperor who maintains a whole courtly social structure) that will become increasingly prominent in this (cf. lines 43, 118, 148–50) and the next cantos.

115–17. had led me from branch ... near the last leaves: The examination, branching into different topics, has resembled a tree; the “last leaves” are the last topics, but in content as well they represent the ultimate form of the pilgrim’s faith (as the leaves of a tree are the fullest manifestation of its form, its principle of life).

118–21. The grace that woos ... what has emerged: As in lines 82–83, saint Peter’s expressed approval of the pilgrim’s reply leads to the next question. Dante’s term *donneare* (from the Provençal *domnejar* [to woo a lady in courtly fashion], part of troubador terminology) is perhaps surprising in this context, but deeply expressive in imagining God’s grace as wooer of the pilgrim’s mind, which gradually opens and flowers in response.

122–23. now you must express ... offered to your belief: In line 91 saint Peter asked, “Whence did it [faith] come to you?” The difference is that in the first case the question refers to faith *as such*, and here to the specific doctrines of his belief (see the note to lines 127–28).

124–47. O holy father ... flashes within me: The pilgrim’s reply to this last question is more elaborate than his preceding ones. It has three parts, each (except the last) subdivided: (1) introduction acknowledging saint Peter’s preeminence in faith among the apostles (lines 124–26), and (b) defining the scope of his answer (lines 127–29); (2) his belief in God, (a) general: (i) his belief in one God (lines 130–32), (ii) the grounds for this belief (lines 133–38); (b) more specifically: (i) belief in the doctrine of the Trinity (lines 139–41), (ii) the grounds for

this belief (lines 142–44); (4) conclusion (lines 145–47).

124–26. O holy father ... younger feet: The reference is to John 20.3–8 (verse 2 clearly identifies the apostle with Peter as John, whom Jesus loved):

Peter therefore went out, and that other disciple, and they came to the sepulchre. And they both ran together, and that other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And when he stooped down, he saw the linen cloths lying; but yet he went not in. Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulchre, and saw the linen cloths lying. And the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen cloths but apart, wrapped up into one place. Then that other disciple also went in, who came first to the sepulchre: and he saw, and believed.

It might seem that Dante misread the biblical text here; but see *Mon. 3.9.16*, roughly contemporaneous with this passage, which summarizes the incident accurately.

127–28. you wish me ... my ready belief: The pilgrim identifies “what you believe” (line 122) as the actualized *form* of his belief, not, in modern terminology, its *content*. The form is what determines a thing’s nature; in the case of belief, the *matter* that receives this form is both intellect and will, which cooperate in *willing assent*; the *form* is its specific orthodox doctrine. That his faith is “pronto” [ready] means that it contains no hesitations or reservations.

130–44. I believe ... of the Gospels: The two parts of the pilgrim’s statement are both drawn from the Nicene Creed (for its text, see p. 684), recited as part of the Ordinary in every celebration of the Mass.

130–38. I believe ... made you nourishers: Part 2 of the pilgrim’s answer; for the difference between the grounds cited in lines 133–38 and in 142–44, see the note to the latter terzina.

130–32. I believe ... and with desire: A statement of the first article of the Nicene Creed (omitting the words concerning creation), with the addition of the Aristotelian doctrine of the first cause as the “unmoved mover,” unmoved by anything outside it, and completely actualized, therefore unchanging, all change deriving from the love and desire felt for it by the rest of the cosmos (*Metaphysics* 12.7; this doctrine had been adopted, with some reservations, by the Scholastics: see *ST* 1a q. 2 a. 3).

133–38. and for this belief ... made you nourishers: Two types of proof are mentioned: “physical and metaphysical,” i.e., philosophical proofs developed by the natural human power of reason; and biblical.

134. proofs physical and metaphysical: As “physical” proofs Dante probably has in mind Rom. 1.18–20, regularly cited to support the view that God’s “eternal power and

godhead" are revealed in the cosmos, and as "metaphysical" ones, the countless discussions of Aristotle in the Schools.

135–38. the truth that rains ... made you nourishers: Recurrence of the rain metaphor of lines 91–93, this time with the finite verb *piove* [rains].

137–38. through the Gospel ... made you nourishers: The "Gospel" is the "good news" (Old English *gode + spell*, from Gr. *eú* [good] + *aggélion* [message]) of salvation, testified to by each of the four *evangelists* [from the same Greek root]). With the Epistles and Apocalypse, all of the New Testament is indicated here.

138. when the burning Spirit made you nourishers: The "burning Spirit" refers to the descent of the Holy Spirit into the Church at Pentecost, in the form of flames on the heads of the assembled disciples (Acts 2; cf. *Inf.* 19.25–30, with notes, and *Inferno* Additional Note 7). *Almo* (from Lat. *alo, alere* [to nourish]) refers originally to the breast of a nurse, but was widely used in the extended sense.

139–44. And I believe ... teachings of the Gospels: Part 2.b.i, a very abbreviated statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, relying mainly on the Nicene Creed, which was developed under Constantine to deal with the widespread heresy of Arius, who had denied the equality of the Son with the Father. The Nicene Creed emphasizes the equality and consubstantiality of the three Persons much more than other early creed texts.

140–41. an Essence so one ... both are and is: Brief statement of the chief points in the Creed pertaining to all the Persons of the Trinity: absolute unity (*is*) and equality (*are*) of the Persons, who always act together but have distinct names and, in a sense, attributes: Father omnipotent, Creator, Begetter; Son, Begotten, Logos, Mind; Spirit, Love, Comforter, Fire: paradoxes that, like the hypostatic union of divine and human in Christ, utterly transcend human understanding.

142–44. About the profound ... teachings of the Gospels: The New Testament is granted considerably greater authority than the Old Testament here, as the fullest and definitive revelation of the triune nature of God.

145–47. This is the origin ... flashes within me: Part 3, conclusion. The two instances of "this" in line 145 refer to the entire statement of lines 130–44. The fire image may be a reference to the idea that *love*, too, is the form of faith (cf. *ST* 2a 2ae q. 4 a. 3). For the star imagery, cf. 25.70–72 and 13.1–24, with notes.

148–54. Like a lord ... I pleased him: This symbolic crowning is triple (Trinitarian); the parallel with baptism ("in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit") is recalled and made explicit in 25.1–12 (see our notes).



CANTO 25

*Fixed stars, examination of the pilgrim; continued: saint James—
hope—Beatrice certifies the pilgrim's hope—definition—
what hope promises—saint John the Evangelist—blindness*

- 1 If it ever happen that the sacred poem, to
which both Heaven and earth have set their
hand, so that for many years it has made me
lean,
- 4 vanquish the cruelty that locks me out of the
lovely sheepfold where I slept as a lamb, an
enemy of the wolves that make war on it,
- 7 with other voice by then, with other fleece I
shall return as poet, and at the font of my
baptism I shall accept the wreath:
- 10 for there I entered the faith that makes souls
known to God, and later Peter so circled my
brow because of it.
- 13 Then there moved toward us another light
from the sphere that had sent forth the first fruit
Christ left of his vicars,
- 16 and my lady, full of gladness, said to me:
"Behold, behold: here is the baron for whose
sake they visit Galicia down there."

- 19 As when one dove perches next to its
companion and, turning and murmuring, they
express affection to each other:
- 22 so I saw the one great glorious prince receive
the other, praising the food of their feast up there.
- 25 But once their glad greetings had been
accomplished, in silence *coram me* each
became still, so fiery that they overcame my sight.
- 28 Smiling then Beatrice said: "Famous soul, by
whom the liberality of our kingly palace was
written,
- 31 cause hope to resound in these heights: you
know that you personify it as many times as
Jesus did most honor to the three."
- 34 "Raise your head and be reassured, for what comes
up here from the mortal world must ripen in our rays."
- 37 This encouragement came to me from the
second flame, and so I lifted up my eyes to the
mountains that had earlier bent them down with
excessive weight.
- 40 "Since our Emperor in his grace wills that
before your death you confront his counts in the
innermost hall,
- 43 so that, having seen the truth of this court,
you may strengthen the hope of it, which makes
folk love well down there, in yourself and others:
- 46 tell what it is, tell how your mind blossoms
with it, and tell whence it came to you." Thus the
second light continued.
- 49 And that compassionate lady who guided the

- feathers of my wings to such high flight, thus
forestalled my reply:
- 52 "The Church Militant has no son with more
 hope, as is written in the Sun that irradiates all
 our host:
- 55 therefore is it granted him that from Egypt he
 come to Jerusalem to see, before his warfare is
 concluded.
- 58 The other two points, which are not asked for
 knowledge, but so that he may relate how much
 this virtue pleases you,
- 61 I leave to him, for they will not be difficult nor
 cause for boasting; so let him answer them, and
 may the grace of God permit him that."
- 64 Like a student who seconds his teacher,
 ready and willing in what he knows well, so that
 his goodness may no longer be hidden,
- 67 "Hope," I said, "is a sure expectation of the
 future glory, produced by God's grace and
 preceding merit.
- 70 From many stars this light comes to me, but
 he who first distilled it in my heart was the
 highest singer of the highest Lord.
- 73 'Let them hope in thee,' he says in his divine
 song, 'those who know thy name'; and who
 does not know it, if he has my faith?
- 76 Along with his instilling, you instilled it in me
 then in your epistle, so that I am full, and I in
 turn rain on others what you have rained on me."
- 79 While I was speaking, within the living bosom

- of that flame a flashing trembled, sudden and
repeated like lightning;
- 82 then he breathed: "The love with which I am
still aflame toward the virtue that followed me to
my palm and my retirement from the field
- 85 makes me speak again to you who delight in
it, and I wish you to say what it is that hope
promises you."
- 88 And I: "The new Scriptures and the old set
forth the target for the souls whom God has
made his friends, and that fact points it out to me.
- 91 Isaiah says that in the homeland each will be
clothed in a double raiment: and the homeland
is this sweet life;
- 94 and your brother far more distinctly, where he
treats of the white stoles, manifests this revelation
to us."
- 97 And first, after the end of these words,
"Sperent in te" was heard above us, to which all
the carols replied.
- 100 Then among them one light brightened so,
that if Cancer had such a crystal, the winter
would have a month of one sole day.
- 103 And as a joyous virgin rises and walks and
joins the dance, solely to pay honor to the new
bride, not because of any fault:
- 106 so I saw the brightened splendor come to the
two who were turning to a melody such as
befitted their ardent love.
- 109 It joined the song there and the circling, and

- my lady kept her eyes fixed on them, like a
silent and unmoving bride.
- 112 "This is he who reclined on the breast of our
Pelican, and from the Cross he was chosen for
the great duty."
- 115 So my lady, nor did her words, before or after,
cause her eyes to become less attentive.
- 118 Like one who gazes and strives to see
the sun eclipsed, if only a little, and who through
seeing becomes unseeing:
- 121 so did I become toward that last fire, while
these words were spoken: "Why do you dazzle
yourself to see what has no place here?"
- 124 On earth my body is earth, and it will be there
with the others until our number equals the
eternal purpose.
- 127 Only the two lights that ascended have the
two stoles in the eternal cloister, and you shall
take this back to your world."
- 130 At this voice the fiery circling ceased and with
it the sweet blend made by the sound of its triple
breath:
- 133 so, in order to avoid labor or danger, oars that
just now struck the water pause all together at
the sounding of a whistle.
- 136 Ah, how perturbed did I become in my mind
when, turning to see Beatrice, I could not see,
although I was
- 139 near her, and in the happy world!



CANTO 25

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro,1
al quale ha posto mano e Cielo e terra
sì che m'ha fatto per più anni macro,
vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra4
del bello ovile ov' io dormi' agnello,
nimico ai lupi che li danno guerra,
con altra voce omai, con altro vello7
ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte
del mio battesmo prenderò 'l cappello:
però che ne la fede, che fa conte10
l'anime a Dio, quivi intra' io, e poi
Pietro per lei sì mi girò la fronte.
Indi si mosse un lume verso noi13
di quella spera ond' uscì la primizia
che lasciò Cristo d'i vicari suoi,
e la mia donna, piena di letizia,16
mi disse: "Mira, mira: ecco il barone
per cui là giù si visita Galizia."
Sì come, quando il colombo si pone19
presso al compagno, l'uno a l'altro pande,
girando e mormorando, l'affezione:
così vid' io l'un da l'altro grande22
principe glorioso essere accolto,
laudando il cibo che là sù li prande.
Ma poi che 'l gratular si fu assolto,25
tacito *coram me* ciascun s'affisse,
ignito sì che vincëa 'l mio volto.

- Ridendo allora Béatrice disse: 28
"Inclita vita per cui la larghezza
de la nostra basilica si scrisse,
fa risonar la spene in questa altezza: 31
tu sai che tante fiate la figuri,
quante lesù ai tre fé più carezza."
"Leva la testa e fa che t'assicuri, 34
ché ciò che vien qua sù del mortal mondo
convien ch'ai nostri raggi si maturi."
Questo conforto del foco secondo 37
mi venne, ond' io leväi li occhi a' monti
che li 'ncurvaron pria col troppo pondo.
"Poi che per grazia vuol che tu t'affronti 40
lo nostro Imperadore, anzi la morte,
ne l'aula più secreta co' suoi conti,
sì che, veduto il ver di questa corte, 43
la spene, che là giù bene innamora,
in te e in altrui di ciò conforte:
dì quel ch' ell' è, dì come se n'infiora 46
la mente tua, e dì onde a te venne."
Così seguì 'l secondo lume ancora.
E quella pia che guidò le penne 49
de le mie ali a così alto volo
a la risposta così mi prevenne:
"La Chiesa Militante alcun figliuolo 52
non ha con più speranza, com' è scritto
nel Sol che raggia tutto nostro stuolo:
però li è conceduto che d'Egitto 55
vegna in Ierusalemme per vedere
anzi che 'l militar li sia prescritto.

Li altri due punti, che non per sapere
son dimandati ma perch' ei rapporti
quanto questa virtù t'è in piacere,
a lui lasc' io, ché non li saran forti
né di iattanza; ed elli a ciò risponda,
e la grazia di Dio ciò li comporti."

58

Come discente ch'a dottor seconda,
pronto e libente in quel ch' elli è esperto
perché la sua bontà si disasconda:

61

"Spene," diss' io, "è uno attender certo
de la gloria futura, il qual produce
grazia divina e precedente merto.

67

Da molte stelle mi vien questa luce,
ma quei la distillò nel mio cor pria,
che fu sommo cantor del sommo Duce.

70

'Sperino in te,' ne la sua tēodia
dice, 'color che sanno il nome tuo':
e chi nol sa, s' elli ha la fede mia?

73

Tu mi stillasti, con lo stillar suo,
ne la pistola poi, sì ch' io son pieno
e in altrui vostra pioggia repluo."

76

Mentr' io diceva, dentro al vivo seno
di quello incendio tremolava un lampo
sùbito e spesso a guisa di baleno;

79

indi spirò: "L'amore ond' io avvampo
ancor ver' la virtù che mi seguette
infin la palma e a l'uscir di campo
vuol ch'io respiri a te che ti dilette
di lei, ed emmi a grato che tu diche
quello che la speranza ti 'mpromette."

82

85

E io: "Le nove e le Scritture antiche
pongono lo segno, ed esso lo mi addita,
de l'anime che Dio s'ha fatte amiche.

88

Dice Isaia che ciascuna vestita
ne la sua terra fia di doppia vesta:
e la sua terra è questa dolce vita;
e 'l tuo fratello assai vie più digesta,
là dove tratta de le bianche stole,
questa revelazion ci manifesta."

91

E prima, appresso al fin d'este parole,
"Sperent in te" di sopr' a noi s'udì,
a che rispuoser tutte le carole.

94

Poscia tra esse un lume si schiarì
sì che, se Cancro avesse un tal cristallo,
l'inverno avrebbe un mese d'un sol dì.

97

E come surge e va ed entra in ballo
 vergine lieta, sol per fare onore
 a la novizia, non per alcun fallo:
 così vid' io lo schiarato splendore
 venir a' due, che si volgieno a nota
 qual conveniesi al loro ardente amore.

100

Misesi lì nel canto e ne la rota,
e la mia donna in lor tenea l'aspetto,
pur come sposa tacita e immota.

103

"Questi è colui che giacque sopra 'l petto
del nostro pellicano, e questi fue
di su la croce al grande officio eletto."

106

La donna mia così, né però più
mosser la vista sua di stare attenta
poscia che prima le parole sue.

109

112

115

Qual è colui ch' adocchia e s'argomenta
di vedere eclissar lo sole un poco,
che per veder non vedente diventa:

118

tal mi fec' io a quell' ultimo foco,
mentre che detto fu: "Perché t'abbagli
per veder cosa che qui non ha loco?

121

In terra è terra il mio corpo, e saragli
tanto con li altri che 'l numero nostro
con l'eterno proposito s'aggagli.

124

Con le due stole nel beato chiostro
son le due luci sole che saliro,
e questo apporterai nel mondo vostro."

127

A questa voce l'infiammato giro
si quietò con esso il dolce mischio
che si facea nel suon del trino spiro:

130

sì come per cessar fatica o rischio
li remi, pria ne l'acqua ripercossi,
tutti si posano al sonar d'un fischio.

133

Ahi quanto ne la mente mi commossi
quando mi volsi per veder Beatrice,
per non poter veder, benché io fossi
presso di lei e nel mondo felice!

136

139

NOTES

1–12. If it ever happen ... because of it: The canto of hope has a proem unique in the *Comedy* in referring, albeit briefly, to the poet's actual circumstances during the composition of the poem (the only other comparable passage is 17.55–92, a prophecy not spoken by the poet *in propria persona*), and in expressing the poet's ardent hope of returning to Florence amid public recognition of his achievement as a poet (one notes the implicit, unquestioning confidence that he will complete the *Comedy* itself).

He hopes that this masterpiece of his, for which he has endured privation and fatigue (it has made him "lean for many years"), will soften the cruel political vengefulness that prevents his return to his beloved Florence. In that case, late in his life (with changed voice and gray hair), he will return to accept the poet's reward in his "beautiful Saint John" (*Inf.* 19.17), where he was baptized.

1–4. If it ever happen ... vanquish the cruelty: The sacred subject, the poet's love of Florence, and the beauty of the poem should win the love and therefore the compassion of its Florentine readers in particular (for art as winning love, see *Purg.* 10.97–99 and 26.109–14, and *Purgatorio* Additional Note 7; on the purging of anger see *Purg.* 15.85–132). For the *Comedy* as a wooing of Florence, parallel with the wooing of the hostile "donna pietra," see Durling 1992; Dante's earthly hopes are expressed much less confidently than his hopes for the next life, which are the principal topic now, as his examination continues. Note that *continga* [happen] and *vinca* [vanquish] are both present subjunctives.

1–2. the sacred poem ... have set their hand: One notes the parallel, but at a much more solemn level, with the characterization of the poem as "my comedy" (*Inf.* 21.2; cf. *Inf.* 16.127–31). What Dante means by line 2 has been variously explained: "Heaven" can refer to Dante's theological studies, to God's grace, or perhaps to astrological influences (as in 22.112–33); "earth" to Dante's experience of worldly affairs or to circumstances (the support of friends and patrons, for instance), or to his own unremitting efforts.

4–6. the lovely sheepfold ... make war on it: Childhood memories of his own innocence and of Florence as protective enclosure. The depiction of the small, idealized early Florence, in Cacciaguida's account (16.97–135), is prompted by the pilgrim's request to be told of "the sheepfold of saint John," and it is centered on the Baptistry. The proverbial "lamb" is first the poet as young child, but it soon blends into the adult, also innocent and guileless, who entertains political enmity for the "wolves" (Ghibellines, popes, Black Guelphs, Angevins) that threaten it.

7–12. with other voice ... because of it: Note the sense of the completion of a circle (and a return to the original circular enclosure, both of the city walls and of the Baptistry); it is a version, on the scale of the poet's individual life, of the theme of return to origins further and

further into the past of the human race as a whole (in Canto 24 we reach the Apostles, in Canto 26 Adam himself—the spiritual fathers and the literal father of all); in the sphere of the fixed stars we reach the origin of all diversity and Gemini, the pilgrim's natal sign, in 28–29 the angels, and ultimately God himself, the origin of all things.

7–8. with other voice ... return as poet: Dante's repeated word "altro/a" [other] is richly ambiguous. The obvious meaning is that he will have aged: his voice will be that of an old man, his hair (his "fleece") will be gray or white; but the lines also mean that he will have acquired the authoritative voice of a great poet (and perhaps a vindicated political theorist), which he did not have when he left Florence, and the "fleece" he will bring back will be also the poem itself, the parallel of his poetic "voyage" with that of Jason and the Argonauts, in quest of the Golden Fleece (first mentioned in *Inf.* 18.87), having been explicitly established since 2.1–18, to be claimed finally in 33.94–96.

8–12. at the font ... because of it: One notes the centrality, in this system of concentric circles, of faith (the foundation of all other virtues, says saint Peter in 24.89–90—their "substance," cf. 24.64–75), *entered* into within the city walls, within the baptistery, in the font itself (whether *Inf.* 19.16–25 implies sprinkling or immersion, the head is the chief target of baptism). One reason why the pilgrim's confession of faith in 24.139–44 focuses exclusively on the existence and triune nature of God is his being in the very center from which all else radiates (Cantos 28–29).

9. I shall accept the wreath: Dante has in mind here the traditional laurel wreath of the poet (as in 1.22–33), expecting the reader to recognize "cappello" as an adaptation of Fr. *chapelet* [chaplet, wreath]. His ambition for the laurel and his homesickness are both explicit themes in his poetic exchange (ca. 1319–20) with Giovanni del Virgilio, a professor at Bologna, who urged him to write epic poetry in Latin, for which the university would crown him with laurel (*Ecl.* 1.35–40), either literally or metaphorically; Albertino Mussato had already been crowned laureate by Padua in 1305, for his Latin tragedy *Ecerinis*, in the first Renaissance revival of the ancient custom; Dante never refers explicitly to Mussato. Dante's reply, in the first pastoral elegy of the Renaissance, is in part:

Nonne triumphales melius pexare capillos
et patrio, redeam si quando, abscondere canos
fronde sub inserta solitum flavescere Sarno?
... Cum mundi circumflua corpora cantu
astricoleisque meo, velut infera regna, patebunt,
devincire caput edera lauroque iuvabit.

(*Eclogue* 2.42–50)

[Would it not be better to comb my triumphant locks
beside my native Arno, if I ever return, and there hide them, now white,
beneath the woven leaves, in the place where they formerly were bland?
... When the bodies that revolve about the world,

and the dwellers in the stars, like the infernal regions,
shall be published in my song, that will be the time
to bind my head about with ivy and with laurel.]

The clear reference to the *Paradiso* not yet being finished (more likely than merely to its not yet having been published) is important evidence for its dating.

10–11. the faith ... known to God: At the Last Judgment, Christ will turn his face away from all but the saved; as Virgil observes in *Inf.* 4. 35–36, “Baptism is the gateway to the faith that you believe.” Also, at baptism the child receives the name by which he or she will be known in this world and the next. Since the *Comedy* is itself primarily the expression of Dante’s faith, his being crowned at the baptismal font makes the baptismal waters those of a true Castalia (see the note to *Purg.* 31.140–41).

11–12. and later ... because of it: The proem ends, rounded out with the recall of the ending of Canto 24, emphasizing the parallelism of the two imagined crownings.

13–99. Then there moved ... all the carols replied: Now saint James arrives to conduct the examination on hope, and it becomes apparent that Dante is drawing on the exegetical tradition according to which the three Apostles (Peter, James the elder, and John) whom Christ singled out to be with him on three important occasions (the resurrection of the daughter of Jair [Luke 8.1–42, 49–56], the Transfiguration [Matt. 17–18, Mark 9.2–6, Luke 9.28–36], and the Agony in the Garden [Matt. 26.36–46]) personified the three theological virtues (Peter faith; cf. 24.34–39; John love, because of Jesus’s special love for him; cf. lines 112–14, with note; and James hope).

13–39. Then there moved ... with excessive weight: The introduction to this second phase of the pilgrim’s examination is less elaborate than the introduction to the first (24.1–51): a light moves from the circle from which saint Peter came, unidentified, like him (24.19–23), but unlike him (cf. 24.24–33) not speaking immediately before Beatrice identifies him, in lines 17–18 (as she does saint Peter in 24.34–39). New is the expression of mutual affection of the two, after which they turn silently to the pilgrim (lines 19–27), and (as in 24.34–45) Beatrice asks that the pilgrim be examined (lines 28–33); in 24.46–51 the pilgrim prepares for the questioning like a university student, but here the saint first encourages him so that he raises his eyes, no longer dazzled (lines 34–39). For the preliminaries to the third phase of the examination, see 25.100–26.1–6, with notes.

13–27. Then there moved ... overcame my sight: The arrival of saint James. “Sphere” is here again used for “circle” or “carol” (cf. 24.11, 16, and cf. *Purg.* 15.1–3, with note). One notes the official, ceremonial, Latinizing language (*mira* [gaze, admire], *primizia* [first fruit], *vicari* [vicars], *barone* [baron], *grande principe* [great prince], *pande* [sets forth], *prande* [feeds], *coram me* [facing me], *gratular* [express gladness], *assolto* [absolved]), *ignito* [fiery], increasingly emphasizing the analogy with an imperial court (explicit in lines 30 and 40–43).

14–15. from the sphere ... left of his vicars: Saint Paul wrote of the resurrected Christ as "the first fruits of them that slept" [*primitiae dormientium*] (1 Cor. 15.20); saint Peter, as first vicar of Christ (i.e., pope), would be the first fruit of the foundation of the Church at Pentecost.

16–18. And my lady ... Galicia down there: The shrine of saint James at Compostella (supposedly the burial place of the Apostle who came furthest west) was a particularly popular goal of pilgrimage from early times.

19–24. As when one dove ... feast up there: Doves are emblems of hope in many bestiaries (see Shoaf 1975).

25–27. But once their glad ... overcame my sight: It is their gaze that overburdens his eyes; *coram me* means "facing me," "gazing at me." Previously he had been able to endure the sight of them.

28–39. Smiling then Beatrice ... with excessive weight: Beatrice asks saint James to examine the pilgrim on hope, the saint encourages him to endure the brightness, and the pilgrim finds his eyes no longer weighed down.

29–33. Famous soul by whom ... honor to the three: Beatrice cites two of saint James's qualifications to conduct this examination: (1) he wrote of "the liberality of our royal palace" [*basilica*, ultimately from Gr. *basileus*, king, sc. "house of the king"] in his Epistle (lines 29–30); Dante seems to have in mind 1.5: "But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask [it] of God, who giveth to all men abundantly and upbraideth not; and it shall be given" (cf. Matt. 7.7–8); (2) he personifies hope in the incidents where Jesus showed most honor to the three (lines 32–33; cf. the note to lines 13–99, above).

34–39. Raise your head ... with excessive weight: The vision of those who come from below must ripen in the rays emitted by the apostles: note the sun imagery.

38–39. I lifted my eyes ... with excessive weight: Saints Peter and James are the "mountains," of course; Dante is echoing Ps. 120.1: "I have lifted up mine eyes to the mountains, whence help shall come to me." Stäuble 1996 argues for a reference to the "gradual psalms" (Ps. 119–34) as a group; Ps. 120 is the only one cited by Dante.

40–48. Since our Emperor ... second light continued: The formal examination begins again; after a ceremonious apostrophe acknowledging the special grace received by the pilgrim (lines 40–42), the saint defines the purpose of his questions (the strengthening of hope in the pilgrim and on earth, lines 43–45), and poses three questions: the definition of hope, how it "blossoms" in the pilgrim's mind, and whence it came to him (lines 46–47).

40–42. Since our Emperor ... in the innermost hall: This is the most concrete and elaborate instance of the analogy of Heaven with an imperial court that we have so far

encountered (see *Inf.* 1.124–29). The term “counts” is drawn from the office of high officials instituted by Charlemagne, some of whom traveled through his territories supervising government, while others, such as Roland, were in charge of border districts, called “marches.” They are imagined as meeting in a council chamber from which all but the emperor’s closest associates are barred.

43–45. so that, having ... yourself and others: Cf. the notes to 24.40–45, and to lines 76–78 and 85–86 below.

49–63. And that compassionate ... permit him that: Beatrice intervenes to answer the second of saint James’s questions (lines 46–47), so that the pilgrim will not be required to praise himself; she will leave the other two to him.

52–56. The Church Militant ... warfare is concluded: We have known for some time that the pilgrim’s salvation is assured, but we may well be surprised to learn that of all the living (all the Church Militant, still waging its war against sin and the Devil, in which the pilgrim is also enlisted), no one has higher hopes of eternal bliss than the pilgrim! She says that the strength of his hope is what justifies his journey to the next world: from Egypt, the land of exile and bondage (whether figuring this life or Hell), to Jerusalem, the Holy City in the Promised Land (which figures Heaven: this fundamental pattern of the Exodus underlies the entire poem and furnishes its basic allegory (see our introduction to the *Purgatorio*, pp. 12–15).

It is perhaps not surprising that Cacciaguida’s statement of the purpose of the pilgrim’s journey—to prepare him to write the *Comedy*—is not mentioned here (nor is the question raised of how much, in Dante’s mind, his sense of merit—cf. line 69—and to that extent, his hope of Heaven, is based on his pride in his poem, like his earthly hopes expressed in lines 1–12).

58–60. not asked ... virtue pleases you: That is, not asked in order that the pilgrim may show his understanding or knowledge of the nature of hope, but, since in the Gospel incidents in which saint James figures and in his Epistle, not much is said of hope, those on earth might need assistance in understanding why he personifies it; he will show how much he loves it.

61–63. I leave to him ... permit him that: That the two points will not be difficult for the pilgrim indicates that the question she has just answered would have been: how could he have compared his own hopes with those of others? (It has not seemed difficult for the poet, however.) But he still needs God’s help in answering.

64–79. Like a student ... have rained on me: The pilgrim’s reply to the first and third of the saint’s questions (definition and source of hope).

64–66. Like a student ... no longer be hidden: Parallel to the more extended analogy with the bachelor undergoing the examination for the master’s degree (24.46–51). In the first case, the bachelor knows he must not pretend to determine the question; here the imagined situation is a more advanced level of attainment in which the student is given a subordinate

expository role; the emphasis is on his easy confidence that he can perform well.

67–69. Hope, I said ... and preceding merit: Like the definition of faith (which of course was a famous scriptural passage), this definition of hope (though not scriptural) is drawn from the twelfth-century handbook of Catholic theology that every Scholastic theologian (including Albert the Great and Aquinas) made his debut by expounding, Peter Lombard's *Liber sententiarum* (3.26); the definition was virtually a commonplace.

69. God's grace and preceding merit: This formula summarizes the traditional doctrine, based on James 2.17: "Faith without works is dead" (i.e., to be saved, one must *have acquired* "merit" by good works—the merit must "precede" the moment of decision; faith alone is insufficient). This was to be one of the major points of controversy between the Catholics and the Protestants during the Reformation, the latter holding to the Pauline formula that "if righteousness come by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2.21; cf. Rom. 4: works done without faith are worthless).

70–78. From many stars ... have rained on me: The biblical source of the pilgrim's hope. Among the many passages ("many stars") that might be cited, the pilgrim singles out a psalm of David's and the Epistle of saint James, which have so filled him with hope that he can instill it in ("rain it on") others. The light imagery ("stars," "light," line 70: note the implicit Augustinian allegory of the Bible as the firmament over the believers, *Confessions* 13.15) becomes combined with that of dew (lines 71, 76) and then of rain (line 78; see the notes to 24.91–96 and 91–93).

71–75. he who first ... has my faith: The first to penetrate the pilgrim's heart was the psalmist David, particularly with Ps. 9.11, which is literally translated in lines 73–74 and quoted in Latin by the assembled souls in line 98.

74–75. those who know ... has my faith: David was credited by the Christians with having systematically prophesied the Incarnation of Christ in his Psalms, which the influential commentary by saint Augustine interpreted as spoken in the person of Christ (hence David was known as "the Prophet"). The "name" referred to in line 74 is of course that of Christ, as "my faith" (line 75) indicates.

76–78. Along with his instilling ... have rained on me: As the commentators observe, although the word *hope* does not appear in the Epistle of saint James, it contains much urging not to be discouraged by difficulties and persecutions (the appropriateness of the latter to Dante's circumstances is obvious).

77–78. I am full ... have rained on me: The lines refer to the *Comedy*, of course. Note the conspicuous Latinism in "repluo" [I rain again], a coinage based on Lat. *pluo, pluere* [to rain] (from which It. *piovere*), ordinarily used only as an impersonal verb in the third person; cf. 24.91, with note.

79–81. While I was ... repeated like lightning: The saint responds to the pilgrim's words with heartfelt rejoicing, like the lightnings of joy in 18.34–48.

82–99. then he breathed ... all the carols replied: The saint's final question (what is it the pilgrim hopes for?), the pilgrim's answer, and the great rejoicing of all present.

82–84. The love with which ... retirement from the field: The saint introduces his last question with a statement of his great love for the virtue hope, which followed him (did not abandon him; cf. 11.64–72) to his "palm" (i.e., his victorious death as a martyr). Note the military metaphor in "retirement from the field" (i.e., of battle), referring to his death. These lines recall the thought of lines 31–33 and 43–45.

88–96. And I: The new ... revelation to us: The pilgrim's reply, which he states obliquely and metaphorically, citing passages from both the Old and New Testaments (note the parallel with 24.91–93). The term *segno* is particularly rich in meanings (sign, gesture, miracle, letter, target); the reference here is to what hope aims at.

91–93. Isaiah says that ... this sweet life: Dante refers to Is. 61.7: "Propter hoc in terra sua duplia possidebunt, laetitia sempiterna erat eis" [Therefore shall they receive double [*duplicia*, a neuter plural] in their land, everlasting joy shall be unto them]; since the context concerns amends for past suffering and shame, the exegetes connected this verse with Is. 61.3: "I will give them ... the robe [*pallium*] of praise in exchange for sorrow" (and cf. 61.10), and with Apoc. 7.9 (see next note).

94–96. and your brother ... revelation to us: "Your brother" refers to saint John, author of the Apocalypse (both he and saint James were sons of Zebedee): "I saw a great multitude ... standing before the throne, and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes [*stolae*], and palms in their hands." At least as early as Gregory the Great (540–604), the two stoles were interpreted as the gladness of the soul and the glory of the resurrected body (Chiavacci Leonardi). Thus the pilgrim expresses the hope of both beatitudes (cf. lines 127–29).

97–99. And first, after the end ... the carols replied: What is meant by "above us" (line 98) is not specified: it may mean that Ps. 9.11 ("Sperent in te" [Let them hope in thee]) is spoken or sung by Christ, who has withdrawn from sight (23.85–87). The assembled souls, who are still without their bodies, echo the verse: they must wait for reunion with them (which they strongly desire: cf. 14.43–78, with notes). Dante would not seem to agree with Aquinas's argument that the souls in Heaven do not feel hope, since they have attained the chief goal of hope, and therefore reunion with the body no longer seems difficult (*ST* 2a 2ae q. 18 a. 2 ad 4); on a related point, cf. *Purg.* 11.22–26, with note.

100–139. Then among them ... in the happy world: The rest of the canto, with the arrival of saint John the Evangelist and the pilgrim's desire to see his face, constitutes the extended introduction to the third phase of the pilgrim's examination, which we have learned to expect, and which takes place in Canto 26. As previously, a new soul joins the previous

examiner(s), is welcomed, and is identified by Beatrice; now the pilgrim strives to see him, and the saint explains why he cannot. Then the pilgrim goes blind.

100–102. Then among them ... one sole day: The brightness of this soul is sunlike. In winter the sun is in Capricorn, opposite Cancer on the Zodiac. If Cancer held a star this bright, the daily setting of the sun would not bring night at all, but the rising of a second sun, and winter would be one long day.

103–11. and as a joyous virgin ... unmoving bride: Heaven is the wedding feast of the Lamb (24.31–6), as these feminine, nuptial images recall (saint John as a joyous virgin honoring a bride by joining the dance, Beatrice as like the bride) in a striking way. Saint John was the disciple whom Jesus loved (see the note to 24.124–26).

103–9. and as a joyous virgin ... and the circling: As lines 107–8 indicate, saints Peter and James have begun a round dance of their own, which saint John now joins (the implication is that all the other round dances have also started again).

112–14. This is he ... for the great duty: As she did for the two first examiners, Beatrice identifies the newcomer clearly enough for anyone who knew the Bible well. Saint John reclines in Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper:

When Jesus had said these things, he was troubled in spirit; and he testified, and said: Amen, amen I say to you, one of you shall betray me ... Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, and said to him, Who is it of whom he speaketh? He therefore, leaning on the breast of Jesus, saith to him: Lord, who is it? Jesus answered: He it is to whom I shall reach bread dipped. And when he had dipped the bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot (John 13.21–26).

And it was to saint John that Jesus, speaking from the Cross, entrusted the care of his mother:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary of Ceophas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus therefore had seen his mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that he saith to his disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her as his own (John 19.25–27).

118–39. Like one who gazes ... in the happy world: The pilgrim strives in vain to penetrate with his sight the intense brightness that hides the face of saint John (as of all the souls since Justinian); he is like one endangering his sight by gazing at the sun during an eclipse (the focused rays of the sun can burn the retina). His blindness at first seems to him as like such an earthly blindness.

122–29. Why do you dazzle ... back to your world: The saint interprets the pilgrim's effort to see him as an instance of the legend that he had ascended bodily to Heaven (Ariosto

deliciously has his Englishman Astolfo, who never lacks aplomb, meet saint John the Evangelist on the moon, where he rides on the hippogriff to recover Orlando's [Roland's] lost wits (*Orlando furioso* Cantos 34–35]) and John explains that the only ones to have their bodies ("the two stoles": cf. lines 91–96, with notes) in Heaven ("the eternal cloister") are Christ and the Virgin, who alone "ascended." The bodily ascent of Elijah is also excluded (cf. *Inf.* 26.34–39, with notes).

130–35. At this voice ... sounding of a whistle: As saint John speaks, the "fiery circling" (the dance of the three apostles, since they have been dancing to "their triple breath," i.e., their singing) ceases, and this is compared with the simultaneous lifting of oars at the whistle of a pilot or coxswain. Note the emphasis on unison of motion, as in 12.10–21 and 13.16–21.

136–39. Ah, how perturbed ... in the happy world: The precise moment when the pilgrim becomes blind is not identified; the moment is parallel to the shout in Saturn that terrifies him (21.139–22.1–9).