

# Meditations



## ON THE DIVINE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI

by ***A. S. KLINE***

***POETRY IN TRANSLATION***

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This print edition is published by  
**Poetry In Translation** ([www.poetryintranslation.com](http://www.poetryintranslation.com)),

ISBN-10: 150310916X

ISBN- 978-1503109162



'We cannot fly. We can only climb those towers  
that we have built for ourselves.'

*Osip Mandelshtam, 'The Morning of Acmeism'.*



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# The Inferno



# **MEDITATIONS ON THE INFERNO**

## **Introduction to the Inferno**

Who is Dante? Has he been read? Has he been understood? I want to talk about him and his work primarily as a poet speaking about a poet. I do not want to approach him primarily from the viewpoint of religion, or history, as Dante the moralist, or Dante the political exile. I want to approach him through the word and the life. His life, his religion, his politics, his role as re-vivifier and transmuter of the classical world, as architect of a visionary construct, the story of his love for Beatrice, these are threads which wound into this man's reality until he became the archetypal lover, writer, man of destiny. All that both makes his greatness as a poet and is secondary to it. His content is poetic in the extreme, it is language heightened to grasp and control those threads and wind them tight.

How to distinguish his essential importance? An isolated, solitary, intense and visionary extremist takes the stage. Individuality, placing itself in its time within the world, weaves a tapestry of elements, to illuminate its own unquenchable desires, for love, for beauty and for truth. What happens here in the Divine Comedy happens in Dante's mind, at a moment in history. Do not all the heavens and all the realities of time and space circle around him, around the single man? He does not look back into the distant past, he draws from it to illuminate the present. He writes not an epic, but a novel. An Odyssey and not an Iliad or an Aeneid. Odysseus is there too, restless, in the Inferno, inside a burning flame. Dante takes the archetypal motif of the journey, the travels of the hero, only he is an anti-hero, humbling himself, a lover, a pupil, a child with its guides, a sinner, and the object of that journey is illuminated by the events of his own life, so that the journey is above all contemporary and personal. Odysseus's journey is not Homer's, Aeneas's is not Virgil's, but Dante's journey is above all his. The individual, that essential heart of Christianity, steps out, burdened with its own past, a lover still weeping the loss of his beloved, dedicated, as the last pages of the Vita Nuova tell, to an act of homage to her which took a

lifetime, a poet still learning how to write, an apprentice walking beside his masters, borrowing from them and speaking to them, a live poet among the dead, making them live again, a sinner, a child at fault being shown the essence of how to live and how to succeed in living, and being guided to the heights of vision of what is. Lover, Poet, Sinner. And then into his tapestry he weaves the Classical and Medieval worlds, the one as myth, legend, history and political formula, the other as example, theatre, power play, and political aspiration. Anguished and angered he strikes at his enemies, defends his ideals, refuses to cheat, to be other than he is, sometimes inept, ignorant, awkward, often proud, confessing to sins of lust, but also convinced of the rightness of the vision, its externalised symbolic meaning, its rational and emotional validity.

Dante is an outsider, an exile. His emotional intensity sets him off from others, makes him poet, lover, and sinner. He inhabits a 'party of one', wanting to purify the Church on the one hand, and purify the Empire on the other. A reformer without true power, a difficult and an extraordinary man. But not a revolutionary, a visionary. It is the word he turns to, not violence or intrigue. His inner zeal, his need to make both goddess and unattainable ideal out of Beatrice, and with her out of Intellect, out of Knowledge, out of Truth, his desire, his urgent desire all his life, to make Beauty and Truth and Love one, place him already outside the norm. And his own passion and mission, his own need for personal solace, acceptance and redemption, is extended outwards to his society. What is needed for him, right for him, must be needed and right for his whole society, for all men, for all time. He humbles himself to humble his world, he purifies himself to purify his world. Pride and Lust must become Humility and Innocence, Understanding and Light. Beatrice, Beauty, must also be divine philosophy and perfect spiritual love. Knowledge and Aesthetics and Relatedness must come together in a knot of light that illuminates the whole universe in its flow outwards and downwards, and its reflection backwards and upwards.

He is the outsider, the exile who takes it upon himself to interpret the orthodoxies, to incarnate the Classical and Christian past, to reinterpret his own life and that of his contemporaries, and to do so in a vision, in a dream, in a symbolic journey. Did he believe in the reality of what he saw in his vision? Yes and no. Yes, he believed in the emotional and spiritual truth of what he saw, the values incarnated there, the morality and theology

reflected there, the positioning of historical events and personalities within those value constructs. No, he did not believe in the precise material reality of what he knew to be his own construct, a poem, and edifice of words. He himself speaks often of its dream nature, its visionary form, and yet it is also memory, which he cannot easily recall, it is psychological reality. He had been there: he had, in creating it. He had lived its possibility, and hovered on the border between the creation that is never truth, and yet by being created becomes truth, becomes a part of the life. Is memory truth? Is memory real? We re-create events and places, faces and voices in our minds. Are they real? In what sense are they real? Dante is in this region of reality, between and among the realities of meaning and feeling, on the edge of what is externally real, at its extreme boundaries, where what is outside melts into what is inside and becomes one with it. The journey is symbolic, but it is not fantastic. It is a search for truth, beauty and love, through memories of reality, historical and contemporary, set back slightly in the poet's past to distance it, yet launched at the future, his own future that went on beyond the last canto, and involved his own purgation to come, his own triumph (?) over pride and lust, his own re-visiting of the symbolic Mount yet to come, and launched at us, at posterity, at that fame he knew would be his, proud in his humility, offering his humility to help ensure his fame.

The journey enshrines values: therefore it is no mere story, no mere epic tale. What is Homer's view of his material? Or Ovid's? Virgil on the other hand is the perfect guide, not merely because Virgil enshrined, in the Aeneid, a usable store of poetic techniques and scenes, (particularly the Underworld visit of Book VI), and an Empire, a political reality, still ideal in Dante's mind, not merely because he is the dead, older, morally virtuous, pagan, poet, and poetic historian, but because Virgil himself wrote a great poem with an objective, a political and moral objective, and intended it to reflect the Romans to the Romans in a mirror. Virgil was a poet like Dante with a mission, not a Homer, a great poetic storyteller and upholder of accepted values, not an Ovid, a poet *par excellence* weaving enchantment and laughter for its own sake, the one a poet of truth and beauty, the other a poet of beauty and love, both sometimes moralists, but in Virgil's case a moralist and creator using beauty and truth and emotional realities to serve the goal, to achieve an end. I think Dante goes beyond Virgil precisely because Love and Beauty were as vital to him as Truth, but it was Truth,

and moral truth, above all he sought to serve, believing that Love and Beauty were part of that Truth.

Dante uses everything he knows to convince us and himself of the concrete possibility of his construct. He is an artificer extreme, knowing, and sensitive to knowledge, as only an exile, an outsider, can be. Like Ovid, even more so than Virgil, he raids his own time and history for examples, he delights in showing off his learning and understanding, because it fuels his pride and his poetry yes, but also because it serves his end, which is Keats' 'willing suspension of disbelief'. The agenda is the moral content, the message is the values that he seeks to communicate, the rest beautiful, complex, brilliant is the means. Dante without moral content is as meaningless as Virgil, only a good story well told. Homer, Ovid have a moral intent, yes, but it is quiet, secondary, a facet of the good life, well lived, obvious and humanist. Virgil and Dante have a deeper aim, to enshrine their own morality in the political reality, in the wider world. Virgil to convince Augustus and his peers. Dante to convince his age and posterity.

So Dante walks through history, of the world, of his own times and of his own life, and points that history, as he walks and climbs and soars, at his world and at us, the future. The Mount is a missile aimed. Hell is its reverse in the mirror of the underworld. Paradise is what it is aimed at. Purgatory is a rocket ship, fuelled by the matter of the Inferno, aimed at the stars. The examples, the punishments, the inverted cone of moral failure of the Inferno, is sucked up into the Mountain, transmuted into energy, and fired upwards.

Space which is inwards, contained, a prison, in the Inferno, is reversed outwards, and liberated in the Purgatorio, to allow a progression towards the Good, towards Moral Truth, and a vision of its fulfilment in the Paradiso. Time which is endless in the Inferno, a pattern of eternal recurrence, eternal penalty, hopelessness, unremitting doom, in that place where there is no way back and no way forward, marked out as passing by the downward journey under the receding sky, becomes a forward movement in the Purgatorio, where hope creates the possibility of an end to purgatory and purgation, to self-torment, an end to time, and in the Paradiso earthly time is suspended as Dante circles with the zodiac, and gazes towards the timeless realms of the Infinite.

Dante is a mask, it is time to humanise him. Dante is relevant beyond his age, it is time to rescue him from theologians and historians. Dante is a poet, it is time to rescue him from scholarship. He has more to say than most to those who are not Christians, not theologians, not historians and not scholars, but who still as human beings search for moral understanding, and have love, truth and beauty as realities in their lives. The language of the Inferno, its babble, its gutturals, its verbal quivering and snapping, its physical concreteness, becomes the language of the Purgatorio, human, gentle, sweetened, softened, singing, and then melts into love, light and the smile of Paradise. Is that not felt by our world? Do we not understand the deathliness of the discourse of violence, and darkness, its babbling rhetoric, its voices of hatred, anger, pain, lust? Do we not try in our own lives to bring about a human world of solace, and compassion, of relationship and tolerance, of purgation and ascent? Do we not long for paradise? A human paradise, of love, truth and beauty? And do we not care about the language, the life of the word, in which love, truth and beauty can be invoked? Do we not want the song-less Inferno, the world of cries, groans and wails, to become the singing Purgatorio, where the harmony of the race might outweigh its disharmonies? Do we not want all singing to become the wordless, ineffable music of the spheres?

In Dante, with medieval economy and directness, all the worlds are contemporary. There is no feeling of the thousand years between himself and Virgil, that lapse of Empire he seeks to abolish. He picks up where Virgil leaves off in Book VI of the Aeneid. Virgil already offers him the Golden Bough, Beatrice the path forward, one will conduct him downwards, a historical Sybil, then upwards, the other will conduct him onwards, a contemporary Muse, but ah, so much more than a Muse. From these ever-contemporary timeless worlds of art and love Dante will send us signals, show us signs, exhibit his points of reference for us, educate us, and ask us about our education, as he piles example upon argument and declaration, not to debate with us, here there is no debate, but to reveal to us, here all is revelation. Christianity declares itself here in its parameters, its rootedness in time, in a moment of time, in history, and Roman history: its celebration of the individual and the life story of the individual, from birth to redemption, from recognition to freedom: its revelatory nature, solidifying into orthodoxy, grounded on words in the Testaments, glorifying the primal Word: its evangelical fervour, its anti-heretical zeal, its

appearance as news, its concern for interpretation of the present in terms of the historical past and that revelation. Even to the unbelievers among us, he sends moral signals, a vision of humanised beauty, individual worth and shared possibility, a structuring of experience into that which is destructive, rejected, submerged, defied, that which is accepted, recognised, learnt and acted upon, and that which comes from outside us, is given, and aspired to, that beauty of the world and time, of love and experience, that joy of love granted and shared, that comes to us as final vision and benediction. All those signals we ignore at our peril. Dante sounds all the notes of the flute that others played, and from whom our values have filtered. He does it in the name of Christianity, but he also does it in the name of Humanity and Poetry, of Love, Truth and Beauty.

Dante mirrored a thought process rooted in antiquity, as the Aeneid testifies, and developed by Christianity, in respect of the levels of experience, the gradations of reality whether emotional, spiritual or physical. There is in the mind a hell, a purgatory, a paradise. The echoes in the ancient world are endless, of underworld kingdoms or labyrinths, of the descent through the seven levels below, or beyond: of the places of cleansing and rebirth, the wells, the rivers, the sacred groves, the stone temples, the sacred spaces: and of the Edens, childhood, arcadia, the garden, the paradisaical space-less and timeless experience. He echoed the spiritual structure of a belief, the aspirations of spires already stretching towards the sky, of towers. He made a spiritual architecture, and became the master-builder of a pit, a mount, and an ascent through space, all of which the mind and emotions know. We go down into the pit and labyrinth of ourselves, we emerge through the pain and sometimes the redemption of understanding and conception, we aspire towards the space and moment, the infinite space and timeless moment, of freedom. Freedom is the commandment to all things to flower, it's denial to any living thing is its denial spiritually to all, and no freedom is a true freedom that takes away the freedom of other living entities. So Dante's un-free inhabitants of the nine circles of Hell destroy each other's freedom, gnaw at each other's present, and past, and future, push each other down, batter against each other, deny each other speech. His purgatorial aspirers know each other, declare each other, and urge each other on to freedom, the freedom of one being the possible freedom of all, so that the Mount shakes when a spirit is freed. Has that no relevance to our world, to our conflicts? And the true



freedom of Paradise is everywhere a shared giving, an outpouring that enhances and reflects and swells and sounds and blazes out and glorifies, that increases and does not diminish by free flow, that is devoid of barter and transaction, and enshrines relationship and knowing. What is given is multiplied endlessly, and infinitely. What is taken is transformed and enhanced and repeated as in the image of the Three Graces, in their receiving, thanking and returning.

Down through the circles, up the spirals and levels of the Mount, out through the seven planetary spheres, the motion of the heart. There are endless echoes from pre-history and history of those journeys. Consider them in the stories of every people, and the constructs of every race. The outward or downward journey, to the place of understanding and truth, with the final return as one of the blessed. Turn that in the light, gaze at it in your hands, and it becomes Dante's journey. He fulfils the motions of the 'Hero With A Thousand Faces': he even loses and forgets, as he returns, the experience of the full glory, and is left with the flower of paradise alone, in his hands, his *Commedia*. The spirit guides, the incidents, the examples all bring echoes of the primeval and ancient and classical journeys. But see how Dante's journey is mediated through the word. He is not the hero who acts. He is not the lover, not the warrior, not the king, or redeemer, or saint. He is the human being, the individual man, and he travels to see and to learn and to interrogate and be interrogated. The *Commedia* is a verbal journey. Its protagonist is a Poet. Yes he is a lover and a moralist and a politician and a student of theology and philosophy and science and the arts, but primarily he finds his way through existence by the Word. Beatrice herself is here transformed from real woman, to spirit guide, to Divine Philosophy, to another participant in the final glory. She is metamorphosed, and moved from centre to circumference, so that she can make way for the Word. Is the poet asked to choose between the real woman and the Muse? Between reality and the Word? The true Poet knows how he will always choose, and hopes never to be forced to make the choice.

Dante travels in Vision, has dreams within the Dream, and ends his *Commedia* with an awakening without sequel. So that the great music swells and rises, and then ends on a long echoing note that goes on resounding within his life, the reader's life, and within existence itself. He carries the senses with him. Are not the ear, the eye, the mouth, the nose, the touching tongue, all placed near to the brain, the mind, the spirit of a human being?

All the senses become one, an ineffable music, a fragrance, a remembered taste, an image in a vision, a feeling of heat and light. The senses are dazzled, and the vision both dies back from mind into the word, from the word into the written text to be passed on written on stone into the future, containing the past, and ever open to the sensitive present. His imagery of the journey, his sailing boats, his moving flames and lights, his metric feet, reach a haven. That haven is only temporary, because the *Commedia* is a warning too, a sign to the sinner, a call through the dark wood, and it is a challenge to the reader's or the listener's thoughts on the moral structure of existence, the meaning of love and beauty, the nature of truth. And are these not still intractable problems for us? We have inklings. We know that empathy, appreciation of beauty, love and knowledge exist. We handle them every day. But do we know what drives the mind to seek the good, the beautiful, the beloved, the true? And even if we fully understood the mechanics of our biology and history that create drives towards these things, don't we still know that for the individual, for you and I, these things have a special status. We choose the empathetic and compassionate, loyalty and respect over their denials. We choose beauty from what is around us, yet we feel it chooses us. We choose love and yet we know we are chosen also. We find knowledge and in the end through a complex process accord it belief. Is it not still true that the good, the beautiful, the beloved and the true, are both within us and beyond us, both demand recognition and demand belief? If so then Dante's call is to us, and is contemporary, and is beyond his own time. And his problems and agonies, his personal quest and his recognition of his beliefs are also ours, and still alive and demanding of us.

Dante's *Commedia* is a place where experience is tested, through assay, through example, through observation, through interrogation, through memory and repetition, through recognition and acceptance. And from that grand revelation, that giant glass, Dante believes that truth which must encompass love, goodness and beauty will emerge to the reader's eye. His *Commedia* is the gift of his belief. From the divided city of Dis, where love and freewill are abused and misused, from the shattered community of man, we ascend the Mount where the Individual mind is purged, re-oriented again towards others in Love and understanding, until we are ready to climb through Paradise where the true community of spirits is nurtured, where Love endlessly shared is endlessly increased, and where relationship

is re-established beyond the fracturing realms of earthly violence, incontinence and fraud as we see them in Inferno, beyond the inner errors of perverted, inadequate or excessive Love as we understand them in Purgatorio. It is a journey from ignorance through understanding to divine wisdom. From destruction, through knowledge, to creation.

I have touched on some of the themes. Progress with me now through the Cantos of the Commedia. Reference the indexes to, and the text of, the Divine Comedy as you go. Let us, with Dante, bend over the text, while gazing outwards and inwards at the reality.

## **Meditation I: Inferno Canto I**

### ***Meditation I: The Individual: Inferno Canto I:1-60***

Out of the Void the lone voice. The *Individual* [p. 282], circumscribed lost and solitary steps onto the stage of world history. The wood is dark, it already has echoes of Piero delle Vigne and the wood of suicides of Inferno Canto XIII. The light falls on this single, anxious, troubled human being. The Poet himself. Here is no character from a play or hero from an epic. Here is the author, himself. And we have read the Vita Nuova. We have seen the prologue in the art and the life. Here is its sequel in the mind. There have been works of biography written before, works of history, and works of spiritual journey, Augustine's 'Confessions' is a great pre-cursor to this work. There too a sinner appears, and elements of biography, but not with the depth and intensity with which Dante weaves history, life and self into the Divine Comedy.

It is the end of the night before the dawn of Good Friday, when the annual and historical sacred drama begins, and glancing backwards over his shoulder at the reader, Dante begins his journey, not exactly a Pilgrim's Progress, (does Dante actually progress fundamentally in the spiritual sense in this work?), but rather a Book of Revelation. The Light is falling through the leaves and the dark twisted branches, a single shaft onto the face of the distraught man. The wood is error and sin, material existence, the knotted and tangled, impenetrable reality of earthbound life, symbolised by the rooted intransigence that Sartre used in 'Nausea' to symbolise being here

and not elsewhere, among things. That awareness, that coming to oneself, that recognition, of moral error in the self and the life, brings fear. *Fear* [p. 267] that this is all there is, and that there is no opportunity for change or progression.

And this is a dream, a vision, seen and now retold by the Individual. The Divine Comedy begins as it ends with this lone Individual recounting a dream and its ultimate departure. A vision he has seen. The I has seen. It is for the reader to judge its 'truth'. Dante does not insist. Above him at the end of the valley in the vision there is already a gleam of light on the hills. But he has been standing at the brink of Hell, the 'pass....that no living person ever left'. He is in the wasteland at the edge of the Inferno. Over the empty ground he begins to walk. He commences the rhythm of the moving feet, physical and poetic, mental and spiritual. He must *walk* [p. 347] to make this journey. There must be effort. The walking will indicate chosen direction, freely willed ascent or descent, ease or difficulty, speed or slowness. Here one walks. The exceptions will be interesting, when Dante is carried, drawn along, or moves without conscious will.

The sun's position is fixed at that of the Creation, the Spring Equinox in Aries, as it will remain through the poem, it is the dawn of Good Friday. There must first be a descent to Hell in the sacred drama. A Crucifixion. A painful self-examination through example. He is obstructed from ascending, by the leopard, the lion and the wolf, by *Lust* [p. 291], *Pride* [p. 306] and *Avarice* [p. 244]? By Florence, France and the Papacy? Lust that dances before the eyes, and pushes back towards the pit? Pride that creates fear in others, with its raised head and its envious hunger? Avarice with its leanness and craving, destroying the shared experience, buying and selling where giving and receiving should operate? A Florence with potential for hope but seduced by trivialities, by short-termism, by superficiality and pleasure? France, or perhaps the Empire, rapacious and envious, failing to build and bring justice? A Papacy flawed by corruption, drawn to wealth, clutching greedily? At all events three barriers, bringing confusion, fear and sadness. Mirroring perhaps also the three major divisions of Hell, the fraudulent and traitorous, the violent, and those who failed to exercise self-control, taking them in the order of their depth within the Inferno, and identifying them with the wolf, lion, and leopard respectively?

Hope is lost. This is the verge of Hell. The Individual desires the good,

but must first understand the darkness. '*Inferna tetigit possit, ut supera assequi*' says Seneca, 'I must touch the depths, to achieve the heights.' Those social forces that should help the Individual, his native place, political structure, institutions of faith, have failed him. The Authorities are bankrupt, City, Empire and Papacy. But this Individual still has desire for the good, has been awakened, has come to himself in recognition. And Dante will throughout recognise examples from the past and the present, he will be aware of what is around him, he will question and seek, he will thereby learn or rather disclose. The pupil is ready, but where is the teacher? The traveller is ready but where is the guide?

### ***Medl:2 Virgil: Inferno Canto I:61***

The teacher and *guide* [p. 278] will come from the *past* [p. 298], a poet, a guide to the true Empire, a moral spokesman, a strong character, yet must be a pagan since it is Beatrice who Dante knows will be the guide later on to Paradise. There is such a person to Dante's knowledge, and one whose own epic work already touched on the nature and structure of Hell, as a pagan Underworld. Virgil, creator of the Aeneid, and its Book VI, seminal for Dante's own work, was just such a great poet who sang a salutary message to his Roman world, holding out the path of true virtue to the Empire, revealing its own history and present, strongly moral in his own life, an exemplar.

Virgil appears, hoarse from the long silence of neglect, from his own silence in death, and enters the wasteland. Another human being, in fact a spirit guide, a master of poetic style, and a wise teacher, and one loved, and read intensely by Dante. A Poet will hand on the torch to a Poet. And he was an Italian, of Mantua, a precursor. He is aware now of his own paganism, the false gods of his age, and points Dante towards the path to salvation, expressing surprise. Why doesn't the intelligent Dante see the way? And Virgil proclaims that the current Papacy, and its Avarice, is an obstacle. That Dante must go another way, the way of the Individual (was that not the heretical cry of the Abigenses, and the Manicheists?...that individual path disregarding the established Church, how dangerous for Dante, unguided to attempt it.) Virgil is now his contemporary in the Vision. Time has collapsed or rather concatenated to allow Rome to touch

Medieval Italy despite the intervening years. All Christian time is *contemporaneous* [p. 250], since Christ and the Deity are ever-present. And are there not many moments in Virgil where the pressure of imminent Christianity is felt, Virgil can almost seem like an early Christian at times. And Dante is humble before him. Dante is the outsider, the exile, where Virgil was the insider. Dante is gauche and inept where Virgil was assured and confident. Dante is morally flawed where Virgil was fine and tempered. Dante is the nervous modern, anxious, wracked, troubled, uncertain, lacking in hope, out of his way. Virgil seems none of those things. Virgil already holds the golden bough, has already read the Sibyl's leaves, has already been in the Underworld. There is a 'real' spiritual journey to be made. One has to look and walk. One has to think and feel. There is no need for mysticism. One only has to read the manuscript of eternity, and history, and thought. One only has to be an expert copyist to achieve some faint imitation of the Divine structure of existence. One has to remember, recognise, be aware and consider. One must ask and listen. The good news will appear from outside the Individual, yet within him, and not mystically but in a revelatory fashion. It is already there. Dante's Vision is of what exists, not what needs to be created. His task is to make it appear solid in the mind, through symbol and description. He has to draw back the curtain, examine memory, send out ripples and echoes.

### ***Medl:3 The Salvation of Italy: Inferno Canto I:100***

The poet and guide immediately initiates another great theme by *prophesying* [p. 307] a political saviour, an Augustus, who will return the world to Roman law, to Virgil's own moral rectitude. This political champion will feed on the great triad, on Wisdom or *Truth* [p. 344], on *Love* [p. 288], and on Virtue or *Goodness* [p. 277]. Perhaps it is Can Grande, this Greyhound, this destroyer of the wolf of Avarice. Dante strengthens the link to *Rome* [p. 312] with Virgil's references to his own well-known characters, Trojan and Italian, from the Aeneid who are killed in the process of Aeneas the Trojan establishing the proto-Roman rule over Lower Italy. With this initial thrust Dante declares the political disaster of Church and State competing for total rule over both spiritual and temporal domains. He sets himself ultimately against Black Papally-oriented Guelphs and White Imperially-oriented Ghibellines, and is

‘a party of one’. The political exile finds here in this speech of Virgil’s a more ancient ally for his political cause. Already here Virgil is implying the reality of and diagnosing a recognised disease in the body politic, and subtly declaring Dante’s own political stance. Avarice will be chased back into Hell along with the corrupt Popes, like Boniface, whose place is reserved in the Eighth Circle. The prophecy of a saviour will be repeated *twice more* [p. 340], by Beatrice in Purgatorio XXXIII, and by Saint Peter in Paradiso XXVII.

### ***Medl:4 The Boundary of the Pagan: Inferno Canto I:12***

The iron structure of the universe is now revealed. Virgil as a pagan cannot enter Paradise. Though as we will see in Inferno Canto IV some of the great Jewish spirits of the Old Testament have been snatched from the Inferno to Paradise as Christian pre-cursors. Virgil in not acknowledging the Old Testament Deity (though in ignorance we presume) but acknowledging the false gods of Greece and Rome, and the deified Aeneas, Romulus and the Caesars is outside the pale. He will lead Dante through the places he has seen, having been to Purgatory before.

Hell is where the tortured beg to die again in order to escape, though there is no escape. Dante’s *pity* [p. 302] will be stirred by the desperation and pain. Purgatory is a place of *hope* [p. 279] where the pain is a precursor to salvation. And Paradise, which lies beyond Virgil’s personal knowledge, is the space of faith, of the blessed, where *Beatrice* [p. 245] will be the guide. All is ruled by *God* [p. 274], but Paradise is his city.

Already the *cities* [p. 248] of Florence, Rome, and the Deity have been indicated. The city is Dante’s primal social construct, and the citizen the primary civilised human being. Here is Aristotle’s influence.

And so Canto I closes with that reference in passing to Beatrice, his third great theme, the first two being those of the journey of the Individual towards redemption, and the political state of Italy, Empire and Papacy, or Dante’s need for salvation, and his aspirations for the politics of the Western world.

There she is, implicit since we have read the Vita Nuova and know the story, as yet un-named, the feminine guide of the soul, who will eventually take over from the masculine guide of the mind, divine philosophy who will

transcend and amplify natural and temporal philosophy.

The three great themes have been skilfully laid out, the first guide has been acquired, the future journey has been outlined in nature and architecture, time and place have been defined, the promise of finding Beatrice again has been hinted at. The two poets, old and new, move on. The *Individual* [p. 282] is no longer totally isolated, he already has helpers and sympathisers. What could not be achieved alone, can now be contemplated and begun.

## **Meditation II: Inferno Canto II**

### ***MedIII:1 Doubts and Fears: Inferno Canto II:1***

Dante's triple rhythm, his *terza rima* [p. 336], celebrating the Trinity in the inner structure of his verse, has drawn the *triple* [p. 340] strands of his life together in Canto I: his spiritual journey (the soul), his political existence (the mind and body), and his poet's love of Beatrice (the heart). The *three* [p. 340] cities, of God, *Rome* [p. 312] and *Florence* [p. 267] are the backcloth to these aspects of his life and each figures in each thread. The city of Florence is where his love for Beatrice began, is the place from which his politics exiled him, and is where his spiritual journey also started. The city of Rome, Imperial and Sacred, is his political and poetic reference point, and is the seat of the corrupt Papacy. The city of God is his greater authority, granting temporal rights to the Empire, and the space where he will again find Beatrice and the true path of the soul.

Now in Canto II, which is the first Canto proper of the thirty-three Cantos of the Inferno (there are thirty-three Purgatorial and thirty-three Paradisial Cantos also) since Canto I has served as an introduction to the whole work, immediate *self-doubt* [p. 255] sets in. Having wound the three strands together, Dante now realises the magnitude of his task. The *light* [p. 287] fades, other creatures may sleep, but the *Individual* [p. 282], the 'one, alone' must now set out on his painful labour, his 'inner war'. The journey through the Inferno will be one of *Pity* [p. 302].

The Medieval view here conflicts with ours. In our age we feel that



pity and compassion must be translated into the alleviation of suffering, in an attempt to confer some dignity and humanity on even the worst offenders against the moral and civil laws. To the Medieval and Classical ages, pity was wholly compatible with a ruthless execution of the law, and the greatest agonies of destiny. Pity was a response of the individual to the pitiable, but not a reason for commuting or reducing punishment, which was written into the structure of the Universe by an all-powerful, and loving Deity. (Ivan Karamazov could not accept such a Deity and nor can I, but the Middle Ages certainly could and did). Faith, Hope and Pity are the great themes of the Paradiso, Purgatorio and Inferno. The Paradiso embodies *Faith* [p. 264], the Purgatorio reveals *Hope* [p. 279], the Inferno inspires Pity. The Inferno does not embody Pity, because Divine *Justice* [p. 285] is without pity there. The Pity is in the poetry, and in the witness, in the observer, that lone Individual. Failure to feel Pity would condemn Dante, as a soul not worthy to be saved.

The *Muses* [p. 293] are now invoked. And error-free *Memory* [p. 292], not Invention, is what Dante calls on. He will be a faithful scribe of the Divine reality, glancing up and across tirelessly at the manuscript of the Universe, of the *Past* [p. 298], *Present* [p. 305] and *Future* [p. 273], as he illuminates the book of the Commedia, the Divine Theatre. Bent to his desk we see him: destroying his eyesight for the sake of the faithful reproduction of the Vision.

At once the self-examination begins, and the request to Virgil to begin the wider external *examination* [p. 259]. Aeneas went to the Underworld in Book VI of the Aeneid, well Dante is no Aeneas, no founder of Rome and Empire, those two sacred spheres of action. Not a Paul who made Rome the centre of the Faith. He is neither of those builders of the earthly City. So Virgil alone must judge if he is worthy, he thinks. Dante's poetic and political *pride* [p. 306], his sense of being in the right and fulfilling a destiny, his certainty of his age's political errors, and of his own future *fame* [p. 266], both give way before his spiritual anxiety, his uncertainty concerning his own soul. He wavers, he almost 'un-wishes, what he wished'. Here the Christian sense moves counter to the old Classical certainty. In the Classical world one propitiated the Gods as best one could, and the Gods chose, the uncertainty was in the nature of chance and fate not in the individual. Here one is on one's own, faced with a true way and therefore *able to determine* [p. 271] one's own spiritual destiny, even in the last breath of life, yet uncertain of ultimate worth and capability, needing intervention, assistance, grace.

Does he trumpet his own Humility? Is there a secret certainty that if not building an earthly city he is at least building an intellectual structure that will reveal the spiritual City? That lurking Pride is always endearing in the man, even his pride in his awareness of the need for humility, which is almost a step on the way to humility itself! But there is a genuine feeling of concern too. As a poet as a politician he feels certain of his worth, but as a lover and as a Christian soul he is unsure. His confidence in himself fails before Beatrice and before the Light of Truth.

Dante inherited *three*<sup>[p. 340]</sup> great modes that made three great threads of his life. He inherited the spiritual world of Christianity and faith, where humility is a pre-requisite of the spiritual journey. He inherited the political, and Imperial world of Rome, the world of 'being in the world'. And he inherited the poetic world of the *Troubadours*<sup>[p. 343]</sup> and Provence, that Arabic and Christian influenced world of courtly love, with its commitment to the beloved, humility before the beloved and the Lord of Love, and denial of self-worth. Here in the dusky air on the dark shore it is the anxious spirit and nervous lover who is uppermost.

### ***MedII:2 Beatrice: Inferno Canto II:43***

Virgil, the pagan in Limbo, was chosen then by *Beatrice*<sup>[p. 245]</sup>, moved by *love*<sup>[p. 288]</sup>, to go to Dante's assistance. Dante is to understand that the journey is triggered from outside, initiated by Love, furthered by Beatrice, prompted by Virgil directly. She is Divine Philosophy and she is also his beloved Beatrice, of the angelic *voice*<sup>[p. 347]</sup>, her *eyes*<sup>[p. 257]</sup> brighter than two *stars*<sup>[p. 331]</sup> (eyes brighter than the twin Gemini stars of his birth-sign). God's *grace*<sup>[p. 277]</sup> that prevents her fear, which must temper fear in Dante also, allows her to enter Limbo, from Paradise. She represents virtue and beauty, love and truth. She is that on which Dante's mind must fix on his way to the goal beyond her, that of the ultimate Truth, the ultimate Love, Virtue and Beauty. She offers Dante through Virgil, friendship and humanity, aid and eloquence. She has passed through the fire to bring Dante help, unscathed and without fear, through grace. He must pass through the fire at the top of Purgatory to reach her, in fear but unscathed, and aided by grace. She has descended through the fire, out of love, to bring help to a man troubled by lust, and he must pass from the circle of the Mount where lust is purged,

through the fire, to reach her, in his love for her. She is the object of courtly love of the troubadours with the erotic charge of that tradition, but she is spiritualised with the attributes of the saint. Love itself is no longer Amour but empowers the spirit to rise to Heaven, it is no longer a rhetorical device or a pagan concept but a marrying of intellect and emotion, of feeling and reason, of mind and heart. It is a force for good, for spiritual redemption, as a reflection of Divine Love that enfolds the universe, and no longer the potentially destructive force of the Troubadour lyrics. And so Beatrice can symbolise everything that leads upwards in Dante's hierarchy, Love, Intellect, Philosophy, Theology, Faith, Hope, Pity. She is the directional arrow.

### ***MedII:3 The Hierarchy of Love: Inferno Canto II:94***

And it is the *Virgin* [p. 347] who has interceded. The feminine principle, the Goddess (I will not trace all the well-known aspects of the ancient Goddess that were incorporated in the Medieval Cult of the Virgin, and the continuity between her attributes and those of earlier feminine divinities, but she is associated with the sea, and starlight, with lions and doves, with beauty and remoteness, and so on, from earliest times). At the top of the hierarchy of Love she calls to her a saint, Dante's personal Saint, Lucia, Illuminating Grace, associated with the *eyesight* [p. 257] and light, Lucia 'opposed to all cruelty', and she passes on the message, down the *hierarchy* [p. 279], to Beatrice, Divine Philosophy, who is sitting with Rachel, Contemplation, in the third rank. Rachel for whom Jacob patiently worked and waited, as Dante has in a sense for Beatrice leaving 'the common crowd'. Rachel the Jewess one of those Old Testament figures raised by Christ from Hell to Paradise. Beatrice carries the message to Virgil, as he will to Dante. 'No one on earth was ever as quick to search for their good, or run from harm' says one of Dante's lovely similes, one of his swift examples that bind the real world to the world of the Vision. The *threefold* [p. 340] feminine message is sealed with her *tears* [p. 336] as Virgil receives it. And the passing of the message is an exception to the rules, as Dante's journey is an exception, in taking a living man among the shades. So the whole Divine Comedy is a movement of *compassion* [p. 302], and intercession, an act of love, at its very inception.

***MedII:4 The Descent to Hell: Inferno Canto II:121***

Virgil proclaims the trinity of ladies in Heaven, who care for Dante. And Dante himself brings forward another perfect simile, one of great beauty, as the man bent with the chill of fear and anxiety, unbends like the night-chilled flowers at the light of this sun of Love. And, Dante's will empowered, recognising Beatrice's help and Pity, Virgil's gentility and swift agreement to her request, she who has placed faith in Virgil's true speech, and he who has obeyed her true words, he and Virgil move forward again, down the steep way which is tree-shadowed in the Classical sources, that path of which Virgil said: '*Facilis descensus Avernus*' (Aeneid VI:126) 'the way to Hell is easy', and Ovid speaks of as 'gloomy with fatal yew trees' (Metamorphoses IV:432), the path that leads to the City of Dis. They are somewhere in Italy, at one of the chasms, the downward tracks to the Underworld, perhaps at Cumae, where Aeneas entered. But the precise location does not matter. As Virgil says, it is easy to enter Hell from any place. This is the downward path of the spirit.

## **Meditation III: Inferno Canto III**

***MedIII:1 Divine Justice: Inferno Canto III:1***

The Gates of Hell are the gates of adamant *Justice* [p. 285]. Dante, anxious and bewildered, gazes at the message over the entrance. Here we have to stretch our modern imagination and sympathy. Constructed by *Love* [p. 288], by *Wisdom* [p. 349]? By *Power* [p. 305] certainly. The very thing we might mistrust in our age, Power, is evident here, and the values we might honour of wisdom and love, are not obvious to our ethically different eyes. This is God's plan for humanity (the creatures don't appear, lacking souls, other than for the purposes of analogy or symbol, which is another problem for our biologically oriented era). This is a *threshold* [p. 337], requiring courage, incorporating the Holy *Trinity* [p. 340] of Power, Wisdom and Love. And Virgil offers small comfort. What Hell signifies though is the loss of that good derived from the *intellect* [p. 283], and it is the medieval world of reason that Dante must use to penetrate Hell and beyond, reason embodied in

philosophy, philosophy that is a conduit for divine truth to the world below, that strengthens human faith and points up the ladder of creation again through the angels to God who is pure intellect (Convivio III vii 5). This is a neo-platonic vision. And though Dante sees the beatitude of this world as dependent on the intellectual and moral virtues and ideally under the control of the Emperor, while the beatitude of the higher world is dependent on faith, hope and pity, the theological virtues, and ideally, on earth, under the control of the Pope, once beyond this world intellect does not vanish but is refined as it nears the godhead. The progress through this world is benefited by the operation of one's own virtue, while that through the next requires divine assistance. (Monarchia III XV). The light of intellectual love holds the Universe bound together, and its power flows downward to humanity.

The Gate of Justice is the first guardian of the threshold, and beyond is danger. The intellectual companion Virgil reaches out with a calm expression, he has been here before and is one who knows, to comfort Dante, hand on hand. The message over the gate is desolate, but through the good of the intellect, through endless observation and questioning, through listening and seeing with the mind, there is hope. Pity embodied in Dante the Christian, more so than in Virgil the pagan, takes a walk through Hell.

### ***MedIII:2 Spiritual Neutrality: Inferno Canto III:22***

The darkness is full of cries. What terrible sins have these spirits committed? Intellectual sloth, spiritual indifference, the self-centred neutrality of those spirits that strive neither for the good nor for the bad, who fail because 'they have never lived'. Harsh? All sin and error is Hell, the depths are merely symbolic. There is no hope here, any more than deeper down. This is a terrible medieval no-man's land, a place where there is nothing to hope for, nothing to repent of, and nothing of beauty to remember. This is one of the very strangest chambers of Dante's imagination, and indicates the deep hatred of the non-intellectual that every intellectual revolutionary secretly nurtures. They suffer more than the pagans in Limbo who at least like Virgil used their intellects, though falling short, through ignorance of the Christian message. This place, the very first

place entered after Virgil's comment about intellectual good shows the importance Dante placed on living a whole life, with mind spirit and heart, the three great strands he weaves endlessly in the *Commedia*. It is a vision of the sensitive mind that looks for an echo of sensitivity in all parts of the universe. God's inscrutable logic is here at work. Dante is here to see and learn. The first lesson is that loss of the intellect, indifference to it, is also Hell. The *punishment* [p. 310] fits the crime, the no man's land of life becomes a no man's land of non-death. And their symbol is Celestine V, the Pope who was driven by the winds of fortune into the Papacy and who abdicated from it, a refusal that clearly irritated Dante deeply. The courage Virgil called for is not merely physical courage, but intellectual and moral courage too. And punishment is an imaginative parallel, an analogy, throughout Hell, so that torments may appear to us to be heavier or lighter than they 'should' be according to a grading of torments that might have matched the gradations of Hell. God is a poet too! Failure to use the *free will* [p. 271] is a crime as great as any, since free will is the greatest gift of God.

### ***MedIII:3 Crossing the Acheron: Inferno Canto III:70***

A pause almost, for a powerful poetic vision of the spirits gathering at the second *threshold* [p. 337] of the Acheron. Beyond it is Limbo, and the First Circle proper of Hell. Dante asks a question. Virgil tells him he will receive a reply. Dante is humbled, ashamed and downcast, fearful of having offended. He is as he frequently is in the *Commedia* awkward and troubled, unsure of himself or of the etiquette, noble but somehow impoverished. The opposite of a pagan hero, a Christian anti-hero, a student, a child almost. But Virgil, the courteous master (Dante enshrines the values of Troubadour *cortesía* and transcends them), confirms to Charon that *Dante* [p. 252] is aligned with Aeneas and Paul, that his journey is willed above, that he is one of those whose work is to bind Empire and Church to their proper places, and to reveal earthly dualism, and Heavenly hierarchy, in a neo-platonic vision. The spirits in pain and blasphemy are misusing *language* [p. 328] as they have misused *free will* [p. 271], as Adam did, of whom they are the evil seed. And Justice is the goad that converts their fear to a desire to cross where no one in their right mind would wish to cross. These must be recently dead contemporary spirits, but Dante singles none of them out,

recognises none of them. He is the anti-modernist, the anti-contemporary, who is looking back and forward not sideways. He does not even recognise the 'some among them' whom he recognised among the spiritually neutral. He faints now, and somehow the Acheron is crossed.

## **Meditation IV: Inferno Canto IV**

### ***MedIV:1 Limbo: Inferno Canto IV:1***

On the brink of the First Circle, even though he is returning initially to his familiar place in Limbo, Virgil pales. But he replies to Dante that it is not fear that causes his loss of colour. It is *Pity* [p. 302], *Justice* [p. 285] is pitiless in operation, but its results create pity in the observer. Pity, charity, is the keynote of the Inferno, but not mercy. To alleviate the torments of the sinners, symbolic or real, would be mercy for those who have not deserved mercy, because they have died denying God. But pity and compassion, empathy and identification are attributes of human feeling. There but for the right use of intellect and Christian baptism go us all, says Dante. The Pity is in the seeing, in the voyeurism of the passer-by, not in the structure of Justice, which is implacable. For some things there is no forgiveness. Forgiveness is for those who recognised God and purge themselves of their sins. Paradise requires Divine intervention, God's grace. Hell is where there is no way forward and no way back. It is this infinite howling.

So Virgil pities those below. But in fact the First Circle is 'without torment'. Here are the un-baptised. Those who died before being able to know God, historically or in their life. The heathens and those dying before baptism. It is not a barrier to worth, there are many worthy spirits here, but to redemption. That is God's law. It is a place, says Dante initially, that is not a place of *torment* [p. 310], and yet those there live in desire without hope. What is that to us Moderns but torment? And Virgil confirms it: that is their 'only' torment, as if that were not enough!

Jesus has *entered Limbo* [p. 248] to pluck from it the Old Testament great ones: Adam the source: Abel and Noah, the pious: Moses, the lawgiver, and the Patriarchs: Rachel: and 'many others' who remain undefined here, but later we will find Solomon for example in Paradise, and Eve and others are

there sitting below the Virgin, believers in the Christ to come. Such are the rules: and Dante here accepts what appears to us the extreme injustice of un-baptised infants remaining in Limbo, something even Saint Bernard had problems with, and the eternal condemnation of his master Virgil and the other great pagan spirits to their place in the Inferno.

***MedIV:2 The Great Poets: Inferno Canto IV:64***

For Dante *time* [p. 339] in the Vision is God's synchronous moment, even though time passes and the chronology of the Vision is so carefully worked out. Delightful! Though time's processes run on, and the characters walk and talk, and dawn and evening happen, nevertheless, like some great instrument sounding many notes from different ages, the moment of the Vision contains all history, and all the famous people of the past can appear together. In a sense this is the old Greek and Roman afterlife, where the heroes of many ages brush shoulders with each other, but in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* the Greek cultural unity blurs the impact of that reality. Here Classical, Biblical, and Christian spirits are in a sense *contemporaneous* [p. 250] with those of later Imperial history and the Medieval past. Here any of the dead from one age can be alongside any of those appropriate from some other (though Dante is careful to preserve artistic form and harmony in extended passages), and only Dante is still a living spirit. All examples are present, all those who need to be questioned can be. Yet earthly time is still to come and only prophecies can lead forward into it. History is still being played out. The Vision is set at a specific time. There are souls still to arrive beyond, there are places set aside in Hell for some of them as we shall see. Dante's own spiritual life is still unfolding, real events beyond the Vision of 1300 are still to happen and Dante must not let obvious knowledge of them intrude except as those self-fulfilling *prophecies* [p. 307]. But into the construct of the Inferno are crammed all the ages past: into the thunder of the abyss. Beyond is Christianity and the Purgatorio and Paradiso, with some choice spirits plucked from pre-Christian times. But here, deeper down than Limbo, all history is present in one great cacophony of sin. Hell is here an eternal recurrence, while Purgatory will be a progression upwards to the eternal moment of the Paradiso where all times are truly contemporaneous and ever-present.



For a moment though there is peace and tranquillity. The great Poets recognise Virgil, and, in a blush of false modesty, Dante is also allowed to join them. He already knows his destined place. And he recognises *Pride* [p. 306] as one of his major faults. He is a sixth beside Homer, bearer of the sword, who appears 'as if he were their lord', Horace, Ovid, Lucan and Virgil himself. Dante here declares his major Classical sources and influences. Horace, as moralist, and Lucan, as epic historian, we might find a little surprising. Dante walks on with the Poets, in a secret inner conclave of the great. The modest mask slips a little. We are not allowed to hear the conversation. It is 'best to be silent'. There is also clearly no one sufficiently great to be worth mentioning here between Lucan and himself, a thirteen hundred year pause. He sets himself in the direct line of *Imperial Rome* [p. 312] and the Classical secular poets.

### ***MedIV:3 Heroes, Heroines, Philosophers: Inferno Canto IV:106***

After *Poetry* [p. 303] and a resonance of the personal life, come characters from *Imperial* [p. 312] History, from Troy and through the Wars in Latium of the Aeneid to the Republic and Empire, with the interesting addition of Saladin, the noble infidel, and then characters who exemplify the life of the *Intellect* [p. 283], with Aristotle not Plato as the master, and showing the debt to Arabic commentators. Dante is again weaving together the personal, historical, and spiritual or at least intellectual themes. The Greek, Roman, and Medieval worlds provide the large majority of examples.

He and Virgil move on rapidly from the calm of Limbo to Minos, the Judge, and the lower Circles of the Sinners.

## **Meditation V: Inferno Canto V**

### ***MedV:1 Minos, and The Carnal Sinners: Inferno Canto V:1***

Minos is the guardian of the next *threshold* [p. 337], the judge of those who have truly sinned, by abusing and misusing their freewill. Those we have seen above were the spiritually neutral who failed to use their free will through passivity, indifference and selfishness, and those in Limbo who

were unable to exercise it fully in a spiritual sense through ignorance of God, despite their worth. Now we begin the descent through those who had the chance to embrace God but chose otherwise, through weakness, or *malice* [p. 292]. First are the circles of those who lacked *self-control* [p. 314], and below them are the circles of the *violent* [p. 345] and *fraudulent* [p. 270].

Minos is the judge and decision-maker here, his Classical role of lawmaker and judge of the dead confirmed by Dante. Like Charon he addresses Dante and Virgil: Hell has its voices. Virgil again asserts that Dante's journey is willed from above, once more placing *Dante* [p. 252] in the line of Aeneas and Paul, Empire and Church. They pass on to the carnal sinners in the whirlwind those who gave up the good of the intellect, and 'subjected their reason to their lust'.

Two of Dante's beautiful extended *similes* [p. 315] follow, the flock of starlings and the line of cranes, invoking memories of Classical augury from the flight of birds: the Iliad Book II where Homer compares the Achaean clans to the flocks of geese, cranes, or long-necked swans that gather by the River Cayster in Asia Minor: and to Ovid's love of birds revealed in the Metamorphoses. He creates a feeling of numbers, of the extent of Hell, sweetly, and without strain.

Dante momentarily parts company, as he did in the Vita Nuova, from the *Troubadour* [p. 343] tradition, while absorbing it, since adultery or at least adulterous desire was a cornerstone of that tradition. Dante retains the other characteristics of that tradition, Humility, Courtesy and the Religion of Love, but all three are subsumed in the spiritual life. *Love* [p. 288] grants the power to rise to Heaven if coupled with Intellect and Reason. Beatrice has the characteristics of the Saint, of a Clare or a Margaret of Cortona, and their authority, as well as the erotic charge of the tradition of courtly love. Love is then a redeeming force, the spirit preventing ruin through raw desire and emotion. And *Beatrice* [p. 245] can also be the philosophic intellect, pure intelligence mediating divine truth to the world below, aiding faith and showing Heaven's beauty and joy. But here, condemned to Hell, are those who took the path of their passions, losing the good of that intelligence. Tristan is there and presumably Iseult. Cleopatra presumably with Antony, though Dante may subtly be hinting at the relative guilt within these pairings. Virgil points out the shadows with his finger, naming 'more than a thousand'.

***MedV:2 Love's Heretics: Inferno Canto V:70***

What this space invokes in Dante is *Pity* [p. 302]. His weakness was *Lust* [p. 291], as well as Pride. Another bird image: Paolo and Francesca approach at Dante's call, like 'doves, claimed by desire'. Dante begins here that endless *questioning* [p. 259] which will run through the *Commedia*, a great demonstration of the path to knowledge, through enquiry and thought. Francesca speaks in reply, and the poetry of her voice affirms the power of passionate love. She speaks to Dante since 'you take pity on our sad misfortune'. The root of their love was a single moment, hovering over one of the tales of courtly and adulterous desire, that of Lancelot for Guinevere. Dante both warns here, and affirms the influence of that tradition's sweetness on himself. Was not he drawn to poetry through the Troubadours and Virgil's tale of Dido, and Ovid's tales of passion, and so on? And Dante faints from Pity. Justice demands that those who misused the intellect, and the power of the feelings, who did not sublimate desire in the quest for reason, should be condemned to this eternity of longing without rest. At least they are together.

The whole episode immediately calls to mind the story of Abelard and Heloise, that twelfth century cry of the heart that Dante knew (he had been in Paris himself it is surmised). That Abelard whose reliance on the questioning *intellect* [p. 283] was so excessive Bernard condemned it, Bernard for whom the mystery of *faith* [p. 264] transcended human reason, and could only be gained by contemplation and *grace* [p. 277]. This ultimately is Dante's own position, though he still insists on intellect as the path towards that point where Divine grace can intervene. Bernard condemned Abelard as a *heretic* [p. 279]. Abelard told the tale which must be read, of how 'more words of love than reading passed between us, and more kisses than teaching', and then we have Heloise's letters (perhaps a literary invention but no less powerful for that) those calls of total human love and of a soul in longing that tear the heart, 'a love beyond all bounds', she who 'would not have hesitated, God knows, to follow you or go ahead at your request into the flames of Hell'. Like Tristan and Iseult, their story which is also one of punishment by fate, and of moments of living hell, is pagan, secular, sensuous and ultimately Stoic, and asserts the cry of human *freedom* [p. 271]. Dante could not ignore it, it was his own early story in many respects, but he denies like Bernard that unbridled love is the right path. And so caught,

himself, in that conflict, a conflict he was still passing through, between the claims of love on this earth and the claims of the spiritual life, he faints.

The understanding of this episode and the reason for its emotional and poetic power is critical. Dante embraced wholly that tradition of courtly love, was seized by it, yet transformed himself, through commitment to intellect and learning, as he spells out at the end of the *Vita Nuova* and later exemplified, and so ultimately transcended the old tradition. Love became a marriage of mind and heart, of intellect and feeling, of spirit and emotion. *Beatrice* [p. 245] was spiritualised, as Dante came to deny Guido Cavalcanti's view of love as an accident, an irrational force, and destructive of virtue, and himself drew from Franciscan radical thought and the reality of the 'holy woman', her miraculous power, devotion, influence, saintliness. The religion of love in his hands becomes the religion not of Amor but of God. Still the old stories drew him. Their human poetry. Their human reality. Their cry of deep human love. And their sense of tragedy woven with beauty, transience with commitment, delight with disaster. The story of *Paulo and Francesca* [p. 261] is almost irrelevant. Go read the story of Abelard and Heloise, the conflict of passion with religion, of Abelard's path of total intellect with Bernard's of contemplation and grace, to understand why Dante is so powerfully affected that, out of Pity, he falls 'as a dead body falls'. It was his spiritual and personal crisis too. And the questions and answers in the *Commedia* are part of his journey from Courtly Love, and the even more dangerous reality of Abelard, to the spiritualised Beatrice. Abelard and Heloise are conspicuously absent from the named spirits of the *Inferno*, though Heloise might be expected among the heretics rather than the lovers. Dante fought in his own mind for orthodoxy, and it is Bernard the lesser intellect but the deeper mystic who presides over the last Cantos of the *Paradiso*, as perhaps Abelard and Eloise in spirit preside over this first true circle of the sinners.

## Meditation VI: Inferno Canto VI

### *MedVI: Ciacco's Prophecy: Inferno Canto VI.1*

Dante recovers from the empathetic trauma of Francesca's story, his 'complete sadness', and the poets pass by *Cerberus* [p. 337] through the tainted rain, over the putrid earth. This is the third circle of the gluttonous, and Virgil quiets Cerberus by stuffing his greedy maw with the corrupted soil. Cerberus, the monster, carves away from the shades that substance they have added through their gluttony.

Paulo and Francesca have given us the first encounter of conversational substance in this *Commedia* of interrogations and avowals, of autobiographies and instructions, of examinations and responses, of introductions and challenges. Dante's inner tensions and anxieties, his hopes and fears, surface in these dream encounters, these visionary dialogues, these pocket dramas where he can rehearse both his failures and his imagined triumphs in verse within his own control. Dante selects his *examples* [p. 261] and then has them reveal, or divulge, or present, just that of themselves that fulfils his purpose, and usually enough to make them live again, briefly, or at some length, in words like those on the plaques below statues, or the inscriptions on sepulchres, in dramatic exchanges, or with whole monologues.

Now there is the first of the 'guess who I am - I don't know, tell me' types of meeting. After the personal and spiritual challenge to Dante of the Paolo and Francesca episode, he moves to the personal and political. Here is Ciacco the Florentine. Dante wants to awaken an immediate interest in his Italian audience, and he uses a '*prediction* [p. 307]' of the near-term political future to do so. Ciacco's prophecy outlines the outcome of the *struggles* [p. 348] of the Black and White factions in Florence during 1301-1303. The Blacks under Corso Donati allied to Pope Boniface VII, who was in turn allied to the French King, Philip IV, and his brother Charles of Valois, defeating and expelling the Whites led by the banker Vieri de' Cerchi. Allied to the Whites and their desire for Papal reform coupled with support for the Hapsburg Empire, Dante nevertheless incurred the enmity of both parties, though he was exiled in 1302 as a White. His desire for a separation of *Empire* [p. 256]

and *Church* [p. 296], involving the reform of both, placed him against the pro-Papacy Blacks and the pro-Empire Whites. His idealism struggled to find a place in the complex web of politics. He was of those who hoped for a spiritualised Papacy, and a 'saviour' for the Empire, one of the dreamers and revolutionaries, like the Franciscan radicals, wishing the Church to return to its goals of poverty and spiritual authority and to cease meddling in power politics, and like the political 'right' yearning for the return of ancient Imperial authority, law and structure, a political regime that would equally cease to meddle in the affairs of the Church, and the world of the spirit. Alas, idealism is usually doomed to disappointment.

Dante has managed already then, at this early stage, in this and the preceding Canto, to sound the *three* [p. 340] great notes of his *Commedia*, his personal life of thought and poetry, love and Beatrice, Florence and exile: his political life and aspirations for a reformed Empire and Papacy: and his spiritual life with its struggle to weld reason and love, intellect and passion, learning and revelation, into one whole, one single Vision of the Divine Light. The Francesca episode hints already at the unspoken text of his spiritualization of love, the Ciaccio prophecy at his as yet unrehearsed dualistic concept of Church and State. Both were already obvious to his contemporary audience. The first from his *Vita Nuova* and its closing words. The second from his forays into politics and his continuing exile.

Now Ciaccio, in passing, highlights *Pride* [p. 306], *Envy* [p. 256] and *Avarice* [p. 244], as the root of the political evils. Dante calls the prophecy 'mournful' (!), and then swiftly asks after some of the great Guelph (Black, Papal alignment) and Ghibelline (White, Imperial alignment) captains and politicians of the recent past who are already dead. Ciaccio tells him those he named are deeper down in Hell, but for other reasons than their political allegiances. Ciaccio then issues the first of many requests by the spirits to be recalled or prayed for in the world of the living. This is the human desire for *recognition* [p. 310], for remembrance, and for assistance expressed by the dead to Dante so that he can communicate with those who are still alive.

### ***MedVI:2 A Question to Virgil: Inferno Canto VI:94***

Now, Virgil offers the first example of an extended series of statements, questions, and answers to those questions that reveal religious orthodoxy

and dogma throughout the Vision. The *Commedia* sounds always the deep, and sometimes harsh or sombre, notes of the appeal to Divine *authority* [p. 244]. Dante enjoys finding the eloquent phrase that will express that resonance of the accepted truth. And there are appeals to Imperial orthodoxy also. They are not presented as mindless bowings to received opinion, or mere protection against error. Dante is learning, and testing the dogma also, reasserting the reason for it, and sometimes the need for unreason and faith, for trust. He presents himself in the *Commedia* as an eternal student, questioning but accepting the word of the great spirits he meets and is guided by, above all Virgil and Beatrice. Ultimately he trusts in the authority of revealed truth: and therefore, in the world, he would like to trust in the authority of an Imperial central power, and a reformed Church, that would express that Divine authority and trust in worldly terms. But beyond this world he also has revelation, contemplation, intellectual light, and spiritual passion to trust in, and ultimately it is the Franciscan purity of Lady Poverty, and the Classical purity of early Rome as expressed by Virgil, idealistic and ethically sound, that feeds Dante's spiritual yearning. His sources are the noblest things he knows and has read, and the noblest things he feels and has experienced.

Virgil states that Ciacco like the other sinners in Hell is doomed not to progress, until the Day of Judgement. Hell is a place of spiritual *stasis* [p. 328]. A place where the spirits cannot go forward or back. Its very space constricts as the Poets descend. It becomes a dead weight pressing on the spirits, and on our and Dante's spirits. Dante accepts Virgil's authority regarding the afterlife and asks about the nature of the torments, will they increase after the Judgement when the spirits have returned to the flesh? Virgil replies in a slightly convoluted way, perhaps to dull the impact of the conclusion, that the sinners will be more perfect, therefore they will feel pain more!

Dante has illuminated another facet of his great theme in a simple way, the theme he enunciated in his letter to Can Grande della Scala accompanying his gift of part of the *Paradiso* 'The subject then of the whole work taken in the literal sense alone is the state of souls after death, pure and simple...from the allegorical point of view the subject is man according as by his merits and demerits in the exercise of his *Free Will* [p. 271] he is deserving of reward or punishment by Justice.'

## Meditation VII: Inferno Canto VII

### *MedVII: The Avaricious Church: Inferno Canto VII:*

Plutus, gabbling some *unknown language* [p. 328] of threat, *guards* [p. 337] the next circle of those lacking in self-control, the *avaricious* [p. 244] and their contrary. Virgil ‘who understood all things’ can interpret this mutilated tongue of the monster, a creature derived from Pluto the god of the underworld and Plutus god of wealth. In Hell *language* [p. 328] itself suffers, and becomes childish, guttural, nonsensical, or sibilant, as appropriate. Its moans and sighs, hisses and cries will become familiar to us.

For a third time Virgil confirms that *Dante’s* [p. 252] journey is willed on high, and mentions the *Archangel* [p. 340] Michael who fought against Satan, he who fell through the sin of *Pride* [p. 306], a weakness Dante found in himself.

In this circle those greedy for material things, or careless of them, are made to suffer by rolling weights, lumps of matter. The churchmen, the Cardinals and Popes are the worst examples, since they are the ones who should have adhered to the way of poverty. Here is a condemnation straight out of Franciscan Radicalism, reflecting Christ’s own teaching: Francis’s ‘Lady Poverty’ must have appealed deeply to Dante’s imagination, as yet another and different allegorical spiritualization of courtly love. These sinners are evidence of that corruption of the Church and *Papacy* [p. 296] that Dante fiercely rejected. It is interesting that Dante classes prodigality with avarice as a sin, indicating that he is opposing the ‘getting and spending’ culture, particularly in the religious sphere, and again evidencing his underlying rationale, his sins are abuses of the gift of freewill.

His ethics are not concerned as our modern ethics often are with moral conflict, the problems of conflicting ‘rights’. It is not at all clear how Dante would have resolved those problems, as in his structure his examples are made to appear clear-cut. Brutus and Cassius, for example, in assassinating Caesar commit the greatest of crimes, as traitors, regardless of any view that they might have held that they were ‘striking a blow for freedom’. Note that it is not the physical violence involved in the murder, or the sacredness of life, that are Dante’s main grounds for condemnation, reasons that we might find fundamental to our condemnation of their



action, but rather the act of treachery itself, the misuse of freewill. His sins are all in a sense *intellectual* [p. 283], since it is reason that differentiates Man from other creatures in the Medieval world view. Reason is the unique human attribute, and its abuse is therefore the root of sin, which is a concept specific to human beings, who possess knowledge of the tree of good and evil, through being the seed of Adam.

In this schema moral conflict is in a sense to be avoided so as not to mar the perfection of God's design, while in our world based on neo-Darwinian understanding of our biology and history as a species, and on cultural values spread by civilisation, moral conflict is recognition of our unplanned reality. That is not to invalidate Dante's, nor our, belief in higher values, nor his and our condemnation of the abuses of intellect and of reprehensible actions and intentions. We can still support his view of certain things as fundamentally undesirable, and others as overpoweringly desirable, while also admitting the problems of moral choice, and the reality that many of our moral instincts, that derive from nurturing mammalian empathy and our creative drive, are inputs to the reasoning process from the non-rational roots of our being. We are more compassionate and merciful in our punishments often, as a result of seeing the complexities, but that equally does not change our repugnance for crime or the pain caused.

It is interesting to reflect on modern secular attitudes to suicide, for example, to abortion, to crimes committed in self-defence, to genetic engineering, and to the concept of 'rights', to see how our view of ethics has changed and is changing. Despite all that, if we are moral agents, we still have the same struggle inwardly with our own spiritual journey, against destructive and corrupting forces, and the same aspiration towards creative and empathetic actions and feelings. We can all still be in favour of modified forms of Love and Goodness, as well as Truth and Beauty. It is not hard then to identify with Dante's personal journey.

Once one frees oneself from any requirement to endorse Dante's specific grading and classification of evils, wrongdoings, misuses of freewill, which can seem both arbitrary and unjust by modern standards, then it is easier to endorse strongly his general thrust away from destruction and darkness, and towards creation and light, away from hatred and violence and imbalance, and towards love, peace, and harmony. If that is

unashamedly a poet's reading, then so be it. Poetry is often a different way of approaching reality, and a different kind of truth.

***MedVII:2 Fortune and Mutability: Inferno Canto VII:67***

Dante immediately asks about Fortune, and Virgil replies, giving a *neo-platonic* [p. 294] description of the downward flow of Divine light through the guiding powers of the heavenly spheres, including Fortune the guide of earthly splendour, who is concealed behind the world 'like a snake in the grass', a reference to that *simile* [p. 315] in Virgil's own Eclogue III. Fortune is beyond human reason, and hidden from it, an agent of mutability and of the redistribution of wealth and power between nations. But time is passing, and the stars of Libra, the scales of *Justice* [p. 285], are setting.

***MedVII:3 The Wrathful and the Styx: Inferno Canto VII:100***

Dante has so far been adapting and enriching much of Virgil's imagery in book VI of the Aeneid, a reading of which shows his indebtedness to *Virgil* [p. 346] for the idea of a structured Other-world. Charon, the Acheron, the gates and ditches and towers, Cerberus etc. much of the imagery of these early parts of the Inferno derives from Virgil. Now the Poets descend to the Stygian marshes where the *Wrathful* [p. 349], sullen and violent, are tormented for their sins of Anger. They are submerged in the mire of their dark passion. The Poets are nearing the city of Dis, and must first cross the marsh. They will then have passed through the circles of the incontinent, of Lust, Gluttony, Avarice and now Anger, of those lacking in self-control, and into the lower regions, of Dante's devising, whose structure Virgil will soon explain.

## Meditation VIII: Inferno Canto VIII

### *MedVIII:1 Approach to Dis: Inferno Canto VIII:1*

Another little boat, and not the last, sails here over the Styx. *Phlegyas* [p. 337], who scorned the power of Apollo, in his anger, is the boatman, and anger is what he displays. The boat settles lower in the water under the weight of the living Dante. The spirits are insubstantial, while their punishments are heavy. Dante is heavy while his punishments are as yet light.

Now one of those wonderful swift portraits of an *individual* [p. 282] that Dante does so well, catching in a few words some essential characteristic, element of personal history, or contribution of knowledge of a name, and leaving the figure there frozen for posterity. Yet these individuals are captured by generic characteristics, or historical reputation, they are still not the complex individuals of reality, or psychologically oriented art, they are usually not shown in complex situations, they share the slightly naïve Medieval outline and colouration, while anticipating the more developed characters of the Renaissance and its painting, the subtlety say of a Giovanni Bellini. Here then is Filippo Argenti, that fierce Florentine spirit, and a contemporary of Ciacco. Instantly memorable, completely generic, as a representative of the angry soul.

But think how it must have been for Dante's own audience, as these people not long dead sprang to life again in his art. How strange. How brave of him and dangerous, how judgemental. There is Filippo, the arrogant man, mired, weeping, torn until he even rends himself! What would his descendants think of a picture like that. No libel laws, but enough hatred must have been incurred towards Dante the exile, as he set his enemies in Hell, or merely those whose reputation placed them there. Imagine a recently dead figure of our time appearing in a novel or play, condemnatory and hostile to them, and not a Hitler, not a world figure associated with clear-cut evil, but a local and domestic individual, and not as now appearing in some work that is 'merely art', but in what was well believed to be a 'vision' of the real afterlife! Francesca, and now Filippo, adding to the list of notable vignettes in the *Commedia*, adding to its feeling of reality, solidity, its personal urgency and its dramatic flavour.

The *Commedia* is conversational, interrogatory, full of rhetoric and dialogue, autobiographical monologue, pleas and commands, prophecies and prayers. Its use of *speech* [p. 328] is one of the finest things about it, learnt perhaps from Ovid and Virgil, but achieving new impact through Dante's mastery of the appropriate phrase, he who rehearsed in his mind endlessly no doubt, the perfect retort, the exact answer, the upstaging remark, the put-down, the humble and winning petition, all those things he may have been uncertain of in his own life, that here in his writing could be said once and for eternity, with no fear of a slip, an embarrassed silence, incorrect timing, or of receiving an unanticipated reply. Dante controls everything, as God controls his greater universe.

### ***MedVIII:2 The Fallen Angels: Inferno Canto VIII:64***

Moated, burning Dis, the great *city* [p. 248] is in front of them. Here is Hell's analogue to Rome or Florence, walled and towered and gated, a parody of the City of God. It is *guarded* [p. 337] by more than a thousand fallen *Angels* [p. 241], those creations of God, who fell with Satan, from *Pride* [p. 306], and to whom disdain and anger belong also. They challenge the living Dante's presence there. And Dante turns, in his personal urgency, to the Reader. He looks out for a moment from the text and addresses us. This is personal, this is what we all have to experience if we go that way. Virgil again reaffirms the spiritual authority that allows the Vision's journey to take place. Virgil offers hope to counter fear, as the Purgatorio counters the Inferno, and is its reversal, a spiral up to balance a spiral down, a progress to counter a stasis.

'Yes' and 'No' war inside Dante's head. Is there a fleeting thought here of Abelard again, another fallen 'angel', fallen through spiritual weakness, and then through intellectual pride? Abelard's own *Sic et Non* (*Yes and No*) had examined 158 problems with conflicting authorities, and insisted on always *examining* [p. 259] the evidence, texts that Bernard considered revelatory and not to be questioned. It left a picture of Abelard as an inveterate sceptic.

Virgil, prevented from going on by the insolence of the Angels, waits for the coming of a *Divine messenger* [p. 241] to open the gate of the city. The need is apparent elsewhere, it seems, without Virgil requesting assistance.

Dante creates beautiful suspense in a few words at the end of the Canto, as we imagine in our mind's eye the journey of the messenger, already on his way.

## **Meditation IX: Inferno Canto IX**

### ***MedIX:1 Conscience and Obduracy: Inferno Canto IX:1***

Dante questions Virgil about his descent from Limbo, and discovers Virgil has been here before, down as far as the Giudecca at its base, to bring a spirit out of there: we wonder who. The guide is thus a knowledgeable guide who will travel with Dante as far as the garden of the Earthly Paradise at the top of Purgatory.

The attitude of the Fallen Angels has caused anger in Virgil, so that we see an affirmation of the fact that anger causes anger, and its provocation is self-fuelling. Above the tower of Dis, the *Furies* [p. 337], the Erinyes, Eumenides or Kindly Ones, the pangs of Conscience that pursue the guilty now appear. They are still seeking revenge for Theseus's raid on Hell, when he tried to rescue Persephone, and was in turn rescued by Hercules, who also captured Cerberus in one of his labours. They call for Medusa so that Dante can be turned to stone, that is his heart can be hardened. Dante is warned by Virgil to turn his back to avoid the possibility of seeing her. The veiled meaning of the clouded verse is simply that *obduracy* [p. 306] hardens the heart against God, and stifles the conscience, delaying repentance. It is a facet of spiritual anger and pride. The heavenly messenger now appears and chastises the Fallen Angels for their intransigence and recalcitrance. The poets can now enter the city in safety. They pass on the Sixth Circle of the heretics.

## Meditation X: Inferno Canto X

### *MedX:1 Farinata: Inferno Canto X:1*

A plain of burning sepulchres with lifted lids. Here are the *heretics* [p. 279], but not as we might expect the heretics of the Early Church, no Arius, no Sabellius, though they do later pass the tomb of Anastasius, and none of the radical religious rebels of the Middle Ages, but instead the free-thinkers who denied the soul's immortality, as Dante supposes Epicurus to have done. They are therefore trapped in the mortal tomb. *Dante questions* [p. 259], Virgil replies, they will be entombed with their bodies and the lids shut, on the day of Judgement. Virgil rebukes Dante, and elicits a *humble* [p. 281] and polite reply.

Now the challenge. An unknown voice rises from one of the tombs. It speaks with old-fashioned *courtesy* [p. 250], and calls, Tuscan to Tuscan, Florentine to Florentine, linking the *city* [p. 248] of Florence to the City of Fire, Hell. Is not Florence extended around Hell, and interwoven with it, with all an exile's love, hatred and longing? The signal is sounded for the threads of Dante's personal and political life to be entwined once more in the poem. Dante shows fear. Virgil says: 'What are you doing? Che fai?' This is Farinata.

The *Individual* [p. 282] again. Such a clearly delineated portrait of the old aristocrat, 'erect in stance and aspect, as if he held the Inferno in great disdain'. Here is a root of that European tradition of the demonic soul, Don Juan, Faustus, Prometheus, the unrepentant, the free-thinker. Virgil thrusts Dante towards him, towards Farinata's contempt, to receive his first question: 'Who were your ancestors?' *Pride* [p. 306], free-thinking obduracy, the self-willed man. Yet this is Farinata, of the Uberti, the great-souled Ghibelline, *the victor at Montaperti* [p. 348], by the River Arbia, in 1260, who put country before party, who refused to raze Florence to the ground. Whose family was finally exiled after his death.

Here are Dante's personal echos, *Florence* [p. 267], his father's Guelph allegiance, his own Ghibelline leanings, his looming political *exile* [p. 264], an exile that will, as Farinata will in a moment, *predict* [p. 307], be finalised within fifty moons. And now an interlude, Cavalcante, to tie the whole Canto even more tightly into Dante's personal life.

***MedX:2 Cavalcante: Inferno Canto X:52***

A kneeling figure shows its face from the tomb, it is Cavalcante, the father of Dante's friend Guido, the poet, searching for his son. Where is he? If Dante's journey is accomplished through power of *intellect* [p. 283], then Guido, at one time husband of Farinata's daughter Beatrice, should be there with him, a sweet compliment to Guido's mental abilities. Dante makes a slip of the tongue, and speaks of Guido in the past tense. There is a deep irony here, since Guido, a white Gueff, exiled in June 1300, in a move that Dante was party to, was still alive at the time of the vision but fated to die in that August of 1300. So that Dante meets Cavalcante almost at the moment of his son's death, and in a sense mocks his own manipulation of time in the *Commedia*. Cavalcante fades back again into the sepulchre, like an operatic voice raised in an aria of hope, and then stilled. Dante in a moment will apologise for his slip of the tongue, an error, but a *prophetic* [p. 307] one.

***MedX:3 Prophetic Vision Inferno Canto X:94***

Farinata having shown the powerful, determined nature of his character, by returning to the conversation, and examining Dante further, prophesying exile, now answers Dante's courteous question on the nature of his *prophetic* [p. 307] ability. The damned *souls* [p. 330] can see the far future but not the present, and this far-sightedness will vanish completely on Judgement Day when *time* [p. 339] will end. Virgil reassures Dante that his full fate will only be revealed by *Beatrice* [p. 245], when he sees her, thus offering a double *hope* [p. 279], both of meeting her again, and of learning something more favourable about his future life. The poets are now at the dividing line between the upper circles of Hell those of incontinence, and the lower Circles, of Malice, separated into those of Violence and Fraud.

## Meditation XI: Inferno Canto XI

### *MedXI:1 The Structure of Hell: Inferno Canto XI:1*

While the poets now mark time before descending to the remaining three circles, Virgil informs Dante about the structure of Hell. Dante's concept of Hell derived from many sources including Virgil's own Aeneid, while the internal divisions arise from ideas in Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas and others. The classification is fundamentally intellectual, and does not follow the concept of the seven deadly sins, nor Aristotle's distinction in the *Ethics* between incontinence, malice and bestiality, nor Cicero's idea in the *De Officiis* of injury done by force or fraud, but is an original concept deriving from these and others. Dante's structure flows from his treatment of *freewill* [p. 271] as God's greatest gift, distinguishing man from other creatures, and sin as a failure to use, or misuse of, or abuse of, freewill, the Divine gift.

So we have seen the spiritually neutral who failed to use freewill: the un-baptised who had no opportunity spiritually to use it in the correct way: then the circles of lust, gluttony, avarice, and anger, those who failed to use freewill to restrain their desires: and the heretics whose intellectual errors and pride constituted a misuse of freewill.

Virgil now explains the lower circles, which contain those who are guilty of *malice* [p. 292], the deliberate abuse of freewill. They are divided between those who maliciously commit harm by force or *violence* [p. 345], those who commit harm by *fraud* [p. 270] or deceit, and those who do so by *treachery* [p. 340]. The seventh circle of the violent is subdivided into those committing violence against their neighbours, themselves, or against God. The eighth circle of the fraudulent is for those who were not in positions of special trust, the ninth is for those who were trusted above and beyond natural ties, and so committed acts of treachery.

Dante's subdivisions of the violent and of the fraudulent reflect the fact that God is *love* [p. 288], and that love is reflected in natural bonds, and radiates from God. So the violent inflict greater damage the nearer their violence touches God. Neighbours, self, God: *concentric* [p. 340] rings with an implication of God within the self, and of love flowing from God to the Individual and then Society. The fraudulent attack the natural bonds



between human beings. The treacherous also attack the special bond of trust between themselves and those against whom they commit their treachery.

Given the emphasis on freewill it is a rational enough classification. The main point is the relative sinfulness of the categories: incontinence, malicious violence, malicious fraud and treachery. We would treat violence as more reprehensible than fraud or treachery now, but that is partly because our western legal and moral codes place emphasis on the secular earthly life and the integrity of the body and of this life, and not on the certainty of an afterlife. We are in fact much more flexible in our evaluations, taking account of conflicting goods, mental forces, the possibility of reparation of harm, and our view of biological human weaknesses, and cultural and environmental factors. We are also more focussed on intent, so as to distinguish the non-malicious from the malicious action. The spiritually neutral, the un-baptised and the heretics would not be eligible for any punishment under secular law. Our attitudes to suicide, and the modern challenges of abortion, euthanasia, medical interference etc are not capable of Dante's cruder treatment. Nevertheless his core values of Love (or at least empathy and compassion) and the right use of Freewill are central to our secular laws also.

Virgil then adds a comment or two regarding usury, which allows him to stress that art follows nature which follows God, again the *hierarchical* [p. 279] flow. Usury employs neither man's arts (skills, abilities) nor nature's fecundity, so is unnatural and anti-social. An interesting comment on the growing power of the moneylenders. *Florence* [p. 267] would of course become the great banking capital of Europe. Our own concepts of economic growth of course depend directly on the use and employment of capital, and the payment of interest, whether the capital is labour or is stored value in the form of money or assets, and whether the interest is in the form of labour, money or assets, since all are convertible into monetary equivalents. Nevertheless we do also understand that there are anti-social aspects of money-driven behaviours, with potentially corrupting effects.

It is near dawn above, and Pisces, the Fishes, the protective sign of the Christian religion, is rising as the poets descend into the depths of Hell.

## Meditation XII: Inferno Canto XII

### ***MedXII:1 The Minotaur: Inferno Canto XII:1***

Dante supplies a topical *simile* [p. 315], the landslide by the Adige, as the poets find the *Minotaur* [p. 337] guarding the downward gully. Here he symbolises *violence* [p. 345], but was also a creature born of Pasiphae's *deception* [p. 270] of the bull from the sea, and is himself an unnatural hybrid, half-beast and half-human as are the violent themselves. His presence also carries echoes of the Cretan labyrinth, an analogue for Hell's imprisoning depths, and of Theseus who penetrated the labyrinth and killed the Minotaur, but also entered Hell himself to attempt to rescue Persephone. The poets evade him, and Virgil explains that the rock-fall post-dates his last visit here in pre-Christian times, and was caused by *Christ's* [p. 248] entry into Hell to remove souls from Limbo, at which the universe thrilled with *Love* [p. 288].

### ***MedXII:2 The Violent against Others: Inferno Canto XII:49***

The unnatural hybrid *Centaurs* [p. 337], who fought the Lapiths in *anger* [p. 349], are the guardians of the first ring of the seventh circle, that of the violent against others. The sinners boil in a river of blood, their depth within it indicating the extent of their guilt. One of the centaurs is Nessus, symbol of *deceit* [p. 270] and anger, who revenged himself on Hercules, via Deianira, by soaking his shirt in his envenomed blood.

Dante gives examples of the tyrannically and mercilessly violent. Tyranny is also a violent act against the subject, and here Dante is subtly promoting the idea of Republic and Empire, with citizenship as a key good. He references two ancient tyrants, Alexander of Pherae and Dionysius of Syracuse, and two medieval ones, Ezzolino III, 'the son of the devil', and Obizzo, murdered by his son-in-law. Then De Montfort who indulged in a revenge killing, Attila for the number of dead he caused, Pyrrhus and Sextus Pompeius who fought against the Imperial power, and finally two Italians who preyed on travellers.

Dante's interest here seems limited, and the canto lacks a feel for the individuals. Since the intellectual content of *violence* [p. 348] is low it fails to spark Dante's imagination. There is no fundamental moral issue involved: tyranny, vengeance killing and the murder of others for gain are simple wrongs. The concept of the river of blood is a strong image, but we are suddenly tourists as are the poets, ticking off sights seen, adding the river to the list. It is the Centaurs that absorb his poetic attention. Nothing makes more obvious the thrust of the *Commedia* than seeing how minimally the *violent* [p. 345] against others are handled, compared with sinners where any subtlety in the misuse of freewill is involved. Here in the circle where we would place Hitler and many other instigators of the mass killing of innocents, there is no true individuality. And that itself may be a subtle implicit comment, expressing the banality of this violence, its sameness, its lack of uniqueness except in terms of numbers and barbarity. We will meet this feeling of the depressing monotony and burden of sin, later in the *Inferno*, as the weight of the many concentric circles of evil begins to press down on us.

## **Meditation XIII: Inferno Canto XIII**

### ***MedXIII:1 The Wood of Suicides: Inferno Canto XIII:1***

Dante now takes inspiration from *Virgil's* [p. 346] *Aeneid* Book III 22 concerning Polydorus's grave mound, and the myrtle grove around it, and Virgil refers to it. Virgil's work as a source for the *Dis Cantos*, and to some extent the *Inferno* itself, is therefore subtly acknowledged. The wood the Poets reach is guarded by the Harpies, the violent birds hostile to Aeneas, and so the Empire. The episode of the suicides, those who have used violence against the self, also echoes Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with its *transformations* [p. 293] of people into trees, for example Daphne and Myrrha. The passage is wonderfully graphic, and the *individual* [p. 282] spirit of Pier delle Vigne, poet and chancellor, speaking from the broken branch, questions Dante's capacity for *Pity* [p. 302], before asking to be *remembered* [p. 310] in the world above. Delle Vigne also gives an opportunity to point out the *envy* [p. 256] that is rife in political life. Dante expresses his Pity while Virgil

questions further on his behalf. Suicide through the pressure of extreme circumstances is understood, but also condemned as an abuse of *free-will* [p. 271].

Two characters appear who apparently threw their lives away through recklessness, and are pursued through the wood by hounds, and then Dante brings us back to a Florentine reference. An unnamed figure gives us some of the history of *Florence* [p. 267], partly legend. Dante's point is that the rejection of Mars was believed to be at the root of Florence's internal *strife* [p. 348]. He is using the incident to highlight the *violent* [p. 345] nature of his own city, within the city of Dis. Nevertheless the incident stirs Dante's love of his native place, he the *exile* [p. 264].

## Meditation XIV: Inferno Canto XIV

### ***MedXIV:1 Capaneus, Pride and Disdain: Inferno Canto XIV:1***

The Poets cross the burning sand, and Dante adds a reference to Cato, the republican and lawgiver, type of the virtuous pagan. Cato who committed suicide rather than fall into enemy hands. Cato the champion of *liberty* [p. 271]. Cato, whom we will meet again, since the Mount of Purgatory is in his care. Dante accepts, it would appear, that Cato's virtue outweighed his suicide, and perhaps that his suicide was a positive act in favour of freedom rather than a negative one of violence against the self. And he follows Virgil (*Aeneid* VIII) in placing Cato amongst the virtuous. His other source of information being Lucan (*Pharsalia* II).

Here now is Capaneus (sourced from Statius's *Thebaid*), a type of the proud man, disdainful of the gods, who was struck down by Jupiter's lightning bolt while scaling the walls of Thebes. Dante refers back also to the obdurate Fallen Angels at the gate of Dis. His imagery here intensifies the fiery scene. Capaneus is tortured by his own *pride* [p. 306]. Pride is the ubiquitous sinful background to Hell.

***MedXIV:2 The Degeneracy of the Race: Inferno Canto XIV:73***

Dante now invents a rationale for the streams of Hell, and derives an image that perhaps combines the episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where Ovid describes the Ages of Man, with the Old Testament dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The Old Man of Crete is a *metaphor* [p. 315] for the decline of man, from *the Golden Age* [p. 276] of Saturn and its innocence and virtue, to Dante's own age. Cretan Mount Ida where Jupiter was raised, once verdant is now a spoil heap (Dante reflects the real degradation and deforestation of the Mediterranean environment, a process that the Romans accelerated). The golden head of the statue inside the mountain looks towards *Rome* [p. 312], and reflects it, his body images moral and spiritual decline through silver and bronze to his iron left foot, the temporal power, perhaps, and his clay right foot the fragile spiritual power and the corrupted *Papacy* [p. 296]. Below the gold he is fissured and from there the tears drop that form the rivers of Hell we have seen, Charon's Acheron, the marshy Styx, and the blood red boiling Phlegethon. Below will be the frozen Cocytus in the ninth circle.

The concept of Crete as a golden cradle of civilisation is interesting, reflecting what we know, but Dante could not, of the Minoan culture, its spontaneous and colourful art and myths, and the Cretan reference echoes the presence of Minos and the Minotaur in the *Inferno*, as well as passing references to Pasiphae, Daedalus, Theseus and Ariadne. Likewise interesting is the idea that the sorrows of the corrupted world form the rivers of Hell, as its crimes form the grounds for Hell's punishments. Dante underscores his view of the Papacy as corrupt and the Empire as degenerate, the twin bases of earthly life now clay and iron. Rome is the natural heir of Crete, Dante no doubt following the myth that Teucer of Crete was one of the founders of the Trojan people (Teucrians), from whom came Aeneid, the ancestor of the Romans. So there is a direct link from Crete to the Empire and Papacy, which partly explains Dante's interest in the Cretan myth complex. The city of Rome, that should be the golden fountainhead, is in fact standing on these feet of iron and clay between which flow the sins and tears of the world. Dante was also brooding over moral and spiritual decline in the *Convivio* and his *Canzoni* during the exile period.

Virgil reassures Dante that he will see the river Lethe though, it is on the Mountain of Purgatory where the spirits purify themselves and *penitence* [p. 298] *absolves* [p. 241] them of guilt.

## Meditation XV: Inferno Canto XV

### ***MedXV:1 Brunetto Latini: Inferno Canto XV:1***

The Canto begins with an extended *analogy* [p. 315], with the sea-walls of Belgium, one of Dante's marvellous concrete details, followed by another pair of similes. Now our eyes are alert, bombarded with visual imaginings, ready for the moment of *individual* [p. 282] recognition as the baked visage of Brunetto Latini appears, Dante's teacher, flawed by his sin of sodomy. Here is one of the wonderful brief portraits of the Inferno, one that again evokes Dante's sympathy with the sinner. Always in those areas which in modern times secular society no longer regards as sinful or against nature, the passion of the lovers in the whirlwind, the pagans and un-baptised, and here the homosexuals, Dante's instincts lead him to *empathy* [p. 302], though his orthodoxy forces him to take the standard line.

Brunetto's *Tesoretto* was a source book for the idea of an allegorical journey, beginning in a wood of error, and Brunetto himself was an *exile* [p. 264], a wanderer, after Montaperti, visiting France and probably England. A political scientist too. A supporter of Dante's political views it seems. From his *Trésor*, his prose encyclopedia written in French, comes the story of Florence's founding by remnants of Roman legions (aristocratic proto-Blacks) and the villagers of Fiesole (proto-Whites), the beginning of the internal divisions. The Fiesolean strain, ungrateful and malignant, guilty of envy, pride, and avarice, the three sins Ciacco said were rife in *Florence* [p. 267], will oppose Dante, according to Brunetto's *prophecy* [p. 307]. Dante will be hungered for by both Whites and Blacks, and will revive the spirit of the ancient *Empire* [p. 312]. That elicits a touching tribute from Dante, and a promised acceptance of his fate, that Virgil notes. Brunetto previously mentions Dante following his *star* [p. 331], meaning both his fate, and *Beatrice* [p. 245], whom Dante now hopes to see, given Virgil's previous promise.

Brunetto now points out other clerks and scholars guilty of his own crime, allowing Dante too an ironic reference to Boniface, the Pope in 1300, and the object of Dante's scorn for his corruption of the *Papal* [p. 296] office, using one of his official titles, 'the servant of God's servants', a pointed comment on Boniface's actual behaviour.

Then in a delightful parting *simile* [p. 315], Dante shows Brunetto, the teacher, running faster than the pupil, for the green cloth, the *palio*, at Verona, in the Lenten race, like 'one of those who wins, not one who loses', a wistful comment on one who to Dante must have indeed seemed in life one of the spiritual winners, but who in fact was a spiritual loser. Brunetto is the first of the vividly evoked individuals, but not the last, who point to the fallibility of human knowledge and intellect, to the reality that some of the greatest minds still deny themselves true salvation, by the misuse of free will.

## **Meditation XVI: Inferno Canto XVI**

### ***MedXVI:1 The Condition of Florence: Inferno Canto XVI:1***

After the beautiful *simile* [p. 315] ending the previous canto, another naturalistic one opens this: Dante comparing the noise of the falling water to a hum of bees. Here are further Florentines, and it is the beehive of *Florence* [p. 267], the 'perverse city' with its angry buzzing, that Dante wants to evoke in us. Dante is saddened once more, by his *pity* [p. 302] for the state in which the sodomites find themselves, which is also compassion for the state of Florence. The *city* [p. 248] of Dis reflects the city of Mars.

*Courtesy* [p. 250] is owed them, says Virgil the courteous: owed to these men betrayed by the flesh. And courtesy for Dante is still *cortesía*, the mark of nobility, of breeding, and of the conventions of courtly love, an intellectualisation, a way of formalising passion and reality so that life itself becomes form, and the afterlife equally becomes form. Courtesy is the harmony of the social mind, the communicator of respect, humility, and recognition.

The homosexual trio, in another probing graphic *simile* [p. 315], like

'wrestlers, naked and oiled' seeking advantage before conflict, seemingly *ashamed* [p. 315], caught in the rain of fire, of perverse passion, like their perverse city, are Rusticucci their spokesman, accompanied by Guido Guerra and Aldobrandi, two famous Guelphs who argued against the conflict that led to the Guelph disaster at Montaperti. Corresponding here to the Ghibelline wisdom and control of Farinata previously referred to. Sin is once more not a reason for blind condemnation. Worth can exist side by side with the errors of freewill. Dante is careful about this. It is what prevents the Inferno from becoming merely a deadly catalogue of torments in the manner of a De Sade. Value can shine even in these lower levels of hell, as here in the case of those who sinned against nature. We find noble warriors there, and men of learning, poets and philosophers. The misuse of Free will makes strange bed-fellows, concatenates history, and reveals the limits to human intellect, which can rise so high and yet in many cases is compatible with the fall into the Inferno.

Dante is 'eager to embrace' these citizens of his city, men of stature, whose condition 'stirred *sadness* [p. 302], not contempt', though fear of the flames (metaphorically fear of their sin also? Is there a sexual tension here beneath Dante's words, remembering that we have just left his teacher Brunetto. Did he feel a homosexual pull that his will resisted at some time in his early life?) inhibits him. *Fame* [p. 266] is the concept that is teased at here: their fame guarantees them a place in the Commedia, and Dante's fame is anticipated in Rusticucci's courteous words. His prompting leads to Dante's outburst against the 'new men and sudden wealth' that have created '*pride* [p. 306] and excess' in Florence. And then away the sinners go, with legs *like* [p. 315] wings, these sodomites, these worthy men, who run forever through the fires of Hell.

### ***MedXVI:2 Geryon's approach: Inferno Canto XVI:88***

They vanish *as quickly as* [p. 315] an *Amen*, and there follows one of Dante's extended geographical river *similes* [p. 315], to convey not only the sound of this water falling, but his wide knowledge of Italy's fabric, the deeply-ingrained memory of wandering an exile's road through his country, walking the miles, slowly studying the changing topography from the path, and also the downward plunge of their journey into Hell.



Now Virgil throws down a cord with which Dante had tried to catch the leopard ('spotted', is the natural description of its skin, within a few words of the 'tainted' water, both flawed) symbolising perhaps Florentine pride and excess. The poets are about to meet the unnatural usurers, after all, some of the new men with their sudden strange wealth, those who led Florence into that excess.

Dante pauses for some words of wisdom, before he turns to speak to the Reader, to us, and throw us a simile, of a man diving deep and returning from the depths having freed what was caught. Here are we, swimming in these depths, and here is Geryon, *Fraud*<sup>[p. 270]</sup> allegorised, rising with us.

## **Meditation XVII: Inferno Canto XVII**

### ***MedXVII:1 Geryon and Usury: Inferno Canto XVII:1***

There follows a rich and colourful description of Geryon with the 'face of an honest man' but the body of deceit. His surface is a coloured arabesque of complexity, an infidel tapestry, carrying the multiple tracks of the embroidered lie, linked, by the Arachne reference, to the woven webs of the loom and the webs of the spider, designed for skilful representation and entrapment. A quick *reference* <sup>[p. 315]</sup> to grounded boats, aggressive German beavers, and the scorpion, ancient mythological enemy of Good, and Dante goes to find the usurers.

More colours under the falling fire and burning dust. The usurers are like dogs in summer and each usurer has a vivid money pouch. The earlier Canto XI:94 (a strangely placed passage) gave us the justification for their presence here. The coats of arms no longer decorate shields and banners of honour, now they only stamp bags of gold. The Florentine Ghelphs are there, represented by Gianfigliazze's azure lion on golden-yellow, the Florentine Ghibellines by the Ubbriachi's silver goose on red, and the Paduan usurers by the Scrovigni azure sow on silver. And they await the Paduan Vitaliano and the Florentine Buiamonte. Florence and Padua alike are under the spell of usury, that violation of the laws of natural or God-given increase.

Dante and Virgil mount Geryon's back to descend, Dante like a man shaking with fever in his fear, but ashamed in the presence of his master. Once more Dante's weakness, his *Christian frailty* [p. 252] is stressed, and the power of conscience and duty. Dante is heroic in his anti-heroism. Like [p. 315] a boat, like an eel, Geryon departs, and Dante feels fear as the mythical Phaethon and Icarus did, passing too near the fire. Yet again a hint perhaps that the flames of sodomy were once near him, no suggestion that he was part of that scene. Like a falcon Geryon lands, at the *threshold* [p. 337] of Malebolge and the eighth circle of the fraudulent: like an arrow he vanishes. There is irony in the fact of Geryon, enemy of Hercules, and therefore of ancient Rome, since Hercules was protector of Evander and Rome's site (see Virgil Aeneid VIII 108 et al) carrying Virgil and Dante, the exemplar poet and the modern champion, of ancient Rome, on their journey.

## **Meditation XVIII: Inferno Canto XVIII**

### ***MedXVIII:1 The Structure of Malebolge: Inferno Canto XVIII:1***

A medieval military landscape stretches below, ten concentric moats or ditches or fosses, dropping to the central well that leads to the ninth circle. And linking bridges, or causeways, run over the moats from where we stand to the central chasm where they join, like the spokes of an evil wheel. We are the rim: the well is the dark hub. This is Malebolge, the 'malignant space'. Here are the ten rings of the *fraudulent* [p. 270], those who practised deceit on others, but breaking only the natural bonds of trust. Having maliciously misused the mind and freewill they are below the violent of the seventh circle: having broken only natural bonds but not specific bonds of human and divine love and trust, they are above the traitors of the ninth circle. This architecture looms Piranesi-like behind us as we descend with the Poets. It is a rigid structure of concentric prisons, where the spirits are eternally trapped. Gradually, as we read, the dumb weight of it all, the granite stillness, begins to press down on us. The final part of the Inferno is deeply saddening and depressing, in its monotonous saga of pain and sin, as gradually the colourful, worthy individuals are left behind, and true wickedness, unrelieved by redeeming virtues is felt.

***MedXVIII:2 The Pimps and Seducers: Inferno Canto XVIII:22***

Here now are the naked sinners of the first moat, being stripped of their layers of deceit, and Dante slips in a colourful comparison to the bridge at Rome during the Jubilee, in that year of 1300 in which the *Commedia* is set. And a hint perhaps that the Jubilee crowd contained many such sinners! Here is the Bolognese, Caccianimico, who helped Obizzo II, Marquis d'Este to seduce his sister Ghisola. Dante singles out Bologna for his treatment, a city of panders, noted for its *avarice* [p. 244].

Looking down from the bridge above into this first moat we see Jason, an ancient *example* [p. 261] of the deceitful lover, chosen perhaps because Hypsipyle and Medea, whom he deceived, in turn practised deceits, allowing Dante a neat encapsulation of trickery. Interestingly Virgil stresses the wisdom and courage with which Jason obtained the Golden Fleece, without any apparent irony. The common variant of the myth has Jason obtaining the Fleece with the help of Medea's fraudulent magic.

***MedXVIII:3 The Flatterers: Inferno Canto XVIII:100***

On the crest of the causeway, as it crosses the second ditch, we look down into the sewer. Dante recognises one Luccan spirit, embedded there in the mire, because of the mire of flatteries he had perpetrated. Dante has little time for the yes-men, the corrupters of language, and adds Thais the courtesan as an ancient example of whorish abuse of the mother-tongue. The Poets progress to the third chasm and Dante prepares for his diatribe against corruption of the Papacy through simony, the selling of sacred offices.

## Meditation XIX: Inferno Canto XIX

### *MedXIX:1 The Corrupt Papacy: Inferno Canto XIX:1*

The Simonists are named from the followers of Simon Magus. Having filled the vacancies of holy offices with corrupt individuals to whom they sold them, or having purchased their own offices, they are now themselves slotted upside-down into holes in the rock. The rock is an inverted parody of the sacred rock of Peter and the Church. Dante adds in some local colour, an incident from his life when he broke the marble of one of the holes that surrounded the font in the Baptistry of Florence, in order to free a child. He denies having done it for some other sacrilegious reason, and uses this as a chance to exonerate himself. Then the poets descend into the chasm to inspect the worst of the sinners.

A quick *analogy* [p. 315] with a treacherous assassin trying to delay his imminent immolation, and a neat dig at Boniface the incumbent corrupt Pope at the time of the vision, who is expected shortly (1303), and we are in conversation with a representative *individual* [p. 282], Pope Nicholas III of the Orsini family who gives us a swift *prophetic* [p. 307] view of Popes to follow. His torment will alter when Boniface arrives to replace him, having delayed twenty-three years, and then there will be another simonist Pope to follow, Clement, the Gascon who transferred the Papacy to Avignon, arriving within a further eleven years, to replace him in turn. Each will surpass the preceding sinner in their sinfulness. Boniface brought about the total corruption of the Rome *Papacy* [p. 296] and gave control of Florence to the French: Clement transferred the Papacy away from *Rome* [p. 312]. Both in Dante's eyes were destructive of the Papacy itself, its rightful role as a spiritual but not temporal power, and its legacy as the Church of Peter in Rome.

And Dante throws in a Biblical *example* [p. 261]. As Jason the high priest bribed Antiochus IV to grant him his holy office, so Philip IV of France will accept a bribe from Clement to achieve the same end. He follows up with Biblical examples of honesty, and then comments on Nicholas's depriving Charles of Anjou of office, having been bribed by the Eastern Emperor Michael Paleologus. Dante's diatribe then refers to the Donation

of Constantine, that forged document that had Constantine ceding temporal power to the Church in Italy while transferring the Empire to the east. So Dante links back to his main theme, the desired separation of Church from *Empire* [p. 256], with the Church overseeing spiritual and the Empire temporal matters, and the need for the corrupt Papacy to embrace a true spiritual path. The corrupt Papacy and the French are his demons. A purified Rome, seat of ancient virtue, of Empire and Early Church is his vision. *Virgil* [p. 346] is pleased. He then clasps Dante in his arms, ancient Rome symbolically clasping ancient Rome's champion in modern times, and climbs to the arch over the fourth chasm.

## **Meditation XX: Inferno Canto XX**

### ***MedXX:1 Fraud by Magic and Superstition: Inferno Canto XX:1***

The prophets and seers appear, heads twisted round in a parody of their supposed foresight, their tears bathing their backsides. And Dante weeps with *pity* [p. 302] at this image of contorted humanity. Virgil, the pagan, rebukes Dante the Christian. Does Dante intend that we agree with Virgil, compassion here is both useless and impious? Or does he intend us also to see the image of the weeping poet overlaid on it, like a ghostly negative, the Christian prompted to pity even by sinners? There is an ambiguity. Perhaps Dante never resolved completely in his own mind this conflict between orthodox acceptance of Church teaching, and the purer empathy exemplified by Christ.

A succession of mythical prophets and prophetesses follows (culled from Statius, Ovid, and Lucan) Amphiaraus, Tiresias, Aruns, and Manto. The Manto episode allows Dante, through Virgil's mouth, to celebrate Virgil's birthplace Mantua, with an alternative version to *Virgil's* [p. 346] own in the Aeneid. The geographical description is pleasant, and in passing Dante gives a moment from Mantua's recent history, Casalodi's expulsion from the city by Pinamonte. Then there are references to magicians and *astrologers* [p. 331].

Dante closes the Canto with a reference to the full moon, indicating also the carefully planned chronology of the Inferno. *Virgil* [p. 346] is aware of

Moon and star positions, here as in Cantos VII and XI, though presumably at this depth they can no longer see the stars and sky. How does Virgil know? Presumably by Divine grace.

## **Meditation XXI: Inferno Canto XXI**

### ***MedXXI:1 The Malebranche Demons: Inferno Canto XXI:1***

An *analogy* [p. 315] with the Venetian Arsenal serves to point up the pitchy boiling darkness of the fifth chasm where the barrators, the sellers of public offices, are tormented. This was the crime falsely used among other things as a pretext for Dante's own banishment from Florence (and the subsequent sentence of death on him in 1302, presumably if he returned), and there is an air of high burlesque about the whole episode, an ironic grimace on the writer's face as he pens it. Clearly he could not here identify the episode of his own banishment since (in 1300 at the time of the Vision) it had not yet occurred, but the future is anticipated in his fear, the burlesque, and the farcical nature of the scenario.

The Malebranche, the 'evil-clawed', *guardian* [p. 337] demons of this ring, are malicious and violent liars, and so by implication were Dante's own accusers. Dante also points the finger at the town of Lucca, famous for this corruption, Bonturo the worst of the Luccans being mocked here for denying it. The Black Demon hurls a Luccan into the sticky pitch, *analogous* [p. 315] to the concealed sticky darkness of barratry, its hidden behind-the-scenes corruption, and the others push the sinner down *like* [p. 315] the cook's boys immersing hunks of meat.

Dante cowers behind a rock, so as not to be obvious (a mock salute to the trumped-up charges of 1301-2?), while the Demons rush at Virgil *like* [p. 315] dogs on a beggar. Virgil tells Malacoda their spokesman that *Dante's* [p. 252] journey is willed above. The fearful Dante emerges (is this all merely mock-serious?) and it *reminds* [p. 315] him of the fear of the surrendering soldiery at *Caprona* [p. 348], where he was present, in 1289, marching out under the eyes of the besieging Guelphs. This to point the personal nature of the encounter with the Demons, and its Florentine reference. Malacoda then *deceives* [p. 270] the poets, claiming the sixth arch is broken, and Dante gives a

deft reference to Christ's crucifixion, which supposedly rocked hell at noon, setting the *time* [p. 339] here as 7am on the Saturday following Good Friday.

A troop of ten comically named Demons peel off to police the ditch, and the poets go with them, Dante fearing treachery, while they signal rudely to their leader Malacoda on departing. Sinister humour. The farce of *Florentine* [p. 267] politics, its victims hurled down into the dark boiling river of death or exile.

## **Meditation XXII: Inferno Canto XXII**

### ***MedXXII:1 Ciampolo and the Quarrel: Inferno Canto XXII:1***

More military *reference* [p. 315] regarding Malacoda's foul signal, and then the poets walk on by the boiling ditch, watching the sinners *like* [p. 315] dolphins arching from the depths, like frogs squatting in the shallows. A profusion of animal comparisons: *Ciampolo* [p. 282] of Navarre, is hauled out like an otter, Ciriatto the demon has a tusk like a boar's, Ciampolo is the mouse among evil cats. Ciampolo mentions two of Sardinia's corrupt rulers, Gomita and Zanche, and implies that there are plenty of Tuscans in the ditch's dark embrace, and then we see scheming, lying and treachery at work. Dante illustrates the nature of the Demons and the sinners, by this little incident of Ciampolo's flight. Bird similes follow now, ducks and hawks. And Dante neatly ties the incident together with the final quarrel and fight of the Demons.

Once more he has caught the tone of burlesque with his theatrical demons and his mock comic sinner, cleverly evoking the feel of organised corruption, its *trickery* [p. 270], concealment, malice and treachery, cloaked by a stagey air of farce and comedy, a thin veneer over the violence and vindictiveness. A world of superficial loyalties and internecine warfare. Dante's disdain for his own accusers is apparent, coupled with an equal fear of that underlying corruption of State and Office that the barrators and bribe-takers represent. The *examples* [p. 261] cited may be from Lucca and Sardinia, but Dante is aiming at *Florence* [p. 267], with a mockery that, as he admits in the next Canto, is designed to hurt and ridicule the Demons, while it inadvertently arouses his own fear of reprisal.

## Meditation XXIII: Inferno Canto XXIII

### *MedXXIII:1 The Hypocrites: Inferno Canto XXIII:1*

The Poets continue, ‘*like* [p. 315] minor friars’ walking in line. Dante refers then to a version of an Aesop’s fable, that is similar to the recent quarrel of the Demons and their pursuit of Ciampolo. Dante fears being chased by the same Demons, like hounds after a hare. *Virgil* [p. 346] responds with a simile of mirror glass to express his empathy with Dante’s feelings and thoughts, picks Dante up like a mother with her child, and runs faster than the water in a mill-race, carrying him like a son, and leaving the Demons, the *guardians* [p. 337] of the fifth moat behind, powerless to leave their *place* [p. 328] in Hell.

Here in the sixth ditch are the hypocrites, shrouded with external bright gilding, but leaden inside. Catalano and Loderingo, two of the infamous ‘Jovial Friars’, who added to, rather than alleviating the corruption of *Florence* [p. 267], identify themselves, allowing Dante a thrust at the evils of his native city.

The poets then come upon Caiaphas, Annas and the rest of the Jewish Council who renounced Christ, while making a pretence to the greater good of the people in doing so. Their behaviour was therefore cloaked with specious self-justification, while betraying an innocent individual, one of their own people, to Roman punishment. A political, and perhaps a politic action, but not to Dante’s mind a moral one. This is an interesting example of the continuing tension in Western thought between the rights of the individual and the benefit to the majority. Dante no doubt considered the Florentines hypocritical in bringing about his own banishment, since Dante himself was innocent of the charges against him, and no doubt the justification used for the exile of both Black and White elements from the city, was indeed the greater good of the majority. He perhaps considered that he himself had been ‘martyred’ for the ‘good’ of Florence, and makes this indirect connection to Christ’s suffering, indicating the path of those who chose, as he felt he himself had done, the correct moral course of action. Dante points the connection further by indicating that Caiaphas is ‘in eternal *exile* [p. 264]’.



Catalano confirms that Malacoda has deliberately misled them, and emphasises the lying nature of the sinful. By emphasising deceit and *fraud* [p. 270], Dante weaves together here the incident with the Demons, the reference to the lying Florentines who exiled him on trumped-up charges, and the 'betrayal' of Christ, so linking his own journey in life, and in the Vision, to Christ's journey through the world.

## **Meditation XXIV: Inferno Canto XXIV**

### ***MedXXIV:1 Virgil's Exhortation: Inferno Canto XXIV:1***

The Canto begins with a beautiful *simile* [p. 315], of the winter scene and hope regained, with its evidence of Dante's dependence on Virgil as his mystic guide (and with a veiled reference to Virgil in the *crin sotto* of the Italian text which echoes Virgil's *crinitus Apollo*, Aeneid IX 638) and Virgil then carries Dante to the top of the broken causeway. The structure of Malebolge, with its concentric valleys, descending to the central well, is skilfully touched on.

Virgil then exhorts Dante to free himself from *sloth* [p. 326] and exert himself for *fame* [p. 266]. Here is a recognition of the shortness of life, and its ephemeral nature, combined with the Classical thought that fame outlasts the individual life, and with the Christian, and ancient, separation of spirit from the body. It is a curious mixing of ancient and Christian thought that carries on into the Italian Renaissance, but sits strangely sometimes alongside the concept of Christian humility and the path to spiritual salvation, where fame is surely an obstacle on the way. Most of the individuals selected by Dante to illustrate his *Commedia* are world famous, or known in his epoch, while Dante does not comment on the arbitrary nature of fame, or its frequent lack of alignment with worth. Here instead he echoes strongly the calls to eternity made by the Roman poets, Horace, Propertius and Ovid in particular.

Down below, in the seventh moat, are the thieves, among the snakes. Here is a pit of mutation and transformation, where forms are stolen and re-stolen. A serpent strikes at *Vanni Fucci* [p. 282], the Pistoian church-robber, and he is consumed, faster than individual letters are written, before rising from the ashes *like* [p. 315] a phoenix. Vindictively he *prophesies* [p. 307] the *defeat*

[p. 348] of the Whites, Dante's party at that time, by the Blacks in 1302 (see this note) and foresees the expulsion of the Blacks from Pistoia in 1301, and the subsequent expulsion of the Whites from Florence, and the re-taking of Pistoia, by the Blacks in 1306. As in the previous few Cantos, Dante's mind is filled with Florence and politics at this point in the Inferno.

## **Meditation XXV: Inferno Canto XXV**

### ***MedXXV:1 The Serpent Transformations: Inferno Canto XXV:1***

Vanni Fucci is gripped by snakes, as he shows his hatred of God, and is pursued by Cacus the thieving monster (Dante makes him a centaur) of mythology, killed by Hercules, protector of the site of *Rome* [p. 312]. Vanni Fucci is prouder and more arrogant than Capaneus or Farinata. Dante does not explicitly treat the punishment of *pride* [p. 306] in the Inferno: there is no circle for the proud, since pride is associated with the whole of Hell, being Lucifer's sin for which he fell from Heaven. So we find various individual examples of pride and arrogance throughout the Inferno.

Two incidents of metamorphosis, to rival Ovid and Lucan follow, where serpent and human pairs (of *Florentine* [p. 267] nobles, noted as thieves) merge (Cianfa Donati and Agnello Brunelleschi) and exchange forms (Buoso Donati and Francesco Cavalcanti) in an endless cycle. Forms are therefore stolen and re-stolen. Dante relishes the descriptions, and enlivens the verse with apt use of *similes* [p. 315].

## **Meditation XXVI: Inferno Canto XXVI**

### ***MedXXVI:1 Ulysses and Classical Striving: Inferno Canto XXVI:1***

Dante, in time present, rams home his condemnation of *Florence* [p. 267], with irony: the *city* [p. 248] is becoming famous throughout Hell, having supplied its citizens to all parts of the Inferno: the city of Dis and his native city are

analogous, mirroring each other. In the time past of the Vision, the five thieves mentioned were all Florentines, and Florence will pay for its sins in time future. Dante yet again subtly claims his place as a prophet in the line of prophets, and therefore rightfully allowed to make his journey.

Dante was and is saddened by the punishments, his *pity* [p. 302] is invoked, and his intellect reined back towards virtue. The eighth chasm of the evil counsellors gleams with flames *like* [p. 315] summer fireflies, each like the vanishing fire of Elijah's chariot. Dante mentions Elijah and Elisha, true *prophets* [p. 307], perhaps to emphasise the prophecy about Florence's punishment implicit in his opening lines of the Canto, and he links the theme of theft to that of evil counsel by the way the flames 'steal' sinners away secretly within their core, and by his choice of Ulysses and Diomed as the first of the evil counsellors, since they were also the thieves who stole the Palladium, the statue of Pallas Athene, from its sanctuary in Troy.

They were Greeks, and opposed to the Trojans, from whom came Aeneas, Rome, and Dante's own Italian language, his 'Trojan words'. Ulysses' crime of devising the Trojan Horse was an attack on Troy, and therefore in Dante's terms, an attack on the *Roman* [p. 256] Empire. Virgil *questions* [p. 259] the two spirits, to expand Dante's and his own knowledge, and it is Ulysses who replies.

Inventing a new version of Ulysses's fate, Dante uses him, the archetypal wanderer and *exemplar* [p. 261] of human intelligence, to illustrate the ancients search for truth and worth. Sailing West out of the Classical Mediterranean world he and his crew entered the encircling Ocean, turning south, reaching the southern hemisphere, and in a voyage of five months or so, reaching a Mountain which is clearly the Mount of Purgatory, diametrically opposite Jerusalem (i.e. in the as yet unknown Southern Pacific). But in sight of that Mountain of Christian purgation of sin, the Classical world, *represented* [p. 282] by Ulysses, founders and, falling short, is submerged, physically, and spiritually. The Earthly Paradise is not attainable by the unaided efforts of human enquiry and knowledge. The Pagan world remains inferior to the Christian one. A *Dante* [p. 252] who wandered in exile, leaving behind family and city, pursuing virtue and intellectual understanding, a Medieval Ulysses, ultimately moved towards faith and divine grace as necessary to complete the journey of the spirit. Human philosophy is inadequate without divine philosophy, and in the end both

must be illuminated from above. Ulysses therefore joins Farinata, and Brunetto: men of worth and intellect, who nevertheless could not be redeemed by intellect alone.

## **Meditation XXVII: Inferno Canto XXVII**

### ***MedXXVII:1 The State of Romagna: Inferno Canto XXVII:1***

The twin flame of Ulysses and Diomed, is followed by the *courteous* [p. 250] tongue of fire enclosing Guido da Montefeltro, Lord of Urbino in the Romagna. A famous leader of mercenary troops, he became a Franciscan, but was brought from retirement by Boniface, and suggested a ruse to destroy the city of Palestrina, after the *Pope* [p. 296] had granted him the nonsense of prior absolution. His *voice* [p. 347] issues from the flame like the bellowing of the Sicilian bronze bull made for Phalaris of Sicily by Perillus, who became its first victim. And Guido's immediate request is for news of his Romagna. How often the spirits in the Inferno ask about their place on earth, eager for news of their homeland, for *recognition* [p. 310], and for remembrance.

Dante tells of the fortunes of key Romagna strongholds, one of which, Forlì, Guido himself was instrumental in fighting for, driving out the French papal forces.

### ***MedXXVII:2 Corrupt Authority: Inferno Canto XXVII:58***

Guido then tells his *personal* [p. 282] story, and it is Boniface at whom Dante is aiming, the evil Great Priest, Prince of the Pharisees, who has corrupted the *Papal* [p. 296] office. A deft reference to Pope Sylvester and Constantine, evokes remembrance of the Donation of Constantine, that forged document by which Constantine was supposed to have given the Papacy temporal power in the West. This fatal confusion of the material and spiritual spheres is echoed in Boniface's political involvement and personal greed.

Guido conceded to corrupt authority, and preached a counsel of *deceit* [p. 270] and betrayal. Even his beloved Saint Francis could not save him from the Black Demon whose logic is seen to be impeccable. How can prior absolution be possible for an evil deed? Absolution can only be given after *repentance* [p. 298], how then can one repent of the evil at the same time as one is still willing it in advance to occur? Dante's irony is apparent: even the demons can apply logic. Intellect and reason are effective even in Hell. Guido's reliance on corrupt Papal authority is as ineffective ultimately as Ulysses' reliance on inadequate human knowledge and both were flawed by practising cunning and deceit. Human *reason* [p. 283] and authority are insufficient. Divine authority and understanding are beyond both. Subtly Dante contrasts *Franciscan* [p. 269] radical poverty, honesty, chastity and faith, which influenced him strongly, with the devalued Papal See.

*Dante* [p. 252] is perhaps acknowledging with Ulysses the inadequacy of his own intense search for truth prior to the revelations of the Vision, and recognising from Guido's experiences the value of his own rebellion against corrupt Papal authority. Guido, *the noble warrior* [p. 348], like Farinata, and Ulysses found human wisdom ultimately inadequate to grapple with spiritual and moral truth unaided.

## Meditation XXVIII: Inferno Canto XXVIII

### *MedXXVIII:1 The Sowers of Discord: Inferno Canto XXVIII:1*

*Language* [p. 328] and *memory* [p. 292] are inadequate for the task of description in this Infernal place. *Dante* [p. 252] repeats that formula elsewhere, both to emphasise how he has 'passed beyond humanity' and to gently impress on the reader the magnitude of his achievement. He is nothing if not self-aware as a poet. Here the schismatics, and the sowers of discord, are themselves severed and split. Dante *likens* [p. 315] the scene to the aftermath of *famous battles* [p. 348], involving the interests of Rome and the Papacy. War is essential discord. Here is Mahomet, split like a wine-cask, placed not among the heretics, nor the false prophets, but among those who created division in the faith. And here is his brother-in-law, Ali, who in turn created schism within *Islam* [p. 242] itself.

Mahomet pauses to provide a *prophecy* [p. 307] about the fate of Father Dolcino, who was a heretic burnt at the stake in the 1307. Here too is Pier della Medecina, who asks to be *remembered* [p. 310] above, he who created discord in the Romagna, and he prophesies Malatestino Malatesta's treachery against Cassero and Carignano of Fano. The absence of mention of this Maletesta's fate in the Inferno may imply that Inferno was written before his fate was known and could be prophesied in turn: he was certainly alive at the time of the Vision.

Dante uses Pier's plea for remembrance to *question* [p. 259] as to who another spirit is. It is Curio who urged on Caesar's *Civil War* [p. 348], and the march on Rome. And here too is Mosca de' Lamberti, who through endorsing Buondelmonte's murder was at the root of the factional strife in Florence. So Dante brings together sowers of discord in religious history, Roman history, wider Italy, and Florence itself. His *examples* [p. 261] support his preoccupations, and circle in towards the personal, ending with a poet. Here is the great Provencal noble and *troubadour* [p. 343], Bertrand de Born, carrying his own severed head, somehow capable of existence despite being parted in body from his own intellect, who had created strife in the English monarchy, between Henry II and his son, as Ahithophel did in the Biblical case of David and his son Absalom. A fine and striking passage. Poetry and intellect are not enough, says Dante. Bertrand is condemned for his moral failings, great poet, and noble warrior, though he was. And are there not other under-currents too, of Provence and the Papacy severed from Rome, of the body of the Church severed from a truly spiritual head, of Church and State severed from their origins, of divided humanity?

## **Meditation XXIX: Inferno Canto XXIX**

### ***MedXXIX:1 Geri de Bello; Inferno Canto XXIX:1***

Dante *weeps with pity* [p. 302]. And there is something darker, and more deadly, about that previous Canto than those before it. It is as if the colour, and individuality, and worth still present elsewhere in the Inferno ceases in the ninth chasm. Here is all the bloodshed, and wasteful cruelty of the earth, and of its history. The deadly weight of all those circles of Hell is felt here,

pressing us onwards towards the central pit, and the Ninth Circle. The violence is intensified, the treachery, and deceit of war and civil strife is endemic. Here the troublemakers congregate, those who for whatever cause, real or spurious, bring death and evil into the world. This is no good place, and Dante's pity is almost rebuked by Virgil. The moon is under their feet, at the nadir, this is no place for feelings and emotions. The valley is twenty-two miles in circumference implying a distance to the centre of the central well of three and half miles (and hinting at the 22/7 value of  $\pi$ ), but much less than that to reach its rim. There are only five hours left before the Poets will leave Hell, and Virgil urges Dante on.

But Dante had noticed Geri de Bello, his own relative, unavenged in an ongoing blood feud with the Sacchetti, and therefore hostile to Dante, who Dante therefore *pities* [p. 302] more since Geri is still lost in desire for revenge. We may take it Dante was in favour of settling the feud peacefully which in fact went unresolved until much later, with further bloodshed. Virgil too noticed Geri and saw him depart. So Dante has brought us in the previous Canto from the wider circles of *war and strife* [p. 348], to Florence, to poetry, and now ultimately to his own family, gradually personalising and localising the mischief of conflict, circling in, revealing its ubiquity, and its nearness to all us human beings. Malicious deceit is all around us, severing the human bond, divorcing ourselves from ourselves, splitting the human community. From the single Individual must flow the desire for peace, and a corresponding intolerance of all those who sow violent discord.

### ***MedXXIX:2 The Alchemists: Inferno Canto XXIX:37***

Again Dante takes *pity* [p. 302] on the pain. We remind ourselves again that while there is no pity within the Divine execution, the 'infallible *justice* [p. 285]' of the Inferno, there is within Dante, and therefore within the greater Divine Plan. The good feel pity, human sympathy, empathy, the root of creative, nurturing morality. Therefore it is right to say that Pity is the motif of the Inferno, strange as that may sound: the pity is in the Poet. And the Christian Dante is more moved than the pagan Virgil. Dante *likens* [p. 315] this place to a vast hospital. Here, the diseased ant-heap of the falsifiers is a mirror of the wretchedness and misery of a sick world.

Here is Griffolino of Arezzo, an alchemist, burned alive by Albergo of Siena, which allows Dante a jibe at the vanity of the Sienese (and in passing the French). Capocchio a second alchemist, also burned at Siena, echoes Dante's effort, and lists as examples four members of the Sienese *Brigata Spendereccia*, the Spendthrift Brigade, a club of wealthy Sienese who squandered their money on riotous living. Siena therefore joins the list of *cities* [p. 248] which Dante has drawn examples from on his way through the Inferno.

## **Meditation XXX: Inferno Canto XXX**

### ***MedXXX: A World of Lies: Inferno Canto XXX:1***

The rabid spirit of Gianni Schicci, who carried out an impersonation to falsify a will, fixes on Capocchio, and Dante draws a *parallel* [p. 315] with the maddened king Athamas, and the crazed Hecuba. And a second demented spirit here is Myrrha, who disguised herself to enter her father's bed.

Like a fevered patient, Adam of Brescia, the coiner, tells his tale, mentioning the Conti Guidi, who induced him to sin, but themselves escaped punishment. He tells us that this chasm the tenth has half the circumference of the ninth chasm, at eleven miles, and is half a mile across. So we can calculate the narrowing down of the eighth circle to the central well that drops to the Ninth, and feel the graded constriction of this level, and the nearness of its gullet.

Now we see Potiphar and Sinon, false accuser and false witness, and Adam and Sinon quarrel, Dante avidly listening, so that Virgil has to reprove him ironically, Dante showing his *shame* [p. 315], Virgil condemning the vulgar desire that makes us spectators of vileness. *Lying* [p. 270], falseness, mendacity, the corruption of the world: the grand hospital is left behind.



## Meditation XXXI: Inferno Canto XXXI

### *MedXXXI:1 The Giants: Inferno Canto XXXI:1*

Virgil's words *like* [p. 315] Achilles' spear both wound and heal Dante, and moving on towards the central well he hears a horn, louder than Roland's. Dante is associating this horn-cry at the mouth of the Ninth Circle, which is adverse to spiritual good, with the infidel attack on Christendom. The Poets are nearing the Giants who guard the *threshold* [p. 337] to the pit, and Dante *likens* [p. 315] their shapes to the towers of Montereggione near Siena.

Dante reminds us that for him misuse of the mind, of *free will* [p. 271], is the greatest evil, the Giants representing here power joined to malice, the tyranny of misapplied strength, since it was they who in mythology attacked the heavens, and mankind. And against power combined with malice there is no defence for the decent human being. Evil pulls us down into its mire.

First is Nimrod, the mighty hunter of the Bible, who created the tower of Babel, and corrupted *language* [p. 328]. His head is as large as the bronze cone at Saint Peter's (seven to eight feet) and the rest of him in proportion. Next is Ephialtes, another monster of *pride* [p. 306], the besetting sin of the Inferno, who attacked the gods, and then Antaeus, the Libyan giant who wrestled with Hercules, and who is unchained since he was absent from the battle with the gods. His North African origin allows Dante a reference to the defeat of Carthage by Scipio: the defeat by Hercules, protector of Rome, of his enemy mirrored in Scipio's defeat of Hannibal, enemy of *Rome* [p. 312], at Zama. (Hercules, in Virgil's Aeneid, saved the people of Evander, Aeneas's ally and distant kin, on the site of the future Rome, by destroying Cacus. The same passage in Virgil, Aeneid VIII:108-384, mentions Geryon, another enemy destroyed by Hercules. So Hercules is a Roman protector, and his enemies are enemies of Rome. This explains Dante's employment of limited elements of the Hercules myth, and the selection of Geryon, Cacus and Antaeus as figures in the Inferno.)

Virgil reminds Antaeus that Dante can bring him renewed *recognition* [p. 310] by refreshing his memory on earth. Antaeus lifts the Poets, bending down from above over Dante *like* [p. 315] the leaning tower at Bologna, the Carisenda, and places the Poets in the Caïna, the first of the four rings of

the Ninth Circle, given over to the traitors against their own kin. He then raises himself again like a mast raised in a boat. There is a delightful symbolic irony in Antaeus an ancient enemy of Hercules and therefore indirectly of Rome, now lifting and aiding Virgil, the exemplar poet of Imperial Rome, and Dante its contemporary champion, as there was when Geryon carried out a similar action.

## **Meditation XXXII: Inferno Canto XXXII**

### ***MedXXXII:1 The Caïna: Inferno Canto XXXII:1***

Dante reflects on his inability to find suitable *words* [p. 328] to ‘squeeze out the juice’ of his imagination: he needs a language without warmth or nurture, and asks the aid of the Muses. Under his feet is the frozen lake of Cocytus, which calls up a spate of *similes* [p. 315], icy rivers and mountains, and the sad shadows like frogs at the margin.

The pit, of which this is the first ring, Caïna, named after the Biblical Cain who slew his brother Abel, holds those whose *treachery* [p. 340] broke the special bonds of *trust* [p. 264], not merely those of society, but of family, country, friendship and allegiance. Betrayal destroys trust, as doubt destroys faith. As perverse pride, mistrust, and doubt break the bonds of faith, so un-faith is revealed in treachery, envy and malicious desire. Trust engenders faith, while doubt erodes it. Faith is mirrored in trust. Doubt is echoed by treachery. So that the opposite of that *faith* [p. 264] and trust and goodwill which is the highest Paradise, is that malice, doubt and treachery which is deepest Hell. For intellectual therefore as well as personal and emotional reasons, Dante’s Inferno is structured to place treachery below violence and fraud, deeper, and nearer to Satan. Dante’s Hell is graded in accordance with the descent from faith: the pagans may have beliefs but are denied Christianity, the incontinent trust but in the wrong things, the violent place no trust in the intellect, the deceitful have no faith in each other, but the treacherous turn from faith to un-faith, to its opposite. While our own secular gradations might be driven by the degree of harm inflicted on the person, from crimes against wealth and property to physical and mental hurt, from violence and abuse to the taking of life, and are entwined about

by freedoms and rights, Dante is driven to organise his Hell by the severity of offences against free will and against trust, since trust, or Faith, and the right use of free will are the paths to his God.

Camicion de' Pazzi now gives the *names* [p. 261] of some of these frozen spirits, comparable with Mordred who fought his father Arthur, in legend. They are all Italian and close to home, the degli Alberti brothers who killed each other and caused an ensuing vendetta: Focaccia de' Cancellieri who killed his kinsmen and started the feuds of the Whites and Blacks, Sassol Mascheroni who killed his kin for gain, and Camicion's own relative Carlino who will, he *prophesies* [p. 307], treacherously cause the death of many Whites.

### ***MedXXXII:2 The Antenora: Inferno Canto XXXII:70***

The Antenora, named after Antenor, a Trojan who *betrayed* [p. 340] Troy, holds those who were traitors to their country and cause. Again Dante chooses examples close to home. Bocca degli Alberti is here, a Ghibelline who fought with the Florentine Guelfs and betrayed them at Montaperti. Dante offers him *recognition* [p. 310] above in return for his name, but it is refused. And the lack of courtesy is matched by Dante's roughness. Bocca's identity is betrayed (a nice touch), and he in turn names Buoso de Duera, who was traitor to Manfred, Tesauo and Gianni who were turncoats, Ganelon who deceived Charlemagne, and betrayed Roland, and Tribaldello who betrayed members of his own party out of personal spite.

Finally here is Count Ugolino Gherardesca, whose story we are about to hear, gnawing the head of Ruggieri, as Tydeus gnawed at Melanippus in an incident from Statius. In the Antenora, there is anger and violence among the spirits, to match their *betrayal* [p. 340], as though the worst sins intensify all sin. Dante again offers *recognition* [p. 310] in return for information.

## **Meditation XXXIII: Inferno Canto XXXIII**

### ***MedXXXIII:1 Count Ugolino: Inferno Canto XXXIII:1***

Ugolino, the Pisan, spins his tale of Pisan treachery, adding that *city* [p. 248] to Dante's list of Italian viper's nests. Ugolino challenges Dante to do anything but show sorrow, and *empathy* [p. 302], at the piteous nature of the children's sufferings. Here in the depths of Hell is a dark and powerfully told story shot through nevertheless with the brightness of love, of the heart (however sinful) for its kin. Here Pity is evoked in the reader, that covert *leit-motif* of the whole Inferno. If Pride is Hell's ubiquitous sin, Pity and sorrow is Dante's Christian response to what we see and hear.

Ugolino's own doubtful reputation and his own treacheries, for which he is in this circle, still do not justify the torture of innocents, which made Pisa *shameful* [p. 315] throughout the land. Dante himself curses Pisa, a strangely un-Christian curse since it presumably condemns innocent Pisans, and then offers no further comment on Ugolino's tale. He leaves it to stand entire on its own feet. What else is there to say? That *treachery* [p. 340] and evil often involve the innocent, and bring sinless others within the shadowy net: that the evil force of the downward spiral curses all it touches? That a love counterbalanced by a hatred that gnaws our enemy's skull is not in itself sufficient?

### ***MedXXXIII:2 The Ptolomaea: Inferno Canto XXXIII:91***

The treacherous against their friends and guests (as Ptolemy was who murdered Simon Maccabeus) are inverted in the crystal visors of their tears, here in the Ptolomaea, and blown-on by the wind generated by Satan's wings, as is all Cocytus. Alberigo Manfredi's *spirit* [p. 330] is here, though his body is still alive on earth, and makes a request of Dante to clear the ice from his eyes: it is that Manfredi of Faenza who murdered his brother and nephew. And his is the not the only soul of the living dead that is down here. At another banquet Branca d'Oria, of Genoa, killed his father-in-law Michael Zanche whom we found in the Eighth Circle in the Malebranche-guarded ditch of the barrators. The murderers' living bodies are left on

earth, inhabited by demons, until physical death, such is the power of *treachery*<sup>[p. 340]</sup>, while the souls plunge down into the well of the Ninth Circle.

Here is an opportunity for Dante to issue another un-Christian generic curse, and add Genoa to his list of corrupt *cities*<sup>[p. 248]</sup>.

Treachery then is also an absence of soul: the bond of trust and faith almost adds the soul of the other to one's own, but treachery, its opposite, subtracts one's own soul from the body. Here the double knot of kinship and hospitality is loosened, a double treachery.

## Meditation XXXIV: Inferno Canto XXXIV

### *MedXXXIV:1 Satan: Inferno Canto XXXIV:1*

In the Judecca, named for Judas the arch-traitor, the souls of the damned are frozen deep in the ice, and Dante has again reached a place where *words*<sup>[p. 328]</sup> are unable to describe his feelings of *fear*<sup>[p. 267]</sup>, and the Reader's powers of *imagination*<sup>[p. 281]</sup> are invoked. Here Lucifer, the rebellious angel, banished from Heaven for his pride, his desire for the forbidden, his anticipation of the will of God, fell, and burying himself in the earth, creating Hell, threw up behind him the Mountain of Purgatory. His sin of pride pervades the Inferno, his banners (wings) advance in a parody of a Latin hymn by Fortunatus (6th century), *Vexilla Regis prodeunt*.

His red yellow and black faces *signify*<sup>[p. 334]</sup> the opposites to Love, Power and Wisdom, those forces that created the Gate of Hell, namely Hatred, Powerlessness and Ignorance. The draught of his wing-beats produces the *three*<sup>[p. 340]</sup> winds of lust, pride and avarice. Various *similes*<sup>[p. 315]</sup> are used to heighten the language: Satan is like a giant mill, greater than a giant in size, his black face dark as an Egyptian, his bat-like wings greater than a ship's sails. He chews a sinner in each mouth, the *three*<sup>[p. 340]</sup> greatest traitors, to *Empire*<sup>[p. 256]</sup> and *Religion*<sup>[p. 296]</sup>. Brutus and Cassius the co-conspirators who assassinated Julius Caesar, hang there their faces outwards, Cassius in the yellow face of powerlessness, Brutus in the black left-hand (the Roman inauspicious side) face of Ignorance, and the worst of all, that Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ, his face lost in Satan's maw,

within the red central face of hatred. Brutus's filial relation to Caesar, and Caesar's status as the founder of the Empire make his crime doubly treacherous. *Treachery* [p. 340] is here the precise antithesis of Trust, which is an aspect of *Faith* [p. 264]. The faithful trust in the Divine, as Dante here hides in the shelter of Virgil, who is the representative of the ancient Empire and the spiritual guide, while the treacherous abuse trust and break faith. The worst abuse of *free will* [p. 271] is treachery, since through it the intellect destroys the closest bond, of the highest worth, and renders its own salvation impossible.

### ***MedXXXIV:2 The Exit From Hell: Inferno Canto XXXIV:70***

Now it is evening in Hell, and Virgil, with Dante clasped to his neck, climbs down Satan's pelt until swivelling round at the world's centre, he clammers into a cave in the rock. The Poets are now ready to climb away from Hell. The journey through the Inferno has taken from Good Friday to approximately 7.30pm Saturday, but it is simultaneously 7.30am Sunday in Purgatory as Virgil informs Dante (on the opposite side of the earth from Jerusalem, and therefore twelve hours ahead) as the Poets prepare to begin their climb, by the channel cut by Lethe, the river of Forgetfulness, and it will take them the Sunday day and night to reach the foot of Purgatory on the morning of Easter Monday, so rising to the world of purgation on the auspicious day of Christ's resurrection. Once more Virgil has special knowledge of the *time* [p. 339] of day, while Dante is confused. Virgil explains the topography. They have passed the earth's centre, and are beneath the southern hemisphere, opposite Jerusalem, the scene of the Crucifixion. They are standing on a little sphere that forms the tip of the Judecca. Satan fell from Heaven into the earth beneath Jerusalem, and created the pit of Hell, while driving up the Mount of Purgatory on the earth's surface beyond him, so that it projects upwards from the Southern Pacific Ocean (theoretically at 144deg 50min West, 31deg 47min South, in what is actually empty ocean). The channel of Lethe, that the Poets now follow upwards, descends from Purgatory, and stretches, like the pit of Hell in reverse, from the earth's centre to its surface. Climbing for a day and a night, Virgil still leading, and Dante following, they reach the surface and see again the sky and the *stars* [p. 340]. The whole journey so far has taken *three* [p. 340] days.

***MedXXXIV:3 A Coda to the Inferno***

What have we learnt of the three threads that Dante began to wind together in the first Canto? Firstly that of his personal life: involving Florence and his exile from the city: Beatrice and his love for her: poetry and his practice of it. Secondly that of Florentine and Italian politics: the Papacy and the Empire, and his aspirations for both. Thirdly that of the intellectual and spiritual life: his own journey towards Christian truth: and the ethical and religious framework of that journey.

Of Beatrice we have learnt a little, following on from the story of his love for her in the Vita Nuova, and her death reported there. In Inferno she is the messenger, sent indirectly by the Virgin, to rescue Dante from spiritual disaster, through her plea to Virgil, and his intervention. There is a repeated promise that Dante will see her again at a later time: that she will guide him through Paradise and reveal his future to him. She represents Divine philosophy, the intellect guided by faith, beyond the human philosophy of Virgil that is derived only from human wisdom.

Of Dante's personal political life in Florence and his subsequent exile, we have hints and prophecies. He does not reveal a great deal of personal history for a mix of reasons: for example because it was widely known to his audience: because it was immodest to focus on himself politically when his stance is that of Christian humility: and because it is not in fact the main objective of the Inferno. We hear that he has been present during military activities. We know his exile will take place.

Of his poetic life we catch a few glimpses: his troubadour influences, his friendship with Guido Cavalcanti, his Classical influences including Virgil, Lucan, Ovid, and Statius, and his knowledge of Homer. We are aware of the value he places on poetic fame, and of his 'acceptance' among the great poets in Limbo.

All of this is quite modest. Though the Inferno is about Dante's journey, he himself is not the central subject of it, except indirectly in terms of his spiritual and intellectual response to it. He is a student setting out to learn, with his Master. His presence is in the poetry. His voice is what we hear. But the eyes are gazing elsewhere: the copyist is stealing glances, in memory, at the wider Universe, and sending us the corresponding messages and news about his mental travels. Only once or twice does he glance at the

Reader, and address us directly.

Where the Purgatorio does in fact emphasise Dante's personal journey, and the Paradiso the spiritual life, *Inferno* is very much about the political state of Italy and Florence. From the opening Cantos we become party to Dante's strong views, and his intent: to reveal the corruption of the Papacy, the corruption of his City, the degradation of the Empire, and the degradation of Italy. His examples, the individuals who come to life in swift vignettes within his text, the references to battles and recent history, weave a pattern, lay out an Italian and Florentine reality, of factional in-fighting, of cross-border conflict, of a Papacy enmeshed in temporal affairs, of rulers with eyes to an annexation of Papal power, of dubious alignments and frail allegiances. His own thoughts go back to early Rome, the Empire and the Early Church. His model for the Empire is of a temporal power separated from spiritual matters, with Roman laws and virtues, central control based in Rome, and an authority in accord with active virtue. He hopes for a political saviour who will revitalise the Empire and re-establish its Roman roots. His model for the Church is conversely that of a purely spiritual authority, eschewing temporal power, its ideal more akin to the poverty of a Saint Francis, than the wealth, deceit and profligacy of the Papacy. His Florence is a corrupt city. Its citizens people its analogue, the city of Dis, and the *Inferno* generally. There are some noble souls, flawed by a single error, but in general the effect of *Inferno* is to question the soul of Florence, and to lay bare the poverty of Italian and European political thinking. The politics are military rather, an endless series of power struggles, event-driven forays revealing the worst kind of greed, and short-term jockeying for position. The scene is littered with historical and 'contemporary' Medieval armies, mercenaries, factional armed groups, and marked by individual murders and vendettas. City after city is corrupt. Is there another Italy? It is hard to see it from the *Inferno*.

It is not the purpose of these Meditations to trace the complex history of events, details will be found in the index and notes to the translation, and in comments on the individual Cantos, but in fact the fine detail merely supports the main thrust of Dante's critique, adding colour, but little new insight. In some respects the political protagonists are unimportant. Dante does not select Farinata or Guido da Montefeltro, to delve into the details of their careers, but to use them as examples, while tyrants, Kings, Emperors, Popes, generals, great political entities, and others, pass across



Dante's scene like shadows without strong personality, exemplifying the moral vacuum of power abused and misused. It is not power or rank or fame or historical importance *per se* that attracts Dante to individuals, or inspires him to use them as examples, but their moral failings, their local 'colour', their place in the history that is important to him, their ability to reveal nobler characteristics or invoke pity, their relevance to the ideas he wants to communicate, their meaningfulness to his contemporary readers.

Dante ceaselessly promotes his ideals. Firstly a Church re-established along the lines of the early Church, dedicated to the spiritual domain, and free of material wealth and power. He is therefore both a radical in the Franciscan sense, and a traditionalist in looking back towards the origins of Christianity. Secondly he envisages a rejuvenated Empire, dedicated to earthly virtues in the tradition of Early Rome and the Augustan Empire, and free of spiritual authority. Again he is traditionalist and yet subversive. He selects example after example to reinforce the worth of the early Church and Rome, and to denigrate the corruption of contemporary times.

As far as intellectual and spiritual life is concerned, Dante orchestrates the Inferno to reveal the sins of humanity, which are essentially abuses and misuses of the gift of free will. Failure to utilise the mind correctly is the great error. Pride is the universal underlying sin of perverse mankind. Dante is at pains to show that noble and intelligent men may still be flawed by arrogance, intellectual error, and weaknesses of the will, so that despite seeing the good, in a pagan sense, they fail to achieve true enlightenment and the road to redemption. Farinata, Brunetto Latini, Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro are four of the greatest examples, and the encounter with each is a mixture of sadness and respect, recognition and condemnation. Without that respect for worth, the Inferno would lack the moral shading and subtlety that provides resonance to these meetings.

Dante spiritually is the humble Christian seeker after truth, following in his Master's footsteps, modest, awkward, shame-faced, eager, fearful, yet brave in his questioning, and revealing in his references to fame, in the self-consciousness of his role and a (dubious) pride in his poetic achievement. We will question later whether he fully met the challenge of his own personality in adopting the role of the humble seeker after truth: he is certainly conscious of internal conflict. The character he depicts, anti-heroic, modern, respectful, courteous with those who deserve courtesy, yet

sensitive and apprehensive is charming and realistic. His shudderings, and his pity, his fear and his relationship with Virgil, all add to that atmosphere of risk and adventure, supported by affection and intelligence, that is the heart of the spiritual pilgrimage.

Beatrice is barely visible as yet, but we already know that Love is the promise and hope of the journey, and that Dante will meet with her again. Love is the redeeming religious power, and Beatrice is the noble lady, Divine philosophy. Philosophy is the mediator between God and Man, the medium through which faith is strengthened and Paradise revealed. Human Reason, and natural philosophy, embodied in Virgil, can take us so far, but no further. Reason and the right use of the mind are the factors that fulfil human potential and open up the path to spiritual achievement, but in themselves are not complete. Grace, divine intervention, a higher truth are required. And, in the spiritual core, the rational mind and the exercise of the intellect are nothing, if they do not form the basis for the theological virtues of pity and charity, hope and yearning, belief and faith. Beyond and above all is Love, the source of beauty, virtue and truth.

In *Inferno* Dante tried to show the limitations of human knowledge, wisdom, and intellect if they are flawed by moral failing, the errors of free will: if they are blind to the highest good. Amongst the worthless, the worthy are also trapped, in that stasis of Hell, sad failures, engendering Pity at naked human misery. The weight of failure is terrible. Dante's fear is great. The charm of the expression, the beauty of the poetry, does not in the end palliate the deep spiritual cold of the pit. It is with a profound sense of relief that we leave Hell, along with the Poets, and see the stars again, those stars that conclude each of the three parts of the *Commedia*. And Dante here echoes Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (V:487 et al.), where Arethusa speaking to Ceres about her lost daughter Persephone, tells how she herself lifted her head again after slipping through the deepest caverns of the earth, and 'saw the unfamiliar stars'. Dante is preparing us for the rebirth myth of Persephone, and his own rebirth on the Mount of Purgatory.



# The Purgatorio



# **MEDITATIONS ON THE PURGATORIO**

## **Introduction to the Purgatorio**

After the darkness the sweetness. Purgatory is the realm of hope. After the stasis, after the inability of the spirits to escape the eternal recurrence of their punishment, there is progression, the movement of the spirit onwards and upwards. Purgatorio emphasises Dante's personal journey, and the spiritual reality, hope for his own salvation, hope for the reform of the Church, but also political hope for Italy. The Inferno revealed the misuse of freewill, its abuse through incontinence, malice and fraud. The Purgatorio is a preparation for the right exercise of freewill, a purgation of sin with effort and through time, a climb to the Earthly Paradise, and for Dante an ascent to his own personification of Love spiritualised, of Divine philosophy, of transcended eroticism: an ascent to beauty, truth and goodness, realised in Beatrice.

Inferno was a vertical prison. The Mount of Purgatory is a vertical Cathedral, a procession with singing and music, a Mass with its repentance and absolution. And for Dante himself it is no longer a question of merely observing, he is in a real sense a participant. This is the journey that he himself must repeat after death, must repeat spiritually once the Vision ends, and his own particular failings will be stressed, the real nature of the journey he still has to endure emphasised. He will come like a penitent, guilty, to the feet of Beatrice, and his pain will burst out of him, in tears and shame. Confession will cleanse him: the waters of Lethe will purge him of the remembrance of sin. The waters of Eunoë will restore the memory of good. Beatrice is real. She affirms it. Love is real, and the spiritual path is real. Dante himself is purified, and emerges with his will 'free, direct and whole', ready to understand the Earthly Paradise, the Triumph of the Church, and prepare himself for the final journey of the Paradiso.

Virgil will still be the pagan and classical guide for much of the way, to be joined by Statius, a secretly converted pagan, but both depart as Beatrice

nears. She alone can take him onwards into the realm, not of pity, or hope, but of faith.

In Purgatory friendship is apparent: love is operating: the prayers of the living can intercede for the dead: the two realms are closer than in either *Inferno* or *Paradiso* to the everyday world. Intellectual and literary errors must be erased for Dante as well as the cardinal sins. The nature of Love must be explored as far as is possible before Divine Love illuminates it fully. The nature and origin and immortality of the soul must be considered. The irrational urge of erotic and temporal love, the love visible in the Celtic world, and the poetry of the troubadours, in *Eloise* and *Iseult*, must be sublimated, brought within the control of the will and understanding.

The Earthly Paradise will express the beatitude of earthly life, the cardinal virtues and the right use of the will and intellect, guided by human philosophy, possible in this existence: a place where the Golden Age returns. The beatitude of eternal life will follow in the *Paradiso*, a Vision of God, as Light and Love, embodying the theological virtues. Dante's Apocalyptic view of the corruption of Papacy and Politics, the assault on the Church of God, and on the still achievable Empire of Justice, is shown in the symbolic procession of the chariot, a pageant of contemporary history, and a condemnation of temporal degradation. The Church being founded by God points the way beyond the temporal. To reach that beyond, Dante must rehearse the path of penitence and expiation, cross through the thresholds of fire and water, make his own confession and be cleansed, see clearly, once more, the reality of his contemporary world, and then prepare to enter the new dimension of spiritual beatitude, of pure Love.

In order to reach Beatrice Dante must recognise his sins of Lust and Pride: his neglect of Beatrice and the Divine world in favour of earthly pleasures and sins of the flesh, intellectual pride and human philosophy, and the desire for fame. He must reject and go beyond not only the ideas of courtly love with its irrational power and destructive emotions, upsetting the harmony of the mind, ideas which he had indeed moved beyond, but also the spiritualised human love and study of human philosophy that had taken their place, according to both the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*. His mind must be focused now, through the person of Beatrice, on Divine Love and Divine philosophy. The sweet love poetry of his youth has to

become the idealistic vehicle for abstract ideas and religious awe of the Paradiso.

## **Meditation XXXV: Purgatorio Canto I**

### ***MedXXXV:I The Invocation: Purgatorio Canto I:I***

The *intellect* [p. 283] is a *little boat* [p. 315], afloat in the immensity of history, reality, and the Vision, and Dante now sets it on its way once more over gentler waters. The task is to speak about *purgation* [p. 298] of the spirit and the preparation for Heaven. He calls on Calliope, the mother of Orpheus, the eldest of the learned sisters, the Muses. She is the muse of epic poetry, and she lead the singing in the competition against the Pierides, that Ovid tells of in *Metamorphoses* Book V. It is significant that Calliope sang there the myth of Dis and Persephone and the Underworld. Who better to invoke for the journey away from it?

Venus, the planet of Love, the planet whose influence encourages human Love, is shining in the dawn sky, in the *constellation* [p. 331] Pisces, as it was reputed to be at the time of the Creation, next to the sun in Aries. Pisces, being the constellation in which the sun actually rose at the Spring equinox during the Christian era, is therefore doubly associated with the dawn of Christianity. And in the sky, near the southern celestial pole which Dante now sees for the first time, in this southern hemisphere where Mount Purgatory lies, is the constellation of the Southern Cross. Presumably news of its sighting by voyagers south of Africa had been carried to Italy by 1300. The sight of the Cross brings joy, and the four stars *signify* [p. 334] the four *cardinal virtues* [p. 347], Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude. They appear later symbolically as four ladies, accompanying the Chariot of the Church, who say 'here we are nymphs and in heaven we are stars'. Later in Canto VIII he will see three stars at evening replacing the Southern Cross, unknown stars, which signify the *theological virtues* [p. 347] of Faith, Hope and Charity, and correspond to three further nymphs who later accompany the Chariot again in the Earthly Paradise. The Southern Cross was first seen by Adam and Eve and their descendants, expelled from that Paradise, since it is the human race that needs the four cardinal virtues to

regulate its spiritual life on earth.

Muses, stars, virtues, the planet of Love, our first ancestors: Dante invokes them all, as he begins the journey towards the Earthly Paradise.

### ***MedXXXV:2 Cato: Purgatorio Canto 1:28***

Where the Poets stand, on the eastern shore at the foot of the Mount, that east from which the sun rises and which *symbolises* [p. 334] the risen Christ, Dante turns, to see a noble old man, Cato of Utica, the Younger, Julius Caesar's Republican opponent. Obligated to become a supporter of Pompey, in a vain attempt to save the Republic, noted for his honesty and moral stance, Cato committed suicide rather than fall into the hands of his enemies. The rays of the four stars, the *cardinal virtues* [p. 347], *light* [p. 287] his face. Dante makes Cato the *guardian* [p. 337] of the Mount of Purgatory. Though a Republican, Dante treats him as a precursor of the moral Empire under Augustus: as a man who deliberately laid down his life in honour, Dante treats him as an exemplar of *free will* [p. 271], his suicide for moral reasons being an exception to the rule that suicide is contrary to the teachings of the Church and a relinquishment or evasion of free will: and as a moral pagan, Dante treats him as an exemplar of the best in human moral practice and ancient philosophy. Cato is therefore sharply contrasted with Brutus and Cassius whom we left in the mouths of Satan, equally Republican enemies of Caesar but treacherous in their intent. The Republic is unimportant to Dante, whose emphasis is on a powerful sole ruler in temporal matters, mirroring God's authority over the Universe, and the Pope's over the Church. Dante is a thorough Imperialist, and prefers the rule of the single monarch, as God rules the whole Creation. It is rather Cato's moral integrity he is celebrating, and the contrast of the honourable man who chooses his own death, in defeat, rather than the treacherous man who chooses malicious deceit and murder. It indicates Dante's view that treachery and murder is not acceptable however justified the cause, and that suicide (but not murder or treachery) is acceptable if the cause is honourable enough. The one is an abuse of free will, the other a fulfilment of it. The first harms others: the second liberates the self.

Cato questions who they are, surprised at their exit from Hell, and Virgil, quickly and courteously, recapitulates Dante's prior state, Beatrice's



intervention, and his own role as Guide. Dante, he says ‘seeks freedom’, while he Virgil has come from Limbo where Cato’s Marcia is, and Virgil affirms her love for Cato. She is a type of the noble and chaste Roman wife. Cato is unmoved, since inexorable Divine *Justice* [p. 285] has placed her the other side of Lethe, and the *lower realm* [p. 279] cannot influence the higher, but Beatrice’s wishes are enough. Cato it seems is worthy, though a Pagan, to be placed at the foot of the Mount he can never climb, because of his own nobility of spirit, moral worth, and supreme sacrifice. Marcia, like Virgil, despite her worth, must remain in Limbo. (Dante’s knowledge of Cato came from Virgil’s Aeneid VIII where as lawgiver, he is among the righteous, and Lucan’s Pharsalia II.)

Cato now tells Virgil to cleanse Dante of Hell’s foulness. After they have walked a little, *like* [p. 315] lost travellers returning to the path, he does so, wetting his hands in the dew and wiping Dante’s face, stained with tears of *Pity* [p. 302], and then ties a rush around him, as instructed, the pliant marsh-plant, a *symbol* [p. 334] of *humility* [p. 281], which is replaced as it is plucked, as the humble are replenished on the earth, those meek who shall inherit. The whole canto is full of natural beauty, the ‘eastern sapphire’ colour of the sky, ‘the tremor of the sea’, the stars and the dawn light, and is also full of the language of hope, with its planet of love, its reverend figure of Cato, its brightness, its feeling of purification, and with Dante’s inner relief and delight at exiting Hell.

## Meditation XXXVI: Purgatorio Canto II

### *MedXXXVI:1 The Angel of God: Purgatorio Canto II:1*

A flourish of *astronomical* [p. 331] knowledge to set the chronology. It is dawn in Purgatory, on that same great circle of the earth as Jerusalem, which forms the horizon and zenith at both places. It is evening in Jerusalem, midnight on the Ganges, and Libra, the scales of justice and harmony, is the constellation rising there, in India, the opposite sign to that of Aries the Ram, where the sun appears during the Vision and now lights the morning sky with a deep orange glow.

A quick flow of *similes* [p. 315]: *travellers* [p. 347], Mars, speed: and an *Angel* [p. 241] of God, a divine *bird* [p. 315], comes skimming the waves, driving a vessel with the beat of his wings over the southern ocean. It carries a fresh load of spirits for Purgatory. And the *singing* [p. 323] begins. It is Psalm 114, the liberation from Egypt, when 'the mountains skipped like rams', a psalm that Dante interpreted in its mystical sense as 'the exit of the sanctified soul from the slavery of this world's corruption, to the liberty of eternal glory', allegorically as 'our redemption through Christ', and morally as 'the conversion of the soul from the sorrow and misery of sinfulness to a state of grace.' (The letter to Can Grande della Scala is assumed authentic.) It is a song of freedom, and of the free will.

Capricorn, the goat of *lust* [p. 291], in the mid-heaven, is obscured as the sun, the skipping ram, rises in the sign of Aries, ninety degrees from it. The spirits seek the way, Virgil replies, and, amazed at the living, breathing Dante, they hesitate, until one of them comes forward to embrace Dante. It is a mutual embrace. Here is *love* [p. 288], as friendship, in Purgatory, recalling that equally affectionate meeting with Brunetto Latini in Hell.

### ***MedXXXVI:2 Casella : Purgatorio Canto II:1***

It is Casella, the musician, who, dying before 1300, has been lingering at Rome by the Tiber, the *gateway* [p. 337] to salvation, where the *spirits* [p. 330] who do not pass to the Acheron wait. Since the Jubilee (beginning Christmas Day 1299, so three months previously) the Angel has been transporting the spirits to the Mount. Dante embraces Casella, and in the Classical image employed by Homer and Virgil, his hands meet *three* [p. 340] times, empty, round the insubstantial spirit of his friend, who *smiles* [p. 326]. The words conjure the new realities and hopes of Purgatory, embraces, affection, smiles, gentleness, love: mutual love. Dante makes a *courteous* [p. 250] request for Casella to sing his setting of one of Dante's own poems, the second Canzone that Dante annotated in the Convivio: 'Love that in my mind discourses with me.' The Canzone is a poem of praise for the Lady *Philosophy* [p. 300], who is an intermediary between the spiritual and intellectual sphere of God and the material world of Man. Philosophy, like an angel, communicates and interprets between divine truth and corporeal nature. On the ladder of being that reaches from God to inanimate matter, man is

between the gross animals and the almost diaphanous angels. As objects are susceptible to inner illumination depending on their translucency, so creatures are more or less capable of understanding the divine, depending on their degree of spirit and intellect. Philosophy is the bridge, the go-between, the 'lady' who in her love, and by being loved, spiritualises the erotic, sublimates *desire* [p. 291] and suffering, and lifts the heart to vision and goodness. In the Divine Comedy she has been replaced with Beatrice, the merging of the spiritualised erotic with the rational and the ethical, so that Truth, Beauty and Goodness are unified in the light of Divine Love. It is a neo-platonic vision, illuminated with light. It is all sweetness, the sweetness that Casella now sings.

Cato alone is not lost in the delight of the *singing* [p. 323], and urges the spirits on to redemption. They, *like* [p. 315] humble doves, alarmed, scatter and move towards the slopes, like *travellers* [p. 347] unsure where they will emerge. And the Poets likewise.

Pause for a moment to think of Casella. To us he is another *character* [p. 282], on a par with Virgil, or with Ulysses, or with Pope Boniface VIII: with literary, historical, or mythical figures. Maybe real to others once: but not real to us now except as names, involved with events in verse or prose. But we should remember that *Dante* [p. 252] is writing about his dead friend. That like Brunetto Latini, the recent dead here come alive, and speak with him. What did that mean in Dante's mind? Imagine someone we have known, now dead, returning to speak with us. Imagine that. Dante is not writing conventional epic like Homer, or even epic mingled with history as Virgil does in the Aeneid, or Ovid at the end of the Metamorphoses. He is writing epic, history, and autobiography rolled into one, and extended by intellectual discussion, and aimed at spiritual truth. He is Homer, and Virgil, and the Saint Augustine of The Confessions, and more. Casella was real to him, not a fictional character, not even a remote figure of his day, of history, but a friend, a beloved friend. Imagine. Casella is dead. Casella speaks. And the impact of that on Dante's contemporaries? Imagine. The Commedia does that all the time. Dante is the writer writing, and his literary projection on the journey, who at any moment of the Commedia may be standing among mythical, historical, literary and *contemporary* [p. 250] people, in the vast halls of his visionary Christian Moment, which is eternal and beyond time, as well as revealed in succession within time.

## Meditation XXXVII: Purgatorio Canto III

### *MedXXXVII:1 The Limitations of Knowledge: Purgatorio Canto III:1*

Dante turns towards the mountain ‘where reason examines us’ that is where the self-questioning *intellect* [p. 283] examines itself, with moral *conscience* [p. 250], as Virgil now does, reproaching himself for having been seduced by the music, and being alarmed into hurrying. *Dante* [p. 252], within the poem of the *Commedia*, seems less aware than Virgil of what has happened. Is there a subtle message here? Dante has indulged himself, somewhat arrogantly for a humble Christian seeker of truth, by requesting a setting of his own poem celebrating Lady Philosophy, and also, by doing so, invoked an earlier stage of his life, one of desire and longing, love of the flesh as well as of the intellect. Art and memory have seduced him and others from their intent. Pride and Lust Dante’s personal weaknesses, though muted, are both entangled here. Dante is not yet wholly beyond the call of *Troubadour* [p. 343] courtly love, where love is a fatal and disruptive power, a disturbance created by beauty, troubling the heart and mind. He had sought out a spiritualised human love which goes beyond the ache and longing of unrequited love, as *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio* reveal, and learnt to celebrate the grace and beauty of the Lady who goes beyond this world and now becomes a conduit for Divine love, an emblem of it, and a pointer towards it. He is not quite there, but he is on his way towards Beatrice.

Virgil now slows *his pace* [p. 347] to a more dignified one, as Dante’s gaze focuses on his surroundings and he looks intently at the highest slope of the hillside. The rising sun is behind them in the East, the Mountain lies to the West, and Dante’s shadow is cast in front of him, while the other *spirits* [p. 330] including Virgil cast none, and Dante starts with *fear* [p. 267], with the shadow of fear. Virgil reassures him, and queries his lack of *trust* [p. 264]. It is evening in Italy where Virgil’s own body that once cast a shadow is buried, at Naples. And Virgil tells Dante that the spirits are transparent, as are the heavenly spheres that do not block the light that falls through them. *God* [p. 274] does not will that human beings should understand the workings of the Universe, Virgil says, and makes the spirits insubstantial bodies, as they are, transparent but capable of *punishment* [p. 310] and suffering. Human

*knowledge* [p. 349] is limited, and humanity should be content with the '*quia*', the effects of existence, rather than the 'why' and have *faith* [p. 264]. There would have been no need for the coming of *Christ* [p. 248], and the Virgin birth, if human beings had understood all that was necessary for salvation. Desire for knowledge of the unknowable is an eternal grief, a constant suffering, a thirst, like the thirst of the Classical philosophers that can never be quenched. Here is a further indication of Dante's moral and intellectual errors that he must reject and expiate, correct and transcend. Not only are Courtly *Love* [p. 288] and spiritualised Human Love inadequate, but Human *Philosophy* [p. 300], Lady Philosophy, must also give way to Divine Philosophy and Beatrice, Virgil, still troubled by the awareness of the philosophers and poets doomed to Limbo, and his own place there, as well as by the self-reproach caused by Casella's music, and its seductiveness, the seductiveness of *art* [p. 243] that Plato condemned, is silent, with bent head.

### ***MedXXXVII:2 The Excommunicated: Purgatorio Canto III:46***

Virgil and Dante stop, searching for a way up the cliff, which Dante, revealing his knowledge of the rough *tracks* [p. 347] of Italy, compares to rocky Liguria. While Virgil is pondering Dante sees a crowd of *spirits* [p. 330], the excommunicated but repentant, approaching from the left, the south. They can ask the way, of them. 'Joyful' and 'hope' are keywords here as *Dante* [p. 252] emphasises the changed atmosphere of Purgatory compared with that of Hell. They pause, *like sheep* [p. 315], in fear of Dante's visible shadow, cast to the right, the north. Virgil *courteously* [p. 250] asks them where they can climb the slope, commenting that they are chosen, that they ended their lives well in *repentance* [p. 298], that they can achieve *peace* [p. 298] at the last. Virgil sees their hesitation, and confirms that *Dante* [p. 252] is in his living body, and that his journey is willed from above. The Poets go along with them.

### ***MedXXXVII:3 Manfred: Purgatorio Canto III:103***

One of the spirits, blond, noble, handsome speaks to them, seeking *recognition* [p. 310], and the intercession of *prayer* [p. 305] by his daughter Costanza who is still alive. The prayers of the living are beneficial, they can shorten

the duration of the time the excommunicated but *repentant* [p. 298] spirits must otherwise spend in Purgatory: thirty times their life on earth. Dante *humbly* [p. 281] denies having seen him (since he died just after Dante was born) and Manfred *smiles* [p. 326].

This is Manfred, illegitimate son of the Emperor Frederick II, grandson of Henry VI and his wife Constance. Costanza, his daughter by Beatrice of Savoy, married Peter III (Pere) of Aragon, and had two sons James II, King of Aragon, and Frederick II, King of Sicily, both alive in 1300. Manfred was the Ghibelline leader, and therefore of Dante's political party, who opposed three Popes and was excommunicated by all three. He fought Charles of Anjou who was sponsored by Pope Clement IV, the Pope who furthered the French entry into Italy and moved the Papal Court to Avignon, and was defeated by him at *Benevento* [p. 348], near Naples, in 1266. His body buried under a cairn was disinterred by the Bishop of Cosenza on the Pope's orders, and carried over the River Verde (The Garigliano) outside the boundary of the Kingdom of Naples and the Papal States, with the rites of excommunication, so that the body might not rest. Manfred stresses that excommunication does not prevent divine *love* [p. 288] being shown, and the *repentant* [p. 298] may still hope for peace. *God* [p. 274] pardons the repentant willingly.

Dante's mention of Costanza's remaining sons is intended to point to the recovery of Sicily by Pere after the Sicilian Vespers in 1282. We will find Pere, a negligent ruler, further on in the Purgatorio. Though Manfred calls Pere's sons 'Sicily's and Aragon's pride', Dante regarded them as degenerates. Manfred acknowledges his own sinfulness (though not the specific charges, such as incest, made by his Guelph enemies). Dante clearly marvels at meeting him, and respects *the noble warrior* [p. 282], but is there some ambivalence perhaps, a lack of praise, that indicates reservations on Dante's part? Though a protagonist of Empire, Manfred's attitude to the Church may have indicated the designs of the Empire on the spiritual realm, or a wanton disregard for the spiritual life until the end on Manfred's part, that Dante, believing in a separated Papacy and Empire, may have found not in alignment with his own preferred views. Nevertheless Manfred was one of the great Ghibelline 'lost' leaders involved in that long struggle between the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy, in which the Guelph and Ghibelline confrontations played a significant part. (The Empire was created, though that specific name was not employed until the mid-thirteenth century, when

Charlemagne was crowned Emperor by Pope Leo III, in 800AD. The Imperial title passed to the German Kings until the Holy Roman Empire was abolished in 1806. Its territory comprised much of Western and Central Europe, centred on Germany and Austria but including parts of Eastern France and Northern Italy.) It is part of *Dante's* [p. 252] sometimes maddening reticence that we are left to deduce his attitude to Manfred, and as with Farinata and Guido da Montefeltro, I am left with a feeling of his uncertainty about the role of the noble warrior in his own age. Champions perhaps, but also stirrers of strife and war? Particularly those who were Imperialists, supporters of Imperial order and law, who might also be seen as destructive of the Church's true mission and the proper spiritual rule of the Papacy? Dante treads a careful path between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy (sometimes toying with *heresy* [p. 279], for example how acceptable was his role as *prophet* [p. 307], even though it is often merely a literary device, and how valid was his claim to have seen the workings of the afterlife?)

## **Meditation XXXVIII: Purgatorio Canto IV**

### ***MedXXXVIII:1 The Unity of the Soul: Purgatorio Canto IV:1***

Illustrating the increasing emphasis on human reason a necessary adjunct to the ascent to the Earthly Paradise, Dante introduces *philosophical* [p. 300], ethical and intellectual or scientific topics into the Purgatorio. Here he uses the meeting with Manfred that has so absorbed his attention to address Plato's error, as reported by Aquinas, concerning the nature of the soul. Dante argues that the soul is a unity, since if we had multiple souls we would not be distracted in our thoughts by focusing on one thing to the exclusion of all others. In particular we would not lose track of *time* [p. 339], which Dante has done in speaking with Manfred. The free will turns its attention to some absorbing pain or pleasure, and the other powers of the mind are temporarily constrained. It is mid-morning when Dante again realises the time, and they reach the path up the mountain.

Dante adds a delightful *image* [p. 315] of agricultural life, and another of his testaments to having *wandered* [p. 347] the hill routes of Italy, round Urbino

and Reggio, and a metaphor of desire as a bird with swift wings, calling *Virgil* [p. 346] also his leader, who gave him *hope* [p. 279], and was a *light* [p. 287] to him. Dante gives a mathematical image to indicate the steepness of the slope they are climbing, and the tiring Dante is spurred on to *effort* [p. 255] by Virgil to reach the ledge above. The descent to Hell is easy. In Purgatory we have to make an effort, we have to force ourselves to climb. And there has to be a great desire driving us, to engender that effort, and sustain it.

A piece of *astronomical* [p. 331] learning follows, as Virgil explains the reason for the sun being to their North. Reflecting the Divine Light downwards *like* [p. 315] a mirror the Sun in the Southern hemisphere arcs to the North and not the South as it crosses the sky each day, whereas at Jerusalem it will pass to the South towards Arabia. If the sun were in Gemini, in the Summer, here, rather than in Aries, in the Spring, as it is now, it's zenith would be even higher towards the North, and the constellations of the Bears, this being the effect of the earth's 23.5 degree tilt combined with its position in its orbit round the sun at the respective times of year. The sun's apparent annual path against the background of the fixed stars is the ecliptic, the points on it where the noonday sun appears highest and lowest in the sky are the solstices. The projection of the earth's equator on the heavens is the celestial Equator, which is a circle at 23.5 degrees to the tilted circle of the ecliptic. The points where the ecliptic, the sun's annual path, crosses the Equator (i.e. the points where the two circles cross) are the equinoxes. The points where it is furthest from the Equatorial circle are the solstices. The Equator can therefore be said to lie between the solstices, 'If your intellect understands quite clearly'!! If not draw the diagrams, or go look at a book on astronomy, as I frequently have to. Dante is showing off his learning, while pretending to learn from Virgil, a nice mock-modesty, but perhaps not quite fully in keeping with Christian humility. *Dante* [p. 252] is not yet free of *intellectual* [p. 283] *pride* [p. 306] and arrogance!

### ***MedXXXVIII:2 Belacqua: Purgatorio Canto IV:1***

Dante now emphasises again the *effort* [p. 255] required for *purgation* [p. 298]. Purgatory is a labour, demanding desire and will power. But Virgil explains that the higher one gets the less the effort, that is the more the will is fixed



on the goal, and the more sins are purged away, the lighter the burden of sin, and the more attractive the destination. The summit of Purgatory is ease and rest. Nevertheless a wry voice is heard: wearied spirits are sitting exhausted under a rock. Among them, Dante, breathing heavily from his efforts recognises Belacqua, the instrument-maker, *a friend* [p. 282] noted for his *laziness* [p. 326]. Dante is relieved. He was clearly not sure if Belacqua had repented and where he would be in the afterlife. Belacqua barely lifts his head. Can Dante really have understood that complicated astronomical discourse? Is he really so steadfast? What use is it to bother so? You have to wait for the duration of your lifetime if you repent only at the end, unless there is intercession through prayer, before you can enter Purgatory proper, so why not do only the minimum needed? But it is midnight in Jerusalem, dawn on the Ganges, evening in Morocco, and noon now in Purgatory. Virgil is already climbing on. Dante will not be one of the late-repentants we feel! And Belacqua will be hard put to it to reach the summit of Purgatory.

## Meditation XXXIX: Purgatorio Canto V

### *MedXXXIX:1 The Late-Repentant: Purgatorio Canto V:1*

Once more Dante blocks the light, he alone, and is noticed by the spirits behind him. His hesitation is quickly seized on by Virgil, with a *proud* [p. 306] admonition to ignore the people, to ‘stand *like* [p. 315] a steady tower’ and to avoid too much reflection, to focus his thoughts. Virgil has no time for the crowd, and Dante shows that he is *ashamed* [p. 315]. The tension between pride and humility is interesting in Dante, as the innately proud man bows to his Master, to Beatrice, and to God. He himself constantly recognises his weaknesses in this direction. Intellectual and artistic superiority rightly engender pride, but Divine Love demands humility and acceptance through faith. Humility is constantly in danger of bowing to, and thereby confirming the worth of, what is base. Pride is constantly in danger of valuing incorrectly and ignoring the true merit of what is superior.

A crowd of late-repentant spirits in front come *chanting* [p. 323] the Miserere, a setting of Psalm 51, and an appropriate psalm of *repentance* [p. 298]

that begins 'Have mercy upon me, O God'. These are spirits who died of violence, and repented in dying. *God* [p. 274] fills the penitents with desire to see Him. Virgil confirms Dante's fleshly being, while the whole troop wheel round *like* [p. 315] cavalry, as swift as night mists or evening cloud. They plead for *recognition* [p. 310], and for news of them to be carried to the other side, and Dante *courteously* [p. 250] says that he will, for the sake of the peace he himself pursues.

***MedXXXIX:2 Penitents dead of violence: Purgatorio Canto V:64***

The spirit of Jacopo del Cassero replies, expressing *trust* [p. 264] in Dante's good will. Purgatory is a place of faith and trust, where Hell was a place of mistrust and treachery. Cassero was a Guelph from Fano, in the mark of Ancona, ruled by Charles II of Anjou and Naples, and was Podestà of Bologna in 1296. He frustrated Azzo VII d'Este's attempts on the city and exchanged his office for that of Milan in 1298. He was murdered on Azzo's orders, at Oriaco near the River Brenta, between Venice and Padua, and died in the marshes there, whereas fleeing to La Mira would have taken him to dry land. The *Paduans* [p. 248] killed him, whom he calls Antenori after their founder Antenor, who betrayed Troy to the Greeks. Courteously Jacopo asks to be remembered in Dante's prayers, if Dante ever sees Fano again, so that those prayers might intercede for him. This is the first of *three* [p. 340] of Dante's marvellous *individual* [p. 282] vignettes of individuals who died by *violence* [p. 345], that conjure up person and scene.

Next comes another graphic and beautiful piece of description. Buonconte da Montefeltro, Guido's son, and like him a Ghibelline leader, mourns that his memory is neglected by his wife Giovanna and the rest of his kin. He led the Aretines when the Ghibellines were defeated by the Florentine Guelphs at the *battle* [p. 348] of Campaldino in 1289. *Dante* [p. 252] was supposed to have taken part on the Florentine side. The site of the battlefield, in the Val d'Arno is about an hour's walk from the confluence of the Archiano and the Arno, at Bibiena, where mists and fog were common features of the valley. Repeating the name of the *Virgin* [p. 347] Mary, and crossing his arms on his chest, indicated his *repentance* [p. 298] in dying. An *Angel* [p. 241] caught up his spirit, saved by his tear of repentance,

while a Demon from Hell snatched his body. Dante gives a skilful *scientific* [p. 313] account of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation, and ends with Buonconte's body swirled into the boiling Arno in the Demon's storm, and buried in the silt. Science has joined philosophy as evidence of Dante's intellectual learning, to be exhibited through the Purgatorio as a right use of human reason, to be extended ultimately by Divine wisdom. Yet again we lack any personal judgement or comment by *Dante* [p. 252] on the great Ghibelline warrior.

Lastly in this Canto is the cry of La Pia, Pia de' Tolomei. The traditional story is that La Pia belonged to the Tolomei of Siena, and married Nello d'Inghiramo dei Pannocchiesci, the Podestà of Volterra in 1277, and Lucca in 1314, the captain of the Tuscan Guelphs in 1284, and still alive in 1322. He put her to death at the Castello della Pietra, in the marshes of the Sienese Maremma, in 1295, throwing her from a window, or alternatively she died of disease in that unhealthy place. He was said to be jealous, or to want rid of her in order to marry the Countess Margherita degli Aldobrandeschi, the widow of Guy de Montfort. The identification of La Pia may well be wrong, but the story survives. (The elegiac quality of this little plea has always appealed, and in her words to Dante there is an echo of the lines on *Virgil's* [p. 346] tomb, at Naples, 'MANTUA ME GENUIT, CALABRI RAPUER, TENET NUNC PARTHENOPE : CECINI PASCUA, RURA, DUCES.' 'Mantua bore me, Calabria took me, Naples holds me: I sang of pastures, farms, and heroes.')

## Meditation XL: Purgatorio Canto VI

### *MedXL:1 The Crowd of Spirits: Purgatorio Canto VI:1*

A superb extended *analogy* [p. 315] of the gambling game follows, as the crowd of spirits, those dead of *violence* [p. 345], press around Dante. Here is Benincasa, the murdered judge: Guccio de' Tarlati, a Ghibelline of Arezzo, killed by Guelphs after Campaldino, and Federigo Novello of the Conti Guidi who assisted the same Tarlati family, and was killed, in 1289. Here too is Farinata Scornigiani of Pisa, whose father Marzucco, who became a Franciscan Friar, pardoned his son's murderers: Orso of the Alberti, son of

Napoleone, victim of the continuing vendetta within the family; and Pierre de la Brosse, chamberlain of Philip III of France, and brought to his death by Mary of Brabant in 1278, she the type of the wicked stepmother, accused of poisoning Louis, the King's son by his first wife. Dante warns Mary, still alive in 1300, to repent, lest she end in Hell. There is no shortage of examples of those whose lives ended violently. A whole crowd are there. This is the darkly colourful Italy of poison and vendettas, treachery and murder, factional violence and political killing that intrigues and enthrals like a good crime thriller, so long as it is distanced from us. The later lives of the Borgias, for example, are a distillation of that darkness, shot through with gleams of entrancing and seductive light. But Dante is quite clear about the evil of his times.

***MedXL:2 The Benefit of Prayer: Purgatorio Canto VI:25***

Dante *questions* [p. 259] Virgil now regarding a passage in his Aeneid which seems to deny the efficacy of *prayer* [p. 305]. It is Aeneid VI 372, where Aeneas, in the underworld, guided by the Sibyl, meets his pilot Palinurus, who, drowned at sea, and, not properly buried, cannot cross the Acheron for a hundred years. He entreats Aeneas to carry him across, at which the Sibyl tells him: 'Cease to imagine that divine decree can be altered by prayer.' Virgil explains that the words were uttered in a Pagan world, where Christian prayers had as yet no efficacy, since they were not uttered from a state of grace, but that in the Christian world *Love* [p. 288], a moment of love's fire, may intercede and redeem. Dante is seeking in works of human art for a reassurance that comes only from *faith* [p. 264] in the divine, and Virgil tells Dante to believe unless *Beatrice* [p. 245] tells him otherwise, she whom he once more gives Dante hope of seeing above, at the summit of the Mountain, *smiling* [p. 326], and blessed. She, Divine *Philosophy* [p. 300], spiritualised Love, is 'the light linking *truth* [p. 344] to *intellect* [p. 283].' And, at this promise of meeting Beatrice, Dante is already less weary, as *hope* [p. 279] eases tiredness, and wants to *hurry* [p. 339] on, since the sun now in the North-West is hidden by the mountain, though Virgil gently warns him that it will take more than one day to reach the summit.

***MedXL:3 Sordello and the State of Italy: Purgatorio Canto VI:49***

The poets now encounter the *proud* [p. 306] spirit of Sordello, watching ‘*like* [p. 315] a couchant lion’. Sordello is ‘preoccupied with self’ and responds not to Virgil’s request as to the ascent of the Mount, but to his answer regarding his birthplace. He too is of *Mantua* [p. 248]. Sordello, poet and knight, was born at Goito near Mantua c1200, and wrote in the *Provençal* [p. 343] language. He carried on an affair with Cunizza da Romano, Ezzelino III’s sister, and wife of Count Ricciardo di San Bonifazio, while staying at Treviso, and was obliged to flee to Provence in 1229. Sordello had abducted her for political reasons at her brother’s request. He returned in 1265 as a knight in the service of Charles of Anjou, and received possessions in the Kingdom of Naples. He died a violent death some time after June 1269. His finest poem, written about 1240, was a *planh* (lament) on the death of Blacatz, a Provençal baron, in the service of Count Raymond Berenger IV, in which he rebuked the kings and princes of Europe, and told them to eat the dead man’s heart, and be inspired to valiant action.

It inspires Dante now to a similar invective. Italy is captured in *metaphors* [p. 315] of disaster. Mantua joins the list of cities riven by conflict. Dante laments the state of Italy. The German Hapsburg Emperor, Albert, is absent, and indifferent, and Dante calls on him to come and see *Rome* [p. 312], widowed from the Empire, and to *pity* [p. 302] Italy or be *ashamed* [p. 315], and calls on *God* [p. 274] also, as the highest ‘Jupiter’, that is the ultimate authority over Empire and Religion. The power Justinian had, to enforce the Roman law he framed, has lapsed. The *clergy* [p. 296] have usurped secular power (the ‘people who should be obedient’). Feuding is rife within the *cities* [p. 248]; in Verona Montagues fight Capulets; in Orvieto the Monaldi duel with the Filippeschi; Siena has fragile peace with Santafiora, of the Aldobrandeschi. Every petty partisan is a Marcellus, an opponent of Caesar and the Empire. *Florence* [p. 267] is treated with irony and sarcasm, as a role model of how to sway backwards and forwards with the current, unstable and sick, *like* [p. 315] a patient tossing on a bed trying to find comfort, its populace too quick to judge, greedy for office, profligate and changeable. Dante again shows his firm political stance, in favour of a strong *Empire* [p. 256], enforcing the Roman legal code, with state and church separated, the

Church handling spiritual, and the state, secular matters. The verse is almost uneven with anger, choking with metaphors. Once more the tension of political pride and anger with Christian humility. Dante has not yet transcended his temporal entanglements. Florence, Italy, Empire, Papacy are the terrible magnets that draw him back into the conflicts of the world and his age. It is the anger and frustration of the exile. It is artistically and spiritually appropriate that it is at this point, exiting from the Inferno, and beginning the long climb of Purgatory, that Dante should express the intensity of the political emotions within him, emotions that must ultimately be left behind in an understanding of the greater Universe. And in his mind the political maelstrom is associated with other elements he must leave behind, personal things, signified by Troubadour poetry, and now superseded: love as an un-intellectual desire that overcomes the free will: lust: pride. Sordello is echoed later by Arnaut Daniel, Provence is something both loved and to be gone beyond.

## **Meditation XLI: Purgatorio Canto VII**

### ***MedXLI:1 The Valley of the Negligent Rulers: Purgatorio Canto VII:1***

Virgil confirms his identity to his fellow Mantuan, and Sordello marvels, and runs through all the trappings of *fame* [p. 266], showing Virgil great courtesy and respect. Virgil, who lost Heaven through lack of the faith replies with a swift description of Limbo and the journey. He was moved by Divine Virtue, by Beatrice, and is denied the vision of Christ because he died before Christianity. Limbo is a place of sighs, a place for the innocents who died before baptism, and for the followers of the Pagan virtues but not the Christian *triad* [p. 340] of faith, hope and charity. Virgil's reply entitles him to now *question* [p. 259] Sordello as to the way into Purgatory proper.

There is a degree of *freedom* [p. 271] in Purgatory, not appropriate for Hell. Purgatory is a place of spiritual movement and progression. Sordello can be their guide for a while, but it is the evening now of Easter Monday, and they cannot climb at night, due to the properties of the Mount that take away the power of the will to do so.

***MedXLI:2 The Valley of the Negligent Rulers: Purgatorio  
Canto VII:64***

The *three* [p. 340] Poets now reach the hollow or valley of the negligent rulers, a place of physical beauty that elicits a sweet *description* [p. 315] from Dante. There the spirits *sing* [p. 323] the *Salve Regina* (*Salva Regina, mater misericordiae*), the antiphon sung after Vespers, invoking the aid of the Virgin. That which has shown negligence calls in prayer on *She* [p. 347] who is never negligent, the symbol of spiritual and maternal care.

Sordello points out the famous spirits, those who have also gained Dante's particular disapprobation! Rudolph, the Hapsburg Emperor and Ottocar, King of Bohemia, under whom he initially served, and with whom, after becoming Emperor, he subsequently disputed the right to Imperial lands: and Wenceslas II of Bohemia and Moravia, his son, whom Dante condemns for lust and sloth. Then Philip III of France who connived with the Papacy to take Aragon for his son Charles de Valois but was defeated by Pere III, with Henry I of Navarre, the Fat, whose daughter Joan married his son and heir Philip IV. Here then is mention of Dante's negligent Emperors and despised French Kings, those who failed the *Empire* [p. 256] or attacked it, caused internal strife and dissent, or conspired with the Papacy. And Dante points to a generic failing, a hereditary inadequacy.

Here then is Charles of Anjou, and that Pere III of Aragon, whose son Alfonso sits behind him, and whose other, degenerate, sons James and Frederick, the grandsons of Manfred through Costanza, hold Aragon and Sicily in 1300. Charles' son is degenerate also, and Charles' successive wives Beatrice, the daughter of Raymond Berenger, and Margaret of Burgundy, have no more to boast of than Pere's wife, Costanza.

Finally the pious Henry III of England, father of the warrior King Edward I, who also married a daughter of Raymond Berenger, Eleanor, and William Longsword, the Marquis of Montferrat, who first allied himself to Charles of Anjou and then turned against him, and was captured by the citizens of Alessandria who brought about his death. His son John subsequently attacked Alessandria and the town of Canavese, bringing them great suffering.

It is evening in this place that the Virgin watches over, where free will is not yet proof against temptation, outside the Gate of Purgatory proper,

and where Divine Grace and Intercession is needed to maintain the Divine order.

## **Meditation XLII: Purgatorio Canto VIII**

### ***MedXLII:1 The Descending Angels: Purgatorio Canto VIII:1***

It is the evening hour, caught in sweet *analogies* [p. 315]: the sweetness of regret and yearning that is the mirror side of hope. Now the eyes of the spirits are turned upwards to the eternal spheres, and through them to the eternal source of Love, as Dante begins to hint at his *Neo-platonic* [p. 294] vision of the universe, while one spirit, turning to the East, and absorbed, *sings* [p. 323] the ‘*Te lucis ante terminum: We pray to You before the ending of the light*’ the Ambrosian hymn sung at Compline, the last office of the day, which is appropriate for evening, but also for those who repent at the last.

The faces look upwards in hope, and two blonde-haired *Angels* [p. 241] dressed in trailing green robes descend, with burning swords: the Angels at the gate of the Earthly Eden, who come to *guard* [p. 337] this place where the will is still open to temptation from the serpent of sin that will try to enter. The brightness of their faces dazzles the eyes. The wreath of positive *words* [p. 328] winds around us: sweet, love, tender, devout, humble, eternal, hope, trust, joy. Dante builds the effects, the background music of the cathedral organ that accompanies us through Purgatory.

### ***MedXLII:2 Nino de' Visconti: Purgatorio Canto VIII:46***

Dante goes down *three* [p. 340] paces and enters the valley of Negligent Rulers just after sunset, to find Nino de' Visconti of Pisa there, a man devoted to Florence and the Guelph cause, and known to him. Nino Visconti was judge of Gallura, one of the four jurisdictions of Sardinia (Cagliari, Logodoro, Gallura, and Arborea) which belonged at the time to Pisa. He hanged Friar Gomita who took bribes to release prisoners. He married Beatrice d'Este, daughter of Obizzo d'Este II of Ferrara, by whom he had a daughter Giovanna, voted a pension by the Guelphs in 1328. After Nino's



death Beatrice married Galeazzo Visconti of Milan, a separate branch. The Milanese Visconti suffered misfortune in 1302. The arms of the Milanese Visconti was a viper, that of Nino, a cock. Giovanna married Riccardo da Cammino of Treviso. The arrangements for Beatrice's marriage were in progress at Easter 1300, and the wedding took place in the June.

The living Dante causes amazement here. *God* [p. 274] hides his first cause so deep there is no path to it: Dante is journeying by His singular grace. Nino asks to be *remembered* [p. 310] to his daughter Giovanna, to ask her to pray for him, since his wife Beatrice in marrying into another branch of the Visconti has clearly forgotten him. Dante makes the conventional Classical and Medieval reference (derived from Virgil and others) to the fickleness and frailty of female love, and the physical rather than intellectual nature of it, surely belied by the religious dedication of saintly women, and countless cases of lifelong loyalty all around him. Such is the perverse and reactionary power of a religious, *philosophical* [p. 300] and literary tradition! Righteous fervour is here a mortal flaw that Nino should leave behind, despite the due reason!

### ***MedXLII.3 The Serpent: Purgatorio Canto VIII:85***

Now Dante's eyes turn to Heaven again, to the south celestial pole where the circling *stars* [p. 331], travelling the shortest arc in the same time as the other visible stars, therefore move more slowly to the observer. Here are *three* [p. 340] stars, *representing* [p. 334] the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, which have replaced the dawn four of the Southern Cross, representing the cardinal virtues. Ethical progress, the active use of *free will* [p. 271], and the ascent of the Mount, is possible only in daylight, presided over by the Southern Cross, the four virtues, visible in the sky. At night the contemplative mind rests in the three theological virtues that should form the bedrock of the Spirit.

Sordello points out the approaching Serpent, a likeness of that which tempted Eve, occasionally twisting head to tail in a form of the eternal circle of sin that is ever-present in the world, and licking itself, in self-absorption. *Like* [p. 315] falcons the guardian Angels rise and drive the snake away.

***MedXLII:4 Conrad Malaspina: Purgatorio Canto VIII:109***

Conrad Malaspina is there, still gazing at Dante, and offers a *courteous* [p. 250] prayer that Dante's *will* [p. 271] may be adequate to the ascent. This is Currado II (d.c.1294) grandson of Currado I, the elder, who married an illegitimate daughter of Frederick II and died about 1225. This Conrad's cousins were Moroello III (d.c.1315) the addressee of Dante's third letter accompanied by Canzone XI, and Franceschino who was Dante's host (d. between 1313 and 1321) at Sarzana in Lunigiana in the autumn of 1306, less than seven years, the sun being already in Aries, from the moment of the Vision. The Malaspini were Ghibellines but Moroello III was a notable exception. Valdimagra, in Liunigiana, north-west of Tuscany, was part of their territory. Conrad is mentioned in Boccaccio's Decameron (II. 6)

Dante [p. 252] is therefore giving a courteous commendation to his patrons and hosts. And Conrad echoes the sentiment, *prophesying* [p. 307] Franceschino's protection, in that Valdimagra that Dante has not yet visited.

## **Meditation XLIII: Purgatorio Canto IX**

***MedXLIII:1 Dante's First Dream, The Eagle: Purgatorio Canto IX:1***

The Moon has passed through Libra into Scorpio. If dawn, Aurora, is the wife of Tithonus, then it is the moon's aurora of light that is his mistress, in Dante's conceit. It is 8.30pm on the evening of Easter Monday, and Dante falls asleep, overtaken by human weakness. He passed through the Inferno without *sleep* [p. 326], and is now exhausted. It is near the dawn of Tuesday that he *dreams* [p. 255], the first of his *three* [p. 340] dreams in Purgatory. The swallow Procne sings in mourning for Itys, from that tale of Tereus's ancient *lust* [p. 291]. And he dreams beneath the sign of Scorpio with its astrological associations of sexuality. The mind now is 'almost' *prophetic* [p. 307], as Dante imagines the descending eagle, like Jupiter snatching Ganymede in his divine lust, and carrying him off to be a cupbearer to the Gods. Dante, we discover, is being carried upwards by Lucia whose

emblem is *light* [p. 287]. The eagle in the medieval Bestiaries flies into the circle of fire in its old age, its feathers are consumed, and it falls blinded into a fountain, where it is renewed like the phoenix. It is a *symbol* [p. 334] therefore of baptismal regeneration through Divine *Grace* [p. 277]. Ganymede being a son of Tros, and an ancestor of Aeneas, links the regeneration to that of *Roman* [p. 312] law and justice. The *purgation* [p. 298] of lust that *Dante* [p. 252] will finally achieve passing through the fire at the top of Purgatory, is here echoed in the dream, and the purgation of the world's lust by a new *Imperial* [p. 256] eagle is prophesied.

Dante wakes like Achilles that agent of Troy's destruction and therefore indirectly Rome's creation by Aeneas: Achilles, carried off by Thetis to Scyros, and hidden there among the women. Dante is now alone with Virgil, near the Gate of Purgatory proper. Virgil counsels against *fear* [p. 267], and instils *hope* [p. 279]. He describes how Lucia came down to help at dawn, and her *eyes* [p. 257], *symbols* [p. 334] of the cardinal virtues by which they can make progress up the Mount, showed Virgil the passage.

### ***MedXLIII:2 The Gate of Purgatory: Purgatorio Canto IX:64***

Dante turns to address the reader, and signals a *symbolic* [p. 334] interpretation of what follows, the 'greater art'. He describes the *threshold* [p. 337] of Purgatory. The Gate has been interpreted as an allegory of the Sacrament of *Penance* [p. 298]. The courteous *Angel* [p. 241] who guards the entrance, is the priestly confessor, while the *three* [p. 340] steps are the three stages of the Sacrament: *Repentance* [p. 298], *Confession* [p. 250], and *Forgiveness* [p. 268]. Repentance is cool marble, Confession rough and scorched, breaking the stubbornness of the heart, and Forgiveness red with Christ's blood. The adamantine threshold is the rock of the *Church* [p. 296] with its power to forgive sin, and the firmness and constancy of the confessor.

Dante throws himself at the Angel's feet, and begs him for *pity's* [p. 302] sake to open the gate. The Angel inscribes seven letter *P's* on Dante's forehead representing the seven capital sins, *peccata capitali*, to be purged on the Mount. The Angel's silver key is experience by which the confessor judges the penitent's repentance and worthiness, the golden key is the *absolution* [p. 268] he grants. His robes are ashen with the colour of *humility* [p. 281], with which the confessor undertakes his role, that same humility

which gains the penitent the benefit of the doubt.

Dante passes through the Gate, like that which guarded the *Roman* [p. 312] treasury, and the great cathedral of the Mount is alive with an indistinct *music* [p. 323], with the *Te Deum Laudamus: We praise You Lord*, the Ambrosian hymn sung at Matins, and on solemn occasions, appropriate therefore for this Tuesday dawn in Dante's Vision, and this entry into Purgation.

## **Meditation XLIV: Purgatorio Canto X**

### ***MedXLIV:1 The Terrace of Pride: Purgatorio Canto X:1***

The Mount is circled by seven terraces on each of which one of the seven deadly sins is purged in an appropriate way. Each terrace reveals representations of the corresponding virtue, an example from the life of the Virgin followed by at least one Old Testament, pagan, or classical example. Prayer and singing accompany the journey up the Mount, towards Beatrice and the Earthly Paradise, and the twin threads of the spiritual and personal life are wound strongly together in this journey towards the woman who represents both.

Beyond the Gate the way is at first difficult, the Poets, caught between the wavering rocks, as if in the vacillations of the wavering will, making their passage as the Argo did, following the dove, between the Symphlegades, those two rocky islands in the Euxine Sea, clashing rocks according to the fable, that otherwise crushed what passed between them.

It is now moonset, or about 9am on the Tuesday morning, as the Poets free themselves from the 'needle's eye' and stand on the *lonely* [p. 315] space, the cornice about eighteen feet wide from its outer brink to the inner cliff. The inner wall is vertical, of marble, carved with friezes like the Greek pediments. And here on this first terrace where Pride is purged the Annunciation is depicted, Mary, receiving the words of Gabriel: the Angel saying *Ave:Greetings*, and her attitude displaying *Humility* [p. 281] as though saying *Ecce ancilla Dei: Behold the servant of God*. Next there is a depiction of the incident where Uzzah put out his hand to steady the Ark of the

Covenant and was struck down for his temerity, and here is David, the humble psalmist dancing before the Ark, while Michal, Saul's daughter, who despised him for it, looked on. And as a classical example we have the Emperor Trajan, unbending to grant a widow *justice* [p. 285], demonstrating *pity* [p. 302]. Pope Gregory supposedly *interceded* [p. 305] on Trajan's behalf, through prayer, to bring about his deliverance from hell, to allow him time for repentance. Dante constantly and implicitly stresses the divinely regulated nature of the events of Roman and *Imperial* [p. 312] history, and winds together the streams of secular and religious history through his chosen *examples* [p. 261].

***MedXLIV:2 The Proud and their Purgation: Purgatorio Canto X:97***

Dante now explains the nature of Purgatory, that here there is a debt to be paid rather than a punishment, and that the burden of *purgation* [p. 298], its suffering, cannot last beyond the Day of Judgement. Hell is eternal recurrence, but Purgatory is bounded in *time* [p. 339]. The proud have to carry heavy burdens to humble them, they are *like* [p. 315] the hunched corbels on Medieval buildings holding up the roof, that create a sense of discomfort in the observer. As they do in Dante whose own *Pride* [p. 306] must eventually be purged. Pride is a perverted desire or love of the wrong thing, as are anger and envy. The Christian is innately weak and exposed, a caterpillar that will be transformed into the butterfly of the departed spirit, the butterfly being a very ancient *metaphor* [p. 315] for the human soul, as is the bird, both creatures that have delicate flight. Therefore humility is its proper attitude. Dante sets before himself the image of what he as the student, the disciple of his Master Virgil, the Christian spirit seeking salvation, must become. Yet he is always conscious of the greatness of the work he is creating, even to the invention of these new sculptures and images carved in the friezes, 'new to us' because 'not found here'.

## Meditation XLV: Purgatorio Canto XI

### ***MedXLV:1 The Lord's Prayer: Purgatorio Canto XI:1***

The Proud paraphrase the Lord's prayer. *God* [p. 274] is above the stars, rather than on Earth, not through limitation, but because *Love* [p. 288] is associated with the first highest creations of the sublime universe. This is in line with Dante's *neo-platonic* [p. 294] view of Divine light, intelligence and goodness radiating downwards through the world from sphere to sphere. Praise of the divine is a natural act of *gratitude* [p. 278] for the gifts poured down from above. Human *intellect* [p. 283] is limited and *peace* [p. 298] is an act of *grace* [p. 277] otherwise unreachable by us. The *Angels* [p. 241] sacrifice their *free will* [p. 271] to God in *humility* [p. 281], as men should. *Forgiveness* [p. 268] should be granted others as we seek to be forgiven, and God's *justice* [p. 285] is not according to what we deserve for our sins but according to our *repentance* [p. 298] and intention. The Proud pray for deliverance from evil not for themselves since they are already penitents, but for those left behind. Dante suggests we reciprocate by *praying* [p. 305] for the dead to gain them intercession and a swifter passage up the Mount so that they might issue to the *starry* [p. 331] spheres, a further hint at Dante's *neo-platonic* [p. 294] vision of the Universe, influenced by Boethius, Albertus Magnus and the *Liber de Causis* (The Book of Causes) a late-antique work. Neo-Platonic thinking was a significant factor in the thirteenth century universities, and Dante's sources are many and varied.

### ***MedXLV:2 The Vanity of Fame: Purgatorio Canto XI:37***

Virgil *courteously* [p. 250] asks directions and explains that Dante is burdened by his human flesh: and his courtesy is rewarded with assistance. Here is Umberto of the arrogant Aldobrandeschi, who held Santafiora and warred with *Siena* [p. 248]. Umberto was put to death at Campagnatico in 1259.

Dante recognises Oderisi of Gubbio, illuminator and painter of miniatures, who worked with Franco of Bologna in the Vatican Library for Pope Boniface VIII. This is a pretext for Dante, in a famous passage, to attack the sin of artistic *pride* [p. 306], and to show its foolishness by

proclaiming the transience of artistic *fame* [p. 266]. Giotto has superseded Cimabue in painting. Guido Cavalcanti has superseded Guido Guinicelli, inspirer of the school of the *dolce stil nuovo*, in *poetry* [p. 303]. And, not so humbly, *Dante* [p. 252] has perhaps superseded both!! Modesty is not one of Dante's strengths, as justified pride in his achievements is in his eyes a weakness.

And pride of power meets the same fate as artistic glory, since here is Provenzan Salvani, the leading Ghibelline among the Sienese at Montaperti, where *Florence* [p. 267] was humbled, killed at Colle in 1269. The story tells of how he *humbled* [p. 281] himself by dressing as a beggar to procure the money to ransom a friend imprisoned by Charles of Anjou. This act, despite his late repentance, allowed him to enter the Gate of Purgatory. And Gubbio *prophesies* [p. 307] that Dante too will know through *exile* [p. 264] the pain of begging hospitality of others.

## Meditation XLVI: Purgatorio Canto XII

### *MedXLVI:1 Examples of Pride: Purgatorio Canto XII:1*

Dante follows the spirit, bowed *like* [p. 315] an ox under the yoke, until Virgil exhorts him to drive on his *metaphorical* [p. 315] journeying boat, and Dante walks on, humbled in thought.

The terrace ahead is carved with sculpted reliefs *like* [p. 315] tombstones in the ground over which the Poets walk (as I have walked over the floor-tombs in the church of S. Croce in Florence). Reliefs designed to prompt the *memory* [p. 292] of the merciful. Pride adorns itself.

Now there follows a swift series of *examples* [p. 261] of *Pride* [p. 306], alternating between classical and sacred instances. First Satan who fell through pride, then the Giants who challenged the gods: next Nimrod whose tower was frowned on by God, and Niobe who boasted of her children: Saul who disobeyed the Lord's commands, and fell at Gilboa, and Arachne who challenged Pallas Athene: Reheboam who refused to lighten the taxation of the people, and Alcmaeon who killed his own mother: Sennacherib killed by his own sons, and Tomyris who savagely revenged

herself on Cyrus: Holofernes the invading Assyrian slain by Judith, and proud Troy brought low by the Greeks. Dante's point is that excess is punished, often by excess. Distorted love or desire has created *hubris* that is punished by fate. The sacred and classical histories run in parallel, and lead to the same end.

### ***MedXLVI:2 The Angel of Humility: Purgatorio Canto XII:64***

It is now noon on Tuesday, and Virgil exhorts Dante not to lose time. At the conclusion of each visit to one of the seven terraces they meet an Angel, whose attribute is the opposite of the sin being purged, here it is the Angel <sup>[p. 241]</sup> of Humility, robed in white with the aspect of Venus, the morning 'star' <sup>[p. 331]</sup>, that once signified Lucifer and now Divine Love. The climb to the next terrace is *like* <sup>[p. 315]</sup> the ascent of the steps at San Miniato overlooking Florence <sup>[p. 267]</sup>, and Dante is unable to resist a jibe at Florence, the 'well-guided' city. Voices appropriately *sing* <sup>[p. 323]</sup> the first *Beatitude* <sup>[p. 340]</sup> from the Sermon on the Mount, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', and Dante contrasts the singing in Purgatory with the groans of Hell. He feels lighter and *gropes* <sup>[p. 315]</sup> at his face: one of the letter P's inscribed on his forehead by the Angel at the Gate has been removed, as the respective letters will be erased at the conclusion of the visit to each terrace. Purgation gradually leads to less labour, the ascent is easier the higher we climb, and the heavy weight of pride has here been lifted. Virgil *smiles* <sup>[p. 326]</sup>, signifying the first victory of hope.

## **Meditation XLVII: Purgatorio Canto XIII**

### ***MedXLVII:1 The Voices in the Air : Purgatorio Canto XIII:1***

The second terrace is that of the Envious, bare and livid in colour, since while pride adorns itself, *envy* <sup>[p. 256]</sup> sees only its own lack of possession. Virgil turns to the North where the afternoon sun is burning, its light a guide, light derived from the source of Light and Love. And voices in the air give *examples* <sup>[p. 261]</sup> of fraternal Love, the counter-virtue to envy. They are



those of Mary at the marriage in Cana proclaiming the need for hospitality prior to *Christ* [p. 248] turning the water to wine: Orestes noted for his friendship with Pylades: and that of Matthew's Gospel proclaiming the need for love rather than hatred.

Those spirits purging themselves of envy are cloaked with the colours of the stone, and repeat the Litany of the Saints, in which, after the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the archangel Michael with the other angels, Saint Peter and the other apostles, and finally the saints, are invoked. Dante is moved to *pity* [p. 302] at their state, their eyelids wired together *like* [p. 315] wild hawks being tamed, as they lean together like blind beggars seeking alms. Their *eyes* [p. 257], which did not value the visible world correctly, are now sealed from vision. Dante feels the *discourtesy* [p. 250], and lack of fraternal feeling, in passing them unseen in silence, and Virgil tells him to *speak* [p. 328] to them briefly.

### ***MedXLVII:2 Sapia : Purgatorio Canto XIII:85***

Dante makes a courteous speech about clearing *the dark film* [p. 315] of conscience so that memory's stream may flow clearly, and asks if any of the spirits is of Italy. Sapia de' Saracini of *Siena* [p. 248], yields an *individual* [p. 282] reply that they are no longer wanderers or pilgrims in Italy but citizens of the true *city* [p. 248]. She rejoiced over the Sienese Ghibelline defeat at *Colle* [p. 348], where Provenzan Salvani died. Generous at the end of her life, she was *prayed* [p. 305] for by the *Franciscan* [p. 269] Pier Pettignano, so that her debt of purgation was reduced. *Dante* [p. 252], self-aware, tells once more the nature of his journey, and that he is living, and significantly anticipates brief penitential suffering here after his death, but fears the purgation of Pride, one of his major faults, more. He suggests that as an elect or chosen *spirit* [p. 330] she ask a favour of him, to carry word of her to the living, and she, taking all this as a sign of God's *love* [p. 288] for him, asks to be *remembered* [p. 310] among the Sienese, who envious of other cities with harbours and fresh springs wasted their efforts trying to obtain both.

## Meditation XLVIII: Purgatorio Canto XIV

### *MedXLVIII:1 Guido del Duca and Rinier: Purgatorio Canto XIV:1*

Now a new device: we overhear two spirits talking about Dante and Virgil. In Hell the spirits *talk* [p. 328] against one another, here they join in fraternal conversation, Ghelph with Ghibelline. Guido del Duca invokes Dante's *charity* [p. 302] and *asks* [p. 259] his origin. He replies with an elliptical description of the Arno, and Guido, a Ghibelline follower of Pier Traversaro now replies with a long diatribe against the bestial valley of the Arno and its *cities* [p. 248], from its source down to the sea, near Pisa. The citizens are *as if* [p. 315] transformed by some Circe, Casentines are hogs, the Aretines curs, the *Florentines* [p. 267] wolves, the Pisans foxes. And he ends with a dire *prophecy* [p. 307] of the misdeeds of his companion Rinieri da Calboli's grandson Fulcieri, who was to be a bitter enemy of the Florentine Whites in 1303. Guido tells his name, despite Dante withholding his own, and after confessing his own envious nature in life, Guido announces that his companion is indeed Rinier, a Ghelph. Rinier fought against Guido da Montefeltro, surrendering to him in 1276, and died fighting the Ghibellines once more in 1296.

A diatribe against the state of the Romagna follows, and a model of the Medieval lament for past glories, for 'the ladies and the knights', expressed by Villon's 'Where are the snows of yester-year?' A list of the virtuous dead follows, Guelph mixed with Ghibelline: Lizio a Ghelph follower of Rinier, from Duca's own Bertinoro: and Arrigo Mainardi a Ghibelline follower of Pier Traversaro: and Guido di Carpigna noted for his liberality. Fabbro the Ghibelline, and Bernadin, the Guelph risen from a humble background. Ugolin who married Provenzan's daughter, and Guido da Prata of Ravenna, the generous Federico of Rimini, and the now defunct Houses of Traversari, and Anastagi, great Ghibelline Houses of Ravenna.

Now Duca laments the decline of his native Bertinoro, and a list of less than virtuous men follows, the Malavicini, Counts of Bagnacavallo, the Castrocaro of Forlì, the Barbiano of Conio nearby, and Mainardo Pagani, 'the devil', the Ghibelline Lord of Faenza, Imola and Forlì. And Duca ends

with the extinguished line of Ugolin de' Fantolin of Faenza, a Guelph whose two sons died fighting for the cause.

Dante's message is once more, degenerate Italy, fallen from its ancient virtues, lost in factional strife. His examples are almost meaningless to us, but well known to his contemporary audience. But the names after all do not matter, this is the traditional lament, a *Troubadour* [p. 343] '*planh*' and its tone is enough to communicate the '*golden age*' [p. 276] of a past world of 'courtesy and love'.

The Poets leave. And the counter *examples* [p. 261] to those first *voices* [p. 328] of love that they heard at the start of the terrace are now echoing in the air. Voices of envy, one Biblical one Classical: of Cain, who envied and killed his brother Abel, and of Aglauros who envied her sister Herse. There is time for Virgil to both admonish the human race for failing to take notice of examples, and to recall Dante to the *neo-platonic* [p. 294] vision of the circling spheres of Heaven.

## Meditation XLIX: Purgatorio Canto XV

### ***MedXLIX:1 The Angel of Fraternal Love: Purgatorio Canto XV:1***

It is 3pm, and the Poets are on the north-east slope of the Mount travelling due west, when Dante feels the brilliant light shed by the *Angel* [p. 241] of Fraternal Love who *attends* [p. 337] the exit from the second terrace. (The *zodiac* [p. 331] skips *like* [p. 315] a child, as the sun's daily path tilts higher or lower in the sky. Here at the spring equinox the noonday sun is on the celestial equator.) The moment allows Dante to exhibit his *scientific* [p. 313] knowledge of incident and reflected rays. The climbing is easier as they leave, hearing the beatitude *sung* [p. 323] behind them '*Beati misericordes: blessed are the merciful.*' *Mercy* [p. 293] is an aspect of fraternal co-existence, a reciprocal grace '*for they shall obtain mercy.*'

Dante pursues this thought by *asking* [p. 259] Virgil about that 'division of partnership' mentioned by Guido del Duca. Virgil explains that *envy* [p. 256] destroys fraternal *love* [p. 288] while shared good increases love. This is a

crucial point: that shared does not mean less, and that in the world of the spirit mutual giving increases what is given. Dante is feeding from the *Franciscan* [p. 269] radical approach to the spiritual life, here, the worship of 'Lady Poverty' in a worldly sense in order to achieve riches in a spiritual sense. Divine goodness is drawn to love, *like* [p. 315] a light ray, and generates increased love, and the greater the number of *spirits* [p. 330] sharing mutual understanding the greater the love, and like a mirror understanding reflects love and love understanding. Dante here communicates his vision of the true society, the city of God, the *community* [p. 249] of intelligences, where spirit determines being, rather than material existence.

Virgil once more gives Dante *hope* [p. 279] of seeing *Beatrice* [p. 245], the end of longing. And a second letter P has been erased from Dante's forehead.

### ***MedXLIX:2 Examples of Gentleness: Purgatorio Canto XV:82***

The third terrace is that of the wrathful, and here Dante in a dream-state is met with counter-*examples* [p. 261] of gentleness. The first, again, from the life of the Virgin, *her* [p. 347] words to Christ in the temple, sorrowing and tender, exemplifying love. The second a classical example, Pisistratus replying calmly to his wife concerning a young friend who had kissed his daughter in public, showing judgement and restraint. (There is also a passing reference to the strife between Athene and Poseidon over the naming of Athens.) The third a Biblical reference, to the stoning of Saint Stephen, he forgiving his tormentors. *Virgil* [p. 346], to whom Dante's inner thoughts are visible, then exhorts him to avoid *sloth* [p. 326], and they travel on towards the west and the setting sun of this Easter Tuesday, onto the northern slope of the Mount, walking towards the thick smoke-cloud of wrath.

## **Meditation L: Purgatorio Canto XVI**

### ***MedL:1 The Wrathful: Purgatorio Canto XVI:1***

Dante wanders behind Virgil *like* [p. 315] a blind man through the darkness, hearing voices *repeating* [p. 323] the Agnus Dei, the prayer from the Latin Mass,

'*Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis, dona nobis pacem*: Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy on us, give us peace.' Here unlike Hell the voices of the spirits are in harmony. It is a Mozartian Mass, the beauty of the Requiem, anachronistically echoing in the mind. A single voice interrogates them in the smoke-cloud, and once more Dante explains his unusual journey, 'outside modern usage'. Here is Marco Lombardo, Venetian courtier, noted for his liberality, bemoaning the degradation of the mortal world, who asks Dante to *pray*<sup>[p. 305]</sup> for him when Dante ascends higher. In return Dante *asks*<sup>[p. 259]</sup> for some explanation of the state of the age, coupling Mark's comments to Guida del Duca's recent lament for the Romagna.

Mark dismisses the view that the heavens alone dictate fate. There is moral awareness and *free will*<sup>[p. 271]</sup>, enabling ethical choice. Dante accepted in the *Convivio*, and explains in the *Paradiso*, that *Angels*<sup>[p. 241]</sup> govern the planetary spheres, their movement and influence. He does associate traditional *astrological*<sup>[p. 331]</sup> qualities with the individual planets, but for Dante those qualities are ultimately divinely inspired, while the greater good creates intellect and will, that are beyond the direct control of the heavens. He is therefore of the school that treats astrological aspects as influences on a life, but not determinants of it. *Prophecy*<sup>[p. 307]</sup> through astrology we have seen condemned in the *Inferno*, in the circles of the fraudulent. The cause of sin is in the self. Mark follows this with the delightful image of the *soul*<sup>[p. 330]</sup> as a child, created from the hands of *God*<sup>[p. 274]</sup>, full of simplicity, drawn to the good, and following it if love is not impaired. *Law*<sup>[p. 285]</sup> is the curb to sin, and the good *ruler*<sup>[p. 256]</sup> is needed, who can see and understand the good. The *Papacy*<sup>[p. 296]</sup> is corrupt, and spiritual life and temporal life are confused, the Empire wrongly influencing spiritual authority, the Church temporal. Rome was the civilising influence, and Rome separated the two spheres, while now they are linked, an error since it destroys mutual respect and obedience. The sons of Levi, the priests of the Temple, should not inherit wealth but live from the tithe, and devote themselves to spiritual affairs.

Mark laments the current state of Lombardy since the time of Frederick II, though in passing he celebrates a *trio*<sup>[p. 340]</sup> of living virtuous men, Corrado da Palazzo, a Brescian Ghelph, the vicar of Charles of Anjou in Florence in 1276, Gherardo da Camino, Captain-General of Treviso till his death in 1306, and Guido da Castello, a gentleman of Treviso, noted for

his hospitality and generosity. To the French the Lombards were tricky, and often usurers, perhaps the source of Guido's nickname, he being in contrast, the 'honest one', *simplice*. Dante's [p. 252] own *anger* [p. 349] at the darkness of his times here achieves catharsis through Mark's condemnation. It is a political wrath that he must leave behind. The tone is softened: the analysis is cool, but the emotion clearly still surges beneath. Just as Oderisi held up to Dante the mirror of fame and artistic pride, so Marco holds the glass of anger, and what Dante sees of himself there he must transcend. Beyond the smoke is the Angel of Meekness.

## **Meditation LI: Purgatorio Canto XVII**

### ***MedLI:1 Examples of Anger: Purgatorio Canto XVII:1***

With another beautiful descriptive *simile* [p. 315] Dante sees the sun setting beyond the western slope of the Mount, as he goes measuring his *steps* [p. 347] by his master's. *Imagination* [p. 281] is stirred not by the reality of the senses but by multi-formed *light* [p. 287] or *Divine* [p. 274] will from above. Dante seems to imply the whole impetus of the Vision, an imaginative construct gifted from Heaven, taking over the mind, shutting out the external senses. *Images of wrath* [p. 261] appear to him. Procne who revenged herself so terribly on Tereus in her pain and anger: Haman 'full of wrath' in the Book of Esther: and Queen Amata, from the Aeneid, an angry suicide after the death of Turnus. Dante continues to wind together the *three* [p. 340] strands of history, Biblical, Classical, and, as in Marco's speech, Contemporary.

### ***MedLI:2 The Angel of Meekness: Purgatorio Canto XVII:40***

The intense *light* [p. 287] emanating from the *Angel* [p. 241] strikes his eyes, and his imagining is broken like sleep, and drives him to find the source of the voice that directs them, with the inner eagerness that demands relationship. Purgatory is a *community* [p. 249] of the spirit, where Hell was divisiveness, an image of the torn and divided city: Florence, Rome or the human city as per Aristotle. Virgil explains the veiled nature of the Angel. The voice gives its assistance without demand, treating the Poets as a man would himself,

offering community of spirit, and sharing knowledge, rather than waiting in a spirit of pride and denial for the request. It is rather the spirit of the early Church, and of Franciscan radicalism, that unified embrace of a shared faith and practice.

Virgil urges them onwards before nightfall, when they can no longer climb and *free-will* [p. 271] is denied them, and as Dante reaches the first step the Angel's wing fans his face removing the third letter P, and the third beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount is *spoken* [p. 323]: '*Beati pacifici: Blessed are the meek who are without anger.*'

### ***MedLI:3 The Structure of Purgatory: Purgatorio Canto XVII:70***

The Poets are grounded *like* [p. 315] boats on the shore of the fourth terrace, that of *Sloth* [p. 326], where all is appropriately silent. Dante turns to question Virgil, who now explains the nature of Purgatory. *Love* [p. 288] is inherent in the mortal creature, as *natural* [p. 293] love that is free of error, or *rational* [p. 283] love that can err. Once more Dante shows the true nature of his visionary afterlife. The order of sins in Hell is less significant than the fact that sin is a misuse or abuse of *freewill* [p. 271]. Inferno is the city of lost *relationship* [p. 249], the place where the free-will through choosing the wrong objective is separated from others and from Divine Love. Hell is incontinence, violence and fraud: destructive forces that break the community of spirits. Hell is social failing, civil war within the *cities* [p. 248] of Man and God. Purgatory is the place where sin is purged within the *individual* [p. 282] self, it is a place where the single one must strive to overcome failings, and embrace virtues. It is a place where the free-will is re-oriented, before it enters into the true community of the Paradiso. The permanent value of Dante's great Vision is not so much for us in the religious details (though these are often charming and meaningful), and which we may or may not accept as valid, but in its true cognisance of Love and its opposites.

In Inferno Love is misunderstood, abused, and betrayed, as Christ was. In Purgatorio Love is the healing process that re-orientes the self towards the living community of shared virtues and graces, where the spiritual life can gain new strength, it is the meeting in the Garden: while in Paradiso Love can be revealed, fully, that risen Love which drives the

humanised Universe, the intellect and the imagination. Community, relationship is at the core of Dante's message. Love in the *three* [p. 340] *Cantiche* is first denied and betrayed, then sought and understood, then asserted and entered into. To his argument which is community, Dante brings the three strands of his life, personal, political and spiritual, and the three corresponding elements of history, which is the record of human social relationship: Contemporary, Classical and Religious.

Love is Dante's great theme, and therefore the source of his endless importance in ethics, social relationship, and the meaning of values. And therefore there is as much meaning in him for the Humanist and the Atheist as for the Christian, because values and ethics are at the heart of what it means to be human.

Virgil explains that rational love is fine when directed with energy towards the virtues. But it fails when it is wrongly attracted towards evil ends (*Pride* [p. 306], *Envy* [p. 256], *Wrath* [p. 349]); suffers from insufficient attraction to the good (*Sloth* [p. 326]); or from excessive attraction towards what is, in moderation, good, but is not essentially good (*Avarice* [p. 244], *Gluttony* [p. 274], *Lust* [p. 291]). Love is 'the seed' of virtue in the mind, and errors of rational love are the seeds of wrong action. Rational love is instinctively opposed to self-hatred or hatred of the Creator, argues Virgil, and therefore the wrong objectives of rational love must be due to the presence of others, to our existence in *community* [p. 249] and relationship.

The three evil manifestations of the rational mind's desires are Pride that wants others to be below us: Envy that is saddened at others being preferred to us (and Jealousy driven by the potential loss which accompanies Envy); and Wrath which is angered at perceived injury and seeks revenge or harm. Dante is here grouping the traditional vices in a way that shows their inter-relationship. Consider in yourself, as I do in myself, the way that Envy (and Jealousy), Pride and Anger feed off and fuel each other. Sexual Jealousy, in particular, is an easily seen interweaving of the forces of bruised pride, envy fuelled by perceived loss, and the resulting anger that is directed at the loved one, the rival, and ultimately the self. All three are aspects of the hurt ego, damaged self-confidence, and unreasonable expectation. All three relate to the attempted possession of what cannot be possessed, another human being or their true position relative to others.



Rational love in the mind should see the good and desire it, but if it fails to pursue it with all the power of its free-will then inadequate love, spiritual apathy, is purged on this terrace, the fourth, that of Sloth.

Lastly there may be excessive love for what is in some way good, but is not essential good. Virgil challenges Dante to understand excessive desire higher up the Mount. There he will find the cornices dedicated to Avarice, excessive love for earthly possessions that are necessary to us in moderation: Gluttony, excessive love for the food we need to survive: and Lust, the excessive desire for the body and its pleasures.

Here is Dante's answer to the problems of the school of Courtly Love which he first learned to admire in the *troubadour* [p. 343] poetry, where love is an irrational and potentially harmful force creating pain and distress in the lover. Love here is not in itself destructive, natural love is certainly not, but the rational mind, abusing its reason and free-will, may select the wrong object of love, a destructive one, by choosing what leads to harm: may fail in attention, understanding and energy: or may love excessively what it should love only in moderation.

## **Meditation LII: Purgatorio Canto XVIII**

### ***MedLII:1 The Nature of Love: Purgatorio Canto XVIII:1***

The *question* [p. 259] and answer continues in this lull, Dante neatly contrasting this intellectual eagerness and effort with the *sloth* [p. 326] that is purged here. Love, Dante asserts and Virgil confirms, is the root of all good action and its opposite. Love is an attraction through the senses, followed by the desire to enter into relationship with that which is loved in order to attain joy. That desire rises *like* [p. 315] flame. And so far the description of *Love* [p. 288] may seem to differ little from the tradition of *Courtly Love* [p. 343], where love of the beloved enters through the eyes causing intense and unrequited longing, and a painful disturbance of body and mind. But Virgil goes on to say that the object of desire may not always be the right one, even though love itself is always the same: though the wax is the same the seal imprinted in it may not always be good. There is a role for the *rational* [p. 283] mind in choosing the right objective of desire.

Dante then asks what merit the spirit can have if Love enters from outside through the senses. This is the moral dilemma of Courtly Love, ravaged by something outside its control. Virgil replies that he can say what is apparent to reason, though the rest must wait for Beatrice as a question of faith, and he goes on to explain that the primary drives are innate and free of volition and therefore free of praise or blame, but there is a specific virtue of freewill that allows choice and judgement. By choosing the good the spirit acquires merit. And this virtue of freewill was recognised by the pagan philosophers, Aristotle in particular. Self-control and judgement can overcome desires that rise of necessity without being willed. *Freewill* [p. 271] is the noble virtue to *Beatrice* [p. 245]. Virgil warns Dante to be aware of this when he speaks to her.

Here is Dante's tough answer to the problems of Courtly Love, and his own deep longing for Beatrice. Self-control: the exercise of that powerful will that he clearly possessed himself, or the *Commedia* would not exist, itself a mighty effort of intellectual control and artistic endurance. It is not an easy answer. Perhaps, faced with unrequited love, or deep sorrow, or extreme temptation, it may seem an impossible answer. Yet we exercise judgement all our lives, and the ethical, the moral, cannot exist in any other way, except by continuous choice. Some desires must be sublimated. Dante's own earthly desire for the real Beatrice must be transcended. Purgatory is a difficult ascent. The path to Hell is easy.

### ***MedLII:2 The Slothful: Purgatorio Canto XVIII:76***

Now in a beautiful moon image it is midnight on Tuesday, and the moon is in the east in Sagittarius, the sign of the active archer, and now the spirits, who are throwing off *sloth* [p. 326], appear like a Bacchic chorus, running in a great throng to show their new fervour. Two of them shout out *examples* [p. 261] of haste: Mary, after the Annunciation, hastening to the hill country, and Julius Caesar, rushing from the siege of Marseilles to attack Pompey's lieutenants in Catalonia. Virgil asks for information.

Here is Gherardo, the Abbot of San Zeno, and he *prophesies* [p. 307] and mourns for Alberto, the father of Can Grande, della Scala's appointment of his deformed and depraved illegitimate son Guiseppe to the post. And two laggard spirits who shout out examples of sloth: The Israelites, delayed in

the desert after their escape from Egypt by their own sins, and Aeneas's followers who stayed behind in Sicily rather than reaching Italy with his elected band.

Dante now wanders in thought, and falls asleep, to dream.

## Meditation LIII: Purgatorio Canto XIX

### *MedLIII: The Dream of the Siren: Purgatorio Canto XIX:1*

It is some time before dawn, perhaps about four a.m., and the *stars* [p. 331] of *Fortuna Major*, in Aquarius and Pisces, are rising, when Dante dreams his *second* [p. 340] *dream* [p. 255], of the Siren, a symbol of temptation, and seduction: the attraction towards the excessive desires: *avarice* [p. 244], *gluttony* [p. 274] and *lust* [p. 291]. Ulysses first felt that power and then cleverly found a means to resist it. She appears as a crippled, maimed old woman, her true reality, but Dante's gaze makes her appear attractive, as the rational mind may be seduced into believing that the objects of excessive desire are attractive. A saintly lady, representing the powers of right reason appears and calls to *Virgil* [p. 346], earthly philosophy and good judgement, who seizes the Siren within the dream and exposes her. Lust particularly, *Dante's* [p. 252] personal weakness, is indicated here. And Dante wakes. Virgil, who has called him at least *three times* [p. 340], spurs Dante onwards.

It is dawn of the Wednesday, and they are circling to the west with the risen sun behind them. The *Angel* [p. 241] of Zeal, points out the way, fans them with his wings, removing another letter P, and, as Dante grieves for the contents of his dream, and no doubt for passages of his past life, the *Angel affirms* [p. 323] the second Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount: '*Beati qui lugent: blessed are those who mourn*'. Virgil *questions* [p. 259] Dante, reminds him how freewill and reason escape the Siren, and points him again towards the neo-platonic [p. 294] vision of the eternal spheres. Remorse is fine but excessive dwelling on evil may be an obstacle. And so, *like* [p. 315] a falcon, Dante turns towards the lure of spiritual food, and the Poets reach the fifth terrace.

**MedLIII:2 The Avaricious: Pope Adrian V: Purgatorio Canto XIX:70**

Here the *avaricious* [p. 244] who were once so fixed on earthly things by their excessive desire are now pinned to the ground by Divine Justice, weeping and *repeating* [p. 323] part of Psalm 119: '*Adhaesit pavimento anima mea: my soul cleaveth unto the dust*'. Virgil asks the way, and a reply, secretly seeking Dante's recognition, tells them to continue *anti-clockwise* [p. 339] around the Mount, the direction of their journey signifying a return in time through purgation to childhood innocence, the first purity of the soul. Virgil assents to Dante granting the spirit who replied that gift of *recognition* [p. 310], and the offer of carrying that recognition back to the living. Dante also seems prompted by the words about 'longing to find the quickest way'.

The spirit who replied is Adrian V, Pope in 1276, for little over a month before his death. He was one of the Fieschi family, the Counts of Lavagna near Genoa. Alagia was his niece, the wife of Moroello III Malaspina. Though a late *repentant* [p. 298] he has progressed to this circle: how is not explicitly stated. Perhaps it implies that freedom from a failing allows a spirit to progress straight through any given terrace. Dante bends the knee to him, as a holder of Papal Office, but Adrian reminds Dante that all formal *relationships* [p. 330] are abandoned beyond the grave. And he asks to be remembered to his surviving niece Alagia.

## **Meditation LIV: Purgatorio Canto XX**

**MedLIV:1 Examples of Poverty and Liberality: Purgatorio Canto XX:1**

Dante, unsatisfied in his *questioning* [p. 259], bows to Adrian's will, and the Poets move on along the cliff face. Dante raises his voice here against Avarice, the she-wolf (of Inferno Canto I also), and again asks for that *prophetic* [p. 307] saviour of Italy (the Greyhound of Inferno Canto I) who will banish avarice from the world. Where his hopes had once been pinned perhaps on Can Grande, by the time of writing the Purgatorio Dante may well have experienced the rise and final fall of the Emperor Henry VII,

Count of Luxembourg, elected king of the Romans in 1308. Henry aimed to establish Imperial power in Italy and be crowned in Rome. Initially gaining Pope Clement V's support he moved against Guelph Florence and King Robert of Naples, but Philip IV of France changed the Pope's allegiance, and though crowned at Rome in 1312 Henry's initiative had already failed, and his death in 1313 of malaria, ended the hopes of his supporters and allies. The Papacy remained in exile in Avignon, and Dante was left once more hoping against hope for a 'saviour', and for the return of the Papacy to Rome.

Now we hear *examples* [p. 261] of poverty and liberality: from the life of Mary, the humble manger at Bethlehem: from Classical history, Fabricius the Consul and Censor, refusing gifts and bribes: and, from Christian history, Saint Nicholas (known as Saint Nicholas of Bari), and his gifts of dowries to three young girls to protect their honour.

### ***MedLIV:2 Hugh Capet: Purgatorio Canto XX:43***

Avarice is a part of Dante's political perception, and we now have a rapid transit through the history of the *avaricious* [p. 244] French Capetian dynasty to 1300, told by Hugh Capet, King of France (987-996) here confused with his father Hugh the Great (Duke of the Franks, Count of Paris, died 956) who was the supposed son of a butcher. When Louis V died in 987, and the Carolingian Dynasty ended it was Hugh Capet who succeeded, and founded the Capetian Dynasty, not his son and successor Robert I. On Louis V's death, his uncle Duke Charles of Lorraine, son of Louis IV, was the only survivor of the Carolingian line. He was captured by Hugh and imprisoned till his death in 991. He was not a monk ('one who was clothed in the grey robe'), and Dante may have confused him with the last of the Merovingians Childeric III who was deposed by Pepin le Bref in 751 and compelled to become a monk. Between 1060 and 1300 four Philip's (I-IV) and four Louis's (VI-IX) ruled France between them. Hugh gives a mixture of history and *prophetic* [p. 307] statement of things to come: the Flemish revenge at the battle of Courtrai in 1302 for the treachery of Philip the Fair and his brother Charles de Valois towards the Count of Flanders in 1299: Charles I of Anjou's gaining of Provence in 1246 by marrying Beatrice the daughter of Raymond Berenger: and the French Kings' holding of

Ponthieu, Gascony and Normandy, a source of friction between England and France for many years: Charles of Anjou's invasion of Italy and crowning as counter-king of Sicily (to Manfred) in 1265, at the invitation of Clement IV, and his defeat of Conradin, Manfred's usurped nephew at Tagliacozzo in 1268: Charles de Valois's entry into Florence in November 1301, and his support for the Blacks, and his nickname of Lack-land: Charles the lame, King of Naples, the son of Charles I of Anjou, and his defeat by Peter III's admiral Roger di Loria in 1284 while trying to assist his father in retaking Sicily, and his 'sale' of his daughter in 1305 to the aging Azzo VIII da Este: and finally Pope Boniface VIII's being seized at Anagni (his birthplace, forty miles south-east of Rome) by agents of Philip IV, the Fair, and dying in a few days in October 1303.

Hugh's tirade allows Dante to attack the French influence over the *Papacy* [p. 296] and Italy, making Philip IV the new Pilate, in delivering Boniface to his enemies the Colonnese, as Pilate delivered Jesus to his crucifixion, and in persecuting the Order of the Knights Templar from 1307 to gain their treasures. Dante subtly places a somewhat un-Christian desire for *God's* [p. 274] vengeance in Hugh's mouth rather than in his own.

***MedLIV:3 Examples of Avarice: the Earthquake: Purgatorio Canto XX:97***

Hugh now explains that the examples of poverty and liberality in their daylight prayers are replaced by *examples* [p. 261] of *avarice* [p. 244] at night. These are paired Classical and Biblical instances: Dido's brother Pygmalion who murdered her husband Sychaeus for gold (Aeneid I 350) and King Midas: Achan who ignored Joshua's dedication of captured gold to the Lord, and Sapphira and Ananias who were rebuked by Saint Peter for hypocrisy in retaining part of their wealth: Heliodorus the treasurer of King Seleucus, turned from the treasury by a rider whose horse struck at him, and Polymnestor the son-in-law of Priam who murdered Priam's son Polydorus for his wealth. Finally there is Crassus the Triumvir, killed in battle by the Parthians, who had molten gold poured down his throat in mockery of his love of gold.

Suddenly the Poets feel an earthquake as the Mount trembles. Dante is gripped by cold. The quake is *compared* [p. 315] to the shaking of the Isle of

Delos when Latona gave birth to Artemis and Apollo. The spirits *shout* [p. 323] out the *Gloria* with joy, and the Poets stand there, as still as the shepherds when the Angel came to announce Christ's birth. Then Dante is possessed by the desire for knowledge of the earthquake's cause, and by *fear* [p. 267]. Here again is a reminder that the desire of the *intellect* [p. 283] for truth is a legitimate one, that Dante is on a journey of enquiry, and that right use of freewill, and rational love freed from appetite, direct the mind towards that union of light, reason and love which is the Godhead. Dante is careful to assemble the 'right' authorities who validate the 'truth'. In doing so he further legitimises the co-existence of Classical mythology and philosophy with Christian truth and devotion, illuminated by examples of authoritative individuals, which is characteristic of the Italian Renaissance that followed.

## **Meditation LV: Purgatorio Canto XXI**

### ***MedLV:1 Statius: Purgatorio Canto XXI.1***

Now the two Poets meet a third, Statius. Virgil is Dante's literary master, and, through the Aeneid, inspirer of the early Cantos of Inferno. He was celebrated in the Middle Ages as a *prophet* [p. 307] because of the interpretation of the fourth Eclogue as a prediction of the Incarnation. And he had revealed Rome's Imperial mission through the tale of Aeneas's wanderings, a mission Dante treated as divinely inspired, so that Classical and Roman history was necessary and complementary to Christian history. As historian, prophet and poet he was the perfect choice as Dante's master, in a way that say the irreverent, sceptical, humanist Ovid could not have been. Why then the need for a new character, Statius, to help guide the Poets further? The problem is Virgil's paganism. As a representative of earthly philosophy he is complete, but we are now in transition towards the divine philosophy that Beatrice will represent, and Dante therefore introduces the poet Publius Papinius Statius, who was born at Naples around 50AD (not Toulouse), and died there in about 96AD. He lived at Rome in Vespasian's and Domitian's reigns, and dedicated his *Thebaid* to the latter, an epic about the War of the Seven against Thebes. His *Achilleid*, dealing with the Trojan War, was left unfinished. His shorter poems the *Silvae* were unknown to Dante.

Statius according to Dante converted to Christianity, so that he has not only gained entry to Purgatory through his secret faith, but is also able to comment on religious truths in a way that is not appropriate for Virgil.

Dante's knowledge is a thirst that cannot be quenched except by that *metaphorical* [p. 315] water of Truth that Christ spoke of to the woman of Samaria at the well. So he goes along burning with desire for answers, and grieving over the just punishment of the spirits. Statius appears, in a likeness of Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus in Luke's gospel. And Statius then gives them Christian greeting. Dante has therefore pointed *triply* [p. 340] to the Christian transition here, and reinforces it in Virgil's mention of his own 'eternal exile' in Limbo, and his comment that he will guide Dante 'as far as my knowledge can lead'. The boundary of earthly understanding is being signalled, *Virgil* [p. 346] does not know the cause of the earthquake, and it is Statius who will provide the answer. Virgil died before the Incarnation, and before the opportunity for conversion, while Statius lived after that boundary. The two Roman worlds of before Christ and after Christ here meet in that *contemporaneousness* [p. 250] of the Christian Moment, its eternal resonance that the *Commedia* exemplifies. Rome is unified. An essential continuity of history is affirmed. All the notes of time and intellect are sounded together in this Divine space of the *Commedia*.

### ***MedLV:2 The Cause of the Earthquake: Purgatorio Canto XXI:34***

Statius, threading the needle's eye of Dante's wish for *knowledge* [p. 259], gives him *hope* [p. 279], and explains that the earthquake has a purpose and is not unusual. *Natural* [p. 293] causes are inoperative here, because beyond the threshold of Purgatory proper only Heavenly causes take effect. Earthquakes here are due to a purged soul realising its new state and beginning the ascent towards Paradise. The *free will* [p. 271] previously gripped by desire for the punishment of *purgation* [p. 310], as it was previously gripped by the desire for sin, is now altered, and empowered to rise, in complete freedom. Statius, who has been on this terrace for over five hundred years, purging his major sin of Avarice, now feels his will free, and strengthened to progress, and so can travel upwards with the Poets. His sudden feeling of freedom and empowerment was the cause of the Earthquake that the spirits



celebrated, which also symbolises or echoes the ‘earthquake’ of the Incarnation and that of the Harrowing of Hell, the quake that separates the Roman Empire before Christ with Rome after Christ, and the earthquake of Dante’s own spirit and poetic imagination that carried him beyond the tradition and into the new realms of the Vita Nuova and the Commedia.

***MedLV:3 Statius recognises Virgil: Purgatorio Canto XXI:76***

A sweet moment. Virgil now understands the cause of the earthquake and *courteously* [p. 250] asks who Statius is. Statius explains, referring to Titus’s destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70AD, in Vespasian’s reign, as a historical marker, an event deemed by Dante to avenge the Crucifixion, and Judas’s treachery. Not yet a convert, Statius was crowned Poet at Rome, wrote the *Thebaid*, but left the *Achilleid* unfinished, and he proclaims the *Aeneid* as his influence. Virgil tells Dante to be silent, but Dante makes the point to the reader that in the most honest spirit, *truth* [p. 344] will out, and laughter and tears are produced despite the controlling will, so that he smiles. Statius picks up on this, and looks Dante in the *eye* [p. 257] to *question* [p. 259] the reason for his amusement. So that Virgil seeing Dante caught in a dilemma, allows him to speak. Dante explains that this is Virgil, and that his own *smile* [p. 326] had no other motive (interestingly Statius cannot read what is in Dante’s mind here, though Virgil can). And in a final paragraph, of great beauty of feeling, Virgil expresses the equality and *humility* [p. 281] of the spiritual life, while Statius expresses the *love* [p. 288], warmth and respect that is generated by intellectual affinity.

**Meditation LVI: Purgatorio Canto XXII**

***MedLVI:1 The Angel of Liberality: Purgatorio Canto XXII:1***

With a single *word* [p. 323] ‘*sitiunt: they thirst*’ from the fourth Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount, the *Angel* [p. 241] of Liberality has erased the fifth letter P from Dante’s forehead. The Beatitude both approves Dante’s hunger and thirst for knowledge and virtue, and anticipates the excessive hunger and

thirst of the gluttonous on the next terrace. Dante now moves on more easily, listening to Virgil who comments to Statius that virtuous *love* [p. 288] always inspires love in return when it is known. Statius's love for him had been revealed by Statius's younger contemporary, Juvenal, when he descended into Limbo (he died 140AD). Virgil asserts his friendship, an aspect of *love's* [p. 288] liberality and warmth, and questions Statius about his Avarice.

Statius *smiles* [p. 326] and emphasises how, as we have seen with Dante's smile previously, true reasons may be hidden and cause *doubt* [p. 255] (Dante is subtly hinting at the concealment by Statius of his own inferred conversion to Christianity). His own excess was not *Avarice* [p. 244] but excessive and wasteful spending. The prodigal and extravagant, those who dissipate resources on idle things, are punished in the fourth circle of Inferno, and Statius claims he only realised his error on reading Virgil's lines (*Aeneid* III 56-57) ironically implying that gold may as well drive all human behaviour. Statius then recognised all the dimensions of wrong associated with wealth-driven behaviour. He ends with a passing dig at the 'shorn heads' of the Church.

Virgil points out that Statius's *Thebaid* (which begins with an invocation to Clio, the Pagan Muse of History) is a Pagan rather than a Christian tale, and asks how his conversion came about. Statius, with answering use of *metaphors* [p. 315], refers in turn to Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue* where he *prophesies* [p. 307] the return of a *Golden Age* [p. 276], and which Dante and his age interpreted as presaging the advent of Christianity, and to his association with the early Christians, allegedly persecuted under Domitian. Statius's question about others of the ancients prompts Virgil to reel off a long list of *examples* [p. 261] of those who are with Homer and himself in Limbo. They are Roman playwrights, satirists and poets (Terence, Caecilius, Plautus, Varro and Persius), Greek playwrights and poets (Euripides, Antiphon, Simonides and Agathon), followed by female characters (Antigone, Deiphyle, Argia, Ismene, Hypsipyle, Manto, Thetis, and Deidamia with her sisters) appearing in Statius's own verses.

***MedLVI:2 Examples of Temperance: Purgatorio Canto XXII:115***

The *trio* [p. 340] of Poets reach the sixth terrace after 10.00am on the Wednesday morning (four 'handmaidens of the day', that is *hours* [p. 315], have gone since dawn at 6am) and they continue their anti-clockwise ascent of the Mount. Dante listens to the other two poets conversing about *poetry* [p. 303] until they reach a tree, *symbolic* [p. 334] of natural plenty, heavy with fruit and drenched by a stream cascading down its inverted cone, so that it forms a cornucopia. Its perfume we will discover creates the desire for food and drink, and tantalises the spirits who are purging themselves of gluttony. A voice warns them towards temperance, counter to *gluttony* [p. 274], and gives them *examples* [p. 261], first from the life of the Virgin, the marriage at Cana again, then alternating Classical and Biblical examples: from the writings of Thomas Aquinas who recommended sobriety to women and young people, quoting Valerius Maximus II i. 3 '*Vini usus olim romanis feminis ignotus fuit*: the use of wine was once unknown to young Roman women.' : Daniel who refused the king's meat and wine: The *Golden Age* [p. 276] referred to by Ovid and others, and finally John the Baptist eating honey and locusts in the desert.

**Meditation LVII: Purgatorio Canto XXIII**

***MedLVII:1 The Gluttonous: Purgatorio Canto XXIII:1***

Dante now hears a new *singing* [p. 323], of a verse from the *Miserere*, 'O Lord open thou my lips, and my mouth shall declare thy praise'. Mouths, which were in life dedicated to *gluttony* [p. 274], here are freed for repentant singing and weeping. The spirits are wasted by hunger, purging their gluttony, and Dante gives us a Classical and a Biblical *parallel* [p. 261], Erysichthon who committed sacrilege against the corn-goddess Ceres (Demeter), was persecuted by hunger, in retribution, and ate his own flesh: and Mary of Jerusalem who, out of starvation, consumed her own child during Titus's terrible siege of the city. The scent of the fruit and water from the tree create a desire for food and drink that cannot be satisfied here, like the torments of Tantalus, and the *spirits* [p. 330] cavernous faces fancifully form the word 'omo' or 'Man'.

**MedLVII:2 Forese Donati: Purgatorio Canto XXIII:37**

Dante *recognises* [p. 310] the voice alone of Forese Donati, his former friend, and is robbed of fluent *speech* [p. 328] by his desire to know why the spirits look as they do. Forese, the brother of Corso and Piccarda, (and a distant relation of Dante's wife Gemma Donati, with whose brother Forese di Manetto Donati he has sometimes been confused) explains the power of the tree's fragrance, but also its solace since it leads spiritually to the tree of the crucifixion and the redemption from sin. Forese gives us an *individual* [p. 282] insight into *Dante's* [p. 252] life following the death of Beatrice, a life of spiritual neglect and dissipation. There are some scurrilous sonnets extant between Forese (nicknamed Bicci Novello) and Dante (Dante Gabriel Rossetti translates them in his *Early Italian Poets*) that give a flavour of it and seem to confirm Forese's reputation for gluttony and lust. Forese taunts Dante in verse regarding the failure to avenge Geri del Bello Alighieri, whom we met in Inferno XXIX. Dante taunts Forese for his rapacity and his neglect of his wife Nella, but now makes amends, since it seems that Nella's tears and *prayers* [p. 305] have sent Forese swiftly through Purgatory to this sixth terrace.

Here is an excuse for Forese, praising Nella's goodness, to attack the immodesty of the shameless Florentine women, with their fashions that exposed the naked breasts in public, and he *prophesies* [p. 307] some imminent decree or other against it.

Forese questions Dante regarding his solid body, and Dante hints once more at the life not merely of philosophical or religious error that Virgil rescued him from, but also of that moral unworthiness that he and Forese had experienced together. Virgil is the companion who leads him to Beatrice, and will leave him with her as guide. Statius is the cause of the earthquake. Dante is being drawn to think of his personal life, by meeting Forese, and there is more to follow.

## Meditation LVIII: Purgatorio Canto XXIV

### ***MedLVIII:1 Bonagiunta of Lucca: Purgatorio Canto XXIV:1***

Dante suggests Statius the Christian is slowed by his Pagan companion Virgil, as they speed onwards *like* [p. 315] a ship, and he himself continues to *question* [p. 259] Forese. He asks after Forese's sister Piccarda, who is in Paradise, and whom we will meet later in the sphere of the Moon. Among the barely recognisable shrivelled faces Forese points to Bonagiunta. Bonagiunta Orbicciani degli Overardi was a notary and poet, of Lucca, who died between 1296 and 1300. Jacopo da Lentino (*il Notaio*, the Notary), Guittone del Viva known as Fra Guittone, of Arezzo (1230-1294: one of the *Frati Gaudenti*) in his first poetic period, and Bonagiunta, were prominent members of the Sicilian school of Poetry, continued in Central Italy, based on Provençal traditions. Their style lacked the spontaneity and sweetness of the *dolce stil nuovo* developed by Guido Guinicelli of Bologna, Guido Cavalcanti and Dante. Dante's personal strand of thought has led him to *poetry* [p. 303], via Forese.

Here too are Pope Martin IV, the glutton, who died of a surfeit of eels, and other examples of that weakness: Ubaldino della Pila the father of Archbishop Ruggieri of Pisa, whom we met in the Ninth Circle of Inferno, Bonifazio Archbishop of Ravenna, and Marchese Argogliosi of Forlì, a noted drinker.

### ***MedLVIII:2 Poetry and Florence: Purgatorio Canto XXIV:34***

Dante singles out Bonagiunta, who *prophesies* [p. 307] Dante's meeting with Gentucca, the beautiful wife of Cosciorino Fondora of Lucca. She was a friend to Dante between 1314 and 1316, when he was at Lucca. She was still unmarried in 1300 (and did not wear the *benda*, or headdress reserved for married women, and, when white, for widows.) Clearly Dante seeks to stress the innocence of this friendship and patronage. Bonagiunta *recognises* [p. 310] Dante as the author of the first canzone of the *Vita Nuova*, 'Ladies who have knowledge of Love', and Dante replies in a neatly turned verse indicating that the heart of the *dolce stil nuovo* was that *Love* [p. 288] itself

dictated to the *poets* [p. 303] of that school, and they were driven to write by Love and its emotional and intellectual truth, not mere literary ambition.

The *flock* [p. 315] of spirits passes on, while Forese is left as a straggler, speaking to Dante a phrase of peculiarly deep feeling, combining friendship, love, pathos and poignancy, since it involves *Dante's* [p. 252] own death and purgation: 'When will I see you again?' Dante expresses his desire to leave his life, and the bitterness of the state of Italy and Florence, which leads Forese to *prophesy* [p. 307] once more, concerning the fate of his own brother Corso, Podestà of Bologna, in 1283 and 1288, and of Pistoia, in 1289, and leader of the Florentine Neri.

Following a revolutionary period in Florence between the 'magnates' (the great men) and the 'popolo' (the tradesmen) that ended in the Ordinances of Justice in 1293, the oligarchy of Guelph families, Papal supporters, regained power. The Guelph party then split after 1295 into what became the Black and White Guelphs. Corso Donati led the conservative magnate Black faction, and Vieri de' Cerchi, a banker, led the Whites. Corso was then banished and went to Rome, where he fomented discontent with the Florentine leadership, and in the spring of 1300 Florence decided to prosecute a group of Florentine businessmen at the Papal Court for conspiring against the leadership. Dante as a White, and for two months a Prior, one of the six supreme officers of the City, concurred. Corso and others eventually induced Boniface to bring in Charles de Valois to broker a peace in Florence between the exiled factions. Charles and his army entered Florence on November 1st 1301. Charles then favoured the Blacks, and there was a coup d'état which led to the exile or prosecution of the Whites, including of course Dante who had left the city, was sentenced *in absentia* in January 1302 to exile, and in March condemned to death again *in absentia*. Corso subsequently tried to gain supreme power. Suspected of intrigue with his father-in-law Ugucione della Faggiuola the Ghibelline captain, and the Papal legate Napoleone Orsini, to overthrow the government, and become lord of Florence, he was condemned to death when the plot was discovered (on October 6th 1308). He fled through the Porta Santa Croce but was overtaken and killed by Catalan mercenaries in the service of the King of Naples. He was said to have thrown himself from his horse and been lanced to death on the ground. Dante develops this equine imagery as a *metaphor* [p. 315] of runaway ambition leading to destruction.

Forese now strides away so as not to lose time, and he seems like a horseman of a different kind, one riding out to win honour. There is a distinct feel here of another friendship, another deeply felt *individual* [p. 282], one met in Hell, Brunetto Latini, last seen not like one condemned but like one running for a prize.

***MedLVIII:3 Examples of Excess: The Angel: Purgatorio Canto XXIV:100***

Forese vanishes ahead and the three Poets reach a second fruit-tree, grafted from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that Eve ate from. Dante therefore associates the excess desire being purged on this terrace with the excessive desire for *knowledge* [p. 349], and the disobedience, that led Eve to eat of the apple, and give some also to Adam to eat. 'And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.' (Genesis 3:7). A voice now cites *examples* [p. 261] of *excess* [p. 274], one Classical, the Centaurs who fought Theseus and the Lapiths after drinking to excess: the second Biblical, the men whom Gideon refused as companions for their excessive method of drinking water.

They reach the *Angel* [p. 241] of Temperance, glowing *like* [p. 315] glass or metal in a furnace, who tells *Dante* [p. 252] the way, and he turns back towards his teachers, like a good student. With a beautiful image of the May breeze, the Angel's wings erase another letter P from his forehead, while the Angel *speaks* [p. 323] an interpretation of the Fourth Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are those which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.' used also at the start of Canto XXII. Dante is preaching the Middle Way, but in a Christian context, where *grace* [p. 277] illuminates, sensation is moderated, and hunger and desire is for what is just and right.

## Meditation LIX: Purgatorio Canto XXV

### *MedLIX:1 The Unified Soul: Purgatorio Canto XXV:1*

It is the afternoon of Wednesday, around 2pm, with the sun in Taurus, and Scorpio its opposite sign set below the horizon, as they climb to the seventh and last terrace of purgation, that of Lust. With a series of *similes* [p. 315] and analogies: the young stork, the arrow of speech, Meleager, and the reflected image in a mirror, Dante expresses his need to *question* [p. 259] further as to the nature of the *spirit* [p. 330] bodies, and Virgil replies. Statius is called on to explain, and *courteously* [p. 250] does so. Dante has an opportunity now to display his partly *scientific* [p. 313], partly *philosophical* [p. 300] ‘knowledge’ of human embryology and growth, and add his own speculative explanation of the ‘shades’ of the dead.

Impregnation of the female partner with semen, Dante’s absorbed ‘perfect blood’, having the power to invigorate, or add life, causes the blood of both partners to be mixed, the male active, the female passive. This mixed blood with its power to engender life, creates the embryo and develops organs. The embryo possesses life, shared with the vegetable kingdom, and added to it sensation and feeling, shared with the animal kingdom. Dante here parts company with the teaching of Averroës.

Averroës, Ibn Rushd, 1128-1198 AD, was an *Arabian* [p. 242] physician and commentator on Aristotle. He espoused a sceptical philosophy, and as ‘*the Commentator*’ in Latin translation c. 1250 made Aristotle’s philosophy supreme in the Middle Ages. Dante placed him among the group of wise men in Limbo. He taught, ‘in error’, that the human intellect being potential not actualised, discursive rather than intuitive like the angels, could not have its seat in the actual organs in the way that animals have intelligence, and so existed independently of physical form. He does however make self-consciousness a characteristic of the rational or intellectual soul, as life is of the vegetable soul, and sensation of the animal soul. ‘The action of the intellect is likened to a circle, because it turns round upon itself, and comprehends itself.’ He suggests that the intellect in man is a facet of the universal intellect, loaned temporarily, and reuniting with the universal intellect after death.



Dante rejects this and proclaims the alternative ‘truth’, that as soon as the brain is complete *God* [p. 274], delighting in it as a work of *nature* [p. 293], breathes the rational spirit into it, which combines with what is already there (traditionally the natural spirit of sensations and feelings sited in the liver and the vital spirit of life sited in the heart, roughly corresponding to Averroës’ vegetable and animal souls, the ideas deriving from Aristotle, whose *De Anima* was particularly influential) and forms the unified soul which persists after death. While the Averroists viewed the emotions as a manifestation of matter, the understanding of the mind was a transient implant of the universal intellect, which would separate from the defunct feelings and individual will at death. For Dante this would preclude the ongoing unity of the spirit, the ability to exercise *freewill* [p. 271] and to *suffer* [p. 310] in Hell and Purgatory, and the relinquishment of individual *memory* [p. 292] and *knowledge* [p. 349]. So the single soul ‘lives and feels and is conscious of itself’ beyond the grave. Dante now explains how.

After death the unified soul leaves the body, retaining memory, intellect and will, and is sent to its location in the afterlife. The formative power existing in the soul imprints the air around it, and stamps its likeness on its surroundings, so that the ‘shadow’ or ‘shade’ follows the spirit as a flame follows the fire. The outward appearance is a direct manifestation of the inward feelings, desires and affections. The form expresses the soul. So the spirits purging gluttony desire to eat and drink, and suffer hunger and thirst, and appear emaciated.

Dante’s analogy with Meleager whose spirit was linked to the firebrand, and the reflection in the mirror that moves with the object reflected, are now understood. Just such a linkage exists between the unified soul and its ‘shade’.

### ***MedLIX:2 The Seventh Terrace: Purgatorio Canto XXV:109***

Now the Poets reach the seventh terrace. As the first terrace where *Pride* [p. 306] is purged makes us look back to that all-pervading failing of Inferno, Satan’s sin, which is also one of *Dante’s* [p. 252] major weaknesses, so the last terrace in purging *Lust* [p. 291], his other major weakness, from the spirit, looks forward to the imminent meeting with a transfigured Beatrice, beyond physical desire. So Dante’s own two great failings directly link Purgatory

with Inferno and with Paradise, as we follow the individual and personal strand of his journey. Pride is humbled by a burden: Lust is purged by the flames. The Poets walk along the narrow path by the cliff, hearing the spirits *singing* [p. 323] in the fire: they sing the Matin hymn, with its opening words, as given prior to the revision of the Breviary by Pope Urban VIII in 1631: '*Summae Deus Clementae*. God of supreme mercy,' which contains a prayer for protection against lustfulness. The third verse ran '*Lumbos iecurque morbidum Flammis adure congruis, Accincti ut artus excubent Luxu remoto pessimo*: burning the loins and unwholesome passion with like flames, so that the limbs purged might sleep free of evil *Lust* [p. 291].' Dante both gazes at the spirits in the fire, and is forced to turn away, staring at his feet, and into his own past. Then the spirits shout out *examples* [p. 261] of chastity: Mary at the Annunciation, and Diana preserving the chastity of her sacred band by driving away the fallen Callisto. So the spirits go purging themselves, alternately singing, and shouting out examples of virtue and chaste marriage.

## **Meditation LX: Purgatorio Canto XXVI**

### ***MedLX:1 The Lustful: the Poets: Purgatorio Canto XXVI:1***

The Poets are walking in a southerly direction on the Western slope of the Mount, when the spirits question Dante's living presence among them. Dante now parallels the Second Circle of Inferno, that of the carnal sinners. Here too couples meet, but not entangled together in passion, more in blind friendship of desire as they pass, *like* [p. 315] ants, not like Paolo and Francesca's doves, and they shout out examples of Biblical and Classical excessive lust: Sodom and Gomorrah, the sinful *Cities* [p. 248] of the Plain (Genesis XIX): and Pasiphae who hid herself in a wooden frame, made by Daedalus to resemble a heifer, so that she could mate with a white bull from the sea. One set of sinners are the homosexual Sodomites of Caesar's persuasion, the others are heterosexuals who were beastly in their excesses. Then they part *like* [p. 315] two like crowds of cranes flying, where in Hell the carnal sinners were like a flight of starlings.

The sinners are amazed at Dante, like men from the wilds entering a

city<sup>[p. 248]</sup>, that focal place in Dante's mind of sin and lust, but there is plenty of *courtesy*<sup>[p. 250]</sup> here, this is the place after all where the passionate excesses of Courtly Love are also purged. Dante, who learnt his poetic art following the schools of *Provence*<sup>[p. 343]</sup>, now meets a predecessor, and forerunner of the *dolce stil nuovo*. The spirit is the *poet*<sup>[p. 303]</sup> Guido Guinicelli, and with a graceful passing reference to Statius's *Thebaid* and the story of Lycurgus and Hypsipyle, Dante pays him tribute. Guido (c1235-1276), was valued highly by Dante and his companions, as 'their' philosopher. He was a member of the Ghibelline Principi family of Bologna, and was Podestà of Castelfranco in 1270 and exiled in 1274 with the Lambertazzi. He began as an imitator of the later style of Guittone d'Arezzo. His best work, including the canzone of the Gentle Heart ('*Al cor gentil ripara sempre Amore*. Love always shelters in the gentle heart, as birds do in the green shade of the trees. No love in nature before the gentle heart, nor the gentle heart before love.'), inspired the Florentine School of Guido Cavalcanti, Dante and others. Dante's words are unusually humble, but Guinicelli's reply soon endorses Dante's exceptional poetic worth! Not blatant Pride perhaps: but *Dante's*<sup>[p. 252]</sup> weaknesses of Lust and Pride meet again on this terrace: perhaps he is being self-aware and there is an ironic humour running below the smooth surface.

Dante too had suffered from *Love's*<sup>[p. 288]</sup> attack on the heart, through the eyes, and along the bloodstream, he too had grappled with that irrational force, and by bringing his intellect to bear had at last understood the way to transcend the poetic thought of his youth. The destructive power of unrequited love, a great theme of Courtly Love poetry, was a theme he well understood, aspects of which are documented in the early parts of the *Vita Nuova*, where torment due to passion in life or after death is a matter of indifference to the intoxicated lover, reminiscent of the radical, secular thrust of Heloise's letters, and of *Aucassin and Nicolette*. But the *Vita Nuova* then sweeps on towards a new ennobled and positive view of Love as a redeeming force, initiated by Beatrice's death. She is beyond the physical now, an untouchable. Love is unrequited on earth but now fuels a spiritual journey towards Beatrice as the emblem of Divine grace. Love grants the lover the power to progress towards Paradise. Reason and Intellect give him the power to understand and to learn. Free will grants him the power to turn Reason towards Divine Love and so climb the mountain of virtue. Beatrice though she will still elicit a deep physical

response in Dante at the summit of Purgatory, though her beauty is still apparent to him, though we cannot but feel an emotional if not an erotic charge from her presence, offers him a route to sublimation, as her spiritual authority leads him onwards and eventually beyond her. That concept of the erotic is anyway not central to Dante's age. Strong feeling is allowed to fully accompany deep religious experience: it was manifest in the religious orders of St Francis and St Clare, in the lives of ordinary holy men and women, a world of miracles, conversions, devotions and ecstasies. The Church is the Bride of God. The Virgin is worshipped as virgin, mother, and goddess. The physical realities of Christianity have shape in the flesh. But the sexual component is subsumed in the acceptance of physical reality its feelings, sufferings, compassion, passion, and then transcended in the spiritual. *Beatrice* [p. 245] is saint and angel, woman and beloved. She is redeeming grace, and nobility, beauty and radiance, divine philosophy and a mirror of God. She is faith, hope and joy, charity and empathy, goodness and virtue. She is his transcendent figure pointing the way to the uttermost source of Light, and she is, she is, Beatrice.

Ah, says Guido, this man was a better poet than I, *il miglior fabbro*, one who surpassed Giraut de Borneil, the 'master of the *Troubadours* [p. 343]', and Fra Guittone of the Sicilian School. And he vanishes through the fire like a fish through water. The better poet is Arnaut Daniel, the Provençal poet, who flourished between 1180 and 1200 with Richard Coeur de Lion among his patrons. (See Ezra Pound's poem 'Near Perigord' in his collection *Lustra*). Arnaut was a master of the *trobar clus* or hidden style, inventing the *sestina* form, and it was for this above all that Dante and others regarded him so highly perhaps, rather than his sentiment. In the Provençal poem Dante now invents for him, its sweet French rhythm enclosed in *terza rima*, he refers to the style that *hides*, and is here open, and reminds Dante to consider his *own* punishment to come, for Lust, as Dante himself goes onward. And Arnaut before likewise vanishing in the flames, gives Dante a summary of Dante's own journey, from folly to the promise of joy, from destructive passion to spiritual hope, leaving him with that reminder of his own purgation to be experienced after death. Dante has expressed his poetic, his amorous, and his spiritual journey in this Canto, winding the threads together, making out of life, love and poetry a stairway to the Heavens.

## Meditation LXI: Purgatorio Canto XXVII

### ***MedLXI:1 The Angel of Chastity: Purgatorio Canto XXVII:1***

The sun is setting at the base of the Mount, at approximately 6pm here on the western slopes, and it is dawn in Jerusalem, midnight in Spain (Libra on the meridian there) and noon in India. The *Angel* [p. 241] of Chastity appears beyond the flames *singing* [p. 323] the sixth beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount: *Beati mundo corde*: blessed are the pure in heart.'

Though all three poets go through the flames, Dante is absorbed in self-knowledge. He will pass this way again, and must enter the fire. Virgil reassures him, though Dante is troubled by *conscience* [p. 250], and it is the *hope* [p. 279] of seeing *Beatrice* [p. 245] that rouses him, her name alone that stirs him, and *like* [p. 315] a child he is tempted by a promise to go on. With a poet before and behind him he steps into the fire, hotter than molten glass, while Virgil comforts him, and holds out again the promise of seeing Beatrice's *eyes* [p. 257]. On the far side another voice sings a vitally appropriate verse from Matthew (25:34), the separation of the sheep from the goats: note the traditional association of goats with *Lust* [p. 291], while the sheep of righteousness are such as provide protection to the exile and aid the stranger. The sheep enter the kingdom: the goats are condemned to the everlasting fire.

The sun finally sets here, higher up the Mount, and the Poets stop to rest as night overtakes them, and the power to climb vanishes. And to reinforce the image of the sheep and the goats, *Dante* [p. 252] makes himself the goat, now reflecting deeply on his past life, while the other two are the shepherds guarding him. And as he reflects, seeing the promise and hope of the *stars* [p. 331], brighter now, from the confines of the rock and of his past, he slips into 'prophetic' *sleep* [p. 326].

### ***MedLXI:2 The Third Dream: Purgatorio Canto XXVII:94***

Just before sunrise, at the hour when Venus, the planet of Love, shines, in Pisces, the sign of religion, Dante *dreams* [p. 255], and Leah and Rachel appear

as the *symbols* [p. 334] of the active and contemplative life. Leah gathers the flowers of the field for a garland: Rachel contemplates life in the mirror of mind. In Convivio IV (xvii 9-10) Dante quoted Aristotle in the Ethics X, and Christ in Luke's Gospel in his speech to Martha and Mary, as praising both ways as roads to good, but that the way of contemplation is the superior road. *Philosophy* [p. 300] and reason move the spirit nearer to perfection. Here Dante takes the balanced view that both paths lead to the truth. He does not seem to align the active life with the beatitude of this world dependent on earthly virtues, and that of contemplation with philosophy and the theological virtues, but rather it suggests that he is honouring both active virtue and philosophy equally. Nevertheless it is Rachel whom *Beatrice* [p. 245] sits with in heaven, as Inferno II attests. It is Dawn. Dante wakes.

***MedLXI:3 Virgil's Last Words to Dante: Purgatorio Canto XXVII:115***

Here in this last speech of Virgil's to Dante is the full *hope* [p. 279] and promise of the Purgatorio. Virgil has guided Dante to the summit of the stair. He has brought him to long for the final sweetness, the fruition of understanding and love, though he himself cannot pass on towards it. This is the greatness and glory of the teacher and the master, to point the way to a promised land that he himself may not reach. *Virgil* [p. 346] has attained the end of his own knowledge, of earthly *philosophy* [p. 300], of the ancient pagan wisdom, of his own poetry and his own loyalties. Skill and art are complete for him. Ahead is the Earthly Paradise, signalled by the *light* [p. 287] of the sun and the *beauty* [p. 247] of uncultivated *nature* [p. 293]. Here Dante can rest while those *eyes* [p. 257], *Beatrice's* [p. 245] twin suns of virtue, move towards him. And here are his final words. Dante's spirit is purged and freed, his *will* [p. 271], and this was the objective of the journey through Inferno and along the Mount, is whole and freely directed towards the good, and with that Virgil crowns him and mitres him over himself, signifying that the kingdoms of the earth, the *Empire* [p. 256] and the *Church* [p. 296], are *symbolically* [p. 334] superseded in the redeemed and individual *soul* [p. 330], and that the self is finally in ruler-ship over itself. Moral innocence is recovered. Divine Philosophy will absorb earthly philosophy: and Revelation will enhance wisdom, beyond all human institutions.

## Meditation LXII: Purgatorio Canto XXVIII

### *MedLXII:1 Matilda: The Earthly Paradise: Purgatorio Canto XXVIII:1*

Dante, empowered by his freed will, takes the lead now, and with Virgil (who from now on remains silent) and Statius, he enters the Divine wood that contrasts, in its *natural* [p. 293] *beauty* [p. 247], and *innocence* [p. 276], with the dark wood of Canto I of Inferno where the journey first began. Just as at first in Inferno he no longer remembered how he entered that first dark wood through sin, so now, reborn, in this mirror wood, he forgets his first entry into that fallen state through new-found virtue. In a passage of sustained poetic power (see Shelley's lovely translation of these verses) Dante welcomes the breeze, blowing from the East, the direction of the Resurrection and the rising sun of this Easter Thursday. He *compares* [p. 315] the light air to the south-easterly Sirocco wind through the pine-woods on Chiassi's shore (Chiassi, near Ravenna, was the Classis of the Romans, a naval harbour), and then moves on until he reaches the stream of Lethe, the purest of waters, that takes away the memory of sin. With his *eyes* [p. 257], those emblems of the cardinal virtues, he looks beyond the stream, and sees *a lady* [p. 337] there, gathering flowers and singing. She is Matilda, a symbol of the active spiritual life, *Beatrice's* [p. 245] counterpart, who gathers the flowers of life, and sings its virtue, warming herself in the light of Love. Dante refers us to the great vegetation myth of ancient Greece, celebrated at Eleusis, of the mother, Ceres-Demeter, and her lost child, of the spring and the summer harvest that alternates with the dead months of winter from which the earth is resurrected. She evokes the image of Persephone, incarnation of the Spring, on the plain of Enna, before her rape by Dis. She therefore *symbolises* [p. 334] innocence untarnished, the power of the earth, not yet fallen and dragged into the underworld of Dis, that Inferno we visited, that wintry land, frozen at its core. In a single complex image Dante has linked the Resurrection to its originating myth, that of Osiris, of Attis, of Adonis, to the pre-Classical and Classical rituals of the seasonal rebirth of the world, to a world before the Fall, and to Eve before she ate of the tree of knowledge. Coming so soon after the terrace where Dante's Lust has

been purged, we feel the deliberate contrast he makes between corruption and innocence, moral unworthiness and primal virtue. And he realises her innocence in himself, recognises her as one of those ‘appearances, so often witness to the heart’.

The name Matilda signified to Dante a promise of reconciliation and pardon. He would have recalled the fervent support of the Church that Matelda di Canossa, the energetic and spirited *Grancontessa* of Tuscany (1046-1114), granted to the reforming Gregory VII who sought an independent Papacy, and to successive Popes in her lifetime. Thanks partly to her mediation, on January 27, 1077, the Emperor Henry IV, who had been excommunicated in 1075, was received in her castle at Canossa, and pardoned by Pope Gregory, after waiting humbly for three days barefoot in the snow. Matilde would therefore have represented to Dante not only the spirit of forgiveness and the mercy that he himself anticipated from Beatrice, after his *three* [p. 340] days purgation on the Mount, but also the reconciliation of the Empire with the reformed and purged Church, each operating within its proper sphere. She left her extensive lands and castles to the Church, and it is she that the name Matelda would instantly recall to the mind of a Tuscan of 1300. I think the early commentators were right in this, and that it is a mistake to think that Dante considered Matilda as an anti-Imperialist. Dante rather sees her as establishing the balance between the two powers.

Matilda’s dancing steps are the first presentiment of the footsteps of Beatrice. She is the child Proserpine who heralds the returning presence of Demeter, the Goddess, and all those Goddess associations of the Virgin, and her predecessors through history and pre-history, all those primal Consorts of the regenerated God.

It was all a loss, says Dante. As Demeter lost her Persephone, so Man and Woman lost the primal innocence and beauty of the Garden before the Fall, lost the Spring of Human life, were cut off from its source.

### ***MedLXII:2 The Garden Explained: Purgatorio Canto XXVIII:52***

Her feet turning *like* [p. 315] a lady dancing, her *eyes* [p. 257] as Venus’s, inadvertently in love with Adonis (again a reference to the vegetation myth,



and indirectly to Adonis the sun-consort of the earth, and an analogue, *Adonai: Lord*, to Christ), among the red and yellow flowers of chastity and love, Matilda *smiles* [p. 326], so involving all the virtues, cardinal and theological, in eyes and smile. The flowers here are engendered without seed, again in primal innocence, and *three* [p. 340] steps apart because of the river, Dante [p. 252] looks across at Matilda, loathing the barrier, as Leander hated the Hellespont, the check to pride, that kept him from Hero. Dante invokes a story of ‘innocent’ love, but a highly sexually charged story, and there is a suggestion, a merest hint here, that in his look, his response to Matilda’s smile, he is prompted to think still of lust, and pride, and she responds by clarifying the reason for her smile, in this place which was chosen as a ‘nest’ for the race, her *singing* [p. 323] is of Psalm 92 v4: ‘*Delectasti me, Domine in factura tua*. For, thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work.’

Matilda is there to be *questioned* [p. 259], and Dante asks about the nature of the wood and the water. The Garden was that which was made for Mankind before the Fall and lost through Adam’s fault and Eve’s. *God* [p. 274], who is his own delight, created Man and Woman as good, and destined for *goodness* [p. 277]. It was raised above the storms of Earth as a place of *peace* [p. 298], a divine pledge.

Dante now gives a pseudo-*scientific* [p. 313] explanation for the breeze: it is due to the air being swept round with the celestial spheres rather than with the earth. Plants that are struck by the breeze impregnate the air and are propagated without seed, occasionally in the northern hemisphere too. The plain contains all the kinds of seed. The water flows from a continuously replenished source and not from normal rainfall. It divides to form Lethe and Eunoë. The one stream removes the memory of sin: the other revives the memory of virtue. The poetic idea of the *Golden Age* [p. 276] was perhaps a *dream* [p. 255] of the Earthly Paradise. Matilda once more ties primal innocence to that anciently worshipped rebirth of the world in springtime: at this Easter of the Vision. Virgil and Statius *smile* [p. 326] with approval at her reference to the songs of the ancient poets, and this divine wisdom. Dante looks back toward the face of Matilda, the lady of the threshold. In *Monarchia* Dante had asserted that the beatitude of this life, which consists of the workings of one’s own virtue, is figured in the Earthly Paradise. Matilda is here the personification of that active rational virtue. The Earthly Paradise is a place of peace, beauty, humanism, and classical wisdom.

The beatitude of the eternal life however consists of the enjoyment of the Vision of God, enabled through grace, and is the Heavenly Paradise. The first is achieved by the exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues: the second by spiritual teaching that goes beyond human reason, and by the exercise of the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity. They, as we shall see, are represented by Beatrice.

## **Meditation LXIII: Purgatorio Canto XXIX**

### ***MedLXIII:1 The Divine Pageant: Purgatorio Canto XXIX:1***

*Singing* [p. 323], *like* [p. 315] a lady in love, Matilda confirms her symbolic role as the keeper of the threshold of reconciliation and *forgiveness* [p. 268]. She sings 'Beati, quorum tecta sunt peccata: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.' (Psalm 32: verse 1). She wanders along like a classical nymph of the woodlands, with Dante tracking her course, on the far side of the stream. Their steps curve with the banks of the stream towards the religiously symbolic East, direction of the risen sun, and a great *light* [p. 287] floods the forest accompanied by a sweet melody. Dante regrets the Fall that robbed Man of this bliss, and so delayed his own awareness of it.

Dante now *invokes* [p. 303] the Muses, the sacred Mount, Helicon (its streams were Aganippe and Hippocrene), one of their haunts, and above all Urania, the Muse of *Astronomy* [p. 331], the Heavenly Spheres and their music. She was also the mother of Linus the mythical poet. Once more it is hard for Dante to find expression in *words* [p. 328] for things seen in the Vision. What appears is the Divine Pageant, which stuns *Virgil* [p. 346] also. The whole thing is a *symbolic* [p. 334] procession representing the *Church* [p. 296].

The seven candlesticks are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Dante employs the imagery of Revelation (i:12, 20 and iv:5). According to Isaiah (Vulgate xi: 2,3) the gifts are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Might, Knowledge, Pity, and Fear of the Lord. Dante at first believes them to be seven golden trees but as he nears is undeceived. The senses are not individually deceived by their 'proper' objects - colour, sound, savour, scent, texture, according to Aristotle, but can be deceived by the 'common' objects of the senses - motion, number, shape and size. 'Hosanna' is being

*sung* [p. 323], the word with which the Jews hailed Jesus on entering Jerusalem (Matthew xxi:9, Mark xi:9, John xii:13).

The seven banners are the seven sacraments, or the working of the seven gifts. The rainbow may have been suggested by Revelation iv 3. The ten paces are probably the Ten Commandments.

The twenty-four elders are the books of the Old Testament (the twelve minor prophets counted as one, First and Second Kings as one, and the same with Samuel, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah). The white garments are emblematical of Faith: see Hebrews xi. The basic concept is from Revelation iv 4. The lily crowns (*fleur-de-luce* is iris, but the French royal emblem is equated with a lily) suggest purity of faith and teaching. They *sing* [p. 323] 'Blessed art thou among women' the words of the Angel Gabriel, and of Elizabeth, to Mary. See Luke i 28 and 42.

The four beasts are described in Ezekiel i 4-14 and Revelation iv 6-9. Their faces of man, lion, ox and eagle represent Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (and incidentally the four fixed Zodiacal signs of Aquarius, Leo, Taurus, and Scorpio). The green leaves indicate *Hope* [p. 279]. See I Timothy i 1. The six wings are the six laws (according to Pietro di Dante) Natural, Mosaic, Prophetic, Evangelical, Apostolic, and Canonical. The *eyes* [p. 257] indicate knowledge of past and future. John says the beasts have six wings, Ezekiel four. Dante follows the writings of St John the Divine, taking the New Testament as more authoritative.

The two wheels of the Church's chariot are the contemplative and active life (or the Old and New Testaments, or the Franciscan and Dominican orders, or all three in simultaneous and complex allegory.).

The Grifon is Christ, half eagle and half lion in his divine golden, and human red-and-white aspects. The wings are Mercy, and Truth or Justice. See Psalms 36 verses 5 7, and 10, and 57 verses 1 and 11. The three theological virtues *Faith* [p. 264] in white, *Hope* [p. 279] in green, and *Charity* [p. 302] in red, dance by the right hand wheel (They are also perhaps the Three Graces, Giving, Receiving and Thanking), Charity gives them their measure, see First Corinthians xiii 13 'but the greatest of these is Charity,' while sometimes Faith leads.

The four moral or cardinal virtues Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance, are by the left wheel. Prudence has the three *eyes* [p. 257], which

see Past, Present and Future, and the purple dress of the four moral virtues is that of the Imperial Law.

The depiction of the Books of the New Testament continues. The two aged men are Luke, considered as the author of Acts. Paul calls him 'the beloved physician' in Colossians iv 14, and he is regarded as a spiritual Hippocrates. Paul is shown with the sword of his martyrdom, and of the spirit, see Ephesians vi 17 'the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.' Behind them come James, Peter, John and Jude, the 'humble' authors of the four catholic, canonical Epistles. Finally comes John the Divine, the author of Revelation, the visionary Apocalypse. (There are alternative interpretations.)

The roses, and other crimson flowers, that the seven wear represent Charity, where the Old Testament Elders wore white lilies representing Purity.

There is a clap of thunder and the whole panoply halts. Signalled by that last figure of Saint John the Divine we are entering a moment of Visionary Revelation.

## **Meditation LXIV: Purgatorio Canto XXX**

### ***MedLXIV:1 Beatrice: Purgatorio Canto XXX:1***

The seven candlesticks (the gifts of the Holy Spirit) that guide the faithful, as [p. 315] the *Little Bear* [p. 331] guides sailors, come to a halt. The twenty-four Elders (the Books of the Old Testament) turn to face the chariot of the *Church* [p. 296], and the Elder representing the books of Solomon *sings* [p. 323], *three* [p. 340] times, '*Veni sponsa de Libano: Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon.*' from the Song of Solomon iv 8. Dante mentions that the *Saints* [p. 313] will rise from their tombs, their spirits reunited with their bodies, and sing *Alleluia*, on the Day of Judgement, this an un-translated Hebrew word used as a chant of praise, taken over from synagogue usage (the Hebrew *halleluyah* meaning 'praise ye Jehovah'). The Church is the bride: the spouse of Christ: and Dante places a significant weight on the greatness of Solomon, which he will re-iterate later in the Paradiso.

The hundred spirits who rise in the chariot, sing the *Benedictus*, prescribed for Lauds, the first day-hour, by Saint Benedict: '*Benedictus qui venit*. Blessed is he that comest in the name of the Lord.' (See Matthew xxi 9, Mark xi 9, Luke xix 38, John xii 13.), the words said at Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and repeat words from *Aeneid* vi 884, '*Manibus o date lilia plenis*. Give lilies from full hands! I too shall scatter scarlet flowers...' the words said by Anchises regarding the funeral of Iulus (Ascanius) his grandson.'

Dante therefore combines, in the singing and speech, the Church as the bride of Christ: the words at the entry of Christ as the city welcomes him extended to all the blessed representatives of that Church: a parallel between the high virtues of Christ, and those of Ascanius in the full passage from Virgil, and in both cases their brief visit to earth, so linking the Advent, and the Church, with the Roman Imperial succession. *Roman* [p. 312] history and Christian history are both, Divinely, necessary and inevitable, both interlinked in the essential world history, according to Dante.

Now *Dante* [p. 252], like an initiate at Eleusis, at the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, who has travelled through the underworld, and climbed the Mount of Purgation, is fit for visionary *revelation* [p. 311]. He is ready, knowing now some of the secrets of life and death and the afterlife, to see his lost Persephone again, returned from the dead, beyond the dead, among the dead. And *Beatrice* [p. 245] appears, among the cascade of flowers, like the rising, regenerated, re-born sun among veiled cloud, like the 'goddess' of Dante's emotional and spiritual life returning from the darkness of loss and memory and winter. She is crowned with the olive of wisdom, and clothed in the colours white, green and red of the *three* [p. 340] theological virtues, faith, hope and charity. She is the Beatrice of ten years or so previously: the Beatrice dying young in 1290: the Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova*. Even before his eyes have brought him knowledge that it is she, the traditional way that the exponents of Courtly Love felt the power of their lady, he feels the virtue of her presence as of old. And she is Divine Philosophy, carried in the chariot of the Church, and its great glory.

He had been transfixed by sight of her when he was nine years old, and she a little younger, and he turns now as he *recognises* [p. 310] her, in her unchanged spiritual form, in her former beauty, turns towards Virgil, speaking words that translate *Aeneid* iv:23, '*Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae*. I know the tokens of the ancient flame.' But as Beatrice arrives to guide

Dante onwards, *Virgil* [p. 346] vanishes, his guidance no longer needed or possible, and not even Beatrice's beauty can prevent Dante's tears at the loss of Virgil's companionship. (Statius remains until the end of the Purgatorio.)

Beatrice directs her gaze at Dante across the stream, naming him (he does not name himself in the *Commedia* or elsewhere in his major writings, ascribing to the ancient ideas of literary modesty) encouraging him, and at the same time warning him that he will soon have more to weep over. Repeating the word *ben*: truly, *three* [p. 340] times she impresses upon him her reality, her identity, and her condemnation of the life he was leading, his temerity at approaching the Mount, so that he glances inadvertently at the water of Lethe which erases memory, but sees there his own face and his own memories, and looks away *ashamed* [p. 315], like a child before its mother, at the severe and bitter taste of her *pity* [p. 302] for him. The eyes here are the windows of the soul. 'Look at me' she says.

Angelic singing begins again: Psalm 31 lines 1-8. '*In te, Domine, speravi*: In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be *ashamed* [p. 315]...thou hast set *my feet* in a large room.' Dante, frozen by Beatrice's severity and his own shame, in a fine *analogy* [p. 315] with the Apennine snows melting like candle-wax at the touch of warmth from the African winds, weeps openly at the compassionate singing of the *Angels* [p. 241] who are tuned to the music of the *eternal spheres* [p. 331].

Beatrice stands on the left, the heart-side, and the meditative rather than active side of the chariot, and speaks to the Angels, the alert watchers of night and day. Dante, blessed by the *stars* [p. 331] that create human tendencies, but also with divine graces, should in his 'new life' of Love have been set fair towards virtue. While Beatrice was alive her *eyes* [p. 257], and the cardinal virtues demonstrated by her, directed him to virtue, but at her death he turned towards other physical manifestations of love, and away from the spiritual, future life, beyond death, she represented. Her presence in his *dreams* [p. 255] failed to rouse him. Only his journey through Inferno could do that, and so she went to Virgil and sent him to Dante as his guide. To pass beyond Lethe he must also *repent* [p. 298] with tears.

## Meditation LXV: Purgatorio Canto XXXI

### *MedLXV:1 Dante's Confession: Purgatorio Canto XXXI:1*

We are at the crucial stage of Dante's journey, in terms of his own spiritual life, and the thread of personal history that he has woven through the Inferno and Purgatorio. The Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso represent an analogue to his own Past, Present and Future: his past of moral and intellectual failing, his present of repentance and confession, and his hoped-for future of redemption. He is on the threshold of Paradise, Earthly and Heavenly, as he stood previously at the foot of the stair that led into Purgatory proper. Those *three* [p. 340] steps signified the three stages of the sacrament: *Repentance* [p. 298], *Confession* [p. 250] and *Forgiveness* [p. 268]. Here *Beatrice* [p. 245] acts as the Confessor. His past life has idealised her, and carried him towards her, now he must exalt her, and go beyond her physical being to what she represents and herself points towards, Universal Love.

She points the blade of accusation against him, as she has previously touched him with its edge, and he breaks under her questioning *like* [p. 315] the taut string of a crossbow under the stress. And he confesses to worldly distraction, to unspecified moral failing. Beatrice refers to the Siren, implying the seductions of lust and pride, of excess. The memory of her beauty, which was (and is here) supreme, should have stifled his interest in other mortal things. It should have inspired him to rise beyond the temptations of a young girl (*pargoletta*) or other vanities. He should have displayed a mature mind, been fully-fledged. (Dante employs an image derived from Prov. i.17 in the Vulgate: '*Frustra jacitur rete ante oculos pennatorum*: the net is cast in vain before the eyes of the winged'). Like a child he stands there ashamed, in repentance and confession, and she rebukes him, forces him to look up towards her as she gazes at the Grifon of Christ, the Angels having ceased to strew flowers over her, obscuring her. Under the veil of faith, and pure, beyond the stream of Lethe, beyond memory of sin, Beatrice is more *beautiful* [p. 247] than before, and *Dante* [p. 252] falls, stunned with remorse. Remember that he fell, stunned with pity, at the end of Canto V of the Inferno in the circle of Lovers, at the finish of Francesca's speech to him. Dante's hatred now is greatest for that *Lust* [p. 291] and that worldly Love that most consumed him, love of women, excessive

love of earthly philosophy alone, love of the transient, of 'false things' and 'false delights'.

***MedLXV:2 Lethe: Beatrice Unveiled: Purgatorio Canto XXXI:91***

Matilda, now, the agent of *forgiveness* [p. 268], the power of active virtue, speeds over the water of Lethe *like* [p. 315] a shuttle over the loom, drawing Dante through the stream. Near the other shore he hears Psalm 51: '*Asperges me*, cleanse me' *sung* [p. 323] so sweetly he cannot *remember* [p. 292] nor *describe* [p. 328] the quality of the singing. Matilda submerges him as in baptism, and forces him to drink the Lethe water, that takes away memory of sinful actions.

Dante is led among the *dance* [p. 251] of the cardinal virtues, by the left-hand contemplative wheel of the Chariot. They are Beatrice's 'helpers', who appear as nymphs here: but in heaven they are the four *stars* [p. 331] of the Southern Cross, which Dante saw in Purgatorio Canto I. They will lead him to Beatrice's *eyes* [p. 257] that are their earthly analogue. So they are a *triplicity* [p. 340] also: of eyes, nymphs and stars. They acknowledge the deeper vision of the three theological virtues who are on the right hand, active, side of the Chariot.

Dante now sees Christ the Grifon's double nature reflected in Beatrice's eyes, that contain the cardinal virtues, His divine and human reality alternating, while His true being remains indivisible. The three theological virtues (who are also the three Graces) now *dance* [p. 251], asking Beatrice to turn towards her faithful Dante, and out of *grace* [p. 277] which is needed to supplement human wisdom, unveil her face for him, and reveal her 'second beauty', second to her eyes, that of her *smile* [p. 326], which signifies their own triple virtues of faith, hope, and now charity which is also *forgiveness* [p. 268].

She does so, now that Dante has confessed and regained the state of innocence by drinking from Lethe. But once more the *poetic* [p. 303] capability falls short of the desire to depict its object, in this case *Beatrice's* [p. 245] revealed *beauty* [p. 247].



## Meditation LXVI: Purgatorio Canto XXXII

### ***MedLXVI:1 The Mystic Tree of Empire: Purgatorio Canto XXXII:1***

Dante, still thirsting from the ten-year dearth since her death (in 1290), *gazes* [p. 257] too intensely at Beatrice, and is rebuked by the Virtues. Turning away he adjusts his sight, and watches the Divine Pageant turn away to the (active) right, *like* [p. 315] a military formation (the Church Militant). Dante, Matilda and Statius follow the right wheel and walk with it through the forest of the Earthly Paradise, empty since the Fall. Dante, purified, his mind clear, his personal and spiritual destiny renewed, is now ready to understand *revelations* [p. 311] concerning the *Church* [p. 296] and the *Empire* [p. 256].

*Three* [p. 340] flights of an arrow further on, Beatrice descends from the Chariot and they all stand around a naked tree. This is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, see Genesis ii 9, that Adam ate from, the *symbol* [p. 334] of the temporal powers of the earth, the Empire and obedience to it, since the prohibition to eat of it was the origin of law and duty. The Tree, strangely, increases in breadth as it climbs higher since the Empire and its justice is destined to flourish with time according to Dante, while *Justice* [p. 285] is greater the nearer it is to God.

Christ was blessed in taking nothing from the temporal powers, and so leaving the Church to embrace radical poverty and dominion over the spiritual sphere alone. Justice and righteousness was maintained when the Church followed Christ (the Grifon) by not usurping the temporal power of the Empire, and vice versa. The chariot pole is the Cross, which, legend has it, was taken from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Christ bound it to the Tree, linking the Chariot of the Church and the Tree of Empire, but maintaining each in its proper sphere, and the Empire blossomed in royal or Imperial purple after the advent of Christianity (the sun, shining from Aries at the Nativity) in *Pisces* [p. 331] the sign of the Christian era (since the spring equinox fell in Pisces, due to the precession of the equinoxes) just as the world renews in the Springtime. The Empire benefited from the spiritual sphere of the Church, and should not usurp its dominion over that sphere.

Matilda is present at this revelation since she (historically) represents that reconciliation of Church and Empire (Pope Gregory VII and the Emperor Henry IV) previously discussed. Dante cannot *understand* [p. 328] the nature of the hymn the people sang, and its melody overcomes his mind.

Dante *sleeps* [p. 326] now (while 'historical' time passes) and he wakes like the disciples after the Transfiguration (see Matthew xviii 1-8) when Christ shone like the sun in white raiment, and Moses the lawgiver and Elias the prophet appeared talking with him, and after they were overcome Christ said 'Arise, and be not afraid'. Christ is the apple-tree, in accord with the Song of Solomon ii 3, 'As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.' He finds the compassionate Matilda bending over him. She shows him Beatrice, and it is Beatrice who occupies all his attention once more.

The Revelation is now of the present age. *Beatrice* [p. 245], Divine Philosophy and Heavenly Wisdom, is seated at the root of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is Rome, the seat of the Empire, and in the shadow of the new foliage that blossomed when the Church was united to the Empire. She watches over the chariot of the Church, attended by the seven (four cardinal and three theological) Virtues, who carry the seven lights, the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### ***MedLXVI:2 The Church Past and Present: Purgatorio Canto XXXII:100***

Beatrice instructs Dante to write down what he sees. The *Commedia* is for Dante a transcription of revelatory Vision in the style of the radical *Franciscans* [p. 269], and in that sense more than merely a creative literary work. What is revealed is a *symbolic* [p. 334] history of the *Church* [p. 296] and *Empire* [p. 256].

The eagle represents the ten Imperial persecutions of the Church instigated by the Emperors from Nero to Diocletian. (See also Ezekiel xvii 3.)

The vixen represents the heresies of the early Church, suppressed by the writings of the Fathers etc.

The second descent of the eagle represents the Donation of Constantine, whereby temporal and spiritual powers were confused, the Church acquiring its earthly riches.

The dragon represents the *Islamic* [p. 242] schism, its form suggested by Revelation xii 3. Mohammed has previously been represented in *Inferno* as a schismatic rather than a heretic.

The fresh feathers covering the chariot are those of temporal power and worldly wealth (increased by the Carolingian Emperors) and the Church becomes transformed into a Monster with the seven capital sins as its heads (suggested by Revelation xvii 3).

The Whore is the corrupted Papacy under Boniface VIII, and Clement V.

The Giant is the French dynasty, Philip the Fair specifically. His feud with Boniface ended in the death of the Pope, and he connived with Clement V at transferring the Papal Court to Avignon.

If Dante here represents Florence and Italy, then the Pope was punished, and the Whore scourged, for her aspirations in Italy, that is for turning her eye towards him. The Church is then dragged off 'through the wood' to Avignon, where it lies between Italy and the French Court with its whorish French Pope.

Dante has brought together the past strands of his personal life with those of the religious and political history: all three strands are interwoven. What remains of *Purgatorio* must be a further revelation, a prophecy of things to come.

## **Meditation LXVII: Purgatorio Canto XXXIII**

### ***MedLXVII:1 Beatrice's Prophecy: Purgatorio Canto XXXIII:1***

The seven virtues bewail the corruption of the Church, *singing* [p. 323] Psalm 79: '*Deus, venerunt gentes*. O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled.' And Beatrice employs

Christ's words to his disciples from John xvi 16. '*Modicum, et non videbitis me, et iterum*, my beloved sisters, *modicum, et vos videbitis me*: a little while, and ye shall not see me, my beloved sisters, and again, a little while, and ye shall see me.' Christ explains these words in the gospel as meaning that lamentation will be followed by joy. Beatrice implies that the Church is corrupted but will be cleansed.

Beatrice [p. 245] moves on with Dante [p. 252], Matilda and Statius. Dante's deft words here, that hardly a tenth step touched the ground, remind us that he has not seen her so, standing above ground, for ten years. She then calls to Dante, addresses him as Brother, demonstrating the relationship required, and asks why he does not question her. She is reminding him of the purpose of this journey, enquiry. He shows humility, and she tells him now, since his will is liberated and his mind purified, to free himself from fear and shame.

Now the prophecy. Beatrice implies that the Church is no longer recognisable as the Church of God, but nothing can save the guilty from God's vengeance (Dante says no sop will help: referring to the custom where a murderer could escape vendetta if he contrived to eat a sop of bread and wine at the murdered person's grave, within nine days after the murder. The family kept watch to prevent it.)

Emperor Frederick II (d1250) was regarded by Dante as the last true Emperor before 1300, despite the reigns of Rudolf, Adolphus, and Albert, so that the throne is empty. But a new heir to the eagle of Empire (perhaps Henry VII in 1308? However he was dead by 1313, and Dante's passionate support for him turned to dust along with the vision of an imminently renewed Holy Roman Empire) will soon arrive, and a new leader (the Roman letters for five-hundred, ten and five, DXV, rearranged, stand for *dux*, a leader, in the manner of Revelations xiii 18 and its numeric reference to Nero), Dante's 'greyhound' perhaps (Can Grande or Henry of Luxembourg, or some later unknown saviour) will rise to rid Italy of the corrupt Papacy, the Whore, and the false French Empire, the Giant. The tree of the Empire has been twice despoiled, once by Adam in the Garden of Eden, by taking the apple, secondly by the wood, the chariot pole, being taken to form the Cross. Equally Dante refers to the two descents of the Eagle, seen in the previous Canto, which stripped power from the Empire and added it to the temporal power of the Church.

Beatrice here expresses Dante's own (Roman) *Imperialism* [p. 256], and his vision of the spiritualised *Church* [p. 296] free of temporal powers. She explains that it is blasphemy to usurp the Imperial prerogatives, as the Empire is divinely ordained, and is a sin comparable in its disobedience with Adam's disobedience in eating the apple. The height, and inverted cone of the tree, signifies the power and extent of the Empire, and its Divine origin.

Beatrice has consciously created the spectacle of the Divine Pageant to leave its *symbolism* [p. 334] and its *prophecy* [p. 307] impressed on Dante's mind, and in answer to his intellectual confusion explains that she wanted him to see how far his own school of poetry and earthly philosophy fell short of divine revelation. Dante replies that he did not believe himself to have ever been far from divine philosophy, and smilingly she gently taunts him with his forgetfulness due to Lethe: *like* [p. 315] fire implied by its smoke, his former seduction by worldly desires is revealed by that very forgetfulness.

***Meditation LXVII:2 Dante drinks from Eunoë: Purgatorio Canto XXXIII:103***

It is noon on Thursday and the seven virtues halt at the source of Lethe and Eunoë. Dante asks about the nature of the streams, knowledge which drinking of Lethe should not have erased from his mind, since Matilda has already explained their nature and origin. Beatrice gently implies that the stress of his confession and the revelation of the Divine Pageant has made him forget (and perhaps the reader also!) their meaning. Matilda, agent of forgiveness and reconciliation, and of active virtue, leads Dante and Statius to the waters of Eunoë that restore the memory of virtuous actions. And with one more reference to the rebirth of the vegetation in springtime, to the ancient renewal of the earth, Dante himself renewed and purified, readies himself for Paradise, with *Beatrice* [p. 245] as his guide.

***MedLXVII:3 A Coda to the Purgatorio***

The Purgatorio places strong emphasis on Dante's personal and spiritual journey, culminating in the crucial scenes of his confession to Beatrice. His own major failings of pride and lust, his forgetfulness of Beatrice after her

death, and his neglect of divine philosophy, are brought home to him. The guidance of Virgil (and the addition of Statius) and the wisdom of earthly philosophy have brought him as far as they can, and Dante now must understand the nature of divine philosophy and revelation. Beatrice becomes his guide, and presents a symbolic spectacle that brings in the third strand of his political life. The Empire and Church are corrupt, both need to be cleansed, and a prophetic saviour is on the way who will achieve that. Sordello, Marco Lombardo, and Hugh Capet have given us views on that corruption, the failure of the German and French emperors and kings, the confusion of spiritual and temporal powers. Rome must be recovered, that Rome which is the divinely ordained centre of both Empire and Papacy.

Beatrice is Love re-born, and transfigured. She *is* both the real woman, appearing in the form that he knew, and Divine Philosophy in its symbolic presence. Like the wine and wafer of the Catholic Mass, the symbol *is* the reality. The Divine Pageant is more than allegory. Beatrice is more than a mere illustration. She is the source of that erotic and amatory power that possessed Dante, *and* she is what exceeds the physical and the earthly, and transforms human love into Divine Love. Courtly Love became love of the Lady 'Philosophy' and that love too has been lived through, lived beyond. Beatrice is divine grace and knowledge. Her attitude to Dante is that of the sister, with wisdom, to her brother who is still learning, and of the object of one kind of love, who smilingly and compassionately wishes to divert its flow to another kind of love. She is confessor and teacher, a mother (Dante uses the image of mother and child) rather than a lover. She is the eternal feminine, and the feminine in its deepest empathetic mode, of nurturing and caring, protectively and tenderly, wise and severe as a mother to her child on occasions, but all-knowing and all-loving. In front of her he is chastened, humbled, ashamed, tearful, stunned and confused. Her beauty is greater than in life, her wisdom and power to move him are magnified. He is the anti-hero, the poor Christian, who seeks, and who through effort and steadfastness and the pain of experience, ultimately finds.

The Purgatory was a procession through a vertical cathedral, through a sacrament, from sinfulness in penitence to confession and renewal. The seven deadly sins have been purged, the seven cardinal and theological virtues have been evoked. The soul is immortal, the individual mind and feelings are continued beyond the grave. The pity evoked in Hell, has

become the hope felt in Purgatory. The will has been purified and freed. The right objects of the free will have been understood. Intellect can overcome the irrationality of human passion, to direct its forces towards true human and divine Love.

The Earthly Paradise, empty and innocent still, is the possible goal of human endeavour, but in the end only a gateway, a passage beyond. It evokes the Golden Age, and the ancient re-birth of the Springtime world, and in that sense Beatrice is Persephone beyond the grave, lost but found again, and Dante is the initiate at the great Mystery of Eleusis, drawn through passages underground, assaulted by things seen, heard and done, until he is ready for the final revelation. Virgil and the pagan world must now fall back and away, returning to Limbo. Innocence is regained. Lethe has cancelled the memory of sin, Eunoë allows the virtues of the ancient world, of human intellect and reason, of human love and beauty, to persist as the soul goes forward.

What was fine within the traditions on which Dante drew, of Classical poetry and thought, Aristotle and his Arabic and Medieval commentators, the Troubadours and Courtly Love and the *dolce stil nuovo*, what pointed the way towards virtue in those traditions is carried forward within the new style of the *Commedia*, and its constant references to the noble past. But earthly love and wisdom has proved to be only a precursor to the Divine Love that gives the spirit of the lover the power to ascend to Paradise. Beatrice the woman has become Beatrice the saint. Dante the lover has become Dante the pilgrim. Hope will triumph. Love redeems.







# The Paradiso



# MEDITATIONS ON THE PARADISO

## Introduction to the Paradiso

The Inferno invokes pity in Dante: Purgatory brings him both the hope and the reality, in his confession to Beatrice, of forgiveness: the Paradiso demands, and explores, his faith. Calliope who sang the myth of Persephone was invoked in Canto I of Purgatorio: Matilda reminded Dante of Persephone gathering flowers near its end. The journey of Purgatorio took Dante from the loss of spiritual life in Inferno and has brought him to the rebirth of spiritual life and of the world that the ancient myth signifies. From the Crucifixion to the Resurrection, and beyond. From sin to confession, and forgiveness. From clouded sight to burgeoning knowledge. From the depths to the heights. From stasis to freedom. From eternal recurrence to the eternal Moment.

The emphasis in Inferno was on the political life, and in Purgatorio on the personal life: Paradiso emphasises the spiritual life, though all three *Cantiche* vitally interweave the three threads. Inferno leaves lasting images of the hellish city: Purgatorio of Dantes' own purgation and his meeting again with Beatrice: Paradiso brings sweetness, and the glory of intellectual Light. Here a Neo-platonic vision of universal order unfolds, a hierarchy that leads from the planetary spheres through the heavens to the Empyrean, that still centre and, paradoxically, that circumference of the universe, from which the Divine Light and Love flows. As Dante ascends with Beatrice through the levels, he acquires knowledge that extends and expands the Vision. The view from here is wide and all embracing. He looks back at the littleness of Earth. The student questions, is questioned, learns and understands. The seven Virtues who accompany Dante, Beatrice, Statius and Matilda at the end of the Purgatorio are the initial key to Paradiso. It is a continuing ethical journey, an exploration of the perfections and imperfections of life according to the seven virtues, theological and cardinal, aligned to the seven 'planets', the theological virtues being considered again in the Stellar Heaven where Dante's understanding is 'tested', and it encloses within its

intellectual sweep Empire and Church, the active and contemplative life, Love and Justice, and above all Faith. Knowledge increases as Dante ascends, until he is fit to receive the final understanding of Religious Glory, of Universal Love, and the outer (and innermost) heavens.

As Light and Love cascade down through the Universal hierarchy, Dante and Beatrice are conversely drawn upwards by their spiritual desire, towards the greater brightness, joy, and Love. It is intellectual light filled with love: it is love of virtue filled with joy. And Paradise is a virtual space and moment where the will, imprisoned by the Inferno, freed in the Purgatorio, is now paradoxically to be relinquished in the Paradiso. The will, abused and misused by the sinner, and purged by the penitent, is returned to God, the prime mover and source of love, by the free spirit.

Faith and Belief in revealed Truth is the structure that underpins the journey from a spiritual viewpoint, while it is the light of Justice and Order that is turned on the political and religious domains of Empire and Church, and the light of Love that illuminates the personal. Earthly philosophy is transcended by Divine philosophy, but the use of the intellect, the power of the rational mind is exalted throughout, and classical reason is incorporated in Christian learning to the extent that it supports and confirms Christian truth.

Dante, continually disappointed in his hopes of political progress, showed the Earthly Paradise, that realm of sinless innocence, as empty, a place to act as a backcloth for the Pageant of history, to reveal the failure of Empire and Church on earth, not the place yet of its fruition. The great philosophers and poets of the ancient pagan world are in Limbo, not in the Earthly Paradise, that was a Divine creation. The exile, and frustrated believer in the just Empire evoked by Classical Rome, and the apostolic Church of radical poverty evoked by that of the early Church, turned in Paradiso to the inner world, in a Vision of what is beyond this life, that underpins this life. Prefiguring the Renaissance, the beauty of the Vision blends Classical, Christian and Medieval thought together. It is a Revelation, and Dante claimed it as such, fundamentally 'a thing seen'. When the Vision ends, Dante's life must still continue. In the silence and the stillness he must prepare for the willed creation of the *Commedia*, prepare continually to repeat his steps through Purgatory, in order to find Beatrice once more, and, through finding her, to see beyond her, and see with her, the Divine

Love, that point from which nature and the heavens hang, and from which flows the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.

## Meditation LXVIII: Paradiso Canto I

### *MedLXVIII:1 The Invocation: Paradiso Canto I:1*

Paradiso begins with a statement of belief, of *faith* [p. 264], of revealed truth as far as Dante is concerned. God is the Aristotelian prime mover, and the source of that *Light* [p. 287] of Love and Intellect that permeates the Universe, varying in its intensity according to the region. This is a *Neoplatonic* [p. 294] vision of the descending hierarchy founded on the Deity, though it would be a misunderstanding to consider God as occupying a space or time, being infinite and eternal, or rather beyond space and time all together in the dimensionless eternal Moment. Dante is able to write of his journey towards that final point of the Empyrean, but not to *retell* [p. 292] the nature of that ultimate experience, as we shall see.

He calls on Apollo for inspiration, the God of *poetry* [p. 303] and music, importantly of *prophecy* [p. 307] also, and *symbolically* [p. 334] equated with Christ, therefore a doubly appropriate power for him to invoke at this entry into Paradise. Dante takes The Muses as inhabiting one peak of Parnassus, their sacred mountain, and Apollo the other, and he needs the inspiration of the Muses now as before and also that of Apollo's singing in his contest with Marsyas (the god defeating his presumptuous rival, as the Muses defeated the Pierides) so that he might be worthy of those laurel leaves that the god took as his emblem, after his pursuit of Daphne, those with which poets are so seldom crowned, through a failure, Dante says, of *will* [p. 271]. It is significant that the Paradiso ends with the energising of Dante's will (to write the *Commedia*).

The flash of *pride* [p. 306] is still there! Though it is followed by a *humble* [p. 281] comment on his own poetic powers. Some 'tiny spark'!!

**MedLXVIII:2 The First Ascent: Paradiso Canto I:37**

Dante is about to rise into Heaven at midday on Thursday (in Purgatory: it is midnight at Jerusalem). He then goes round the world with the day, so that, for him, it remains mid-day, and no 'earth-time [p. 339]' passes. The sun is in Aries throughout, since it is at the equinox. Dante then uses his *astronomical* [p. 331] knowledge to point us towards the significance of the seven Virtues in the scheme of Paradiso. At the equinox, at sunrise, the celestial circles of the Ecliptic, and the Equinoctial and Equatorial colures, cross the celestial circle of the Horizon at the same point. Each of the three then forms a cross with the fourth, the Horizon. Allegorically, *God* [p. 274] most influences the world through the four Cardinal virtues (Temperance, Fortitude, Justice, and Prudence) when they are joined to 'form' the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity). The happiest constellation is therefore Aries, the sign in which the Sun was at the Creation, when the spring equinox fell there, making this configuration of four circles and three crosses.

Beatrice, his *guide* [p. 278], gazes towards the left, the heart side, *like* [p. 315] an eagle, staring at the sun, and Dante, is enabled to do so also, without impairing his *sight* [p. 257], reflecting *Beatrice's* [p. 245] stance like a mirrored ray of light, in its pilgrim desire for return. As God's light is reflected downwards through the Universe, *Dante* [p. 252] feeds on Beatrice's reflected wisdom and love. The power to look at the sun is a gift of the Earthly Paradise, which was made to fit humanity, but whose gifts Adam lost through his original *sin* [p. 296]. Dante sees the Light redoubled, and, averting his gaze, and looking towards the mirror of Beatrice, he becomes transformed like Glaucus (who was able to inhabit another element). *Speech* [p. 328] cannot communicate the inward effect of that grace, since 'To go beyond Humanity is not to be told in words.'

Dante is now lifted into the Heavens at noon (compare Second Corinthians xii 2: 'the man caught up into paradise' and its note of proper humility), by the power of Universal *Love* [p. 288] and its Light. Effectively the desire of the mind and spirit for God draws the soul upwards, and, according to Aristotle's *philosophy* [p. 300], God causes the eternal movement of the celestial spheres through the love and longing he inspires in the universe. The *soul* [p. 330] is a new creation of God's, not generated by nature,

but breathed into the embryo.

Dante hears the heavenly harmonies (In one Medieval world view the seven planetary spheres produce divine harmonies like the seven strings of a lyre, though this view is expressly rejected by Dante's authority Aristotle) and sees the increase in light, firing his longing, and before he can *question* [p. 259] her Beatrice explains that they have risen into the heavens like lightning in reverse, which startles Dante since he is heavier in his earthly and watery body than the spheres of lighter matter above. In the Medieval view of the four elements the sphere of fire surrounds the sphere of air with 'a second atmosphere'. Air is relatively light, and fire absolutely light. Already we can see the increased intellectual content of Paradiso. We can expect intensive *scientific* [p. 313], astronomical, philosophic and theological question and answer in this realm.

### ***MedLXVIII:3 Universal Order: Paradiso Canto I:100***

Beatrice anticipates Dante's first question and sighs (*like* [p. 315] a mother over her child) in pity of his ignorance at his second. She then expands on the *Neoplatonic* [p. 294] order of the universe, in which the higher creatures, with *intellect* [p. 283], can see the stamp of the *Maker* [p. 274], that being the purpose for which the detailed structure of things was created. The whole creation is ordered, structured, and graduated at varying distances from the source. The upward movement of flames, the stirring of the emotions, the gravitational attraction of the component parts of Earth, and so on, are due to forces ('*instincts* [p. 313]') that drive matter and intellect.

*God* [p. 274] orders this structure, and the source is in the unmoving light-filled Empyrean, within which (or round which) the ninth sphere, the Primum Mobile whirls. Beatrice explains the diffusion of the Divine Spirit from the Empyrean where all space is *here* and time is *now*, and where God is, and the Angels, and Blessed spirits truly are (as opposed to merely manifesting themselves) down to the lowest sphere of the Moon. The Primum Mobile, or ninth Heaven, where the Angels manifest themselves (in symbolic meeting), contains all Nature. It receives the Divine influence and communicates it downwards to the eighth sphere of the Stellar Heavens, where the Blessed Souls are all manifest. The Stellar Heaven divides it among the stars. Each of the seven lower Heavens (Saturn,

Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury and Moon, in the Ptolemaic system) likewise receives the influence from the sphere above, and passes it to the sphere below (as in the emanations of medieval mysticism). See the General Structure, Note 1, for the attributes of the spheres. Each of the lower sphere's virtue and motion derives from an Angelic presence, which is wedded to each planetary body, and the mingled virtue of Angel and planet shines throughout that sphere. The Stellar Heaven is, likewise, animated by the deep spirit of the Cherubim. Each Angel is connected with its sphere, but still distinct within it. The combination is an alloy, a union, a melding. The virtue that shines there is likewise the personality of the Angel mingled with the creative and inspirational power of God. Groups of blessed *spirits* [p. 330] manifest themselves in the lower spheres as symbolic meeting places with Dante that are appropriate to them. In Hell spirits are fixed in their location, below Limbo, 'unable to go forward, or to go back': in Purgatory they progress through time, until the will is free: and in Paradise they are free and timeless, but manifest in the appropriate sphere, 'all places being Paradise that are in Heaven'. The journey therefore allows increasing degrees of freedom, until freedom itself becomes an irrelevance within God's will.

The material on which the Light works may be inadequate, Beatrice explains: there is the potential for failure and imperfection. We have seen these imperfections in Inferno and Purgatorio, but even in Paradiso Dante will explore further imperfections in the application of the virtues as he ascends. He and Beatrice (as a manifestation returning to her place in the Stellar Heavens) are lifted upwards naturally, as the source draws the mind and spirit towards it, and this is the natural order. She gazes at Heaven again, indicating the direction of the source, its power to draw her eyes, the divine nature of the truth she is revealing, and the focus of the Divine Philosophy that she represents.



## Meditation LXIX: Paradiso Canto II

### ***MedLXIX:1 The Moon: Faith and Inconstancy: Paradiso Canto II:1***

Dante warns the Reader, we who are following in our little *boat* [p. 315] (*picciolletta barca*) behind his singing keel. In describing the Heavens in epic poetry he is going beyond previous poets, driven by intellect (Minerva), steered by Divine creativity (Apollo), and guided by Poetic inspiration (the Muses). True spiritual yearning is needed to follow in his track.

They ascend swiftly impelled by desire, Beatrice gazing at the Divine source, and Dante gazing at her: she like a mirror that reflects the light, until they enter the sphere of the Moon. *Beatrice* [p. 245], ‘*joy* [p. 285]ful as she was *lovely* [p. 247]’ tells Dante to turn towards God in *gratitude* [p. 278] for this marvel. They are absorbed, as light in water, into the pearl-like mass. Though Dante is still in the body, and the interpenetration of solid bodies is *inconceivable* [p. 313] on Earth, the reality of this gives an inkling of the essential place of Light, where God and Man are unified, as in Christ where human and divine co-existed. This sphere of the Moon is that of *faith* [p. 264], and the content of faith, which is taken on trust, in this life, will ultimately be revealed, realised, self-evidently, as truth. Dante will also explore imperfections of faith in this sphere. In Medieval astronomy the Earth threw its shadow, i.e. created imperfection, as far as the third sphere of Venus (in the Copernican system it only throws its shadow on the Moon, Mercury and Venus being in inner orbit round the sun).

### ***MedLXIX:2 Variability: Moon-Shadows: Paradiso Canto II:46***

A discussion now follows on the *question* [p. 259] of why there are dark shadows on the Moon, an apparent imperfection. Beatrice’s explanation is designed to illustrate the variability in the natural order, and the differences in quality not just quantity among the gradations and parts of the Universe. Dante believes that density and rarity of matter explain the shadows. Beatrice explains that if that were used to explain the differing appearance of the stars it would imply differences in quantity only and not the

differences in quality that actually exist. Equally the Moon would have patches of dense matter right through, or would consist of layers of denser and rarer matter. If the first case were true it would be revealed by the pattern of light from the Sun passing through the Moon to Earth during a solar eclipse which is not what we observe. In the second case sunlight would be reflected back from the denser layers further away from us, and that might explain the darker patches. However brightness is the ratio of the quantity of light reaching the eyes to the apparent size of the object. These both diminish as the square of the distance, so the brightness remains constant, and there would be no dark patches apparent. (This ignores absorption by the medium, and the reflective capability of a coarse surface like the moon.) Dante points to a *scientific* [p. 313] experiment with the three mirrors that demonstrates the effect. The vital point is that the shadows, and in fact the essential variability in all things, is due to qualitative not merely quantitative difference. Reasoning from experiment and observation is demonstrated here also, as a key method of the scientific intellect.

### ***MedLXIX:3 Diffusion of the Divine Spirit: Paradiso Canto II:106***

Beatrice now extends the point made about variability and qualities. The existence of the lower spheres in this *Neo-platonic* [p. 294] scheme depends on the Primum Mobile, the ninth sphere, which whirls within the Empyrean, the outermost circle (or paradoxically the innermost centre) of the Universe. The power of the Primum Mobile cascades down through the Stellar Heaven, the eighth sphere, varying in quality and quantity as it creates different forms containing different essences, and so down to the seven 'planetary' spheres (treating the Sun as a planet rather than the star it is) with their diverse qualities. The power that flows is mediated by the Cherubim in the Stellar Heavens, and by separate *Angelic* [p. 241] presences in the planetary spheres, which merge with and imprint their respective spheres, like the soul within the body powering the members (Dante refers to 'the organs of the Universe'). The planets then shine with the virtue of their Angel due to the *joyful* [p. 285] nature of the source, *like* [p. 315] the light shining in the *eye* [p. 257]. This is presented by Dante (through Beatrice) as the

*truth* [p. 344] behind the differences in qualities and virtues within the universe, a matter of trust (an aspect of *faith* [p. 264]) to be realised self-evidently hereafter. 'It is a formal principle.'

## Meditation LXX: Paradiso Canto III

### ***MedLXX:1 The Spirits in the Moon: Paradiso Canto III:1***

The Moon is the sphere of *Faith* [p. 264], the first of the theological virtues, and that virtue and its imperfections will be illuminated here, a pattern repeated for the virtues in the three lower planetary spheres, where the orbiting earth casts its shadow. Dante makes use of accepted associations of the *planets* [p. 331] also: inconstancy or variability being a traditional association of the Moon, from its cycle of waxing and waning. It is also associated in our culture with Woman, with the virginity and chastity of Artemis-Diana, with the myth of 'Pearl' and the return of the soul to the stars, and we would expect to meet female characters in this sphere.

*Beatrice* [p. 245], Dante's 'sun', has satisfied his *questioning* [p. 259] using an intellectual *method* [p. 300], proof and refutation, and Dante is about to express his *belief* [p. 264], when he sees faces faintly apparent within the Moon's 'eternal pearl'. Unlike Narcissus who believed his own image was a real 'other' whom he fell in love with, Dante is attracted to these faces that he thinks are reflected images, and turns again to Beatrice puzzled. Beatrice *smiles* [p. 326] at Dante's misunderstanding, his lack of trust in what he sees, her holy *eyes* [p. 257] glowing. This is *truth* [p. 344]. The faces are real, and these spirits manifest themselves in this appropriate sphere because they failed in an aspect of faith, by breaking their vows.

### ***MedLXX:2 Piccarda Donati: Paradiso Canto III:34***

Dante *courteously* [p. 250] seeks information from the most eager of the spirits, who is Piccarda Donati The daughter of Simone Donati, and the sister of Forese Donati, Dante's friend, and of Corso Donati. In Purgatorio Canto XXIV, Forese mentioned her as being in Paradise, and now she is in the

sphere of the Moon, appearing to Dante here because of her neglect of her vows. She had taken the habit of the Poor Clares in the convent at Florence, and was forcibly abducted from there by Corso her brother in 1288 or thereabouts, and compelled to marry Rosselino della Tosa, a turbulent noble of the Black faction. She died shortly afterwards. She stresses that she was a 'virgin' sister, echoing that Moon association, and is now blessed by being in the *slowest* [p. 294] sphere, one of the brides of Christ, pleased and informed by Him. Dante *recognises* [p. 310] her now, transformed as she is by her blessedness, the first *individual* [p. 282] spirit he has met in Paradiso, as her brother Forese was the last major contemporary of Dante's in Purgatory.

Piccarda explains in answer to Dante's *question* [p. 259], that the spirits have no *will* [p. 271] to change their station because the power of love makes them desire what they have. By necessity the blessed spirits have their being in *Love* [p. 288], and so cannot be at odds with *God's* [p. 274] greater will. 'His will is our peace' she says, and Dante realises that every part of Heaven is Paradise despite the variability of its qualities, since every spirit is drawn towards the source, and *joyful* [p. 285] at being in its assigned state and station.

Dante reveals that great love of and desire for intellectual and social *order* [p. 295] that characterises his age and the Renaissance that followed. His stress on courtesy, which is an aspect of order and respect, is only one telltale sign of this. Out of political, spiritual and moral chaos men like him sought the authoritarian but benign powers of uncorrupted Emperor, Pope and Saint. The craving for order is in tension with the craving for freedom even in the thirteenth century, but the backcloth of warfare, violence, evil and corruption led to a massive yearning for peace, love, virtue and the cleansing of the social fabric. The *Commedia* in the end is orthodox, because it supports the traditional establishment of Church and State, Pope and Emperor, even if in his reaction to their corrupted reality Dante can seem at times like a revolutionary, full of radical enthusiasms. It is purgation and reform he longs for, not abolition. He is a believer, whose questioning is aimed at confirming and clarifying his belief. His writing of *Monarchia* is only one example of Dante's faith in the concept of centralised power, kingship, and authoritarian rule. However much qualified by the need for the rule of Law, of Love, of Peace, he nevertheless embraces a social system as his ideal that is always vulnerable to the flawed will of the leader. Though he never stopped hoping for an Augustus to run the Empire, and a Peter to

uphold the Church, the *Commedia* turns in reality to the unseen, and perfect deity, and to the afterlife and Paradise as the only sure hope.

Piccarda tells her story, that she was a follower of Clare, Chiari Scifi of Assisi, now known as Santa Clara, Saint Clare (c1194-1253), the friend and disciple of Saint Francis of Assisi, she who founded the order of Franciscan nuns known as the 'Poor Clares' (The Order wore a grey habit, with white coif covered with black veil) and is an *example* [p. 261] of perfect *faith* [p. 264]. Piccarda turned her back on the world but was dragged back into it.

By her side is Constance, the wife of Frederick II, and grandmother of Manfred. She was the daughter of King Roger II, and heiress of the Norman House of Tancred that conquered Sicily and Southern Italy from the Saracens in the eleventh century, and so of the crown of 'the Two Sicilies' (Naples and Sicily). She married Henry son of Frederick Barbarossa in 1186, who was afterwards Emperor Henry VI, and bore him Frederick, later Emperor Frederick II. Frederick Barbarossa, Henry and Frederick II were the three 'stormwinds of Suabia'. She assumed the regency for her son, after Henry's death at the early age of 32. She died in 1198. Dante follows the tradition that she had been a nun, and had been forced to make a political marriage against her will. Her name itself no doubt attracted him, as he looked for an example of constancy within inconstancy.

Piccarda stresses that Constance, though forced to leave the religious life, had remained true to her heart's belief and commitment. *Singing* [p. 323] the 'Ave Maria', Piccarda vanishes *like* [p. 315] a heavy weight through water. From hereon the singing in Paradise is such that though Dante hears it he cannot remember or describe it, until he reaches the Stellar Heaven, when Mary is again the theme, and where the theological virtue of faith, which she embodies, is again addressed. Dante now turns back to Beatrice full of further questions.

## Meditation LXXI: Paradiso Canto IV

### *MedLXXI:1 Dante's Questions: Paradiso Canto IV:1*

Dante is caught between doubts, in this sphere of faith, and he piles on the *similes* [p. 315] to indicate so. Like Daniel, divining and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, Beatrice divines and answers Dante's pair of unspoken *questions* [p. 259]: how can a violent disruption of Piccarda's and Constance's lives, causing them to break their vows, lessen their virtue: and have the spirits here returned after death to the stars they originated from as Plato taught?

Beatrice takes the second question first. The blessed *spirits* [p. 330], including Piccarda, all inhabit the Empyrean along with other great souls, though they differ in the degree to which they experience God's power. Piccarda for example does not inhabit the sphere of the Moon but has manifested here in human semblance to allow Dante's intellect to receive information through the senses, just as God, Christ, and the Archangels are depicted with human forms *symbolically* [p. 334] in scripture and elsewhere. If Plato intended the *Timaeus* to say that the *stars* [p. 331] influence human qualities at birth, then that is partially acceptable, but if he intended to say that souls are split from a star at birth and return to it at death, then he was wrong. Dante, through Beatrice, while acknowledging stellar influence, as we have seen previously, insists on human *free will* [p. 271], without which ethics and human life itself is robbed of meaning. Dante condemns the confusion of pagan Gods with planetary influences in Pagan Religion and Astrology. It is noticeable that while Dante does employ some of the traditional attributes of the planets in Paradiso, he does not systematically employ their supposed qualities and virtues as used in Astrology.

The first of Dante's questions is less dangerous to his spiritual life. Beatrice concedes that Divine *Justice* [p. 285] is a matter for *faith* [p. 264], and may appear unjust to human beings. Piccarda and Constance could have willed not to break their vows indefinitely, but could have attempted to return to the religious life. Since they did not, they wavered in their faith, and are less virtuous for so doing. Dante quotes Saint Lawrence and Mucius Scaevola as two extreme (male!) *examples* [p. 261] of loyalty to an ideal regardless of

suffering, and of the strong *will* [p. 271]. If Piccarda and Constance and the others who broke their vows had possessed that strength of will they would have found their way back to the religious life. Was then Piccarda lying, which is impossible for a blessed spirit, when she said that Constance remained devoted in her heart. Well, the vows were broken to avoid danger, and life may force actions like Alcmaeon's that are morally wrong in one context but unavoidable in another. The Modern world is familiar with this concept of (sometimes invidious) moral choice. Dante follows Aristotle's *theory* [p. 300] of the dual will, an absolute will that does not consent to evil coupled with a practical will that chooses the lesser of two evils. The former may remain intent on its goal, while the latter compromises, and that is a failing. See Aristotle's Ethics III, where the example of Alcmaeon is also mentioned. Inasmuch as the practical will allows violence to succeed, it aids and abets it, and is culpable. The absolute will may continue though to adhere to its ideal, which was the case with Constance, according to Piccarda.

### ***MedLXXI:2 Dante's Next Question: Paradiso Canto IV:115***

Dante pursues the theme of imperfect faith, and broken vows. He addresses Beatrice with tactful *courtesy* [p. 250], acknowledging her speech that vivifies him. The intellect is never satisfied with anything less than the truth, and Truth can be attained or longing would be worthless (!), so that *question* [p. 259] leads on to question. In this case Dante wishes to know whether reparation can be made for broken *vows* [p. 264]. He is thinking of his own personal case, no doubt considering his promise made at the end of the *Vita Nuova* to dedicate himself to her and the higher ideal, and from which he had strayed. In return Beatrice gives him such a look of love, indicating his spiritual progress, that Dante is confused and overcome by the sparks of that love in her *eyes* [p. 257]. The personal feeling here is intense, but implicit.

## Meditation LXXII: Paradiso Canto V

### *MedLXXII:1 Dispensation: Paradiso Canto V:1*

The overpowering effect of her *eyes* [p. 257] Beatrice attributes to increased understanding of *love* [p. 288], that itself generates greater love. She sees the progress of understanding in Dante since the eternal light of love and truth is reflected by his *intellect* [p. 283] (in asking the question he has asked). The teacher is praising the pupil.

Beatrice now extols *free will* [p. 271] as the greatest gift of *God* [p. 274], most matched to Him, and most valued by Him. It is possessed by intelligent creatures. A *vow* [p. 264] is a pact between God and the self, made freely, and therefore breaking the vow is an abuse of freewill and a severance of the pact made, an act of self-sacrifice and self-dedication. As such no recompense is possible, no more than it is right to abuse a consecrated item, in this case the self, by putting it to other purposes. However the Church grants dispensations, says Beatrice, and employs a *metaphor* [p. 315] of eating to impress on Dante the need to inwardly digest this *understanding* [p. 283] so that it becomes firm knowledge in the memory.

The vow cannot be cancelled, but its content can be altered, though not at one's own discretion, only under the control of knowledge and authority (the judgement that the guilty party is fit for absolution, and the authority of the confessor to absolve). The new content must be half as great again as the old (does Dante hint here at his efforts on the Paradiso, and in revising or re-writing the Inferno and Purgatorio?). Since the religious vow made by Piccarda was of the complete self that nothing exceeds in value there can be no recompense for the breaking of such a vow. (For the regulations regarding 'substitution' see Exodus xiii:13, xxiv:20, Numbers xviii:15-18, and the last chapter of Leviticus)

Vows should be serious and well-considered, and not perverse in execution, and Beatrice gives Jephthah and Agamemnon who both cruelly sacrificed their daughters, as *examples* [p. 261] of ill-considered perversity. Dispensation should be accepted only from a proper authority. Dante is arguing against the 'pardoners' and the selling of remissions and dispensations.



***MedLXXII:2 Mercury, and Hope: Paradiso Canto V:85***

Beatrice turns towards the region where the universe is most alive, towards the Sun at the equinox on the celestial equator, the swiftest circle of the life-giving local star as spring livens the world. And its close companion on the ecliptic is the planet Mercury, within the orbit of Earth and therefore never seen far from the Sun.

Together Dante and Beatrice ascend like arrows to the sphere of Mercury, that of *Hope* [p. 279], the second of the theological virtues. Beatrice is delighted by her entry into Hope, and the planet itself brightens, as does *Dante* [p. 252], changeable in nature. He is referring here to his birth-sign *Gemini* [p. 331], and its traditional association with Mercury, its ruling planet in Astrology. Astrological characteristics of those born in Gemini are the mercurial intellect, versatility, a flair for language and literature, changeability and restlessness. Hope itself is a desire for and expectation of change: as Dante hoped for a saviour for Italy, a just and strong 'Roman' Empire, a purified Church and Papacy, his own redemption.

Radiant spirits flock towards them like fish rising to feed (a counter image to those previous *similes* [p. 315] of fish and heavy weights sinking through water, here everything is light) and, as in Purgatorio XV, *love* [p. 288] increases love, so that these spirits delight in the addition of loving spirits to the sphere where they themselves are made manifest. Dante turns to the reader to stimulate our expectation of further revelations!

A spirit speaks to Dante, and Beatrice tells Dante to '*speak* [p. 328], speak' in true Gemini fashion. Mercury is the planet of communication, and the messenger god in Greek mythology. The spirits here are 'nested' in the Divine light, fired by it, as Mercury is lost to our eyes in the Sun's rays due to the closeness of its 'internal' orbit to the Sun. The spirit that spoke, having shown itself, conceals itself in the glow as it speaks, becoming the last spirit whose features are at all described in the spheres, and implying that as Dante ascends higher the *light* [p. 287] grows brighter to obscure all *individual* [p. 282] features.

## Meditation LXXIII: Paradiso Canto VI

### *MedLXXIII:1 Justinian: The Empire: Paradiso Canto VI:1*

Dante's themes in this sphere of Mercury are earthly *hope* [p. 279], namely that of the just Empire, at peace under the law, itself recognising the Church's spiritual ascendancy: and spiritual hope, given by the promise of redemption through Christ. The imperfections of hope in this sphere are those of its worldly equivalent, earthly ambition.

Firstly Justinian, the Lawgiver, explains who he is, and his revised belief in the dual nature of Christ, which he now realises as clearly as Aristotelian *logic* [p. 300] would suggest (where the propositions that this is so, and this is not so, cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time. Related propositions are termed contradictories e.g. if 'some swans are not white' is true, then 'all swans are white' is false, since a black swan would be white, and not white, if both statements were true simultaneously).

He then gives a swift summary of Imperial history leading to Augustan *peace* [p. 298] throughout the Empire, and to the *justice* [p. 285] of the sin of the *Fall* [p. 296] being 'avenged' by the Crucifixion and the Crucifixion being 'avenged' by the destruction of the Temple.

Aeneas, coming from Troy, landed in Italy, took Lavinia as his bride, and fought Turnus. Aeneas was allied with Evander, whose kingdom was based on the seven hills of the site of Rome. Evander's son and heir Pallas led these allies and was killed by Turnus, and avenged by Aeneas.

Aeneas founded his kingdom at Lavinium, and it was transferred by his son Ascanius (Iulus) to Alba Longa where it remained for more than three hundred years till in the reign of Tullus Hostilius (670-638BC) Alba fell to Rome, when the three Curiatii, the Alban champions, were defeated by the survivor of the three Horatii, the Roman champions. Rome had been founded by Romulus, an Alban outcast, on the Palatine, one of the seven hills, and the Romans made wives of the Sabine women.

Under Romulus and his six successors Rome's power grew until Sextus Tarquinius, son of the last king, raped Lucretia, and the monarchy was ended in 510BC. Rome then became supreme in Italy. Lucius Quintius Cincinnatus (from *cincinnus*, a curl) called from the plough to the

dictatorship conquered the Aequiana in 458BC. One of the Fabii, and Titus Manlius Torquatus, distinguished themselves against Brennus and his Gauls (390BC etc). The Decii, three generations, died fighting against the Latins in 340BC, the Samnites in 295BC and Pyrrhus the Greek invader in 280BC. The greatest of the Fabii, Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator, defeated Hannibal, who crossed the Alps in 218BC, and Scipio Africanus the Elder, a boy of seventeen, saved his father's life, at the defeat of Ticinus. He forced Hannibal's withdrawal from Italy. (Dante calls the northern Africans Arabs)

Pompey who conquered the east and defeated Marius celebrated a triumph, when not yet twenty-five, in 81BC. The Romans reduced Fiesole, which overhangs Florence, and was the refuge of Catiline.

Julius Caesar campaigned in Gaul (58-50BC), crossed the Rubicon, between Ravenna and Rimini, in 49BC, leaving his province, without the Senate's permission, and precipitating a Civil War. He overcame opposition in Spain, and besieged Pompey at Dyrrachium, defeating him at Pharsalia in Thessaly. Pompey escaped to Egypt where he was murdered by Ptolemy. Caesar crossed the Hellespont, took Egypt from Ptolemy and gave it to Cleopatra, subdued Juba, King of Numidia, who had protected his opponents after Pharsalia, and returned to Spain in 45BC to fight Pompey's sons.

Caesar was assassinated, and Octavian (later Augustus) his adopted son defeated Mark Antony at Modena in 43BC. He then defeated Brutus and Cassius, the leaders of the assassination plot, with Antony's help, at Philippi in 42 BC, and Lucius, Antony's brother at Perugia in 41BC. At Actium in 31BC he defeated Antony, who committed suicide, Cleopatra his consort dying by the sting of a viper (asp).

Augustus was master of the Empire to the remotest ends of Egypt and the gates of the Temple of Janus were closed for the third time in Roman history to signal the Empire at peace.

Christ was born, and crucified in the reign of Tiberius, Augustus's successor, and the sin of the Fall thereby avenged. Jerusalem fell to Titus and the sin of killing Christ was avenged on the Jews, with the destruction of the Temple.

The Church was defended by Charlemagne against the Lombard king

Desiderius whom he dethroned in 774AD.

After this long succession of triumphs of the Imperial eagle, demonstrating its nobility, Justinian comments on the current state of Italy and those who oppose the Imperial banners. The Guelphs, as Papal supporters, are allies of the French against the German Empire and Italy, while the Ghibellines, though nominally Imperialists, appropriate the name of the Empire for merely factional purposes. Justinian expresses the *hope* [p. 279] that Charles II of Naples, head of the Guelphs in Italy, will fail to destroy the Ghibellines, who should fight under their own banner. Peace in Italy depends on an end to factionalism and support for the Emperor. The Empire has witnessed and destroyed many worthier opponents.

Justinian then explains that the little sphere of Mercury is filled with spirits who hoped for earthly fame and honour, so that they impaired the force of their spiritual hopes. Nevertheless the spirits are satisfied because reward is matched with merit and they are free of any envy. Romeo of Villeneuve is *one* [p. 261] of them, an example of a saintly man distracted by his application to earthly ambitions, and subsequently wronged through envy. Romeo of Villeneuve (1170-1250) was the seneschal, or chamberlain of Count Raymond Berenger IV of Provence, who died in 1245 leaving his lands to his youngest daughter Beatrice, whom he had made heiress under Romeo's guardianship. According to the legend Romeo (which simply means *pilgrim*) came to Raymond's court, managed his business, and arranged the marriages of Raymond's four daughters. The Provençal Barons persuaded Raymond to demand account of Romeo, at which he asked for his mule, staff and scrip, and vanished, as poor as he had come. The story is probably fable.

The eldest daughter Margaret married Louis IX of France, Eleanor married Henry III of England, Sancha married Richard of Cornwall, titular King of the Romans, and Beatrice, who inherited, married Charles of Anjou, King of Naples and Sicily, and, through her inheritance, King of Provence, in Dante's view a fitting revenge on the Provençal barons!

Dante has used Justinian, himself an *individual* [p. 282] who sought honour and fame, to point to the imperfection of earthly ambition compared with spiritual hope, as he has pointed to the imperfection of the existing Empire compared with the hope for a return of the Empire of Augustus or Charlemagne.

## Meditation LXXIV: Paradiso Canto VII

### *MedLXXIV:1 Incarnation and Redemption: Paradiso Canto VII:1*

Dante's second great theme in this sphere is that of the *hope* [p. 279] of redemption represented by the Incarnation. Justinian, representative of Law and Empire the great earthly hopes, *sings* [p. 323] the Hosanna and then like dancing sparks he and the other spirits veil themselves in distance. Dante urges himself to *speak* [p. 328] to Beatrice with a *three* [p. 340] times repeated '*dille*', appropriate to Mercury's sphere of communication. The love he feels is expressed in the beauty of the verse, in the tremor of reverence and joy, and *Beatrice* [p. 245] is again more than a symbolic presence, she carries an erotic charge that is transmuted here to awe and gratitude rather than desire.

Beatrice expands on Justinian's reference to the *justice* [p. 285] of the Crucifixion. Adam condemned the race with his *original sin* [p. 296], which was an abuse of his *free will* [p. 271] through a failure of restraint. *God* [p. 274] in an act of *love* [p. 288] for Mankind sent Christ his *Word* [p. 328], his bringer of the eternal message, incarnated as Man (Dante's text links Word, Creator and Love in an expression of the *Trinity* [p. 340]). In that incarnated being Man was pure and *good* [p. 277] as he had been in Paradise, Christ representing the whole race, exiled from the Garden of Eden that, we remember, was designed for humankind. As a punishment, a 'revenge', for Adam's sin inflicted on Mankind, therefore, the Crucifixion was an act of supreme and divine justice. As a punishment inflicted on Christ, the epitome of divine goodness, it was at the same time in human terms wholly unjust.

Dante is now troubled. Why did God will this method of redeeming Adam's original sin, and thereby the sins of Mankind, bringing hope to the world?

Beatrice explains. Divine Good creates beings that are signs of divine beauty, eternal in spirit, and with free will. What is least in the thrall of transient things is closest to the good since it resembles it most. Sin mars this and can only be atoned for by just *punishment* [p. 310]. The only solution for Adam's sin was for God to absolve Man, or for Man to make reparation. Beatrice refutes the second possibility. (Her argument follows

Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*. Adam's disobedience injured himself not God, and what was demanded was not a propitiation, but restoration. Man was required to give back what he owed, to match what he had taken that he did not own, but could not since he owes everything and owns nothing. Therefore God who owes nothing and owns everything had to become Man to achieve restoration. See *Cur Deus homo* passim, and specifically Bk i, chapter 15.) There was nothing Man could do sufficient to match the original crime. So God adopted the first course, and displayed His divine goodness by acting with maximum *grace* [p. 277] to reveal the maximum goodness, employing both *mercy* [p. 302] and justice.

God in this showed generosity higher than mere remission of the sin, by wedding Himself to human nature in the Incarnation, and suffering just punishment in that nature, so mercifully making Man capable of redeeming his fault, to bring the hope of redemption to all humankind.

### ***MedLXXIV:2 The Hope of Resurrection: Paradiso Canto VII:121***

Beatrice now reassures Dante that while composed of the *four elements* [p. 313] and therefore subject to corruption human beings are nevertheless eternal. The Angels and Paradise itself were directly created, while all other things are formed indirectly by creative power from created matter. Plants and Animals gain their limited life from the influence of the sun and planets that are combined, as we have heard, with Angelic presences, acting on matter, but human life is breathed directly into it by *God* [p. 274] and so is drawn automatically towards God by the love instilled in it. Anselm's argument is then used: that since God made Adam and Eve in the flesh directly, man's body will be restored at the Last Judgement when redemption is complete. Dante ends the canto with this hope of resurrection.

## Meditation LXXV: Paradiso Canto VIII

### *MedLXXV:1 The Sphere of Venus: Paradiso Canto VIII:1*

Dante reminds us of the traditional association of the planet Venus with the ancient Goddess, and of her role as the deity of love in ancient times. Beatrice now rises with him into the third sphere of Venus, that of Charity, Pity and *Love* [p. 288]. Venus being in an inner orbit close to the Sun appears as a morning ‘star’ [p. 331] near sunrise, or an evening ‘star’ setting shortly after the sun. Dante recognises his presence in that sphere because of Beatrice’s increased *beauty* [p. 247], and finds spirits manifested there, *like* [p. 315] sparks among flames, or voices among voices.

The spirits leave their circling, which derives from the highest of the *three* [p. 340] hierarchies of the nine orders of Angels, led by the Seraphim, and is imitated here in the lowest of the three hierarchies, led by the Principalities or Princedoms. The nine orders correspond to the nine spheres below the Empyrean, those of the planets, the stellar Heavens, and the Primum Mobile. As they advance the spirits *sing* [p. 323] the Hosanna, and the spirit of Charles Martel approaches and quotes Dante’s own opening line of the first canzone of the *Convivio*: ‘*Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete*. You who by understanding move the third circle’ Charles explains that the spirits are so filled with love that to give pleasure is also to receive it. This is the divine aspect of *love* [p. 288], that it increases by being mutually experienced, and that shared love is not a loss but an addition.

*Dante* [p. 252] receives permission from Beatrice and then asks who has spoken, with affection in his voice generated by this recognition of his own *poetry* [p. 303] in Heaven. The *spirit* [p. 282] is Charles Martel, who befriended Dante. Charles (1271-1295) was the eldest son of Charles II of Naples, and of Mary of Hungary the daughter of Stephen IV. Dante probably met him in March 1295 when he visited Florence, and was popular. He died in the August. He was married to Clemenz, or Clementina, the daughter of Emperor Rudolph of Hapsburg, and his line might have reconciled the Guelph and Ghibelline factions, but his early death quenched Dante’s hopes. His brother was Robert Duke of Calabria. His daughter Clemenza married Louis X of France. His wife Clemenz died in 1295 though Dante

still appears to address her as living, in Canto IX. His son Caroberto became heir to Naples but was ousted by Robert, his uncle, in 1309 after the date of the Vision.

Dante then shows his geographical knowledge as Charles describes the regions over which he would have held power including Provence, of which the Angevin kings of Naples were Counts; Hungary of which he had already been crowned king in 1290 at Naples, holding it from his mother; and Sicily, which would already have been his had it not been for the Sicilian Vespers, in 1282, the rising in Palermo against the French that led to rule by the House of Aragon.

He then gives his brother Robert a *prophetic* [p. 307] warning. Robert and his brothers Louis and John were hostages in Spain after the release of their father Charles in 1288 (see the note on Charles II) until 1295. Robert was accompanied back to Italy by certain greedy Catalanian adventurers, whom he gave office to, when he succeeded to the throne of Naples, and their greed made them, and him, detested in Apulia. He was shipwrecked in 1301. Dante treats Robert as an example of meanness, though descended from a generous line (Dante gives no real evidence anywhere for this generosity.)

In this sphere Dante is dealing with love and its imperfections, one of which is excessive earthly love, and we can assume that Charles' love for Clemenz was intense, just as Dante's love for Charles was great.

### ***MedLXXV:2 Heredity; Paradiso Canto VIII:85***

Dante's *joy* [p. 285] at the conversation is increased because he is aware that Charles is also aware of it, and is aware of it because it is divinely inspired. Charles's comments allow Dante to ask a *question* [p. 259] regarding heredity (linked to the sexual act and therefore Venus), as to how a bad trait can emerge in a succeeding generation.

Charles explains that *Divine* [p. 274] providence structures and controls the creation in its nature and its continuing welfare. This is achieved through the *angelic* [p. 241] intellects present in the *planetary spheres* [p. 294]. Since God and they are perfect then the results must be *regular* [p. 295] and not chaotic, *art* [p. 243] and not disorder. Dante expresses his belief in the



completeness of this created *Nature* [p. 293].

Charles now links in an *argument* [p. 300] of Aristotle's that human society requires varied conditions and qualifications amongst its members. In the *Politics*, Aristotle shows that the individual is not self-sufficient but a part of a whole, and a State is a group of citizens providing all the necessary variety for a complete life. Functions and duties are distributed so that the State can be self-sufficient where the individual is not. Charles gives *examples* [p. 261] of diverse skills: lawgiver, soldier, priest, and inventor. Esau differs from his brother Jacob, and Romulus the god came from a humble background. Divine Providence is the force that *creates dissimilarity* [p. 313] between offspring, and between parent and offspring. The world drives people into roles not suited to them, and Dante's recognition of individuality but love of order suggests it would be best for *individuals* [p. 282] to realise their inborn qualities (an interesting forerunner to the nature-nurture argument) in society, which would then be organised in the optimum way.

## **Meditation LXXVI: Paradiso Canto IX**

### ***MedLXXVI:1 Cunizza's Prophecy: Paradiso Canto IX:1***

Charles Martel's final prophecies slide away into discreet silence as Dante rhetorically addresses Charles's dead or living wife Clemenz. Then another spirit flares brightly and Dante interrogates it. This is the soul of Cunizza da Romano, sister of the infamous Ezzolino whose mother dreamed she had given birth to a firebrand that scorched the land. Cunizza was born in the castle of Romano, between Venice and the sources of the Brenta and Piave. Famous for her love affairs, she had four husbands and many paramours, of whom Sordello was one. In 1265 (when she was about 67 years old) and the last survivor of her father's family, in the house of Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti she executed a deed of manumission liberating her father's serfs. She died in Florence in 1279 or 1280. Dante suggests here she was a penitent. Her brother Ezzellino III da Romano, the tyrant (1194-1259), lord of Verona, Vicenza and Padua, called 'the son of the devil', was imperial vicar under Frederick II. Pope Alexander IV declared a crusade against him,

and he was defeated at Cassano on the Adda, and subsequently died. He was the head of the Ghibellines in Northern Italy. Dante came across him in the seventh circle of the Inferno among the other tyrants.

Cunizza admits her excessive earthy love, but is satisfied with her state. With her is Folco, or Folcetto, a *troubadour* [p. 343], a Genoese by origin, born at Marseilles shortly before 1160. A famous lover he became a Cistercian monk and was made Bishop of Toulouse in 1205. He was a friend of Saint Dominic, and persecuted the Albigensian heretics till his death in 1231. Cunizza *prophesies* [p. 307] his lasting fame, presumably for the heretic persecutions of the Albigensian Crusade, that sorry chapter in the history of the Papacy.

She continues with a prediction of Paduan disaster at Vicenza, probably that, in and about 1314, at the hands of Can Grande. Then of the murder of Riccardo da Camino, son of the 'good Gerard' of Purgatorio XVI. Gerard was Captain-General of Treviso from 1283 till his death in 1306 when Riccardo, who was the brother of Gaia, and husband of Giovanna Visconti, succeeded him, to be treacherously murdered at Treviso where the rivers Sile and Cagnano meet, in 1312. Finally Cunizza prophesies the treachery of Alessandra Novello Bishop of Feltre, who in 1314 surrendered certain Ghibelline gentlemen of Ferrara, in his protection, to Pino della Tosa, who then governed Ferrara as vicar of King Robert, by whom they were killed. (Her reference to Malta is to the tower near Padua where Ezzelino held his prisoners, or the Papal prison for criminal priests, sited either at Viterbo, or on the Lake of Bolsena.).

Having delivered herself of these prophecies related to Can Grande's territories round Verona, and possibly written by Dante around 1316 when Can Grande offered him his protection, Cunizza falls silent. Before doing so she makes a reference to the third Order of *Angels* [p. 241], that of Thrones, who signify the Power of God, manifested through the Angels and drawing them towards Him. They are the mirrors of his judgments, and also represent his steadfastness. Joy is connected with the Seraphim: trust in God's power with the Thrones.

***MedLXXVI:2 Folco of Marseilles: Paradiso Canto IX:67***

Folco shines *like* [p. 315] a bright ruby, red with the flames of love, and Dante explains that the outward appearance of the *spirits* [p. 330] is bright in Paradise and dark in Hell, since the outer reveals the inner state of mind: namely joy in the Paradiso, sadness in the Inferno. Dante asks why Folco does not mirror Dante's own desire and speak to him.

Folco explains his origins. Marseilles is on the same meridian as Bougia in Algeria. At Gibraltar where the Mediterranean runs out of the Atlantic the sun is on the horizon when it is noon in the Levant, so the Mediterranean makes zenith at its eastern end of what was horizon at its western end. i.e. it extends over a quadrant. Julius Caesar's fleet won a victory over the Pompeians near Marseilles in 49BC. Folco quotes three *examples* [p. 261] of intense love from the ancient world, Dido, Phyllis and Hercules.

He asserts that the spirits are beyond the state of repentance, and thoughts of their sins, and dwell on the power that made the order of the universe, *beautifying* [p. 247] it with its *Art* [p. 243], and on the goodness that allows the earthly world to return to the spiritual.

Here too, interestingly, is Rahab the prostitute of Jericho who helped Joshua's spies. They in turn swore to save her and her family ('our life for yours'). She was told to fasten a scarlet thread to her window so that she and her family could be identified at the taking of the city. She was converted to the Israelite cause, and became a symbol of the Church, the scarlet cord signifying the blood of Christ, and the two spies the two Testaments. (See Joshua ii and vi 23-25.) Dante uses the examples of Folco and Rahab to assert that their faith or conversion and support for the cause (however dubious we might consider their actions, religious persecution in Folco's case, treachery towards Jericho in Rahab's) redeemed their past lives of excessive dependence on earthly love and sexuality, and placed them in Heaven. Rahab is particularly exalted, as the first 'convert' to the Jewish God, so elevated by Christ, and a *symbol* [p. 334] of the victory of the Crucifixion, despite having been a prostitute, and of another nation.

The mention of Rahab allows Dante, through Folco, a diatribe against Florentine usury and worldliness, along with Boniface's corruption of the Papacy, and his indifference to the aim of the Crusades.

## Meditation LXXVII: Paradiso Canto X

### *MedLXXVII:1 The Sun's Sphere: Paradiso Canto X:1*

Dante urges the reader to gaze with him at the *order* [p. 295] of the universe, in mind and space, and the *art* [p. 243] of the Maker, while invoking the *Trinity* [p. 340] as composed of the primal Power, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or breath of *Love* [p. 288]. The reader's *eyes* [p. 257] will see that creation which the eyes of the Creator never leave. The Spring equinoctial point where the Ecliptic meets the Celestial Equator is the point where the sun rises, in Aries, in the Vision. Dante treats the band of the ecliptic that the paths of the sun and the other 'planets' appear to follow against the fixed *stars* [p. 331], as necessarily tilted (at 23.5deg, since the axis of the earth is so tilted relative to the plane of its orbit round the sun), so that the sun and planets have varying influences throughout the year (by creating the seasonal changes and the varying declinations of the planets in the sky). This is Divinely ordained as an aspect of the order and art of the Universe.

The Sun measures *time* [p. 339], and rises earlier and more northerly each day from mid-winter to mid-summer and later and more southerly each day from mid-winter to mid-summer, so that it appears to travel on a continuous spiral through the sky during the year. Beatrice has led Dante, in a timeless moment, to the sphere of the sun while he was unaware of it. He cannot *express* [p. 328] the increased *brightness* [p. 287] through *intellect* [p. 283], *art* [p. 243] or *knowledge* [p. 349], but it can be a subject of *faith* [p. 264] and *hope* [p. 279]. Beatrice urges Dante to show his *gratitude* [p. 278] for the ascent, and in doing so Dante momentarily forgets Beatrice and goes beyond her, as adoration of the divine goes beyond divine philosophy, and Beatrice *smiles* [p. 326] with laughing *eyes* [p. 257], her smile being a symbol of the theological virtues and of faith, her eyes of the cardinal virtues and reason. Faith and intellect are one.

It is the first sphere of the cardinal virtues, that of the *Sun* [p. 331] and *Prudence* [p. 310], that Dante and Beatrice have reached. *Prudentia* is practical *wisdom* [p. 349], appropriate to the sphere of the sun that brings life to the earth, and here the spirits are manifested who reconciled spiritual and earthly wisdom, pagan and Christian learning and history, and celebrated, explained and directed the virtuous Christian life on earth. The Sun's is a

sphere of light, creation and wisdom.

With a beautiful descriptive passage Dante introduces the coronet of twelve living lights (like the months of the solar year, the hours of the clock) *dancing* [p. 251] and *singing* [p. 323] around himself and Beatrice, *like* [p. 315] a halo round the moon (implying a moon goddess identity for Beatrice). The lights circle them *three* [p. 340] times like stars round the pole then rest like ladies from a dance. The voice of Thomas Aquinas, the great Dominican theologian, now satisfies Dante's craving to know who they all are. We can take it that Dante is also introducing his own prime sources of theological knowledge among them, many of whom tackled the hard truths of Christianity, those requiring subtle philosophical argument from a position of faith. Aquinas stands at the *threshold* [p. 337] of deeper knowledge as Dante leaves the lower spheres reached by Earth's shadow, and enters the sphere of the Sun. He may in a sense also reflect a movement from the first three liberal arts, the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic), to the succeeding four of the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) of the medieval schools, in that he bridges the gap between the tools of knowledge, and the realities of wisdom: between the speech and argument of philosophy, and the mathematical dance and singing of the higher spheres.

Aquinas sought to achieve a synthesis between Aristotelian philosophy and Christian thought, reconciling the *philosophical* [p. 300] method and ancient learning with the truths of spiritual revelation. The 'Angelic Doctor' of theology, and medieval philosopher (c1225-1274), he was the pupil of Albertus Magnus, Albertus of Cologne (1193-1280), the 'Universal Doctor'. The two Dominicans 'christianised' Aristotle adapting his philosophy and making him a treasury of pagan learning. Aquinas completed the work in *Summa contra Gentiles*, and *Summa Theologica*. A man of sweetness and holiness he was canonized in 1323, two years after Dante's death, and influenced Dante greatly.

Gratian is there, the Italian Benedictine monk who brought ecclesiastical and civil law into harmony with each other. His *Decretum* was the first systematic treatise on Canon Law. And Peter Lombard (c1100-1160) an Augustinian, known as 'the Master of the *Sentences*' who wrote his four books on God, the Creation, Redemption, and the Sacraments and Last Things, as the chief summary of medieval theology before Aquinas,

who commented on it. In the prologue he speaks of himself as 'desiring with the poor widow (Luke xxi 1-4) to cast something out of our poverty into the treasury of the Lord.'

Next is Solomon, the fifth light, The King of Israel, son of David and Bathsheba, so wise, before Christianity, that there was a debate, here resolved, as to whether as a Jew he was damned or saved. See First Kings iii 12. He was unequalled in earthly wisdom, that of 'the understanding heart', and chose as his gift from God, practical Wisdom. (See First Kings iii 5-15.). The sixth is Dionysius the Areopagite, Saint Paul's convert on Mars's hill, see Acts xvii, to whom the mystical sixth century writings of the pseudo-Dionysius were ascribed, especially one on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, which were possibly composed in the fifth or sixth century. Dionysius was supposed to have learned of the hierarchies and other matters from Saint Paul, who had seen them when rapt up into the third heaven. Paulus Orosius is next, an early fifth century writer, whose *Historia adversus Paganos* was an apologetic treatise written at the suggestion of Augustine to show that Christianity had not ruined the Empire, as Pagans contended.

The eighth is that major influence on Dante, Anicius Manlius Torquatus Severinus Boëthius (c475-525), Roman consul and philosopher who was condemned to death by Theodoric, at Pavia. He wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy* while in prison, defending the virtuous life and justifying the ways of God. He stressed philosophical truth, and the earthly life, rather than revelation and the afterlife, and though a Pagan with Christian connections was accepted as a Christian teacher. He argued the timelessness of God's view of existence, and the validity of Human Freewill. Cieldauro (Golden Ceiling) is St. Peter's Church in Pavia where he was buried. Since his opponents were Arian heretics, he is claimed as a Catholic martyr.

Isidore of Seville (c560-636) author of the *Cyclopaedia*, the main Medieval Encyclopedia, follows, with Bede (c673-735) the English Ecclesiastical historian who died in Jarrow, and Richard of Saint Victor the Augustinian mystic (died 1173), and friend of Saint Bernard, who wrote a treatise called *De Contemplatione*.

Strangely perhaps Sigier (or Siger) of Brabant (d. c. 1283) is here also, a professor in the University of Paris, where the 'straw-littered' Rue du Fouarre ran close to the river in the Latin Quarter, and was the centre of

the Arts Schools at Paris. He disputed with the mendicant orders, and Aquinas was one of his opponents, so that Dante's thought is reflected back from Sigier onto Aquinas himself. He was ultimately driven from his University chair, and assassinated, or executed, at the papal Court at Orvieto. Sigier was the most famous Averroist thinker in late thirteenth century Paris, arguing non-Christian interpretations of Aristotle. Dante presumably admired his *sylogistic* [p. 300] method, rather than all of his conclusions. Placing him last in the circle, effectively juxtaposes him with Aquinas who is first, and so reconciles the two opponents. Sigier while putting forward Averroist arguments, including those concerning the nature of the soul, and determinism which Aquinas and Dante specifically refute, nevertheless suggested the inferiority of philosophical argument to faith, where they were irreconcilable. Dante is keen to promote reconciliation in this sphere of practical wisdom, and it may be this 'simplistic' aspect of Sigier's thought he is stressing.

Like a clock striking the hour of Matins, when the Church rises and sings to Christ, the wheel of the twelve spirits now revolves sweetly and harmoniously around Dante the pilgrim and Beatrice, Divine Philosophy. So the regular ordered measure of theological truth and practical wisdom, of the harmonious Church and its Orders, circles around the revelatory and divine grace of Beatrice. (The iconography here mirrors that of Revelation 12:1, of the woman crowned with twelve stars). God's Universe moves to the harmony of mathematics, and the regularity of the solar cycle. All is order at this level, far from the chaos of politics, the city, and human destructiveness.

## **Meditation LXXVIII: Paradiso Canto XI**

### ***MedLXXVIII:1 Dominic and Francis: Paradiso Canto XI:1***

Above the distractions of the world Dante's thoughts are understood by Aquinas, and he highlights two *questions* [p. 259] in Dante's mind that follow from his previous speech.

Aquinas first identifies Dominic and Francis the founders of the two great mendicant Orders, as the *guides* [p. 278] of the Church, *exemplars* [p. 261] of

the practical wisdom needed to wed religion to human life. Francis associated with love, and the Seraphim, Dominic with wisdom, and the Cherubim. And Aquinas the great Dominican now praises Francis, as Bonaventura, the great Franciscan, will shortly praise Dominic. Dante is setting the two Orders together, uniting them, their objective being the same. It is vital to Dante's purpose in the whole *Commedia* that his political, spiritual and personal histories should meet in one vision of the harmonious plan of God's world. His politics must be justified by his religion, his personal life by his spiritual understanding.

***MedLXXVIII:2 The Life of Saint Francis: Paradiso Canto XI:43***

Aquinas tells us about Francis's life. Giovanni, later Francesco, of Assisi (c1182-1226) was the Founder of the Order of Friars Minor or Franciscans. (They wore a brown or grey habit, with three knots in the girdle representing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.) Francis was the son of a wool and cloth merchant, Bernadone Moriconi. His birthplace, Assisi, lies between the Rivers Tupino and Chiascio that rise in the mountains near Gubbio, where St Ubaldo (Bishop of Gubbio 1160) chose a hermitage. *Ascesi* an old form of Assisi may be translated 'I have ascended' and Francis was often compared to the rising Sun, making this sphere of the Sun particularly appropriate to him.

His love of 'Lady Poverty' is a spiritual equivalent to Dante's initial courtly love of Beatrice, and there is a sense in which Dante wishes to transfer that spirituality to *Beatrice* [p. 245] as he transforms her from a representative of the erotic tradition to that of the divine. Dante may well have been deeply involved with the *Franciscan* [p. 269] schools and order during his lifetime. He certainly was inspired by its fervour and passion, and its worldly simplicity. As Aquinas stresses, it was Francis who embraced the life naked of possessions that Christ inspired, in a manner closest to the original. It was Francis who transferred the attitudes and language of *love* [p. 288] to a purely spiritual and ideal 'lady'. Here was a source of Dante's inspiration for the later idealised figure of Beatrice.

Francis renounced his possessions before the Bishop, of Assisi in the presence of his father Pietra Bernadone. He gathered disciples. Aquinas mentions Bernard of Quintavalle, Egidius and Sylvester. The popular



stories told of him are the *Fioretti*.

The Franciscan Rule was approved by Pope Innocent III in 1210 and confirmed by Honorius III in 1223. In 1219 Francis went to the East to try and convert the *Sultan* [p. 242], a journey from which he returned unsuccessful. Christ gave him the third confirmation of his work in 1224 on the 'hard rock' of La Verna where he received the stigmata, the five wounds of the Passion. He died at Assisi on October 4th 1226, stretched naked on the ground in the arms of 'his dearest lady' Poverty.

Aquinas then reminds Dante how great Dominic must be to equal Francis's spirituality, and attacks the contemporary state of the Dominican Order, the *sheep* [p. 315] who have strayed into strange pastures.

## **Meditation LXXIX: Paradiso Canto XII**

### ***MedLXXIX:1 Bonaventura: Paradiso Canto XII:1***

A second circle of lights now turns with the first, harmonised with it, with a singing beyond the earthly. In a complex nested *simile* [p. 315], Dante compares the twin coronet to a double rainbow, the one echoing the other, like the bow of Noah's covenant. The two circles fall still together, as eyes open and close together. The twenty-four lights now echo the twenty-four elders representing the Old Testament who preceded the chariot of the Church in the Divine Pageant, as the two coronets of the mendicant Orders echo the wheels of that chariot. Dante now hears the voice of Bonaventura from the new circle.

Giovanni Fidanza, the Franciscan 'Seraphic Doctor' Saint Bonaventura (1221-1274) was born at Bagnoregio near Bolsena. He was a friend and colleague of Thomas Aquinas, and Minister-General of the Franciscan Order from 1256. He wrote the official life of Saint Francis, and shortly before his death was made a Cardinal and Bishop of Albano by Pope Gregory X. Bonaventura worked against extremism in the Order, and was noted for his humility, piety and learning.

He now tells the story of Saint Dominic, to complement Aquinas's life of Francis. Saint Dominic (Guzman) (1170-1221) was the founder of the Order of Preachers, called Dominican or Black Friars. He was born at

Calahorra in Spain of noble parentage. His mother Giovanna Guzman dreamed before his birth that she was whelping a dog with a burning torch in his mouth that would set the world on fire. His godmother had a dream in which she saw a star on his forehead illuminating the earth. He founded the Order of Dominicans or Friars Preachers at Toulouse in 1215. As a young man he became a canon and preached against heresy. He was active among the Albigensians, trying to convert by persuasion, as Simon de Montfort was perpetrating his massacres. He preached throughout Europe and stimulated the study of theology in the universities, dying in Bologna in 1221. Dante stresses his labours on behalf of the Church, and his efforts to combat heresy, the civil war within the Church.

Bonaventura then echoes Aquinas by criticising the state of his own Franciscan Order and its extremism, singling out Ubertino da Casale (1259-1338) leader of the *Spirituals*, the party of strict observance within the Franciscan Order, and at the other extreme Matteo d'Acquasparta, one of Boniface's cardinals, Minister-General of the Franciscan Order from 1287, who relaxed the observances, and as Papal Legate interfered in the affairs of Florence in 1300-1301, with disastrous consequences.

Bonaventura then names the other lights in the second circle, Illuminato Bishop of Assisi in 1282 who joined the Franciscan Order in 1210 and accompanied Francis on his mission to the Soldan, and Friar Agostino who also entered the Order in 1210, and died on the same day as Francis after a vision of Francis ascending into Paradise. They are followed by Hugh of Saint Victor (c1097-1141), one of the great mystics of the Abbey of Saint Victor at Paris. It was the centre of conservative learning as opposed to the scholastic Aristotelian learning of the progressives. He was the master of Peter the Lombard and Richard of Saint Victor.

Then we have Pietro Mangiadore or Petrus Comestor, 'Peter the Eater of Books' (d. 1179) who wrote the *Historia Scholastica*, a History of the Church from Genesis to Acts, paraphrasing the Scriptures. He too belonged to the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris, and became Chancellor of the University of Paris in 1164. Next is Pietro Ispano or Petrus Hispanus who succeeded Adrian V for a few months, and was killed in 1277, in the fall of the Papal Palace at Viterbo. He wrote a much-used treatise on Logic in twelve books. The well-known *Memoria Technica* verses, *Barbara Celarent* etc, are derived from it.

Nathan follows who denounced David's sins (See Second Samuel xii.), and then John Chrysostom, or Golden Mouth (c 344-407) that Archbishop of Constantinople, of fearless eloquence, who denounced the vices of the Court and was persecuted and exiled by the Empress Eudoxia. Ninth and tenth are Aelius Donatus who wrote an elementary Latin Grammar in the fourth century, and Rabanus, Bishop of Mayence (c766-856) who compiled a cyclopaedia *De Universo* in twenty-two books, and was in favour of orthodoxy to the point of unwitting heresy. He was a Benedictine and pupil of Alcuin, and wrote voluminously, summarising ninth century learning. Dante, through Bonaventura, is again emphasising practical wisdom, but also the more radical Franciscan criticism of the established Church and Papacy, which explains the addition of Joachim of Flora, or Fiore, in Calabria (c1130-1202), a Cistercian monk, who founded a monastery there. He claimed to have the power to interpret the prophetic books of the Bible with special reference to the History of the Church. A new dispensation (of the Holy Spirit, after the Father's, and the Son's), the third epoch, was at hand, he said, of perfect love and spiritual freedom. This was known as the Eternal Gospel. The spiritual party among the Franciscans seized on it, and Fra Gherardo da Borgo San Donnino (Gerardus) wrote an Introduction to the Eternal Gospel condemned as heresy in 1256. Bonaventura in fact helped to suppress the Joachists. Dante nevertheless places Joachim alongside Bonaventura in the circle, both as an indication of the reconciliation he is asserting in this sphere, and also giving approval to the purer radical strain in *Franciscan* [p. 269] thought, with its *prophetic* [p. 307] interpretations, which influenced his own Apocryphal and revelatory predisposition. Dante is endorsing the prophetic and the radical inasmuch as it interprets the human mission correctly, and leads back to that supreme order on earth and in heaven.

It is easy, at about this point in the Paradiso, as the theological content unfolds, of losing sight of Dante's fundamental subject matter, which is still the ethical journey of individual spirituality. Having investigated sin and its purgation, *Dante* [p. 252] is now revealing the way, which leads via the seven cardinal and theological virtues, to God. 'And the greatest of these is Love'. Intellect is in the service of that Love, and while Dante uses theology, though without being an innovative theologian, and while he is still concerned to hold out for his perfected Empire and Papacy, his ultimate aim is now the Vision of the Universe filled with Love. The Poet is the

mouthpiece of that Vision, and the poem is his attempt to bear witness to it. Its power is not generated only by its artistic poetic craftsmanship, but by its depth of seriousness, its profound feeling, and its sincerity. Dante is speaking about what can be spoken of, religion and its meaning, and the paths of right action, in order to move towards what cannot be spoken of, the mystical Vision, which is love filled with intellect, and mind filled with love.

## Meditation LXXX: Paradiso Canto XIII

### *MedLXXX:1 Aquinas on Solomon: Paradiso Canto XIII:1*

In a complex *simile* [p. 315], utilising among others the *stars* [p. 331] of Ursa Major and Minor, and Ariadne's constellation the *Corona Borealis* (the myth implying marriage with a god, and therefore the wedding of these spirits to God), Dante asks us to envisage this dance of the double crown of stars, in which the twenty-four spirits sing the *Trinity* [p. 340], and the twofold nature of *Christ* [p. 248]. Aquinas then begins to answer Dante's second question concerning the merits of Solomon. Since Adam and Christ received the full measure of human possibility within them, how can the fifth light here, Solomon, be held up as an unparalleled *example* [p. 261] of wisdom?

Aquinas first gives another version of the *Neo-platonic* [p. 294] structure of creation. All things, mortal and immortal, are created by the flow of Love and Light in the Empyrean, focused downwards through the nine moving heavens, until it engenders transient life forms on Earth. Nature is variable because the heavenly spheres vary their state, and therefore human beings vary in their qualities. *Nature* [p. 293] is like a creative artist, always acting imperfectly. However Adam and Christ were created perfect. Aquinas now clarifies that it is Solomon in the role of king whom he has declared superior among kings, because he chose 'royal prudence, worldly wisdom' as the greatest gift, and not *knowledge* [p. 261] of religion, logic, *philosophy* [p. 300], or *mathematics* [p. 313].

Aquinas then warns against false deductions, and intellectual *pride* [p. 306], and quotes examples from Aristotle of *philosophers* [p. 300], Parmenides, Melissus, and Bryson who reasoned falsely, and examples of two opposing

*heresies* [p. 279], that of Sabellius, who denied the separate persons of God and his son Christ though they are unified in essence, and of Arius who denied the essential unity of God and his Son though they differ in person. Both were guilty of error. He adds *examples* [p. 261] of practical wisdom, that one should wait until the end before judging: bad may end in good like the rose tree, good may end in bad like the ship's course, and God's *justice* [p. 285] is not Man's.

## **Meditation LXXXI: Paradiso Canto XIV**

### ***MedLXXXI:1 The Resurrection: Paradiso Canto XIV:1***

Beatrice's voice is heard, in response to Aquinas, *like* [p. 315] a wave travelling outwards in water in a rounded dish, issuing from the centre to the circle of spirits. The circling spirits intensify their light and *singing* [p. 323] at her words, exalting the *Trinity* [p. 340], and Solomon speaks from the inner circle (implying that the outer circle belongs to Bonaventura and the Franciscan paradigm, that is the circle nearer, though only slightly, to God, which reflects Dante's own primary source of inspiration in *Franciscan* [p. 269] radicalism and the purer nature of its vision. The inner circle belongs to Aquinas and the Dominican Order with its closer involvement in worldly activity).

Solomon gives us a vision of the Resurrection, where the bright flesh will penetrate the *spirits* [p. 330]' existing spiritual brightness making them complete, and will increase in power, increasing in turn their ability to see God and their ardour. The desire for the flesh is the desire for complete identity, eternal individuality, and an aspect of the love that is invested in what is unique, and what is beloved. Dante not only expresses this love of the *individual* [p. 282] in his poem that stresses individuals from all ages, brought together in the contemporaneousness of the afterlife, which he derived from the Classics and the Testaments with their stories of individual lives in history and myth, but he helped to feed that love of individuality forward into the Renaissance, where we see a continuing and conscious striving for originality and the creative definition of the self.

***MedLXXXI:2 The Sphere of Mars: Paradiso Canto XIV:67***

Dante half-sees the vision of a third circle of the Holy Spirit forming in the extreme brightness, and *completing*<sup>[p. 334]</sup> a symbol of the *Trinity*<sup>[p. 340]</sup>, flashing out then so that his eyes cannot withstand it, while *Beatrice*<sup>[p. 245]</sup> appears with too great a *beauty*<sup>[p. 247]</sup> for him to *remember*<sup>[p. 292]</sup> the sight. The initial dimness and then brightness of the third circle indicates the philosophical vagueness of the Holy Spirit (while the Father is essence, and the Son manifestation), but its intense religious reality as the Inspirer (one with the Creator and Redeemer). It therefore connects with the Joachist doctrine of the third epoch, which is indeed that of the kingdom or dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

Dante and Beatrice are now drawn upwards into the sphere of the *planet*<sup>[p. 331]</sup> Mars, that signifies the cardinal virtue of *Fortitude*<sup>[p. 269]</sup>. The red planet carries traditional associations of blood and war in myth and astrology, here of the Church Militant and of the Crucifixion. Dante *prays*<sup>[p. 305]</sup> to God at this sign of grace, and two blood-red rays form the *sign*<sup>[p. 334]</sup> of the Cross inside the circle of the planet, just as the Milky Way gleams between the poles of the heavens, raising questions as to its origin (Dante discusses this in the *Convivio*). A vision of *Christ*<sup>[p. 248]</sup> on the Cross is revealed, white within the redness, and beyond Dante's powers of *description*<sup>[p. 328]</sup>. *Like*<sup>[p. 315]</sup> dust motes in a ray of light, spirits move along the arms and upright of the image, and they sing a hymn which is beyond Dante's understanding but contains the words 'Rise and conquer'. The spirits are those of the warriors of God, those who fought for the Chosen People of the old law, or Christ's Church in the new.

Dante is totally absorbed in this vision, more so than any previous sight. In case this seems a slight on *Beatrice's*<sup>[p. 245]</sup> beauty manifested in her *eyes*<sup>[p. 257]</sup>, he tells us that he has not yet looked at her in this sphere, and they will be more beautiful than before when he does so. Gazing at her is a pure joy that grows purer as they ascend.

## Meditation LXXXII: Paradiso Canto XV

### *MedLXXXII:1 Cacciaguida: Paradiso Canto XV:1*

Silence falls, by grace of the double circle of spirits, enabling Dante to direct his inward prayer towards them. Those people who deny themselves this paradise of love for the sake of transient things should mourn, he says.

Dante now turns in this Canto from the religious and spiritual thread of the previous sphere of the Sun, towards the personal. A spirit flashes *like* [p. 315] a meteorite from the right of the Cross to its base and on towards them. It is the soul of his ancestor Cacciaguida, who comes forward to speak to him like Anchises, Aeneas's father, in Virgil's epic. The comparison is significant. Anchises is remembered in all three Cantiche, though in Purgatory it is by a reference to his words concerning the funeral of Ascanius (Iulus), in that loveliest passage of all Virgil's writings, one filled with his strange strong sweetness. Book VI of the Aeneid was a vital sourcebook for Dante's poem, and at the beginning of Inferno II it is Aeneas Dante thinks of as a fore-runner, a man who himself crossed to the Underworld. Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise, and Cacciaguida here, both stand in the same relationship to Dante as Anchises to Aeneas at the end of Aeneid Book VI. With love, they reveal things to him, they kindle his imagination with a passion for the glory to be, they clarify and confirm his mission, and they prophesy the future. By the reference to Aeneas the history and destiny of Troy and *Rome* [p. 312] is tied to Christian history, all part of a single Divine unfolding. And *Dante* [p. 252] himself becomes heir to Aeneas and Paul, the gate of heaven to be twice-opened to him, now in life and afterwards in death, which is Cacciaguida's subtle *prophecy* [p. 307].

Dante turns towards Beatrice, and there is the flare now of light that accompanies that marvellous image. Her *smile* [p. 326] in her *eyes* [p. 257], the loving *Beatrice* [p. 245], the theological within the cardinal virtues, the beauty of divine truth and grace, overpowers him, until he touches as he thinks *lo fondo*, the limit and end and profoundest depth of his grace and his Paradiso. Is this beyond the erotic, and wholly spiritual? Or is it charged with the erotic? Why should not those who believe in the Resurrection in the flesh be filled still with the power of beauty on seeing the beloved, even in Heaven? Does not the erotic go beyond the physical to encompass the

intellectual, the emotional, the full content of mind and spirit, or rather it embraces body, soul and mind, not as a hierarchy, but as a Oneness, a Trinity. Far from denying the physical, the erotic, beauty and its visual charge, Dante's triumph is to surround and infuse that love with supreme love, so that he does not go beyond Beatrice, leave her behind, in the final moments of Vision, he gazes with her at the Love that transcends, that empowers, that fills the Universe. And so here, the Medieval Mind, more ready than ours to see body as an appendage to spirit and not the other way round, and therefore less troubled by the reality of the incarnate intellect, is content with the living symbol, the word made flesh, Beatrice as both woman and intellectual ideal.

Cacciaguida, his profound *speech* [p. 328] at first beyond Dante's understanding (this should be compared with Nimrod's mention in the three Cantiche, the speech of Babel cannot be understood because it has been corrupted. Here the lack of understanding is because language has been elevated beyond mortal comprehension) now expresses his love and joy at seeing his descendant Dante, whose thought and desire to know who he is are plain to him, without Dante speaking. He tells Dante to speak though, so that he can hear his voice and fulfil his own desire, another confirmation of the desire for the physical in the spiritual. Dante replies that for the *spirits* [p. 330] who see God and His perfection, intellect is equal to emotion and can express it, but for Dante expression falls short of desire. He now asks Cacciaguida to reveal his name.

### ***MedLXXXII:2 Cacciaguida's Life: Paradiso Canto XV:37***

Cacciaguida now explains that Dante is a *leaf* [p. 315] of that family tree of which he is a root. Dante's great-great-grandfather, whose son was Alighiero I, and who having died, according to Dante, some hundred or so years before (but may have been still alive in 1201) had been in Purgatory in the first terrace of *Pride* [p. 306], since that time. Dante is clearly referring to a family trait! Cacciaguida's wife was Alighiera of the Aldighieri family of Ferrara from whom the family name was believed to originate. He himself took part in Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's unsuccessful second Crusade of 1147, under the Emperor Conrad III, and was killed. His brother's name Eliseo suggests a connection with the Elisei family.



Cacciaguida takes the opportunity to extol the simple virtues of early Florence. The Badia, the belltower from which the ancient canonical hours were rung (*tierce* at nine, *nonas* at twelve) was close to the ancient circle of walls, within which, in Cacciaguida's time Florence was still enclosed. The second circle of walls was built in 1173, the third circle which is still intact in part, was built at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Life was simple, daughters waited to be married, dowries were appropriate, great families lived and dressed modestly: none were decayed or in exile: and the founding of Florence by Cataline's Romans, and of Fiesole before it by Electra, were remembered.

He himself, a knight, died fighting the *Muslim* [p. 242] infidel, and he makes clear his view that the Holy Land should of right be administered by Christians. This is ancient Florence speaking, upright and firm, simple and virtuous, staunch and filled with fortitude. Dante is creating echoes of ancient Rome and the Republic, rather than the later Empire, but the effect is Virgilian and calls to mind Augustus's personal adherence to plain values and simple virtues. Here also is the Church Militant in Crusader action. *Dante* [p. 252], the exile, asserts his own Florentine roots in defiance of those who have exiled him, and implies the corruption of modern times compared with Florence's former greatness.

## **Meditation LXXXIII: Paradiso Canto XVI**

### ***MedLXXXIII:1 Ancient Florence: Paradiso Canto XVI:1***

Dante, valuing his ancestry and regretting how nobility may diminish with time, addresses Cacciaguida in the manner in which Julius Caesar was once addressed, according to legend, when he achieved pre-eminence, as *voi* instead of *tu*. It was a purely Roman custom, but disused there in Dante's time. He is confirming the link between the militant Church and the militant Empire in terms of historical destiny. Beatrice *smiles* [p. 326] at Dante's acknowledgement of his relationship with Cacciaguida as the Lady of Malehaut coughed discreetly at Guinevere's first acknowledgment of Lancelot.

Dante asks about ancient *Florence* [p. 267], its patron saint being John the Baptist. The Florentines adopted St John the Baptist as their patron,

displacing the Roman Mars, whose sphere we are now in, and whose statue had stood on the site of the Baptistry. The statue was then removed and set up by the Arno. According to legend, when the city was destroyed, by the Goths (Attila being confused in the story with Totila the Goth leader) the statue fell into the river. Florence could not be rebuilt it was believed until the statue had been reinstated, and according to legend again it was rescued and set on a pillar on the Ponte Vecchio, when the city was restored by Charlemagne. It remained there till the great flood of 1333 carried away the bridge and statue. Their rejection of the war-god Mars was believed by Florentines to be at the root of the endless factional conflict in their city.

Cacciaguida, *speaking* [p. 328] in the ancient Tuscan language, spells out his date of birth, precisely, as 580 revolutions of Mars in its orbit since Christ's birth, by which we assume Dante means the start of the Christian era also. Cacciaguida was therefore born, according to Dante, in 1091 (if calculated from the period of *Mars orbit* [p. 331], 687 days, multiplied by the 580 orbits mentioned, which gives 1091 years 8 months and a few days. The actual visual Mars return was in June, though Dante's astronomy may not have been accurate enough to calculate this, since it allows for precession and Mars position in its orbit. Dante suggests Mars was in Leo at Christ's birth when in fact at the beginning of 1AD it was astronomically in the constellation of Aries the Ram, the sign of the equinox and of Christ as the Lamb of God. It is possible, but unlikely given astronomical knowledge in his day, that Dante is being both knowledgeable and subtle, and that by 'his own Lion: *al suo Leon*', Dante means the sign of Aries which Mars rules astrologically, and that Christ the Lamb is intended by '*his* own Lion!') Cacciaguida was then fifty-six when he joined the Crusade if born in 1091. He then gives his place of birth no less precisely. An annual race was run along the Corso. Of the six sections into which Florence was divided, the *sesto* of *San Piero* was the last to be entered. The Elisei house was on the right.

The precision indicates *Dante's* [p. 252] care once more to establish his own Florentine ancestry: the exile's love for his roots, his pride in them, and his desire to assert his rights. (Note that Cacciaguida to Dante spans five generations since Cacciaguida is his great-great-grandfather, and then note the allusions to the number five in what follows. We are also in the fifth sphere.).

Cacciaguida now talks about the growth of ancient Florence, which was a fifth smaller than in Dante's day, two hundred years later. The statue of Mars stood by the northern end of the Ponte Vecchio, in the south of the city by the Arno, and the Baptistry is in the north, marking the old boundaries. New families filtered in from the towns of the Contado. In the eleventh century, Galuzzo and Trespiano were the southern and northern limits of Florentine territory, which did not include Aguglione or Signa, places whose families have contaminated the city according to Dante. Simifonti was a fortress in the Valdelsa destroyed by the Florentines in 1202. The Conti Guidi sold their castle at Montemurlo, between Pistoia and Prato, to Florence in 1254 being unable to defend it from the Pistoians. Acone was probably in the Val de Sieve. Luni was on the Macra, the northern boundary of Tuscany. Urbisaglia was in the March of Ancona. Chiusi, is ancient Clusium, in the malarial Val di Chiana. Sinaglia is on the seashore north of Ancona.

Cacciaguida laments the passing of the purer stock, and the smaller but more effective city. His perspective is historical, greater than one life. It is noticeable how in Dante the detailed historical perspective of poetry has widened, compared with the less historical, more mythical epics of Greece and Rome.

Cacciaguida now mentions the great families of ancient Florence. Amplifying the text, the gate of St Peter was where the Cerchi lived in Dante's time. They had purchased the houses over the gate before 1300, which had belonged to the Ravignani, from whom the Conti Guidi were descended through Bellincion Berti's daughter Gualdrada.

The Pigli arms were barred with ermine=vair. The Chiaramontesi lived in the Saint Peter quarter. One of the family, in Dante's time, around 1299, Messer Durante de' Chiramontesi, officer of the customs for salt, reduced the standard measure for the issue of salt to the Florentines.

The Calfucci were a branch of the Donati. The Uberti were once the dominant Florentine family. Their *pride* [p. 306] was exhibited by Farinata. The golden balls were the device of the Lamberti, of whom Mosca was one. The ancestors of the Visdomini and Della Tosa families while having the revenues of the Bishopric of Florence in their hands were accused of perverting them to their own uses whenever the See was vacant.

Filippo Argenti belonged to one branch of the Adimari family. Ubertino Donati, the ancestor of Dante's wife Gemma, had married one of the daughters of Bellincion Berti, a sister of Gualdrada, and strongly objected to his father-in-law giving the hand of a third daughter to one of the Adimari. A fourth daughter may have been the wife of Dante's great-grandfather Alighiero I.

The Della Pera in Dante's time had dwindled to the extent that it seemed incredible a gate of the city had been named after them. Hugo of Brandenburg, Imperial Vicar of Tuscany for Otho III, died on Saint Thomas's day. He had created many knights of the families, who all retained his coat of arms (barry white and red with divers charges). The Della Bella had a gold border to the arms.

The Uccellini and Gherardini were associates of the Amidei. Associates were members of a family who joined the tower-club of another for the purposes of its military maintenance, and were legal consorts of that family. These were members of a family, which had ceased to act with their true family, and were therefore regarded as no longer belonging to it.

Buondelmonti was betrothed to a daughter of the Amidei, but broke faith at the instigation of Gualdrada Donati. In the debate as to whether he should be killed Mosca said the evil word, 'A thing done has an end.' Buondelmonte was murdered, at the foot of the statue of Mars, on the Ponte Vecchio, in 1215. The family originated from Valdigueve and settled in the Borgo Saint Apostoli. To reach Florence they would have crossed the small stream called Ema. The family divisions created the Guelph and Ghibelline factional conflicts. So Dante, through Cacciaguida, neatly brings us back to Mars and the civil strife that is diminishing Florence.

The old standard of Florence carried white lilies on a red field. The Ghibellines maintained this, but the Guelphs adopted a red lily on a white field in 1251. Cacciaguida remembers the ancient banner.

Dante has now asserted his ancestry, established the nature of ancient Florence, and the contemporary failings of the city, and tied all this to Cacciaguida's noble fortitude as a militant Christian loyal to the blood of Christ, compared with the factional Florentines dedicated to blood-stained Mars. Cacciaguida having endorsed Dante's ancestry, can now, like Anchises speaking to Aeneas, endorse his mission, and prophesy his future.

## Meditation LXXXIV: Paradiso Canto XVII

### *MedLXXXIV:1 Dante's Future and Mission: Paradiso Canto XVII:1*

Dante turns to Beatrice for confirmation of what he has heard of his ancestry, as Phaethon did to Clymene his mother, concerning his birth as a child of the Sun. Perhaps Dante is also thinking of the pride that led to Phaethon's downfall. Re-assured by Beatrice he shares his fears of the future with Cacciaguida, based on the dark *prophecies* [p. 307] made in Hell and Purgatory, notably by Ciacco, Farinata, Brunetto, Vanni Fucci, and Guido del Duca bearing on the fate of the Whites and his own exile. He anticipates that Cacciaguida can see future events as we can see the almost self-evident truths within Euclidean geometry.

Cacciaguida confirms his powers of future vision, but denies predestination, as Boethius did, God and Paradise being extra-temporal, outside the flow of events, in the same way as [p. 315] the eye does not affect the course of the river it sees. Dante is concerned to preserve the integrity of individual *free will* [p. 271] without which the concept of responsibility for sin is meaningless. (An endless religious debate, which carries within it a paradox only overcome by faith, since God does intervene in the world and history according to Christian tradition and belief. It is of course an issue in non-religious ethics also, concerning the effects of genetics and environment, nature and nurture, on the ability of the individual to be fully moral and have full 'free-will'.)

Cacciaguida reveals *Dante's* [p. 252] fast approaching exile from Florence, engineered by the corrupt *Papacy* [p. 296]. Like Hippolytus Dante will be accused of a crime, which is actually that of his accuser(s), in Dante's case barratry. Dante was sentenced with four others to fine and banishment on January 27th 1302. With fifteen others, he was sentenced to death by burning, on March 10th. The Whites were expelled from Florence on April 4th. Between June 8th 1302 and June 18th 1303 he broke away from them (becoming 'a party of one') in disgust and took refuge with Bartolommeo della Scala at Verona, where he also found the young Can Grande. Bartolommeo was Lord of Verona, his arms, significantly, a ladder (*scala*)

surmounted by the imperial eagle. Dante took refuge with him sometime between the summer of 1302 and Bartolommeo's death in March 1304. Can Grande della Scala, his younger brother Francesco (1291-1329), was probably the 'Greyhound' of Canto I, Dante's patron at Verona to whom the Paradiso was dedicated and who sheltered him from 1316. He received the last thirteen Cantos of the Paradiso, left unfinished at Dante's death, from Dante's son Jacopo. He was born in Verona (between Feltre in Venetia and Montefeltro in Romagna *see* Canto I). He became lord of Verona in 1311, was an Imperial Vicar, and in 1318 the head of the Ghibelline party. He was an art patron, and kept a civilised and stately court. Can Grande was one of the great military men of his age. In 1311 he showed his mettle by recovering Brescia and taking Vicenza.

He was nine years old (nine years and one month in April 1300) at the time of the Vision, born so Dante suggests with Mars significant in his birth chart, and would be noted for virtue, as above, before Clement cheated Henry. Henry of Luxembourg, became Emperor Henry VII (1308-1313). Of insignificant wealth and background he hoped to establish his prestige by his coronation in Rome (1312), and revival of the Imperial claims south of the Alps. Pope Clement V attempted to use him to further his own ambitions. Henry was in Italy between 1310 and 1313, and was hailed by Dante as the Liberator. He reached Milan in December 1310, but failed as honest broker to reconcile the Guelph and Ghibelline factions. He was driven into leadership of the Ghibelline party and aligned himself with Federico III of Sicily. Clement then swung back to the Guelphs, and repudiated the alliance. Henry died at Buonconvento of disease in 1313, as he was marching on Florence and planning a campaign against Naples, ending the dreams of Dante and the Florentine exiles. Dante here identifies two of the possible candidates for his 'Greyhound', or Saviour of Italy, Can Grande and Henry VII, though these words may imply that Henry VII and Dante's hopes in him were already dead when Dante completed this part of the Paradiso.

Nevertheless, says Cacciaguida, you will be more *famous* [p. 266] than your enemies, and to Dante cautious about telling his Vision for fear of inciting his enemies, but equally anxious not to 'lose life' by failing to transmit his great poetry to future generations, Cacciaguida replies that he should tell all, and strike, proudly, with the truth, at the most important names since that brings most honour. That is the reason why Dante has used famous names

as *examples*, [p. 261] to encourage those who read to understand and take note. *Cacciaguida* [p. 282] endorses Dante's heritage, his destiny, and his mission, and his counsel is one of endurance, courage, steadfastness, truthfulness, and fortitude. He is truly an Anchises to Dante's Aeneas.

## **Meditation LXXXV: Paradiso Canto XVIII**

### ***MedLXXXV: The Warriors of God: Paradiso Canto XVIII:***

A startling, profound and beautiful moment. Beatrice tells Dante to attend to Cacciaguida's final speech, and he becomes wholly absorbed in the love in her *eyes* [p. 257], and the joy that streams from her lovely face, and is overcome by her *smile* [p. 326], until she gently, sweetly and lovingly rebukes him: 'not only in my eyes is Paradise.'

The charge of earthly *love* [p. 288] is there, in Dante. We can consider it spiritualised, but its location in eyes and smile and face gives it an irresistible erotic content too. This is the old Courtly love transfigured but still alive. And of course there is an allegorical meaning also. Divine Philosophy is not the only path of religion: the Church Militant is another facet, represented by Cacciaguida. There are many faces of Paradise. The contemplative life complements the active life. Dante turns back to hear the *warrior* [p. 348]. Fortitude complements Love.

Cacciaguida now *compares* [p. 315] the *neo-platonic* [p. 294] universe to a tree, with God as the crown of the tree. The sphere of Mars is the fifth canopy of that tree. As Cacciaguida names seven other spirits along the Cross, they move and flare. The great *warriors* [p. 261] of God, the defenders of the old and new faith, are firstly Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses's minister, and successor, who crossed the Jordan and led the Israelites in taking the Promised Land, and Judas Maccabeus One of the five sons of Mattathias. It was Judas Maccabeus, 'The Hammerer', who resisted the enforced Hellenization of the Jewish people practised under Antiochus IV of Syria (175-164). He took Jerusalem and re-consecrated the Temple (25 *Kislev*, 165BC, remembered by the *Chanukah* festival) Peace was achieved in 163BC and the enforced Hellenization halted. He and his brothers died in the continual fighting until, in 143, Simon, the last survivor expelled the

Syrians. Simon became the first High Priest and civil ruler of the newly established state, with the title *Nasi*.

Dante then turns to later history with Charlemagne, Roland, William of Orange and Renard: Charlemagne was Charles (Born 742, Ruled 768-814 AD), the son of Pepin the Short, King of the Franks. He conquered the Langobard kingdom in 773-774, and extended his empire into Slav territory. As the Founder of the Holy Roman Empire, Pope Leo III (795-816) crowned him Emperor 23-24 December 800, with the Imperial title '*Romanorum gubernans imperium*'. By the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 812, the Eastern Roman Emperor, Michael I, recognised Charlemagne as Emperor in exchange for the surrender of Istria, Venetia, and Dalmatia. He died at Aix-la-Chapelle in 814 and was entombed in the Dome. He was the legendary rebuilder of Florence, and Justinian earlier mentioned Charlemagne in the summary of Imperial history, as having protected the Church by use of Imperial force and right.

Roland (Orlando), Charlemagne's nephew, and the hero of the battle of Roncesvalles, went down to defeat with his Franks, fighting against the Saracens, while attempting to hold the valley in 778AD. He blew his horn in desperation, to alert his uncle eight miles away, but Charlemagne was misled by the advice of the traitor Ganelon, and did not provide aid. The epic is told in the Old French *Chanson de Roland*, the 'Song of Roland', where the intensity of Roland's blast on the horn shattered it. The defeat allowed Arab incursions into Narbonne in 793, but Dante proclaims it as part of the continuing war against the *Muslim*<sup>[p. 242]</sup> threat to Christianity.

William of Orange was a hero of French Romance, historically one of Charlemagne's knights, who, after fighting the Saracens, retired to die as a monk in 812, and Renard a converted Saracen, his mythical brother-in-law and his companion in battle, who retired with him to become a monk.

Lastly as examples of the warriors who fought for the faith, we have Godfrey of Bouillon and Robert Guiscard.

Godfrey, Duke of Lorraine, was a descendant of Charlemagne who led the First Crusade which captured Jerusalem in 1099. (On Friday July 15th he was the first Crusader to drop down from the wall into the city, close by Herod's Gate) The capture was followed by indiscriminate massacre of the inhabitants, 'the knights riding up to their knees in blood, in the Haram enclosure, where the Mahomedans sought refuge'. He ruled there, as king,



until his death of illness the following year, but refused the royal crown and title. He was buried in the Holy Sepulchre where his tomb (and sword) survived until the great fire of 1808. Despite the massacre, he was remembered as the best and wisest of the Christian leaders.

Robert Guiscard (d 1085), the Son of Tancred de Hauteville, was the founder of the Norman dynasty in southern Italy and Sicily. He waged war in Sicily and Southern Italy from 1059 to 1080, against the Greeks and Saracens and won the title Duke of Apulia from Pope Nicholas II in 1059, and died in 1085.

Dante is wholly orthodox in celebrating the aggressive sweep of Jewish and Christian history, and the right of the Israelites and Christians to adopt these tactics is implicitly and explicitly assumed.

***MedLXXXV:2 The Sphere of Jupiter: Paradiso Canto XVIII:58***

The red blush of Mars is replaced by the white light of *Jupiter* [p. 331] as Dante and Beatrice ascend into a wider orbit, the sixth sphere of *Justice* [p. 285]. Jupiter is associated with Justice and Wisdom, with Jupiter the Roman god, and therefore with the Roman Emperors, and with the Christian God. Jupiter is also described as the temperate planet between the cold of Saturn and the heat of Mars in Ptolemaic astronomy. Here Dante sees the spirits rising *like* [p. 315] a flock of birds to form one by one the 35 letters of the opening text of the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon in the Vulgate: ‘*Diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram*: love righteousness you judges over earth.’ Dante calls on the Muse to assist his *poetic* [p. 303] inspiration here, retaining each letter as the spirits pause until they have spelt out the whole sentence. Then they rest forming the *m* of the last word, *terram*: Earth. This is the M of *Monarchia*, in the title of Dante’s treatise on kingship, and a symbol of the Empire and Imperial Law. And also the M of *Mente*, the Mind of God. M in the Latin and Italian alphabets, lacking a *w*, is also the central letter of the whole alphabet.

More spirits join them and eventually form the head and neck of an Eagle, the *emblem* [p. 334] of Rome, the Divine sign of Empire and Justice, above the filled-in M representing the body and wings. The spirits during this process entwine themselves with the shapes of lilies indicating the

Frankish influence on Christian history. The eagle, with the della Scala ladder, was also part of Can Grande's coat of arms. The Mind of God inspires the earthly forms, the nests, where *intellect* [p. 283] builds, and creates justice.

Dante now asks that Divine Mind to turn itself towards Boniface's corrupt Rome, where smoke obscures Divine light, where indulgences are sold, where excommunication is used to wage war, and where the *Pope* [p. 296] is in love with gold Florins stamped with the head of John the Baptist, Florence having been dragged to destruction by the seductions of his political dance.

## Meditation LXXXVI: Paradiso Canto XIX

### *MedLXXXVI: Divine Justice: Paradiso Canto XIX:1*

The multiple spirits forming the shape of the Eagle speak with one voice, *like* [p. 315] the glow from many coals, as the refracted light shines on Dante, and he tries to tell what has never before been *spoken* [p. 328], written or imagined.

The evil recognise *Justice* [p. 285] even if they fail to follow it. Quickly Dante asks to be enlightened, his hidden *question* [p. 259] is that concerning the justice of the un-baptised who lived without knowledge of the faith and are excluded from salvation, and the eagle shakes its feathers like an un-hooded hawk before replying. God has measured out the universe, what is visible and what is concealed, and his Word is infinitely beyond human beings. Even Lucifer as one of the *angels* [p. 241] was too limited to understand everything without God's help, and in fact fell through his own impatience. Human vision is even more limited, and God's justice in the matter is not be questioned. It is a matter of *faith* [p. 264]. Conformity with God's will is what is required. The answer is crystal clear. Only those who believe in Christ rise into Paradise. The Old Testament and other pagans who entered we assume anticipated his coming, or were guided to belief. Dante clearly agonised over the question, as he did over that of the un-baptised infants in Limbo. Trajan and Ripheus are visible in this sphere as we shall see, and new light is cast on the issue.

The Eagle now asserts that there are many who think themselves Christians whose behaviour belies it, and *reveals* [p. 261] the unjust actions of the Christian kings of 1300, and the state of the potential *Empire* [p. 256]. The Emperor Albert Albrecht I of Hapsburg, King of the Germans, and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (1298-1308) carried out an aggressive campaign against Bohemia in 1304, confiscating it as an expired fief of the crown. Philip IV of France (1285-1314) debased the coinage by two-thirds in 1302 to defray the cost of his Flemish campaign. Edward I of England (1272-1307) claimed the crown of Scotland and suppressed William Wallace's popular uprising. Later Scotland obtained national independence under Robert the Bruce, at Bannockburn, in 1314. Ferdinand IV, King of Castile and Leon (1295-1312), was noted for his luxurious style of living at the expense of his kingdom. Wenceslaus of Bohemia, Wenceslas II (1278-1305), was noted for his sybaritic ways according to Dante. Charles II of Anjou, (1243-1309), titular King of Jerusalem, is ineffectual and debased, as is Frederick King of Sicily (1296-1337), and his uncle James of the Balearic Isles (1276-1311), and his brother James II of Aragon (1291-1327). And we go on with the list of these sad days, Dionysius (1279-1325) of Portugal, Hakon (1299-1319) of Norway, Stephen Ouros II (1275-1321) of Serbia, called Rascia from its capital, who issued counterfeit Venetian coins, Andrew III of Hungary, and finally Henry of Lusignan King of Cyprus (died 1324), whose bad rule Dante cites as a warning to Joanna wife of Philip the Fair, concerning her separate kingdom of Navarre. Dark times indeed!

## **Meditation LXXXVII: Paradiso Canto XX**

### ***MedLXXXVII: The Just: Paradiso Canto XX:1***

When the Eagle falls silent Dante is able to hear the spirits singing, just as [p. 315] the stars shine out with Divine light when the Sun vanishes. Then the Eagle speaks again, and Dante weaves delightful similes to express the transitions.

The Eagle tells him to gaze at its eye intently, since the *six* [p. 261] most important of the *just* [p. 285] spirits are there. Firstly David, whose psalms are

rewarded in Paradise. David was the earthly ancestor of Christ, born at the time when Aeneas came into Italy, so making manifest the Divine ordination of the Roman Empire.

Then Trajan, adopted Emperor (98-117AD) after the mutiny of the Praetorian Guard (97). He was the first Emperor of Provincial origin. He was given the title *Optimus* by the Senate in 117 and oversaw the greatest extent of the Roman Empire, conquering Dacia, Armenia, Assyria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia. Dante in Purgatorio X and here refers to the popular story of Trajan and the widow derived from the *Fiore di Filosofi*. Pope Gregory supposedly interceded on his behalf through prayer, to bring about Trajan's deliverance from Hell, to allow him time for repentance. Dante explains that God's will was not altered in that his return from Hell to his body at Gregory's intercession was predestined and he was then saved at the second death. *Prayer* [p. 305] does not alter God's plan but fulfils what God has ordained to be fulfilled by prayer. This seems at odds with Dante's previous thoughts on *free will* [p. 271] but the implication is that while some events are 'pre-determined' pre-ordained judgements, others are free. God in this reading guides history but does not fully predetermine it.

Next is Hezekiah the King of Judah, whose life was extended by the Lord, for the sake of his past sincerity and virtue, and his penitent prayers. The word of God came to him through the mouth and actions of Isaiah. (See Second Kings xx.) Aquinas taught that God's decrees are consistent with prayer, because again *prayer* [p. 305] does not alter the Divine plan, but fulfils what God ordained to be fulfilled by prayer.

Constantine follows, whom Dante has previously referred to in Inferno, the ruler of the Western Roman Empire (lived c280-337) after his victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge on the Tiber in 312 AD. The son of Helena, he defeated Licinius at Adrianople and Chrysopolis in 324, becoming sole ruler of the eastern and western empire (*totius orbis imperator*). Byzantium was renamed Constantinople in 330 and made the second Rome, and the Christian capital as he had embraced Christianity. He died in 337 after receiving baptism on his deathbed. He consolidated Diocletian's structure of the absolute state, to emphasise the divine nature of the Emperor. The Donation of Constantine was a forged document of the Middle Ages, in which Pope Sylvester I was supposed to have cured Constantine of leprosy, he then resolving to transfer his capital to

Constantinople, leaving the Pope with temporal power in Italy. Dante saw this as the source of the fatal involvement of the Church in temporal power, and as a consequence the Empire's involvement in coveting the spiritual power of the Church. He considered the Donation invalid as the Emperor could not relinquish temporal power, nor could the Pope receive it. (See Dante *De Monarchia* iii 10 etc). Dante implies that Constantine was not to blame for an action that intended *good*<sup>[p. 277]</sup>.

Now William the Good, the Norman King of Sicily and Naples (1166-1189), the last king of the House of Tancred, reigning over 'The Two Sicilies'. He was the nephew of the Empress Constance and is here considered a model ruler by Dante.

Lastly we have Ripheus a Trojan, who was killed at the fall of Troy. Virgil in Aeneid ii 426 et seq. says 'he the most just of the Trojans, who never wavered from right, though the gods did not recognise his righteousness.' Dante connects this incident with Acts x 34 'God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.' Aquinas suggests that the good unbeliever will receive inspiration, or a teacher, from God to achieve his conversion. This opens the door to the virtuous Pagans, but note Paul's weeping over Virgil's tomb (traditionally), which suggests Virgil could not be saved in this way. Dante clearly struggled with the whole concept, regarding its natural justice.

Lovely *similes*<sup>[p. 315]</sup> follow: the eagle, the imprint of justice, is like a lark in the air, while Dante's doubt about what he sees still shines through him as if through glass. It is as if *philosophically*<sup>[p. 300]</sup> he hears a thing's name but does not comprehend its reality. The Eagle, seeing he accepts through faith and not understanding, enlightens him.

Dante now celebrates the *three*<sup>[p. 340]</sup> theological virtues once more, in that the **faith** of Trajan and Ripheus, who followed and preceded Christ, resulted from in Trajan's case the **hope** that informed Gregory's prayers (apocryphally, since Gregory himself did not accept the efficacy of prayer for the damned) and returned Trajan's will to the living flesh to allow him to believe and be saved: and in Ripheus's case from the **love** with which he acted on earth, so causing God to instil belief in him even before the coming of Christ. Human vision is inadequate to understand all God's provisions, and cannot judge who will ultimately be redeemed, and so we

require faith to bridge the gap. The twin lights of Trajan and Ripheus quiver like eyes at the Eagle's words.

## **Meditation LXXXVIII: Paradiso Canto XXI**

### ***MedLXXXVIII: The Sphere of Saturn: Paradiso Canto XXI:1***

The preceding three spheres have taken us through the active religious life with its personal and political dimensions, and the virtues of practical wisdom, fortitude and justice, and now in the sphere of *Saturn* [p. 331] we reach the contemplative spiritual life of the individual, and the fourth cardinal virtue of *temperance* [p. 336]. Dante's eyes are fixed on Beatrice who dare not *smile* [p. 326] lest she overpowers him, as we enter the higher and more deeply religious sphere. Saturn shines, as presumably it did at the Creation, in the sign of Leo, a position associated astrologically with strength of will. Saturn itself is associated with patience, caution and self-discipline, the characteristics of *temperantia*, or temperance. Saturn also is a reminder of the *Golden Age* [p. 276] when in myth Saturn ruled the earth, a time of simplicity, moderation and primal innocence.

Here Dante sees a ladder (reminding us of the eagle and ladder, the *scala*, in Can Grande della Scala's coat of arms,) stretching upwards, as Jacob did in Genesis 28:12. *Like* [p. 315] the motion of a crowd of rooks (reminiscent of the starlings simile in the *Inferno*, and the doves of the *Purgatorio*) the spirits gather. Dante, who has balanced the joys of obedience and contemplation in turning his eyes from Beatrice, now pleads his obedience to her wishes before he dare question the spirit nearest to him.

The spirit answers Dante's question as to why this sphere is silent by explaining that like Beatrice's smile the *singing* [p. 323] would overpower him, and as to why he is near that is because he has been assigned to speak with Dante. On being asked why he was predestined to carry out the role, Dante is told that the human mind should not enquire into *God's* [p. 274] will. He is assigned and that should be enough.

He reveals that he is Peter Damian, Saint Peter Damian, of Ravenna, some time Abbot of the monastery of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana in the Apennines, beneath Monte Catria, near Gubbio. (Dante is said to have found refuge there after the death of Henry VII.) His parents' poverty lead to him being exposed as an infant, but he was rescued and educated by his brother Damian, taking the name Damiani, 'Damian's Peter'. He was made Cardinal Bishop of Ostia in 1058, against his will, by Pope Stephen IX. He styled himself Peter the Sinner, *Petrus peccator*, and visited the monastery of Pomposa on an island at the mouth of the Po, near Commachio. He was an ardent reformer of Church discipline and one of the chief ecclesiastical writers of the eleventh century. He was a friend and ally of Hildebrand afterwards Saint Gregory VII, and died at Faenza in 1072. Peter Damian signifies simplicity and the moderation reminiscent of the early Church, and now criticises the modern *Church* [p. 296], supported by the descent of further spirits in a deep resonance of agreement. Dante is overcome by this thunder of condemnation.

## **Meditation LXXXIX: Paradiso Canto XXII**

### ***MedLXXXIX:1 Saint Benedict: Paradiso Canto XXII:1***

*Beatrice* [p. 307], in the *image* [p. 315] of mother and child, reassures Dante that vengeance will be taken on the corrupt Papacy. One of the spirits he can now see comes forward. It is Benedict the Christian Saint (c480-543) and founder of the oldest Western monastic order, the Benedictines. He was born at Nursia in Umbria, and went to Rome to study. He lived as a hermit for several years near Subiaco. He founded the famous monastery at Monte Cassino on a mountain between Rome and Naples, a spur of Monte Cairo, a few miles from Aquino in the north of Campania. It was once crowned by altars to Apollo and Venus-Aphrodite. The Rule of his Order demanded poverty, chastity and obedience, manual labour, and irrevocable vows. He was remembered for his many acts of healing.

Here in the sphere of *temperance* [p. 336] Benedict *signifies* [p. 261] the self-control and discipline, obedience and simplicity of the virtue. He in turn indicates Maccarius the Egyptian (301-391), a disciple of Saint Anthony,

one of the monks of the Sinaitic desert, and Romoaldus a member of the Onesti family of Ravenna. He was a monk of Camaldoli (see *Purgatorio* V:85) in the Casentino district, who saw a vision of the heavenly ladder, and founded the Camaldolese Order, a white-robed stricter branch of the Benedictines. He died in 1027.

Dante asks whether he will see the clear form of the Saint and is told to wait until he sees the last sphere of the Empyrean, where all the *spirits* [p. 330] truly are. The Empyrean is outside space. Benedict then bemoans the state of his own Order, and the monks whose greed is worse than the interest acquired through usury, since they hold their possessions in trust for the faithful. Then he and his companions vanish in a whirlwind.

This simple passage with Benedict shows directly Dante's affinity with the poverty and purity of the early Church, and the contrast he sees with contemporary *religion* [p. 296], and barely conceals an apocalyptic fury under the apparently calm surface.

### ***MedLXXXIX:2 Dante enters the Stellar Heaven: Paradiso Canto XXII:100***

Dante and Beatrice now climb the *mystic* [p. 334] ladder of Contemplation, faster than one can on Earth where *nature's* [p. 293] law of *gravity* [p. 313] applies. They enter the stellar heavens in the *constellation* [p. 331] of Gemini, *Dante's* [p. 252] birth-sign and Dante invokes the power of the sign. Gemini's astrological associations are with intellect and logic, ability in language and writing, inquisitiveness and energetic restlessness. Beatrice now encourages him to look back at Earth and its littleness, down through all the seven spheres of the 'planets', *signifying* [p. 334] the seven virtues. He sees the unclouded reverse side of the Moon of faith, that seen from Heaven, and the sun of wisdom, with love and hope, Venus and Mercury, close to it: and the measured justice of Jupiter, between warlike Mars and Saturn's simplicity and discipline, the Church militant and the Church contemplative. He sees the whole structure of their orbits (in the *Ptolemaic* [p. 331] system), and the 'threshing-floor', of Italy and Florence, from the mountains to the mouth of the Arno. Dante is remembering the threshing-floor of Atad beyond the Jordan (see Genesis 50:10) where Joseph and the elders carried the body of his father Jacob, who had seen the vision of the



ladder, and wrestled with the Angel, 'and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation.'

## Meditation XC: Paradiso Canto XXIII

### *MedXC:1 Christ, Gabriel, Mary, the Apostles: Paradiso Canto XXIII:1*

Beatrice waits *like* [p. 315] the bird of dawn, turned eastwards from Gemini towards the *constellation* [p. 331] of Cancer (associated with home, the 'nest') the place of the summer solstice, and the heavens are lit by a vision of Christ and his host, brighter than the Sun and Moon and more than Dante can endure, so that he loses awareness and is only recalled by Beatrice who wishes him to look at her *smile* [p. 326], of faith, hope and love, more beautiful, which he can now endure, but which is beyond his power to *describe* [p. 328], and beyond the *singing* [p. 323] of Polyhymnia, the Muse of sacred song, and the other Muses.

With his familiar mixture of humility and pride, Dante asks for the reader's sympathy for his attempts to describe what follows, and Beatrice points him towards the vision of Christ's garden, *the rose* [p. 334] of the Virgin Mary, and *the lilies* [p. 334] of the Apostles. Christ has moved higher towards the Empyrean in order to spare Dante's powers of sight. The Archangel Gabriel, the *Angel* [p. 241] of the Annunciation, falls in flame like a coronet to crown the Virgin. He circles her until she follows Christ into the higher sphere of the Primum Mobile, while the saints sing the Easter Antiphon, and their fires stretch upwards towards her like children reaching for their mother. Here the saints have their spiritual treasure earned on earth, the Babylon of Exile, where they rejected earthly treasures. Here Peter triumphs, and holds the key to redemption. The vision is of Christ's Ascension and Mary's Assumption. In this sphere of the stellar Heavens Dante, student and pilgrim, will be *examined* [p. 259] by the Apostles (Saints Peter, James and John) who stand at the *threshold* [p. 337] to the Primum Mobile of the Angels, concerning his understanding of the theological virtues.

## Meditation XCI: Paradiso Canto XXIV

### *MedXCI:1 Saint Peter, Faith: Paradiso Canto XXIV:1*

Beatrice calls on the company of Saints, and Saint Peter descends in flame, sweeping *three* [p. 340] times round Beatrice. She asks him to *examine* [p. 259] Dante on the subject of *faith* [p. 264], despite his prior knowledge of Dante's powers of faith, hope and love. Christ entrusted the keys of the Church, the faith, to Peter 'the fisherman', the 'rock' on which the Church would be built (Matthew xvi:18). Peter died at Rome as a martyr in the persecutions under Nero. His memorial monument at the cemetery on the Vatican Hill was built about AD160-170. The Bishops of Rome (from Stephen onwards, bishop AD 254-256), and the Popes, were his successors. Dante now prepares, *like* [p. 315] a student, to be questioned.

Dante when asked what faith is quotes Saint Paul, Saul of Tarsus, born about 10AD, Jewish by birth but a Roman citizen. He underwent conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts ix 1-9). He preached at Paphos, Philippi, Athens, Ephesus and elsewhere, and was martyred in Rome with Saint Peter on the same day. Faith is an intellectual virtue to the Catholic Church, and Dante here quotes Saint Paul's definition (in Hebrews xi:1) 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' Aquinas commented that faith is not a substance but rather a quality, whereas a substance exists in itself. Dante effectively responds to that *philosophical* [p. 300] point here by pointing out that what are realities in heaven are only belief below, and that is their substance on earth, and that we have to reason from that faith without any further knowledge, and so it falls under the definition of evidence of those unseen realities also. In other words on Earth faith is the substance of, and the evidence for, what will be seen as substance in heaven, and there require no evidence.

Dante confirms that he believes fully in the words he has spoken, and when asked for his sources for his belief he cites the Old and New Testaments, substantiated by miracles. When Peter comments that only the scriptures themselves attest to the reality of those miracles, Dante echoes Augustine, that the conversion of the world without miracles, would have been a greater miracle than any recorded, attesting to their reality. With that the spirits sing in praise of God.

Peter sanctions Dante's answers, filled with divine grace, and now, with the nature of faith and its basis having been defined, asks him to make a statement of what it is he believes. Dante replies that God, himself unmoving, moves the universe with love and desire, and derives this not only from physical and metaphysical knowledge but also from the Scriptural truth that flows from it. In the Metaphysics Aristotle shows that the prime Mover, which causes motion but is not itself moved, must be eternal, must be substantial, and actual, the prime object of desire, and of intellectual apprehension. From these five attributes Aquinas builds his five proofs of the existence of God.

Dante asserts his belief in the *Trinity*<sup>[p. 340]</sup>, for which the sources in the Testaments are chiefly: in the Old Testament the plural form of the word for God, the use of the plural in Genesis i:26, the threefold cry in Isaiah vi:3: and in the New Testament the baptism formula in Matthew xviii:19, the text of the three heavenly witnesses in First Epistles of John v:7 (Vulgate and AV), and the threefold formula in Romans xi:36: but the Unity of the Trinity is the breath behind the word throughout according to Petrus Lombardus and others. Saint Peter then circles round Dante three times, singing.

## **Meditation XCII: Paradiso Canto XXV**

### ***MedXCII:1 Saint James, Hope: Paradiso Canto XXV:1***

Dante dreams in *hope*<sup>[p. 279]</sup> of returning to his native city, the 'lovely fold' in triumph. He refused to accept a laurel crown at Bologna in 1318, invited to do so by Giovanni del Virgilio, hoping still to return to Florence, and be crowned there. Now that lady, whose face he had hoped to see again, in whom he had faith, so much so that it is not so much that Beatrice is a symbol of Divine Philosophy as that Divine Philosophy becomes the form of Beatrice, turns to him in love and joy. She announces the arrival of Saint James, and the two Saints rest there *like*<sup>[p. 315]</sup> spiritual doves. James represents Hope. The disciple of Christ, James the Greater, was the son of Zebedee, a fisherman of Galilee, and the brother of John the Evangelist. He was tried in Jerusalem in 44 AD by Herod Agrippa and executed. His

supposed tomb at Santiago de Compostella in Galicia, discovered in the 9th century, became a place of worship, by the 11th century, next in importance to Jerusalem and Rome, and he became the patron saint of Spain. The pilgrimage is a journey of hope.

Dante ascribes to him the authorship of the Epistle more usually attributed to the apostle James the Less, the 'brother of the Lord', which talks of God giving liberally in i:5. He was of the group with Peter and John whom Christ allowed nearer his presence on *three* [p. 340] occasions: at the Transfiguration, the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and the Agony at Gethsemane.

Dante is now *examined* [p. 259] as to what Hope is, and its source. He replies in words closely resembling Peter Lombard's 'Hope is the certain expectation of future bliss, coming from the grace of God and preceding merit.' The divine song he refers to is Psalm ix:10 in the Vulgate ix:11 where it has '*sperent*: let them hope'. And his other source is James's own first epistle.

James asks what hope promises and Dante refers to the Testaments. Firstly Isaiah lxi 7,10 where the prophecy that the redeemed shall possess double things implies joy of the body as well as joy of the soul and then John the Evangelist in Revelation vii:9 where the redeemed are robed in white, and Dante links this to Isaiah's statement. His hope then is of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.

Note how Dante continually links faith, hope and love as an indivisible trinity within the text. Love is the driving force behind all this faith, and the messenger of hope.

### ***MedXCII:2 Saint John, Love: Paradiso Canto XXV:97***

A light flashes out so brightly that *if the midwinter night sky* [p. 315] in Cancer had such a *star* [p. 331] there would be no darkness just continuous daylight. Saint John joins the other two Apostles making a *triplet* [p. 340] signifying the three virtues of faith, hope and love, and Dante uses images of the virgin and the bride to heighten the emotion.

Saint John, the disciple of Christ, son of Zebedee, and brother of James. was the presumed author of the Fourth Gospel and, by tradition, of

the Apocalypse, and therefore identified by Dante with John the Divine. His emblem in art is an eagle. (See Revelation iv:7. The four beasts are identified with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the fourth beast being a flying eagle.) At the Last Supper he was 'leaning on Jesus's bosom'. (See John xiii 23). Christ, on the cross, committed Mary to his charge. (See John xix 26-27). The Pelican, supposed to feed its young with its own blood, is a symbol of Christ and he with the Virgin alone ascended to Heaven in body as well as in spirit. Enoch and Elijah were only elevated to the Earthly Paradise.

Dante is temporarily blinded by the dazzle of Saint John's splendour, like a man who gazes at the sun's eclipse.

## **Meditation XCIII: Paradiso Canto XXVI**

### ***MedXCIII:1 Dante on Love: Paradiso Canto XXVI:1***

John reassures Dante that he will regain his sight, since *Beatrice* [p. 245] will restore it as Ananias of Damascus restored the sight of the blind Saul of Tarsus (Paul, see Acts ix 10-18). At John's prompting Dante asserts his continuing *Love* [p. 288] for Beatrice. It is worth considering the nature of that love. Has it passed beyond the physical, those eyes, *the gates* [p. 315] through which it entered, and become wholly spiritualised? On the contrary, Dante maintains the physical intensity of his love for her, throughout the *Commedia*. Yet, he says, the beginning and end, the Alpha and Omega, of all the scriptures that Love in all its forms reads to him, is Divine Love, the Good, God Himself. Love is one continuum, from the Divine to the earthly. All Love is one.

John *presses* [p. 259] him further. Dante relies on three authorities, firstly Aristotle, who taught that God is the supreme object towards whom the Heavens yearn. In the *Metaphysics* the Prime Mover is the object of longing or of intellectual apprehension. The good is the object of love, and since *God* [p. 274] is the supreme good He is the supreme object of love, and the more a mind sees the good the more it must focus on that supreme object, with love. The scripture regarding Moses is the next authority, where the Lord says to Moses 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee' in

Exodus xxxiii:19. The Vulgate says *ego ostendam omne bonum tibi*. The *third* [p. 340] authority is John the Evangelist (Christ's 'Eagle') himself in Revelation i:8. 'I am Alpha and Omega the beginning and the ending.'

John tells Dante to keep his highest Love for God. But on being questioned further Dante confesses that all things which share in the Divine Good inspire love in him, including the world's creation, his own being, the redemption, and Man's hope of paradise. Goodness inspires love, and love yearns for goodness.

Goodness is not Love, but its object. Love is not Goodness but a longing for it, and yet in some sense, for Dante and others, God, Goodness, *is* Love. Ambiguity lies in the word Love itself, which denotes both the yearning and the commitment it engenders to actions that are intended for good. Likewise there is an ambiguity in the word Goodness (used in the moral sense), which signifies both a desired state or outcome (say Virtue, moral excellence) and the commitment to actions that cause it. Seen as empathy in action, reflected in mutual love and gratitude, Love is in some sense the object of its own yearning. Out of empathy flows the desire to protect and nurture, as does the adherence to truth and steadfastness that reveals openness and empathy. To be true, sensitive and kind (benevolent, benign etc) can therefore be seen as effects of primal empathy and love, and from those qualities other cardinal virtues including justice, moderation, self-control and practical wisdom take their life. We might say Love arises with Virtue, since the desire and the actions are both rooted in primal empathy. Man's love in Dante's scheme is a desire for God: God's love is empathy towards His creation. If Goodness in action is represented in the earthly life by the Virtues, the question boils down to whether Love is a consequence or the root of Virtue, whether it is initially passive or active. If the latter God might then be seen as an external projection of internal empathy, and active empathy as the root of all manifestations of 'goodness'. (See Plato's Socratic dialogues, Hume's 'A Treatise of Human Nature', Wittgenstein on the usage of words, the modern neo-Darwinian scientific debates et al.)

Dante's orthodox view is that God is Truth and ultimate Goodness, rather than specifically Love, though he is Love also, and that love for His creation is fundamental. As we shall see later Human blessedness, according to Dante derives from a vision of the truth, and the extent of that vision

depends on grace and right exercise of the free will, according to the virtues, only one of which is love. Love is a consequence of vision, not the other way round.

***MedXCIII:2 Adam: Paradiso Canto XXVI:70***

Beatrice clears Dante's sight so that he sees even more clearly, and the spirit of Adam appears. Dante raises his head *like* [p. 315] a bowed branch after the wind has gone by. Adam sees all things including Dante's hidden questions reflected in the Divine mirror where every created thing is perfectly reflected, though none of those created things perfectly reflect *God* [p. 274].

Adam answers Dante's questions. His *original sin* [p. 296] lay in disobedience, (according to Aquinas pride in desiring spiritual good beyond what was owed him), rather than the eating of the fruit of the tree. His Life in the Earthly Paradise endured only to the seventh hour. His existence on Earth, in exile, and in Limbo was more than five thousand years. According to Eusebius, Adam was on earth for 930 years and in Limbo for 4302 years.

Dante makes the point that, while nature allows human *speech* [p. 328], languages like other products of the mind, vary, and decay. Adam's language had vanished before Babel was built.

## **Meditation XCIV: Paradiso Canto XXVII**

***MedXCIV:1 Saint Peter and the Popes: Paradiso Canto XXVII:1***

The whole of Paradise, singing, celebrates the Trinity: Dante seems to see the Universe's *smile* [p. 326]; the three Apostles and Adam burn with light in front of Dante's eyes: and Peter glows red with righteous wrath.

With a *triple* [p. 340] repetition, of 'my place', Peter speaks about the Pope (Boniface in 1300) who usurps that place as head of the Church. Beatrice, though herself innocent, blushes *as* [p. 315] a modest woman at hearing the denunciation. He gives *examples* [p. 261] of the great and good Popes Linus (66-76AD) and Cletus (76-88AD), Sixtus, Saint Sixtus or Sextus I (115-

125), Pius (140-155AD), Calixtus (217-222AD) and Urban (222-230 AD) who according to tradition died for the faith. He condemns factionalism, the use of the keys as a battle standard, or the use of his figure as a seal on corrupt Papal documents. He anticipates the Papacies of the Gascon Clement V (1305-1314), and John XXII from Cahors (1316-1334). Dante then links the workings of Divine Providence that supported Rome against Carthage under Scipio, with the unspecified retribution that will overtake the *Papacy*<sup>[p. 296]</sup>.

### ***MedXCIV:2 The Primum Mobile: Paradiso Canto XXVII:67***

The ether fills with the spirits *like* <sup>[p. 315]</sup> snowflakes travelling upwards. Dante the successful examinee, looks down towards Earth. In *Gemini* <sup>[p. 331]</sup>, he is separated from the sun, in Aries, by the sign of Taurus. It is now sunset over Jerusalem. (Jupiter snatched Europa from Phoenician Tyre, the modern Lebanon, at the longitude of Jerusalem) Dante looking down sees from the dark of sunset at Jerusalem to sunlit Gibraltar (where Ulysses that symbol of restless self-will sailed to the West between the Pillars of Hercules). Dante turns his eyes to *Beatrice* <sup>[p. 245]</sup> whose smiling face exceeds in beauty whatever art or nature could create.

They are drawn up into the Primum Mobile, the sphere 'below' the Empyrean, and Beatrice explains that this is the sphere from which all the other circling of Dante's *Neo-platonic* <sup>[p. 294]</sup> Universe derives. The Light and Love of God clasp it, as it clasps the other lower spheres. *Time* <sup>[p. 339]</sup> has its origin here, below the timeless Empyrean. And Beatrice then condemns the *greed* <sup>[p. 274]</sup> of the human race, and its lack of good government in Empire or Papacy. But she gives promise of improvement before long, referring to the Julian calendar (rectified in 1752) which made the year 11 minutes 14 seconds too long, roughly a hundredth of a day. In Dante's time January began a little later in the real year each time, and so eventually it would fall outside winter altogether.



## Meditation XCV: Paradiso Canto XXVIII

### *MedXCV:1 The Angelic Circles: Paradiso Canto XXVIII:1*

Dante now sees something reflected in Beatrice's eyes [p. 257] *as* [p. 315] in a mirror, and turns to see a single intense point of light *un punto*, around which nine concentric circles wheel, turning faster and brighter the nearer they are to the inner point, through their closeness to the ultimate truth. As in *Aristotle* [p. 300] (*Metaphysics* xxx), Heaven and all Nature hang from this point, the Prime Mover, which is without magnitude but without parts and indivisible. The circles are those of the Intelligences, the Angelic Orders. Dante is *puzzled* [p. 259] as to why these circles reverse the arrangement of the heavenly spheres, where that sphere nearest to *God* [p. 274], the Primum Mobile, is the widest and fastest.

Beatrice explains that the heavenly spheres are arranged in this *Neoplatonic* [p. 294] structure to produce maximum benefit, so the outermost sphere the Primum Mobile which contains all the others must be the most excellent since it contains the most virtue, and therefore corresponds to the like angelic circle closest to God. There is therefore a spiritual rather than a spatial correspondence between the two arrangements, the concentric spheres centred on Earth, and the concentric Angelic Orders centred on God. God is both centre and circumference. Dante sees the truth of this, and the circles glitter with sparks like molten iron, and *sing* [p. 323] *Hosanna*. The quantity of sparks is compared to the old chessboard tale which has a reward being demanded of an amount of corn equal to that obtained by placing one ear on the first of the sixty-four squares of the chessboard, and then doubling the amount of the previous square, at each new square. The number obtained is 2 to the power 63 plus one, which is about 18.5 million million.

Beatrice then explains the nine Orders, arranged in three *triplets* [p. 340]. Beatrice makes a crucial point here that blessedness depends on sublimity of seeing, on the vision of the *truth* [p. 344] 'where every mind is stilled', rather than primarily on *love* [p. 288], which is in fact a consequence of that vision. The extent of vision is dependent on *grace* [p. 277] and the right exercise of the *will* [p. 271]. Dante therefore, ultimately, pins his life and work to the rightness

of his faith and vision, rather than the degree of his love that follows from it. (God is ultimately Truth, the partially undefined Good. The Love flows from the truth, both God's Love for his creation, and Man's love for God. Dante is not denying Man's love in any way, merely seeing it as a consequence rather than a cause, a desire for the good, rather than the good itself. Love is only one of the seven virtues demanding right use of free will, though the greatest of the three theological virtues. Despite many commentators denying that Dante makes knowledge and intellect superior to love, I disagree. He follows Aquinas 'the knowledge (by that above) of what is below exceeds the love thereof, but the love of what is above us, and especially God, exceeds the knowledge of the same.' God, through Love, may move 'the sun and the other stars', but absolute Truth is above Love and contains it. Here one might dispute the need for greater and lesser, above and below. Truth and Love co-exist.)

The *Angels* [p. 241] are divided in three Hierarchies, each of three Orders, here they are three triplets of circles. In the first triplet, Seraphs with their wings, and Cherubs with their eyes emphasise movement towards God (Love) and insight into His being (Knowledge). Thrones signify the Power of God, manifested through the Angels and drawing them towards Him, they are the mirrors of his judgments, and also represent his steadfastness. Joy is connected with the Seraphim, and trust in God's power with the Thrones. In the second triplet, the Dominions are an image of God's dominion, the Virtues indicate Divine strength and fortitude, while the Powers represent Divine power and majesty. In the third, outermost triplet, Principalities, or Princedoms, Archangels and Angels are concerned with the things of this world, love of the Holy Spirit, and communication of the gifts of God to man. The Angels is a term applied collectively to all the nine Hierarchies, signifying 'messengers' and the higher Angels can execute the functions of the lower, while having their special additional qualities. So Christ is the Angel of the Great Counsel.

Dionysius and Gregory had different arrangements of the Orders, Gregory realising the truth of the former when he arrived in heaven. The mystical sixth century writings of the pseudo-Dionysius were ascribed to the Aeropagite, Saint Paul's convert on Mars's hill. Dionysius was supposed to have learned of the hierarchies and other matters from Saint Paul, who had seen them when rapt up into the third heaven.

## Meditation XCVI: Paradiso Canto XXIX

### *MedXCVI:1 The Angels: Paradiso Canto XXIX:1*

Beatrice is silent for *as along as* [p. 315] it takes the sun to set and the opposing full moon to rise or vice versa. She then explains that *God* [p. 274], out of *love* [p. 288], created his creatures so that they might know existence. *Time* [p. 339] was created in the *triple* [p. 340] creation, of form, matter and being, out of the timeless, like three arrows from a bow. Light in Aristotelian *science* [p. 313] requires no time to travel through a translucent medium: its speed is infinite.

*Order* [p. 295] and substance were created instantaneously in the form of the *Angelic* [p. 241] presences, contradicting Jerome. (Eusebius Hieronymous Sophronius (342-420), born at Stridon in Dalmatia. With Ambrose, Augustine and Gregory he is one of the four Latin (western) Fathers of the Church. He retired into the Syrian desert for four years where he studied Hebrew. He settled in Bethlehem in 386. His translation of the Bible into Latin, the Vulgate, was eventually declared the official version at the Council of Trent. He spoke of the Angels being created long before the rest of the universe, which was contradicted by Aquinas.)

The *Angels* [p. 241] are actualised and complete, the lower creatures and matter are potential, and the material heavens and human beings are a binding together of *act and potential* [p. 300]. So human intellect can know in actuality things which it did not know, that is knew potentially: and create what it has not created. Similarly creatures are born and develop, as Genesis claims the world developed, over time, whereas the Angels were created in that first *fiat*.

Having explained the *triple* [p. 340] where and when and how of the Angelic creation, Beatrice explains that unlike Satan who fell through *pride* [p. 306] the other Angels opened themselves to God, and understood their place *humbly* [p. 281], and that it is a virtue to open oneself to *grace* [p. 277] likewise. The Angels have understanding and free will, as was taught, but do not require *memory* [p. 292] since they see past, present and future, as human beings claim to do in true or false prophecy.

Beatrice then condemns the vain displays of philosophy but more so the misuse of scripture, or its neglect. The fraudulent preachers obtain wealth that goes to feed more than just Saint Anthony's pigs. Saint Anthony's (251-356) symbol was the pig, and he was therefore the patron of the pigs that infested Florence, and its neighbourhood, belonging to the monks. They were fed on the fraudulent gain made from selling remissions (indulgences).

The Angels are of too great a number for human conception, as in Daniel vii:10. God's Light is reflected in all the elements of creation, the splendors, which vary in their qualities, says Beatrice, as she and Dante prepare to enter the Empyrean.

## **Meditation XCVII: Paradiso Canto XXX**

### ***MedXCVII:1 The Empyrean: Paradiso Canto XXX:1***

The Angelic display fades *like* [p. 315] stars at dawn, and Dante turns to *Beatrice* [p. 245] with love. In the Empyrean her *beauty* [p. 247] exceeds all measure, and Dante ceases to be able to describe her further. Here in the Empyrean Dante will see the redeemed spirits and the angels in their forms as at the Last Judgement. The Empyrean is the pure light of Truth, that intellectual light, which is filled with love. That Love, full of transcendent joy, is the love of true Goodness. Again we see how Dante unites *Truth* [p. 344] and *Goodness* [p. 277], to be known by the *intellect* [p. 283], out of which flows the transcendent joy of *Love* [p. 288]. Though Truth and Love coexist in God, intellect and knowledge in Man is the cause of human love.

Dante is greeted by a light that bathes him. His vision increases, and he sees a River of Light (see Revelation 22:1, and Psalm 46:4, the river of the water of life, *symbolising* [p. 334] the flow of divine grace), which gradually changes into a vision of the courts of Heaven. The light there is formed from light reflected back by the Primum Mobile below, making the Creator visible to the creature. The spirits are ranked in *hierarchy* [p. 294] and themselves reflect the light upwards and outwards. The eye can see an indefinite distance there since the laws of nature do not apply.

Beatrice draws Dante into the glow of the *Rose* [p. 334], where Beatrice says that the empty throne Dante sees with a crown above it is reserved for Henry VII (died August 1313). Italy will not be ready for his attempt to renew the *Empire* [p. 256], and Clement will work against him. But as we saw in Inferno XIX Clement, dying in April 1314, is destined for Hell.

## Meditation XCVIII: Paradiso Canto XXXI

### *MedXCVIII:1 Saint Bernard: Paradiso Canto XXXI:1*

The Angels fly *like* [p. 315] bees between the redeemed, in the form of a white rose, and God. Their faces are flame, their wings golden, and the rest white, the *three* [p. 340] colours *symbolising* [p. 334] love, knowledge and purity. They fly without obscuring vision or the divine light.

Dante is struck dumb, as the barbarians were on seeing *Rome* [p. 312], having made the *triple* [p. 340] journey from the human to the divine, from time to eternity, and from Florentine chaos to Heavenly order. He gazes at the multitude so as to remember it all, then turns to Beatrice but finds Saint Bernard there instead, *representing* [p. 334] loving contemplation, standing at the *threshold* [p. 337] of the Divine. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) the Cistercian monk and theologian, son of a noble Burgundian family, who founded the great monastery at Clairvaux in France was Abbot there till his death. He had a particular devotion to the Virgin, expressed in his *De Laudibus Virginis matris* and his nine sermons for the feasts of the Purification, Assumption, Nativity etc. He opposed the celebration of her Immaculate Conception. He dedicated all the monasteries of the Cistercian Order to her, and here calls himself her 'loyal' Bernard.

He explains that *Beatrice* [p. 245] has brought him to Dante, and he shows her to him, now seated on the third level. Dante offers her, as his *guide* [p. 278] to virtue, his sublime prayer and receives her smile. This is charged with the real woman as well as any symbolism of Divine Philosophy. And Dante in *gratitude* [p. 278] celebrates her *goodness* [p. 277], and her *grace* [p. 277] that has led him to *freedom* [p. 271] and the *hope* [p. 279] of salvation, and asks for her protection. She then turns towards the Divine Light.

Dante gazes at Bernard like a pilgrim gazing at Christ's image on the cloth of Veronica. Saint Veronica gave her handkerchief to Christ to wipe his brow as he carried the Cross, and when he returned it to her it was said to carry the imprint of his features. It was exhibited at Rome each year at New Year and Easter. Bernard tells him to look higher towards the *Virgin* [p. 347], at whom he looks with adoration. She shines out like the rising Sun, and there a thousand Angels each of a different species in Medieval angelology, are dancing and singing, beyond Dante's ability to relate. Bernard has brought Dante to gaze at the Virgin, the essential feminine aspect of God's universe, its grace and kindness.

## **Meditation XCIX: Paradiso Canto XXXII**

### ***MedXCIX:1 The Heavenly Ranks: Paradiso Canto XXXII:1***

Bernard now explains the ranks of the blessed, with all their *examples* [p. 261]. The ranks are separated on either side of the Virgin into those before Christ's coming, on the left, and those after, on the right. Those before, in the first seven ranks descending, she being in the first rank herself, are Eve, Rachel (Jacob's wife, with Beatrice, signifying contemplation, and therefore higher than the two following), Sarah (Abraham's wife), Rebekkah (Isaac's wife), Judith (The Jewish patriotic heroine and a symbol of The Jewish struggle against oppression She is usually shown holding the head of Holofernes the Assyrian general whom she decapitated with a sword. See Apocrypha.) and Ruth (the wife of Boaz, and great grandmother of David.)

On the Virgin's right side, those who came with or after Christ, we have John the Baptist, and below him Francis (who carried the stigmata), Benedict (opposite that other contemplative Rachel) and Augustine, this being Dante's view of their relative nearness to God. Lower down and running across the ranks is the division of the children who died before they had time to acquire merit, ranked there according to God's justice. They have differing qualities according to God's breathing of their spirits into them at birth, and were saved by their parents' merit in ancient times, first their parents' faith and innocence, then the Jewish rite of circumcision. Once Christ had come baptism became necessary, and the unbaptised are condemned to Limbo. Note that Bernard is made to express this orthodox

view that the un-baptised child must remain in Limbo (See Inferno IV), where spirits live ‘without hope, in longing’. However Bernard himself in his treatise addressed to Hugh of Saint Victor, holds back from this terrible conclusion. ‘We must suppose that the ancient sacraments were efficacious as long as it can be shown that they were not notoriously prohibited. And after that? It is in God’s hands. Not mine be it to set the limit.’

Gabriel now celebrates Mary, *singing*<sup>[p. 323]</sup> the ‘Ave Maria’, and Bernard answers Dante’s question about him.

Bernard now points out the souls on the right and left of Mary in the first rank. On the left are Adam, then Moses, on the right Peter and John. Saint Anne, Mary’s mother, is opposite Peter, Saint Lucy, Dante’s patron saint, who appears *three*<sup>[p. 340]</sup> times in the *Commedia*, is opposite Adam. (It is possible that Dante was born on Saint Lucy’s day as celebrated at the end of May in ancient Florence.).

Bernard now turns, as in life, to the Virgin, and exhorts Dante to pray to her with him, so that he might obtain her grace and assistance.

## **Meditation C: Paradiso Canto XXXIII**

### ***MedC:1 The Prayer and the Final Vision: Paradiso Canto XXXIII:1***

Bernard’s prayer to the *Virgin*<sup>[p. 347]</sup> follows, and Dante associates her with Love, Hope, Grace, Kindness, Pity, Generosity, and other human excellences. She is an embodiment of nurturing, empathetic, and loving humanity, taking on many of the positive and benign attributes of the ancient goddesses. Bernard asks the Virgin for her grace towards Dante so that he might see the final vision, and his protection afterwards. The prayer touches on the incarnation and redemption, the hope of salvation, the end of Dante’s mission, the grace he needs to achieve it and be true to it, the sympathy of the blessed, and Bernard’s own praise and devotion. This *prayer*<sup>[p. 305]</sup> on behalf of another is an essentially loving act. *Beatrice*<sup>[p. 245]</sup> prays for Dante also. The Virgin turns her eyes towards Bernard and then towards God.

Dante now looks into the Divine Light. His power of vision is beyond *speech* [p. 328] and *memory* [p. 292], and like a dreamer he retains only the impression and the sweetness. He asks for the power to reveal a little of what he saw and felt, and dared to endure. His Vision, in the moment of supreme stillness, beyond time, is of a universal unity, bound together by *Love* [p. 288] in a simplicity of *Light* [p. 287]. Within it is the concentrated and perfect *Good* [p. 277], the object of will and desire, which the *eye* [p. 257] cannot turn away from to another sight. Outside it all things are in some way defective in their goodness. Dante is therefore consistent in treating God as the essential Good, and the intellectual Light of Truth, which is desired by Man, Love as the desire for the Good binding all together.

His speech is inadequate *like* [p. 315] a babe's, but as his power of vision increases he sees a *triple* [p. 340] rainbow in the deep light, *symbolising* [p. 334] the Trinity, and within it the human form, symbolising Man's unity with God in his essential nature. Dante is left like the *geometer* [p. 313] who cannot exactly measure a circle's circumference in radii (the equation contains the irrational and transcendental number  $\pi$ : though he can create a square equal in area to a given circle so 'squaring the circle') and cannot see how the image is fitted and set there.

Finally his mind is struck as if by lightning, and his will is empowered. The Vision itself loses power in his imagination, but his desire and will to achieve salvation and to create the *Commedia* are set in motion by Divine *Love* [p. 288] that moves the sun and the other stars. So the *Paradiso* ends on the same word as all *three* [p. 331] *Cantiche*, *stelle*.

### ***MedC:2 Coda to the Paradiso***

Dante set out to re-create an ethical and spiritual journey in a poetic work. That journey was rooted in his self-consciousness of his own life and position in history, and in his critical view of the religious and secular politics of his age. He may have believed that he was divinely inspired. Equally he makes conscious use of motifs and patterns established by the writers of Classical epic and verse-forms. He was aware of his own quality as a poet, and always sure of his own lasting fame, in the manner of Ovid.

He was a fundamental believer in form and structure, to the extent that the whole *Commedia* is tightly controlled, and carefully organised to



reflect a Neo-platonic vision of a hierarchical Universe centred on God. He saw his work as a mission: that he was called, that he possessed a historic role as Aeneas did or Paul did. That mission was to propound a view of the role on Earth of the Church and the Empire, each to have authority in its proper sphere, and in so doing to expose the inadequacies of the Papacy and the secular rulers of Europe: and his mission was also to show the end of ethical and spiritual striving as embodied in the Catholic religion, for the Christian pilgrim. The mission was therefore both personal, and social, reflecting the concern of Catholicism with both the one and the many, the individual and the community of believers.

He drew on a number of areas of knowledge and experience in order to create the *Commedia*. Firstly there was his own life and development as a love poet in the tradition of the schools of Courtly Love, his personal relationship with Beatrice, and his spiritualization of her both as an inner guide to his own journey in this life and the next, and as a symbol of divine philosophy and grace. Secondly he drew on his Classical studies of poetry and myth, particularly Virgil and Ovid. Virgil specifically provided both compelling inspiration, and a mythology of Empire. Thirdly he made extensive study of Medieval philosophy, and of rudimentary science, both strongly influenced by the works of Aristotle. Fourthly came his study of theology, via the Scriptures and the Christian Commentators, including Aquinas. Fifthly he had knowledge of the Mendicant Orders and practical religion, including the Franciscan ideas of radical poverty, and the prophetic utterances of some of their extreme thinkers. Sixthly he absorbed the political experience of Florence and Rome, Italy and Europe, leading to his lasting exile from Florence, and his long and complex relationship with the Ghibelline cause. Lastly was the rapidly altering city environment, with its new industry, commerce and wealth, and its strong sense of individual life, personality and destiny.

Out of all this he wove the three great strands of the *Commedia*, the personal, the spiritual and the political, all three tightly wound together in his life, and with ethics at the root of his response to all three. The question was how to live in order to reach the intellectual and spiritual good that was the aim of earthly life, and the guarantee of salvation and redemption in the afterlife.

In that sense though he is a savage critic of the state of earthly institutions, his solutions are radical only in the sense of looking back to

earlier models of Empire and Church, and desiring a cleansing of institutions in order to achieve a return to those models. He is an Imperialist and monarchist, desiring authoritarian rule of separate Church and State based on justice and law, just as he saw God ruling the Neoplatonic universe. The most difficult questions he faced, and agonised over, in addressing the political and social arena, were the extent of human reason and free will, the extent to which human affairs and history are pre-ordained, and the relationship between human and divine justice.

His spiritual challenge was to reconcile the potentially conflicting elements of religion, the active and contemplative life, religious practice and theology, free will and the divine plan. His solution was to endorse a mainly conservative ethical framework, based around the concept of the right exercise of free will. He explores this through exhibiting the results of incontinence, malice and fraud in the *Inferno*, showing the purgation of the seven sins in *Purgatory*, and reviewing the meaning of the three theological and four cardinal virtues in the *Paradiso*. Free will is misused in Hell, re-aligned in *Purgatory*, and correctly applied to earthly and heavenly existence in *Paradise*.

His own personal challenges given his political and spiritual solutions were spiritually to free himself from those sins of pride and lust which he saw most clearly in his own life, and to spiritualise the tradition of Courtly Love and his own love for Beatrice by applying reason and intellect to emotional and erotic love, and by extending human love to touch the divine: and in the political sphere to become a prophet of a secular saviour to come, who would re-establish the Empire according to Roman law, and return the Papacy to Rome. He confines himself to prophecies regarding the Empire. The Papacy is a matter for God.

The schools of Courtly Love, and the Classical poets, inspired part of the style and content of the *Commedia*, but its sublime execution is his own. He borrowed crucial content from Virgil in particular, and from a wide range of ethical, mythical and scriptural sources, but the precise construction of the three realms is truly his own imaginative achievement. As a poet he has few true precedents, and fewer successors. The combination of lyrical expression, epic structure, and brilliant use of appropriate simile and metaphor is unmatched. Always measured, lucid and concise, Dante convinces imaginatively, and moves the emotions. If he did not believe in some aspects of what he wrote, if he is guilty of mere artistic

licence, there is no way of telling so. The assumption has to be that he did so believe, and that his Vision was to him divinely inspired, and his relationship with Beatrice in life and death as he declares it. That the ethical, spiritual and political purposes of the *Commedia* were pure, and were his overriding concern, the power of his poetry being a tool towards achieving those ends.

To what extent did he succeed, and does he succeed, in convincing us? I take the stance of the non-Catholic citizen of a secular society in addressing the question. I am not qualified to discuss the orthodoxy of Dante's theology, nor the extent to which a practising Catholic might endorse his view of this life and the next.

His ethical vision I find still relevant, and still compelling. That the right and good life should be moved by the centrality of love, of which empathy and courage, compassion and fortitude are crucial components, is wholly relevant, and a source of modern ethics. Out of emotional and intellectual empathy and courage come hope and trust, justice and moderation, and what practical wisdom we have. The Neo-platonic and Catholic detail may no longer persuade, the true sources of our ethical feelings may be in the nurturing and protective basis of our species, our social structures and behaviour may be the result of the historical development of ideas and our education, but that does not invalidate a view of the good individual as being one who is true, sensitive and kind. What Dante's ethics do not do is address the increasing number of moral conflicts that our world presents to us, issues where we are forced to choose between evils, or balance goods, such that we are forced to turn to other concepts, for example that of the 'natural': the 'good of the greatest number': the 'rights' of individuals and the other creatures we share the world with: the continuance of the Earth, ourselves and its species: the applications of science and technology that will change the nature of society, the individual, the environment and the species. Nevertheless the Neo-platonic ideas of the Good, of Truth, Love and of Beauty must continue to be a starting point for and an essential component of ethics and aesthetics. Dante's work besides being poetically and structurally beautiful, also succeeds in carrying forward ethical meaning into our own age and the future.

His political and religious views have been overtaken by history. The separation of secular state and religious authority has effectively been

settled in the West, and much in line with his views. Religion concentrates on spiritual affairs, the state on temporal power. Dante's concept of the single Imperial authority in the narrow sense was dead soon after Dante's own death, though there was a remarkable revival of the concept, I would almost call it a parody, in Napoleon's 'Empire' short-lived though it was, his Imperial Eagle once more creating a wide authority under a single basic and fundamentally benign legal code. Just as in Dante's day it was shattered by nationalist striving and temporal rivalry, and by the very clamour for republican and democratic 'rights' that Napoleon himself long supported. Dante's concept survived for longer in Europe in the more restricted sense of kingship or authoritarian rule, and religious authority within the Churches in Europe still remains though shorn of most of its temporal powers.

The deep challenge to both divine and secular authority, in the sense of the monarchical ruler whether king, Emperor or God, was stimulated by economic pressures and that intellectual freedom that led to the debate over the rights of Man. Dante's own argument for the right use of the intellect and free-will, and his difficulties over the inscrutability of God's justice and the extent to which human life was pre-ordained, were at the root of the dissent. That dissent is visible before his times, as well as after. Dante answers doubts with unquestioning faith: 'ours not to question, ours to obey'. His compelling need to make order out of chaos, his response to the destructiveness of Italian and European politics in his age, and the corruption around him, led him to assert ancient authority, ancient law, and the imperatives of his faith. The expansion of knowledge, geographical, scientific, and historical forced an ever-increasing reappraisal. What if man were free: what if life and the future were not pre-ordained: what if justice was man-made and there to be re-made?

And once blind faith was questioned, and the power of those with most to gain from freedoms and rights was exercised, then the institutions were torn apart, and the modern world came into being. Dante anticipates the questions, and shores up the building. But in the end it is only a tower of the imagination, no more solid than any other. The detail, the fanaticism almost, displayed in the *Commedia's* structure indicates the sense of real and impending chaos that Dante tries to allay. Ironically he is obsessed with building, because the foundations were ultimately flawed. It is reminiscent of Shakespeare's later obsession with order and monarchy, and for much

the same reason. Renaissance doubt and science: the empirical method to which Dante alludes: intellect and reason, the philosopher's tool kit: and the very need for blind faith at various points in the religious and political argument, eroded that faith and that social order. Dante's concern with and delight in individuals, the means by which he brings the *Commedia* to life, their creativity, originality and reasoning powers, passed on into the Renaissance and the efforts of great individuals eventually undermined what Dante stood for politically and religiously. Republicanism and Democracy, the rights and freedoms of the individual, and the new perspectives on the purpose of the state and religion, as being for the betterment of the individual, of statesmen and churchmen as being the servants and not the masters of the public good, destroyed the authority of arbitrary individuals selected by exercise of naked power, or heredity. That questioning aided by scientific progress brought religion itself into question. The most difficult parts of the *Commedia* to find interest in for a modern mind, are certain sections of *Paradiso*, where the poetry alone and its great beauty carries the secular reader through some of the more tedious and outmoded elements of history and theology. Only the delights of structure, lyrical cadence, superlative imagery and simile, make it possible to gain genuine enjoyment from occasionally unpalatable material. I would only say that I find the effort worthwhile even in those sections, if only for their historical and intellectual interest.

What of Dante's personal quest? We cannot know his own spiritual state at the end of his life, nor his emotions concerning the memory of the real Beatrice or his created symbolic form of her, but she is certainly the glory of the *Commedia*. Around her the beauty, love and intelligence gathers, as a promise and a distant goal in *Inferno* (Virgil being her loving proxy), as a strong hope and an emotional striving in *Purgatorio*, and as a present magnificence in *Paradiso*. The *Commedia* could have existed without her, but not with the same power and effect. She is the embodiment of Love, Virgil and the spirits her reflection. Does Dante get beyond her, in the final Vision, substituting the Virgin Mary for her almost at the last, and then gazing onwards into a final sublimity? He hangs on for a very long time before that moment: Beatrice is not easily relinquished!

At times he is overpowered by her presence, and almost makes an end there and then, though we know he will and must finish building the tower! Did he get beyond the erotic, the spiritualised and intellectual erotic but still

the erotic, of her meaning to him, of her physical context, her eyes and smile? I have argued that the Medieval mind more easily merged the physical with the spiritual, Christ as blood and flesh in wafer and wine, the Resurrection of souls being in the body, which Dante stresses. There is no erotic as such for Medieval thought, no such category. The body is the seat of the feelings and carries the soul breathed into it by God. Flesh and emotions and spirit are one. Love takes on a human form. Dante often seems to me to be on the verge of heresy, but never quite heretical. His immense tact leaves many things unsaid, many questions un-attempted and unanswered. He stepped back perhaps from difficult issues, since his purpose was to build the perfect and consistent tower of authority.

While rejecting that authority and the structure's objective truth, I take delight in the poetic and imaginative beauty of it. I find the ethical thrust of the work, so expressive of the thrust of European society, grounded in Love and its attendant virtues, moral and social, as informing and challenging. To go beyond Dante one must first read him and answer him. The history, the situations and individuals, the thought and the emotions are always fascinating. The figure of Beatrice not only charms us but still makes a demand of the modern mind and heart, if we are to understand what Love is and means for human beings. The intellectual and the spiritual is still in tension with the physical and the emotional. The depth of that tension in Dante communicates itself throughout the *Commedia*. A real man moves through a real landscape with real responses even though the towers are constructed in imagination. History is swept together in the timeless Moment in question and answer, in vision and thought, and against that background of Energies, the Individual comes face to face with his or her own self-examination, asks of his or her own self what the purpose of being in this age might be, how one should live a life of creative love and virtue, and what the full dimensions of that life might be.

I see Dante turning away from writing down his 'memories' of the Vision, as he had to finally in his own life, turning back towards the world, away from the long journey of question and examination, turning towards his readers, so many generations later, to challenge us, to ask us to examine the state of our age, of our society, the state of our own spirits and ethics, and to answer, if we can, what we will build greater than his tower of the poetic imagination.



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*MedXIV:2* [p. 53] The penitence performed on the Mount of Purgatory absolves the spirits of their sins.

## Angels

*MedVIII:2* [p. 44] The Angels who fell with Satan, guard the city of Dis. They manifest pride, the besetting sin of Hell, and the cause of Satan's fall. An angel from above (though Dante does not describe him as such) comes to assist the Poet's entry to the city.

*MedXXXVI:1* [p. 89] The birdlike Angel of God, using his wings as sails, ferries spirits from the Tiber to the Mount of Purgatory. The wings are white: the feathers do not moult. The Angels are 'ministers of God'.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] An Angel caught up Buonconte's repentant spirit.

*MedXLII:1* [p. 104] The Angels dressed in green robes, carrying blunted and burning swords that guarded Eden, and guard the ante-Purgatory. Their hair is blonde, their faces dazzle the sense of sight.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] A courteous Angel guards the Gate of Purgatory. His face dazzles, his naked sword reflects the sun's rays, the light of Divine Love.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] The Angels sacrifice their free will to God in humility.

*MedXLVI:2* [p. 112] On each terrace of the Mount Dante meets an Angel whose attribute is the opposite of the sin purged there. Here the Angel of Humility on the first terrace.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Dante finds the Angel of Fraternal Love on the exit from the second terrace.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] The planetary spheres influence fate through the Angelic presences which guide them.

*MedLI:2* [p. 118] The Angel of Meekness on the third terrace (and the other Angels) emits intense light as a receptacle and transmitter of God's light. It shares its knowledge without prompting, fulfilling the nature of its role.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] The Angel of Zeal, with gentle voice, and swan-like wings,

guides the Poets onwards from the fourth terrace.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] The Angel of Liberality on the fifth terrace sends them onwards with a word.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] The Angel of Temperance glows red hot, but fans Dante with a perfumed breeze, at the exit from the sixth terrace.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] The Angel of Chastity sings with a voice 'more thrilling than ours' at the exit from the seventh Terrace. Its presence is within a bright light that overpowers the sense of sight.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] The Angels sing at the sight of Dante's shame, and show compassion for his state. They harmonise their melody to that of the eternal spheres.

*MedLXIX:3* [p. 170] Each 'planetary' sphere has its own Angelic presence mingled with it, which determines its virtue and qualities. Likewise the Cherubim mediate the virtues of the Stellar Heaven.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Divine providence structures and controls the creation in its nature and its continuing welfare. This is achieved through the angelic intellects present in the planetary spheres. Since God and they are perfect then the results must be regular and not chaotic, art and not disorder. Dante expresses his belief in the completeness of this created Nature.

*MedLXXVI:1* [p. 185] Cunizza da Romano refers to the Angelic Hierarchies, specifically the Order of Thrones, the 'mirrors' of God's judgement.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] God's Justice is beyond human understanding. Even Lucifer, an Angel, was too limited to see all, and fell through his own impatience for greater knowledge.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] Gabriel, the Angel of the Annunciation, formed like a coronet of flame, crowns the Virgin Mary.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] Beatrice explains the nine orders of the angelic hierarchy.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] Beatrice explains aspects of the Angels. They were instantaneously created as order and substance. They are actualised and complete. They underwent no development but are complete, and have intellect and free will, but require no memory. They are innumerable.

## Arabic, Arab, Muslim, Islamic, Islam

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Dante inherited the poetic tradition of Provence influenced by Arabic sources.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Mahommed, split like a wine-cask, is among the schismatics who split the true Church, rather than among the heretics. The Caliph Ali is also with him in Hell, as a sower of dissent within Islam itself.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will, and around it a 'shadow' or 'shade' is manifested that reflects its desires and affections. He specifically rejects the teachings of Averroës, the great Arabian philosopher and Aristotelian, on this subject. Averroism was disseminated extensively throughout the universities, including Padua and Bologna.

*MedLXVI:2* [p. 154] Dante watches a symbolically enacted history of the Church and Empire. The Church is attacked, corrupted and divided, acquiring temporal power in a fatal confusion of the spiritual and earthly spheres. The vision culminates in the whorish mating of a French pope to the French court, and the transfer of the Papacy from its true home, Rome, to Avignon. The dragon represents the Islamic schism. Mohammed is seen as a schismatic rather than as a heretic.

*MedLXXVIII:2* [p. 192] Saint Francis attempted to convert the Sultan in 1219. There was strong resistance to the attempt.

*MedLXXXII:2* [p. 200] Cacciaguida, Dante's ancestor died fighting the infidel in the unsuccessful second Crusade of 1147. Dante through him asserts the right of the Christians to the Holy Lands.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] Dante in honouring the warriors endorses the Jewish and Christian incursions into the Holy Land, and the defence of the West against Muslim aggression.

## Art

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Casella's music seduces the spirits and the Poets to delight, such that they temporarily forget their mission. This is the seductiveness of art warned against by Plato in *The Republic*.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Divine providence structures and controls the creation in its nature and its continuing welfare. This is achieved through the angelic intellects present in the planetary spheres. Since God and they are perfect then the results must be regular and not chaotic, art and not disorder. Dante expresses his belief in the completeness of this created Nature.

*MedLXXVI:2* [p. 187] God's Art beautifies the Universe.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The Universe reveals the art of the Maker.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante is unable to express the brightness of the sphere

of the Sun by any known means, intellect, art, or knowledge, but it can be a subject of faith and hope.

### Authority

*MedVI:2* [p. 38] The *Commedia* makes numerous statements of and appeals to authority, whether philosophic/scientific or spiritual. Dante strives to reconcile all issues with orthodoxy and precedent. Virgil discusses the afterlife and the Day of Judgement and its effects on the punishment of sinners. He seeks to trust, through knowledge and belief, in the authority of a separated and reformed Empire and Church on earth, and the authority of Faith as revealed through the spiritual authorities, and revelation (Vision) in Heaven.

### Avarice

*MedI:1* [p. 19] The she-wolf as a symbol of the Avarice which Dante identifies as a failing of the Papacy.

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Highlighted by Ciacco as a root of the political evils in Florence.

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] Punished in the Fourth Circle where the churchmen in particular are singled out for their denial of the way of poverty, and their embracing of the way of 'getting and spending'.

*MedXVIII:2* [p. 59] Dante associates avarice with the city of Bologna.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] A sin arising from excessive love for what should be loved only in moderation, earthly possessions. It is related to Gluttony and Lust. A wrong response of Rational love to desire for the good.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] The Siren symbolizes the temptation towards this excessive desire.

*MedLIII:2* [p. 124] The avaricious purge themselves on the fifth terrace of the Mount. They lie face down turned to the earth by Divine Justice, as they once were turned excessively towards earthly possessions by Avarice.

*MedLIV:2* [p. 125] Hugh Capet's tirade against his own Capetian dynasty, Dante's hated French line, as examples of avaricious rulers.

*MedLIV:3* [p. 126] Examples of avarice at the exit from the fifth terrace. Paired Classical and Biblical examples: Pygmalion and Midas: Achan and Sapphira: Heliodorus and Polymnestor: and finally Crassus.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] Statius's error was Prodigality rather than Avarice. The prodigal and extravagant, those who dissipate resources on idle things, are punished

with the Avaricious in the fourth circle of Inferno, and Statius claims he only realised his error on reading Virgil's lines (*Aeneid* III 56-57) ironically implying that gold may as well drive all human behaviour. Statius then recognised all the dimensions of wrong associated with wealth-driven behaviour.

## Beatrice

*MedI:4* [p. 23] She will be Dante's spirit-guide through Paradise. The feminine aspect of soul. An embodiment of Divine Philosophy, and mortal love transcended.

*MedII:2* [p. 26] Beatrice is characterized by her beauty, blessedness, her bright and tearful eyes, gentle voice, and her love. She blends the erotic object of desire, with the saint: the friend with the guardian and lover. She asks Virgil to aid Dante.

*MedV:1* [p. 33] *MedV:2* [p. 35] Beatrice is a spiritualised form of the real girl, embodying erotic charge, saintliness, and symbolizing and demonstrating the philosophic intellect.

*MedX:3* [p. 47] She will (through Cacciaguida) reveal his future to him.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] She is Dante's 'star', his guiding light.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Beatrice is 'the light linking truth to intellect', she is Divine Philosophy, and the source of truth in matters of religion. She is smiling and blessed.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Beatrice will free Dante from longing, both intellectual and of every other kind. Divine grace, love and philosophy are therefore beyond the erotic tradition of Courtly love. Divine love is not that longing which is the essence of the Troubadour desire for the lady, but perfect peace.

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] Freewill is 'the noble virtue' to Beatrice. In other words Dante must transcend his earthly love for her, and allow her to become the symbol of the assent of the will to higher philosophy, to divine love: allowing her spiritualization, while still like the Virgin Mary retaining the deep attributes of the woman. This is not easy to explain: the erotic is not wholly lost, at least in the Purgatorio: Dante feels her presence deeply, but it is transformed in his submission to a higher love, beauty, truth and goodness of which she is a realizable symbol and to which she can be a guide.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] Beatrice as the transformed emblem of the poetic, personal and spiritual journey.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] The hope of seeing Beatrice strengthens Dante to enter the purging fire of the Seventh terrace that cleanses the spirit of Lust.

*MedLXI:2* [p. 141] There are two paths to the good, that of the active and that of

the contemplative life, symbolised by Leah and Rachel (or Martha and Mary). Convivio celebrates the supremacy of the contemplative life, but here Dante balances the two. Beatrice, as a symbol of Divine Philosophy, sits with Rachel in Heaven and is associated with the contemplative life.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] Dante will rest while Beatrice's eyes move towards him.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] Matilda is Leah to Beatrice's Rachel.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Beatrice appears to Dante in a moment of revelation, within the Chariot of the Church, and is both the real Beatrice (she asserts her individual reality: '*ben son, ben son Beatrice*') and Divine Philosophy. Her presence causes him emotional turbulence, as she rebukes and shames him for his past failings. She wears the colours of the theological virtues, veiled with white Faith, dressed in red Charity, cloaked with green Hope. As she appears, to be his guide through Paradiso, Virgil vanishes.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Dante undergoes the sacrament with Beatrice as confessor, the three stages of penitence, confession and forgiveness. She rebukes him for his past, until he falls stunned from shame and remorse. Beneath her white veil of Faith she is more beautiful to him than before, clothed with spiritual power.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] Dante is forgiven and Beatrice reveals her smile which is that of the three theological virtues, with charity equating to love and forgiveness.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Beatrice, as Divine Philosophy, guards the Chariot of the Church after Christ, bound as it is to the Tree of Empire.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] She prophesies the coming of an Imperial saviour. Her new relationship with Dante is that of a sister in Christ. She will guide him from here on.

*MedLXVII:2* [p. 157] Dante prepares for his entry into Paradise, with Beatrice as his guide.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Beatrice is like a mirror which reflects wisdom, and love towards Dante.

*MedLXIX:1* [p. 169] Beatrice, Divine Philosophy, is both beautiful to contemplate, and filled with joy.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] Beatrice is Dante's 'sun'. Her eyes have a holy glow of the cardinal virtues.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Beatrice's presence still carries an erotic charge to Dante, witnessed by his reactions to her. The charge is transmuted into awe, wonder, gratitude and joy, but it makes her more than merely a symbolic representation.

*MedLXXVIII:2* [p. 192] The concept of the idealised Beatrice may have a source

in Saint Francis's embrace of 'Lady Poverty', the facets of Courtly Love being transferred to a purely spiritual symbol.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] Beatrice's beauty is too great for Dante to remember the sight. Her beauty increases at each level, and the Cross is only the greatest sight he has seen so far because he has not yet gazed at Beatrice's eyes. The sight is both permissible and purer as they ascend.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] Beatrice's smile in her eyes overpowers Dante. The depth of emotion unites the physical presence with the intellectual symbol, in a profound way that suggests the incarnation of grace, and the elevation, rather than transcendence, of earthly love within the divine.

*MedXCIII:1* [p. 221] Beatrice's gaze has the power to restore Dante's temporarily eclipsed sight.

*MedXCIV:2* [p. 224] Beatrice's beauty exceeds all art and nature.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] Beatrice's beauty now exceeds all measure, and Dante ceases to be able to describe her further.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Beatrice now rests as Dante's guide, and Dante in gratitude celebrates her goodness, and her grace that has led him to freedom and the hope of salvation, and asks for her protection.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] Beatrice joins Bernard in his prayer to the Virgin on Dante's behalf.

## Beauty

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] The beauty of nature signifies the Earthly Paradise.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] The wood before the Earthly Paradise invokes the innocence of nature, the uplifting dawn beauty of resurrection and regeneration.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Beneath her white veil of Faith she is more beautiful to Dante than before, clothed now with spiritual power.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] Dante is forgiven and Beatrice reveals her smile which is that of the three theological virtues, with charity equating to love and forgiveness. Her revealed beauty exceeds his powers of description.

*MedLXIX:1* [p. 169] Beatrice, Divine Philosophy, is both beautiful to contemplate, and filled with joy.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] Beatrice's beauty increases as she and Dante ascend through the spheres (and as his intellectual understanding of divine philosophy increases).

*MedLXXVI:2* [p. 187] God's Art beautifies the Universe.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] Beatrice's beauty is too great for Dante to remember the sight.

## Christ

*MedIV:1* [p. 31] Christ harrowed Hell, according to legend, entering it to remove the spirits of the deserving to Paradise. This was in 33AD, fifty-two years after Virgil's death and entry to Limbo.

*MedXII:1* [p. 50] The earth thrilled with Love, and Hell shook, at Christ's entry there.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] The advent of Christ was needed in order to reveal the Truth of Faith to human beings. Human knowledge is otherwise limited.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] As in the Purgatorio, with the symbol of the Grifon, Dante stresses the twofold nature of Christ, human and divine, and also highlights the Arian and Sabellian heresies. Sabellius, denied the separate persons of God and his son Christ though they are unified in essence, and Arius denied the essential unity of God and his Son though they differ in person.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] A vision of Christ on the Cross in the sphere of Mars, signifies the Crucifixion and the Church Militant.

## City, The City

*MedI:4* [p. 23] Dante's primary social entity of the civilized human being. Exemplified in Florence and the Italian city-states, Rome past and present as Imperial and Papal city, Dis, the city of Hell, and Paradise, the city of God.

*MedII:1* [p. 24] An amplification of the above.

*MedVIII:2* [p. 44] The City of Dis is an analogue of Florence and Rome, and a parody of the City of God.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata implicitly compares the City of Fire, Dis, with Florence, Dante's city and his own.

*MedXVI:1* [p. 55] Florence, the perverse city, evoked by another cluster of famous Florentines in the city of Dis.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Florence's citizens are present throughout Hell, making the city notorious and a mirror of the City of Dis.

*MedXXIX:2* [p. 71] Dante adds Siena to the list of Italian cities from which he



has drawn examples to people the Inferno, including Florence itself, Pistoia (Canto XXV), Bologna (Canto XXIII) , and Lucca (Canto XXI).

*MedXXXIII:1* [p. 76] Pisa is added to the list of shameful cities.

*MedXXXIII:2* [p. 76] Genoa is added to the list, and cursed, as was Pisa.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] Dante through Jacopo del Cassera points the finger at Padua. The Paduans are called Antenori after the treacherous Antenor, founder of the city, who betrayed Troy to the Greeks.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Mantua is Virgil's and Sordello's birthplace, now like other cities racked by civil dissent. Verona and Orvieto are riven by feuding. Siena and Santifiora have an uneasy peace.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] Another reference to Santaflora and Siena, through Omberto and Salvani.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] The city of God is the 'true city'. The Sieneze given to envy of other cities' harbours and streams wasted their efforts trying to obtain both. Also a further reference to the battle at Colle where Salvani died.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Guido del Duca compares the citizens in the Val d'Arno to beasts transformed by a latter-day Circe: Casentino, Arezzo, Florence and Pisa are characterized, their inhabitants being hogs, curs, wolves and foxes.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] The city is Dante's fundamental unit of community (Aristotle's community of citizens), divided and damaged in Inferno, restored in Purgatory through the Individual, and expressed in the city of God of the Paradiso.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain, as places of lust. The simple mountain dweller dumbfounded by the city complexity. In both cases the city represents potential sinfulness compared with simplicity and virtue.

## Community

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Purgatory is a community of spirits. The greater the understanding of love, the greater the shared love. Shared is not less but more.

*MedLI:2* [p. 118] Purgatory is a place eager for relationship and community. The Angel of the third terrace shares its knowledge and assists the Poets without prompting, not holding back in divisiveness or denial. Hell by contrast is a mirror of the divided city: of Florence, God and Man.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] Inferno is lost relationship, Purgatorio a re-orientation of the individual towards true relationship, Paradiso an expression of the community of spirits.

## Confession

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] Signified by the second step of the Gate of Purgatory.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Dante undergoes the sacrament with Beatrice as confessor, the three stages of penitence, confession and forgiveness.

## Conscience

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Virgil reproaches himself for being seduced by Casella's music. Conscience is the sensitive moral instrument of the self-questioning intellect.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] Dante is troubled by his conscience when he reaches the purging fire of the seventh terraces of the Mount that cleanses the spirit of lust.

## Contemporaneousness

*MedI:2* [p. 21] The whole of history is in a sense contemporary within the Divine Comedy, and within Christianity, and within Poetry: it is all the spiritual Moment.

*MedIV:2* [p. 32] The eternal recurrence of punishment in Hell creates the effect of contemporaneousness, since dead spirits from all ages co-exist. In Purgatory there is however a progression forwards to Paradise where true contemporaneousness exists in the ever-present eternal moment of God in which all ages are visible.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] The Christian eternal Moment is vividly felt in the *Commedia* where literary, mythical, historical and contemporary characters mingle on an equal footing, in a simultaneous existence. This is highlighted by the presence of recently dead friends of Dante, like Casella, in the same scene with the historical Virgil, and the literary construct of Dante's own self on the journey. Or again by Virgil and Dante interrogating Ulysses, and then passing on to Guido da Montefeltro. Dante is writing epic poem, history, autobiography and intellectual treatise all in one.

*MedLV:1* [p. 127] Virgil and Statius represent the pre-Christian and post-Christian Roman worlds meeting together in the eternal moment.

## Courtesy

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata and Dante demonstrate the virtues of courteous speech, even in Hell. Dante is emphasizing an older Florentine tradition.

*MedXVI:1* [p. 55] Virgil reminds Dante of the courtesy owed to famous and worthy spirits despite their sins. And the exchanges with Rusticucci and the others

reveal that courtesy in action.

*MedXXVII:1* [p. 68] Guido da Montefeltro, like Farinata, shows the courteous speech of the ancient nobility.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] As with Brunetto Latini, Dante shows Casella the courtesies of friendship and affection in his speech.

*MedXXXVII:2* [p. 93] Virgil's courtesy in his manner of speech to the excommunicated spirits in Purgatory.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] Dante's courtesy in addressing the crowd of late-repentant spirits.

*MedXLII:4* [p. 106] Mutual courtesy between Dante and Conrad Malaspina, the family hosting him in 1306.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] Virgil's courtesy obtains a courteous reply and assistance.

*MedXLVII:1* [p. 112] Dante feels the discourtesy, the lack of generosity and brotherly love, in passing the envious in silence, and unseen.

*MedLV:3* [p. 129] Mutual courtesy between Statius and Virgil, symbolizing Rome pre and post the Incarnation, the equality of the spiritual world, and the respect of Statius for the poetic master.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius again demonstrates courtesy to his master Virgil.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] Excessive courtesy is displayed on the terrace of Lust, implying the *cortesia* of the School of Courtly Love.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Paradise overflows with courtesy, which represents order, respect and love. Dante's speech with Piccarda gives the first example of a meeting in Paradise.

*MedLXXI:2* [p. 175] Another example of Dante's elaborate courtesy of speech towards Beatrice.

## Dance

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The cardinal and theological virtues dance to express the delight of their spiritual essence.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The twelve spirits introduced by Aquinas dance around Dante and Beatrice signifying the measure dance of practical wisdom around Beatrice who is Divine wisdom and revelation.

## Dante

*MedIII:3* [p. 30] Charon is told that Dante's journey is willed above. He is in the tradition of Aeneas and Paul, asserting Imperial and Ecclesiastical values, and they too visited Hell according to legend. He though is the un-heroic questioning, humble student, who will learn from examples and responses as he travels.

*MedV:1* [p. 33] Minos is told the same, again by Virgil.

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] And Plutus hears the third affirmation.

*MedXVII:1* [p. 57] Dante's unheroic heroism, his natural fears, his shame. Stressing the Christian nature of this spiritual 'epic'.

*MedXXI:1* [p. 62] Dante again fearful and unheroic. A fourth affirmation of Dante's journey being willed. Reference to Dante's military experiences.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Dante's prophetic role indicated, setting him in the line of the true prophets. Also Dante, a Medieval Ulysses like the noble pagan, found human knowledge alone to be inadequate for the final spiritual journey.

*MedXXVII:2* [p. 68] The inadequacy of human reason alone in Dante's life, and his resistance to the corrupt Papal authority.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Endlessly self-aware of his poetic and prophetic role.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] Dante is writing epic, but also history, and more importantly autobiography. His characters are mythical, historical and literary, but some are also immediate, contemporary and to him, real and compelling shades of the recent dead.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Dante as a penitent climbs towards Beatrice, in a rejection of his errors of lust and pride, neglect of her, and over-reliance on human philosophy and the powers of the intellect. Beatrice represents a stage beyond merely spiritualised human love and human philosophy, as an embodiment of Divine philosophy. Cantos II and III of the Purgatorio shows that rejection, both in Dante's choice of the poem for Casella to sing, and in Virgil's stressing the limitations of knowledge.

*MedXXXVII:2* [p. 93] Dante uses numerous keywords, like 'joyful' and 'hope', to create the changed atmosphere of Purgatory compared with Hell. Virgil confirms his presence there in the living body, and the willing of his journey from above.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] A slightly ambiguous attitude to the 'noble warrior' is perhaps evident, or is this merely Dante's sometimes maddening reticence, his refusal to pass explicit judgement on historical characters?

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] In his flourishes of learning Dante is still showing

intellectual pride in Purgatory. He needs to leave this behind in progressing towards Divine wisdom.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] Dante was supposed to have been present at the battle of Campaldino in the Val d'Arno, in 1289. He again makes no personal comment or judgement on the worth of Buonconte, the Ghibelline leader.

*MedXLII:4* [p. 106] Dante was hosted by the Malaspini in Valdimagra in 1306.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The Eagle in Dante's dream is symbolic of regeneration and of Rome and Imperial law, therefore of the purgation of lust from himself and from the world.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] Dante asserts his superiority among the Italian poets, in his usual strange mixture of innate pride and Christian humility.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] Dante anticipates his own sufferings as a penitent when he passes through Purgatory again after death, so placing himself as a sinful Christian, and no saint, but a true believer. He expects only brief purgation for envy, but fears his greater sin of pride and its associated punishment.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] He must also purge himself of political anger, which here is catharsised in Marco Lombardo's speech against the modern age.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] Dante's dream of the Siren leaves him grieving, perhaps for episodes in his own life where he fell victim to his weakness of lust.

*MedLVII:2* [p. 132] The meeting with Forese Donati recalls the period of moral unworthiness following Beatrice's death.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] The conversation with Forese anticipates Dante's own death

and his anticipation of entering Purgatory 'in reality'. A poignant moment. Dante uses it to point up the state of Florence, under the control of the Blacks, and of Italy.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] Dante portrays himself as the obedient student turning back to his teachers.

*MedLIX:2* [p. 137] As Dante's major failing of pride links Purgatory's first terrace to the Inferno, so his purging of his major failing of Lust links the last terrace to Beatrice and Paradiso.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] Dante's failings are highlighted by his exchange with Guido Guinicelli with its humility and ironic pride, and by Arnaut Daniel's pointed call to remember his purgation of Lust.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] Characterising himself as a lustful goat Dante reflects on his past failings. He fears the purging fire that he must enter again after death.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] At Matilda's look and smile Dante refers to the Hero and Leander story, and to Xerxes's pride. There is a hint here that Dante may still not be quite free of his major failings pride and lust. Matilda clarifies that her smile is of delight in God's works.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Matilda guides Dante towards the ritual of Confession. He must repent his past life, confess to Beatrice, and be forgiven. This sacrament also finds its symbol in the three steps of the stair by which he entered the Gate of Purgatory proper. He is emotionally stricken by the revelation of Beatrice. This is the crucial moment of the *Commedia*, where past, present and future, the Inferno of failing, the Purgatory of repentance and forgiveness, and the Paradiso of promised redemption meet at a focal point, the Eternal Moment of exposure and contrition.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Dante is stunned as he was in Inferno Canto V, now with remorse rather than pity. Lust is the primary failing he confesses.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] Beatrice prophesies the coming of an Imperial saviour. Dante employs symbolism in the Pageant and the Mystic Tree to communicate a complex picture.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Beatrice is like a mirror which reflects wisdom, and love towards Dante. He feeds on her reflected power.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] Dante refers to his own birth sign Gemini, implying its influences on his nature, changeability, literary power, communication skills etc.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] His relationship to Beatrice is one of pupil to teacher, servant to mistress, as he seeks permission from her to speak. It mirrors the relationship with Virgil but on a higher plane.

*MedLXXIX:1* [p. 193] Despite the concerns with theology and with the politics of Empire and Papacy, Dante's aim remains the ethical path of the individual spirit culminating in the Vision of Divine Love.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] The references to Aeneas and Anchises tie in the Trojan and Roman history to Christian history, and Dante's role to that of Aeneas.

*MedLXXXII:2* [p. 200] Dante, through Cacciaguida, asserts his own Florentine roots, and the ancient virtues.

*MedLXXXIII:1* [p. 201] Dante is precise in placing Cacciaguida's birth in time and space. The exile is asserting his roots, his pride in them and his rights.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Cacciaguida reveals Dante's future exile and fame.

*MedLXXXIX:2* [p. 216] Dante and Beatrice enter the stellar heavens in the sign of Gemini, Dante's birth sign, associated with intellect and language.

## Doubt

*MedII:1* [p. 24]. An aspect of Dante's psyche, and an emblem of his humility denoting the pupil before the master, the child before the father/mother, the lover before the beloved, the inferior before the superior.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] True reasons may be hidden, and their concealment causes doubt.

## Dream

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] Dante has passed through the Inferno without sleeping, and therefore without dreaming also. He now sleeps the night of Easter Monday, and has his first dream of three in Purgatory, that of the Eagle of regeneration and justice.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] Dante's second dream in Purgatory, of the Siren who symbolizes the temptation to excessive desires: avarice, gluttony and, in particular, Dante's own weakness, lust.

*MedLXI:2* [p. 141] Dante's third dream, on the third night on the Mount. There are two paths to the good, that of the active and that of the contemplative life, symbolised by Leah and Rachel (or Martha and Mary). Convivio celebrates the supremacy of the contemplative life, but here Dante balances the two. Note that Beatrice, as a symbol of Divine Philosophy, sits with Rachel in Heaven.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda suggests that ancient poetic ideas of the Golden Age were dreams of the Earthy Paradise. This invokes a smile from Virgil and Statius, poets who referenced the Golden Age in their works.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Beatrice's presence in Dante's dreams was not enough to rouse him from his morally torpid state.

## Effort, Labour, Diligence

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Purgation demands effort. Purgatory is an ascent that wearies, though the weariness eases the higher one climbs.

*MedXXXVIII:2* [p. 96] The meeting with Belacqua emphasises the need for effort and steadfastness to ascend the Mount. Belacqua advocates minimum effort given the rules, just as he has delayed his repentance until the last moment. The prize Dante hints is to those who show willpower, effort, desire and do not wait to be driven forward.

## Envy

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Highlighted by Ciacco as a root of the political evils in Florence.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Dante sees envy as a common vice within political circles.

*MedXLVII:1* [p. 112] The envious purge away their sin on the second terrace of the Mount, their eyes, which failed to see correctly in life, sealed with wire. The terrace itself is of bare livid stone. Pride adorns itself, but envy sees only its own nakedness. Its counter-virtue is brotherly love.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Envy is destructive of love which is increased by sharing and mutual understanding.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] A sin arising from a wrong objective of rational Love. Related to Pride and Anger. An error in relationship in the presence of others, it is divisive of community. It fears the preferment of others.

## Empire

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Dante's political ideal was of a central secular authority derived from the laws and concepts of Imperial Rome, separate from the Church, and with no power over spiritual or Papal matters. Equally he envisaged a purified Papacy not involved in secular politics.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] The Simonists give him an excuse to reinforce his diatribe against the corrupted temporal power of the Church, and assert his links to Rome, which Virgil approves, symbolically clasping him in his arms.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Ulysses, by employing the deception of the Trojan Horse against Troy offended against the origins of the Roman Empire.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] Brutus and Cassius the traitors to Empire are eternally tormented by Satan.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante laments the state of Italy, the Empire and the Papacy. God is the ultimate authority appealed to, as final ruler of Empire and Church. Justinian's laws have lapsed, Italy is a riderless horse, a garden turned wasteland etc. The clergy usurp secular powers. The Emperor Albert neglects Italy completely.

*MedXLI:2* [p. 103] Negligent rulers who failed the Empire, or attacked it, caused dissent, or aligned with the corrupt Papacy.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The Eagle in Dante's dream is symbolic of regeneration and of Rome and Imperial law, therefore of the purgation of lust from himself and from the world.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Dante emphasises the need for the good ruler, who upholds the



law, an idea deriving from Plato and Aristotle etc. His underlying preference is for the single all-powerful monarch as expressed in *Convivio* IV and *Monarchia* I. (As the world is ruled by a monarchical God so the world is best under an Emperor. Unity is preferred to multiplicity: political unity leads to peace which furthers intellectual development: spiritual development can then take place in its own proper and separate sphere. The world ruler is not disturbed by greed, since he is all-powerful, and is therefore disinterested and pure!)

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] At the summit of the Mount, radical moral innocence is recovered, and the institutions of earth are superseded by Divine Philosophy. Empire and Church are therefore symbolically superseded by the freed, innocent spirit, with control over itself, and directed towards the good.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Dante sees the relationship between Church and Empire and their history revealed in the symbolism of the Mystic Tree of Empire and the Chariot of the Church. Each should rule its proper sphere.

*MedLXVI:2* [p. 154] Dante watches a symbolically enacted history of the Church and Empire. The Church is attacked, corrupted and divided, acquiring temporal power in a fatal confusion of the spiritual and earthly spheres. The vision culminates in the whorish mating of a French pope to the French court, and the transfer of the Papacy from its true home, Rome, to Avignon.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] Beatrice prophesies the coming of an Imperial saviour to cleanse the Church and Empire, and restore them to their respective roles. The French connection will be broken, and the Papacy restored to Rome.

*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] The eagle symbolises the Empire, Divine Justice and Power, the Roman Emperors, God Himself, and Can Grande via his coat of arms.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] Dante condemns the state of the Empire, and the debased kings of Europe.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] Italy will not be ready for Henry VII's attempt to renew the Empire. A place is reserved for Henry in Heaven, and for Clement in Hell.

## Eyes

*MedII:2* [p. 26] Beatrice is notable for the beauty of her eyes, the instruments of vision and awareness, signifying the cardinal virtues. See Beatrice.

*MedIII:3* [p. 27] Lucia, Dante's patron saint, associated with eyesight, is part of the chain of intercession bringing Dante aid. Dante was troubled by poor or failing eyesight.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] Lucia brings help again, carrying Dante to the Gate of Purgatory, and Virgil describes her eyes, symbolic of the cardinal virtues, as

pointing out the passage to Purgatory proper.

*MedXLVII:1* [p. 112] The envious purge away their sin on the second terrace of the Mount, their eyes, which failed to see correctly in life, sealed with wire. The terrace itself is of bare livid stone. Pride adorns itself, but envy sees only its own nakedness.

*MedLV:3* [p. 129] Statius looks Dante in the eye to question his reason for smiling. The eyes in the truthful spirit are the 'windows to the soul'.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] Virgil reassures Dante with the hope of seeing Beatrice's eyes.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] Dante will rest while Beatrice's eyes move towards him.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] Dante's eyes can cross the stream of Lethe, though he is not yet across. Cardinal virtue goes ahead of the freed spirit.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda raises her eyes to Dante which shine with the brightness of primal innocence.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Eyes represent knowledge of past and future.

Prudence has three eyes, which see Past, Present and Future.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] While she was alive Beatrice's eyes directed Dante towards virtue.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The cardinal virtues lead Dante to Beatrice's eyes, which are their physical analogue.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Dante's eyes gaze too intensely at Beatrice and is rebuke by the Virtues.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Beatrice gazes at the sun, and Dante imitates her. This is allowed by the power gifted to the human race in the Earthly Paradise but subsequently lost.

*MedLXIX:3* [p. 170] The joyful nature of the Divine source is revealed in the way the Angelic virtues shine through their planetary spheres like joyful light through the eye.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] Beatrice is Dante's 'sun'. Her eyes have a 'holy' glow of the cardinal virtues.

*MedLXXI:2* [p. 175] He is overcome by the love radiated from Beatrice's eyes at the sign of his spiritual progress.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] The overpowering effect of her eyes Beatrice attributes to increased understanding of love, that itself generates greater love.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The eyes of the reader may gaze at the heavens which the eyes of God never leave. The eyes therefore communicate love downwards,

through creation, and draw it upwards through contemplation.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Beatrice smiles with laughing eyes, her smile being a symbol of the theological virtues, her eyes of the cardinal virtues.

Beatrice's beauty is too great for Dante to remember the sight. Her beauty increases at each level and the Cross is only the greatest sight he has seen so far because he has not yet gazed at Beatrice's eyes. The sight is both permissible and purer as they ascend.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] Beatrice's smile in her eyes overpowers Dante. The depth of emotion unites the physical presence with the intellectual symbol, in a profound way that suggests the incarnation of grace, and the elevation, rather than transcendence, of earthly love within the divine.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] An intense moment where Dante is overcome by Beatrice's eyes and smile, so that she has to draw his attention away to other aspects of Paradise. The active life complements the contemplative life, and Divien Philosophy is not the only path to God, as the presence of the warriors evidences.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] Dante sees the Angelic orders reflected in Beatrice's eyes.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] The eye cannot turn away from God to another sight, since that vision satisfies all longing.

## Examination, Questioning

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Dante invites examination of his worth by Virgil. This is an aspect of his humility throughout the DC, a willingness to question and be questioned.

*MedV:2* [p. 35] Dante questions Francesca to highlight the seductive but illicit and ultimately destructive nature of their love.

*MedVIII:2* [p. 44] A possible allusion to Abelard's intellectual pride, revealed in his examination of conflicting spiritual authorities, for which he was condemned by Bernard.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] A courteous exchange between Virgil and Dante, prompts Farinata to comment.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Virgil interrogates Ulysses to elicit the story of Ulysses journey to the South, expanding his own and Dante's knowledge. Dante creates a new variant on the fate of the mythological/literary character.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Dante uses the spirits' desire for remembrance in the world above to ask information from them in return.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Dante questions Virgil regarding a passage on prayer in the

Aeneid.

*MedXLI:1* [p. 102] The exchange between Sordello and Virgil indicates the courtesy of question and answer, that entitles the one who gave information to ask a question in return. Purgatory denotes mutual and reciprocal information gathering.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Guido del Duca asks Dante's name and origins, and reveals his own though Dante humbly conceals his identity.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Dante asks Virgil about divisiveness, and is answered by a statement about mutual understanding and sharing.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Dante questions Marco Lombardo concerning the state of the world.

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] A key interchange between Virgil and Dante on the question of Love and Freewill.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] Virgil questions Dante as to why he is staring at the ground, and exhorts him to understand his dream of the Siren and act on it.

*MedLIV:1* [p. 124] Dante questions Adrian V but is left unsatisfied by his questioning, presumably as to the swiftest way to pass through Purgatory.

*MedLV:2* [p. 128] Dante is driven by his thirst for knowledge, for the water of divine Truth. And Virgil, also not understanding the cause of the earthquake, enquires of Statius.

*MedLV:3* [p. 129] Statius looks Dante in the eye to question his reason for smiling. The eyes in the truthful spirit are the 'windows to the soul'.

*MedLVIII:1* [p. 133] Dante questions his old friend Forese about his sister Piccarda.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Dante expresses his need to question further, about the nature of the 'shadow' bodies of the dead spirits. How can they become lean where food is unnecessary?

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Dante is puzzled, believing that natural forces have no effect on the Mount, so that there should be no effects of the wind, or the water cycle. Matilda is there to be questioned, and explains the source of the breeze, the nature of the plants, and the two rivers.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Beatrice anticipates Dante's questioning regarding their ascent into the heavens. She responds with an explanation of Universal Order.

*MedLXIX:2* [p. 169] Dante questions Beatrice as to the dark shadows on the Moon. Her reply uses scientific reasoning from observation and experiment, and indicates that the answer lies in qualitative rather than merely quantitative

variation.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] Beatrice satisfies his questioning using philosophical method. Proof by refutation of alternatives.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Piccarda answers his question concerning the desire of spirits in Paradise, which is that they desire what they have and possess no other desires.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Dante questions Beatrice concerning broken vows, and Plato's belief in souls returning to their stars.

*MedLXXI:2* [p. 175] The intellect is never satisfied with anything less than the truth, and Truth can be attained or the longing for it would be worthless (!), so that question leads on to question. In this case Dante wishes to know whether reparation can be made for broken vows.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Dante questions Charles Martel regarding heredity.

*MedLXXVIII:1* [p. 191] Aquinas anticipates Dante's questions concerning the state of the Dominican order, and the status of Solomon.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] Dante asks the question concerning the denial of salvation to those who do not know Christianity, and is told that it is a matter of God's justice and faith in that justice.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] After his journey and his 'education' below, Dante is examined by the Apostles (Saints Peter, James and John) concerning his understanding of the theological virtues.

*MedXCI:1* [p. 218] Saint Peter examines Dante regarding faith and his belief.

*MedXCII:1* [p. 219] Saint James examines Dante concerning hope.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] Saint John examines Dante concerning love.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] Dante is puzzled as to how to reconcile the structure of the heavenly spheres with that of the angelic orders.

## Example

*MedV:2* [p. 35] Dante uses the story of Paolo and Francesca to highlight the conflict between illicit secular passion and spiritual progress. There is a hidden sub-text of the Abelard and Heloise story.

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Dante's use of individuals to highlight ideas or points he wishes to make. The individuals indulge in conversation, interrogation, autobiographical statement, prophecy, examination, etc. Ciaccio is used to highlight an aspect of the political future of Florence.

*MedXVIII:2* [p. 59] Jason as an example of the deceitful lover.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] Biblical examples of simony, and its opposite.

*MedXXII:1* [p. 63] Dante cites example of corruption from Lucca, and Sardinia.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Ulysses symbolizes Classical intelligence and striving for knowledge.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Dante's use of individuals as examples stresses his preoccupations from religious and Roman history, to Italy and Florence, and then the personal, poetry and in the next Canto his own family.

*MedXXXII:1* [p. 74] Dante cites treacherous Italians close to home to illustrate his deepest layers of Hell.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 108] Dante cites examples from Christian and Roman history to demonstrate the interlinked nature of the two. Rome was a matrix for Christianity, and Church and Empire are both divinely ordained, the one to rule over the spiritual, the other the secular life.

*MedXLVI:1* [p. 111] The pavement of the First Terrace shows many examples of pride alternating between sacred and classical history and legend.

*MedXLVII:1* [p. 112] The voices at the start of the second terrace are reminders of fraternal love: Mary and Christ at Cana, Orestes and Pylades, Matthew's Gospel exhorting love.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] The voices at the end of the second terrace are reminders of envy: Cain and Aglauros. One Biblical, one classical example.

*MedXLIX:2* [p. 116] Examples of gentleness on the third terrace: the Virgin in the temple: Pisistratus: Saint Stephen forgiving his enemies.

*MedLI:1* [p. 118] Examples of wrath at the exit from the third terrace: Procne, Haman, Queen Amata.

*MedLII:2* [p. 122] Examples of haste, counter to sloth: Mary after the Annunciation running to the hill country: Caesar pursuing Pompey: and examples of sloth: the Abbot of San Zeno, the Israelites in the desert, the followers of Aeneas who stayed in Sicily.

*MedLIV:1* [p. 124] Examples of liberality and poverty counter to avarice: Mary and the manger at Bethlehem: Fabricius the honest Consul: and Saint Nicholas of Bari.

*MedLIV:3* [p. 126] Examples of avarice at the exit from the fifth terrace. Paired Classical and Biblical examples: Pygmalion and Midas: Achan and Sapphira: Heliodorus and Polymnestor: and finally Crassus.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] Examples of Greek and Roman poets with Virgil in Limbo; and of mythological characters in Statius's works.

*MedLVI:2* [p. 131] Examples of temperance at the entrance to the sixth terrace, counter to gluttony. The Virgin at Cana: the Roman women: Daniel: The Golden Age: John the Baptist.

*MedLVII:1* [p. 131] Examples of hunger. The gluttonous are tormented by Tantalus with an inachievable desire. The Classical example is Erysichthon who committed sacrilege against Demeter: the Biblical example is Mary of Jerusalem who, in starvation, consumed her own child, during Titus's siege.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] Examples of gluttony at the exit from the sixth terrace: the Centaurs: the followers of Gideon.

*MedLIX:2* [p. 137] Examples of chastity, counter to lust, at the entrance to the seventh terrace: Mary at the Annunciation: Diana chasing away the fallen Callisto from her virgin band.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Clare as an example of perfect faith. Mucius Scaevola and Saint Lawrence as examples of loyalty under stress.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] Jephthah and Agamemnon as examples of takers of perverse vows, in sacrificing their daughters. The one example Biblical the other Classical in Dante's usual manner.

*MedLXXIII:1* [p. 178] Romeo of Villeneuve as an example of a saintly man distracted by his application to earthly ambitions, and subsequently wronged through envy.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Exemplars of diverse human skills and roles in society: Solon the lawgiver: Xerxes the soldier: Melchizedek the priest: Daedalus the inventor, craftsman and artist.

*MedLXXVI:2* [p. 187] Dido, Phyllis and Hercules, as three examples of intense earthly love: for Aeneas, Demophoön, and Iole respectively.

*MedLXXVIII:1* [p. 191] Saint Dominic and Saint Francis are chosen as exemplars of the life of practical wisdom, of how to live virtuously within the earthly life, lives of action unmotivated by worldly possessions, lives of wisdom and love.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] Solomon as an exemplar of 'royal prudence, worldly wisdom'. Examples of knowledge: religion, the number of moving spirits in the heavens: logic, premises and conclusions: philosophic, the acceptance of a first mover: mathematical, right triangles within semicircles. Examples of practical wisdom: harvest, rose, ship, human behaviour: stressing caution and patience in not judging prematurely and not relying wholly on human wisdom, God's justice is not

ours.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Dante justifies his use of famous names as examples, better to impress his readers, and influence famous men of his own time.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] Examples of famous warriors who defended the old and new faith.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] Examples of the evil or ineffective kings of 1300.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] Examples of just spirits.

*MedLXXXIX:1* [p. 215] Saint Benedict signifies the simplicity and discipline of religious order.

*MedXCIV:1* [p. 223] Peter gives examples of the Popes who died for their faith, according to tradition.

*MedXCIX:1* [p. 230] Bernard names the examples of the redeemed who sit beside and below the Virgin.

## Exile

*MedI:3* [p. 22] Dante positions himself outside the simple political framework of Church versus Empire. He aligns himself to a Rome that was the ancestral source of Florence, and to its great history, that Justinian will later summarise in the Paradiso.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Piero delle Vigne's reference to Florence awakens Dante's love of the native city that he is to be (and at the time of writing had been) exiled from.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata prophesies Dante's exile from Florence in 1302.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] Brunetto, exiled after Montaperti, prophesies the enmity of the Florentines towards Dante.

*MedXXIII:1* [p. 64] Dante's exile was on trumped-up charges, and he links the hypocrisy involved to that of the Jewish Council regarding Christ, leaving us with an image of Caiaphas 'in eternal exile'.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] The illuminator Gubbio prophesies Dante's need to beg for hospitality in exile.

## Faith

*MedI:3* [p. 22] *MedII:1* [p. 24] The keynote of the Paradiso. Faith, Hope and Pity align with Paradise, Purgatory and Hell.



*MedV:2* [p. 35] Bernard regarded faith as a mystery beyond human reason, a position which Dante ultimately adopts.

*MedXXXII:1* [p. 74] Dante's Hell is graded downwards in the direction away from Faith, from the pagans, through the incontinent, to the violent, the deceitful and the treacherous. Treachery breaks the bonds of trust that are the complement to Faith. Mis-applied belief and misuse of free will are evident in the higher circles, failure of trust and belief and malicious use of free-will are evident in the lower circles, with treachery at the base.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] The antithesis of trust and faith is treachery which is punished in the deepest, the Ninth Circle, of Hell, where Judas, the arch-traitor, and Brutus and Cassius, are tormented eternally for their unfaith, as enemies of Religion and Empire.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Virgil queries Dante's lack of trust in himself. Purgatory is the place where trust and faith must be strengthened. Human beings should be content with the 'what' of existence and not the 'why', and have faith in the divine providence.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] The spirits in Purgatory demonstrate trust in Dante's good will.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Dante is to have faith in Divine Philosophy, in Beatrice, and not in human philosophy as derived from Classical writing, where matters of religion are concerned.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Indicated by the colour white, and sometimes leading the three theological virtues.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] The keynote of Paradiso is Faith (= Belief, Trust, Loyalty etc), and the first canto begins with a statement of Dante's belief in (the truth of, in his view) the Neoplatonic structure of the Universe centered on God as the Aristotelian prime mover.

*MedLXIX:1* [p. 169] The sphere of the Moon is that of faith, and the content of faith, which is taken on trust, in this life, will ultimately be revealed, realised, self-evidently, as truth. Medieval Ptolemaic astronomy considered that the Earth threw its shadow, i.e. created imperfection, as far as the third sphere of Venus (in the Copernican system it only throws its shadow on the Moon, Mercury and Venus being in inner orbit round the sun).

*MedLXIX:3* [p. 170] Dante (through Beatrice's words) presents the Neo-platonic order of the Universe as a revealed Truth, a matter in which the intellect should trust (an aspect of faith), and which it will find realised self-evidently hereafter.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] The Moon is the sphere of faith, and its related concepts,

trust, belief, loyalty, the keeping of vows, and corresponding imperfections are also illustrated here.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Clare as an example of perfect faith. Constance as an example of keeping inner faith under stress.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Beatrice indicates that Divine Justice is a matter for faith, and may occasionally seem unjust to human beings.

*MedLXXI:2* [p. 175] Dante asks whether reparation can be made for broken vows. The passage has a personal ring to it, and Beatrice's immediate response is approving and loving. He is no doubt considering his promise made at the end of the *Vita Nuova* to dedicate himself to her and the higher ideal, and from which he had strayed.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] A vow is a pact between God and the self, made freely, and therefore breaking the vow is an abuse of freewill and a severance of the pact made, which was an act of self-sacrifice and self-dedication. Dispensation if given with knowledge and authority allows the content of a vow to be substituted but only with greater content, so that the supreme religious vow, that of the self, cannot be so recompensed. Vows should be serious and not perverse. Dispensation should be accepted only from the right authorities in accordance with Scripture and the authority of the Pope.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante is unable to express the brightness of the sphere of the Sun by any known means, intellect, art, or knowledge, but it can be a subject of faith and hope. Sigier's presence may be due to his acknowledgment of the superiority of faith to philosophical dispute where there was a conflict.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] God's Justice is beyond human understanding. Dante asks the question concerning the denial of salvation to those who do not know Christianity, and is told that it is a matter of God's justice and faith in that justice.

*MedXCI:1* [p. 218] Peter examines Dante regarding faith and his belief. Faith is an intellectual virtue to the Catholic Church, and Dante here quotes Saint Paul's definition (in Hebrews xi:1) 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Further philosophical and theological issues are resolved.

## Fame

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Dante is confident of his future fame.

*MedIV:2* [p. 32] Dante is accepted among the great poets in Limbo.

*MedXVI:1* [p. 55] It is fame that determines the spirits which Dante will meet, and they in turn hint at or courteously wish for his fame also.

*MedXXIV:1* [p. 65] Fame as the only way in which the individual survives on earth.

*MedXLI:1* [p. 102] Sordello salutes Virgil's fame.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] A famous passage on the transience of fame. Giotto has superseded Cimabue in painting. Guido Cavalcanti has superseded Guido Guinicelli, and Dante both of them. Artistic fame and political glory are likewise doomed to transience.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Cacciaguida prophesies Dante's future fame.

## Fear

*MedI:1* [p. 19]. The anti-heroic Dante is afraid of Hell. Where the main classical heroes do not show fear, this protagonist already does.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] Words are insufficient to express Dante's feelings of fear in the Judecca. At the end of the journey through the Inferno as at the beginning Hell inspires fear.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Dante's shadow cast by the sun causes him fear when he sees that the spirits, including Virgil, cast none. He is unique and has the fear that uniqueness and difference brings.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] Dante is filled with fear after his dream at the entrance to Purgatory proper, and is comforted and given hope by Virgil.

*MedLIV:3* [p. 126] Dante is fearful, through ignorance of the cause, after the earthquake on the Mount.

## Florence

*MedII:1* [p. 24] The native *city* [p. 248], symbolic of the personal life. The place of Dante's meeting with *Beatrice* [p. 245].

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata, representing the older Florentine aristocracy, prophesies Dante's exile from the city. He also implicitly links the City of Dis to the City of Florence.

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] Usury condemned. Florence would later be a banking centre for Europe.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Florence seen as a city of violence, stemming from its history.

Dante is nevertheless filled with love of his native place.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] Brunetto mentions Florence's founding from Fiesole, a

mixture of Romans and Fiesoleans, the harsh nature, and the pride, envy and avarice of its people, as Ciaccio had previously suggested.

*MedXVI:1* [p. 55] Florence a buzzing beehive perhaps, a perverse city under the influence of new men and sudden wealth. One riven by faction, but once having possessed men of the older generations capable of caution, and judgment.

*MedXXI:1* [p. 62] *MedXXII:1* [p. 63] The episode of the barrators and the Malebranche Demons is used to highlight the political corruption of Florence and the trumped-up charges used to banish Dante (and confirm a sentence of death on him in 1302, if he returned to Florence).

*MedXXIII:1* [p. 64] Dante refers to past Florentine corruption, and goes on to link the hypocrisy of the charges against himself, to those against Christ, and therefore the corruption of the Florentine leaders to those of the Jewish Council.

*MedXXV:1* [p. 66] Dante selects five individual thieves from the nobility of Florence to point the finger once more at the sinfulness of his native city.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Florence mirrors Dis, and its citizens are spread throughout the Inferno making it notorious. Punishment will follow.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante attacks Florence, during his diatribe on the State of Italy,

its people are too quick to judge, greedy for office, profligate and changeable. The city is compared with deep irony to Athen and Sparta rich in arts and laws.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] Over-proud and humbled at Montaperti.

*MedXLVI:2* [p. 112] Dante mentions the steps at San Miniato overlooking Florence, and has an ironic jibe at that 'well-guided' city.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] The Florentines compared to wolves.

*MedLXXXIII:1* [p. 201] Cacciaguida speaks in detail about ancient Florence, and the modern degeneration of the city.

## Forgiveness, Absolution

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] Signified by the third step of the Gate of Purgatory. The golden key signifies the ability of the confessor to exercise judgement and grant absolution.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] Forgiveness should be granted to others as we ourselves seek forgiveness.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Matilda confirms her role as the keeper of the threshold of forgiveness by singing '*Beati, quorum tecta sunt peccata*: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.' (Psalm 32: verse 1).

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Dante undergoes the sacrament with Beatrice as confessor, the three stages of penitence, confession and forgiveness.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] Matilda as the active agent of forgiveness draws Dante through the waters of Lethe, and makes him swallow the waters, which erase the memory of sinful acts.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] Dante is forgiven and Beatrice reveals her smile which is that of the three theological virtues, with charity equating to love and forgiveness.

## Fortitude

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] *Prudentia*, or practical wisdom, one of the four cardinal virtues, and represented by the sphere of the Sun. Dante treats prudence as the virtue of engaging religiously with the world. The mendicant Orders therefore figure significantly, as well as the practical philosophers and theologians.

## Franciscans, Franciscan Radicalism

*MedXXVII:2* [p. 68] Guido da Montefeltro, the mercenary turned Franciscan, serves to hint at Franciscan radical poverty compared to the corrupt Papacy.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] Pier Pettignano the Franciscan's intercession for Sapia.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Virgil's comments on the nature of shared love, and the distinction between earthly possession and spiritual mutuality, echo Franciscan 'spiritual' thoughts on communal simplicity, and spiritual rather than temporal intensity.

*MedLXVI:2* [p. 154] Dante watches a symbolically enacted history of the Church and Empire. The Church is attacked, corrupted and divided, acquiring temporal power in a fatal confusion of the spiritual and earthly spheres. The vision culminates in the whorish mating of a French pope to the French court, and the transfer of the Papacy from its true home, Rome, to Avignon. All this is an application of the imagery of Apocalypse to politics in the style of the radical Franciscans.

*MedLXXVIII:2* [p. 192] The concept of the idealised Beatrice may have a source in Saint Francis's embrace of 'Lady Poverty', the facets of Courtly Love being transferred to a purely spiritual symbol.

*MedLXXIX:1* [p. 193] By including Joachim of Flora in the circle of lights Dante is expressly approving the prophetic interpretation of scripture and prophecy generally, and the more extreme radical views within the Franciscan Order concerned with the cleansing of the Church and Papacy, where these do not verge

on heresy. This is despite Bonaventura's actions against the Joachites.

*MedLXXXI:1* [p. 197] Bonaventura's is the outermost circle nearer to God. Dante acknowledges his affinity with Franciscan thought.

## Fraud, Deceit

*MedV:1* [p. 33] One of the divisions of the malicious is those who are guilty of forms of fraud.

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] Fraud is subdivided into fraud against natural bonds, and treachery which is fraud against human trust as well as natural bonds.

*MedXII:1* [p. 50] The Minotaur signifies the deceit of his conception as well as violence, and the unnatural.

*MedXII:2* [p. 50] The Centaur Nessus who deceived Deianira, signifies fraud.

*MedXVI:2* [p. 56] Geryon personifies Fraud, and is on the path to the lower eight and ninth circles of fraudulent malice. Geryon, the mythological Spanish king, whose cattle Hercules appropriated, has traditional associations with triple-headedness and with the alphabet. As an enemy of Hercules he is thereby an enemy of Rome, since Hercules was the protector of the ancient site of Rome and Evander's people. (See Virgil's Aeneid VIII 108 et al. His use as an allegorical representation of Fraud seems to have little mythological basis. Spain in 1300 was stable after the *Reconquista*, but perhaps there is some reference to Moorish Granada. Dante's attitude to Spain would bear some more research.)

*MedXVIII:1* [p. 58] Malebolge, the eighth circle, holds the ditches where the fraudulent are tormented. They have shown malice, through fraud rather than violence, and have broken the natural but not the divine bonds between men.

*MedXXI:1* [p. 62] The Malebranche Demons are treacherous, and Malacoda their spokesman lies to the Poets.

*MedXXII:1* [p. 63] The incident of Ciampolo and the Demons illustrates the ethos of organized corruption, the mutual deceit, overt and covert violence, the lying, trickery and malice. Florence is the subtext.

*MedXXIII:1* [p. 64] Malacoda has deceived the poets, and the Devil is the father of lies. Fraud underlies the whole of Hell, since sin is both a self-deception and a betrayal of the Good.

*MedXXVII:2* [p. 68] Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro, show the weaknesses and strengths of human reason, and the ultimate inadequacy of human knowledge and authority, since despite wisdom and intelligence, they abused freewill through cunning and the acceptance of sophistry. There is an ironic illustration of the

Demonic use of valid logic, showing that human reason is not a skill of the divine alone. Intellect is therefore seen to be a two-edged sword, capable of immoral as well as moral usage.

*MedXXX:1* [p. 72] Leaving the Eight Circle, the tenth chasm is like a vast hospital, an analogy with the world above diseased by fraud and deceit, lying and falsity.

## Free Will, Freedom

*MedII:1* [p. 24] The (Christian) *Individual* [p. 282] is free to follow the path of spiritual achievement and therefore determine his/her own spiritual destiny.

*MedIII:2* [p. 29] The spiritually neutral who failed to make any use of their free will are condemned to a no-man's land.

*MedIII:3* [p. 30] The spirits gathered at the Acheron who misuse language in blasphemy as they have misused freewill in life.

*MedV:2* [p. 35] Love regarded as a path to human freedom, for example by Heloise in her letters, may for Dante conflict with the spiritual path. The right exercise of freewill for Dante is in accord with mainstream religious and spiritual orthodoxy.

*MedVI:2* [p. 38] The importance of the theme of free will stressed in Dante's letter to Can Grande.

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] The structure of Hell depends on the non-use, misuse and abuse of free-will. Neutrality, Ignorance, Heresy and Incontinence thus figure as less serious than Malicious abuses of freewill which involve violence or fraud, including treachery. The treatment of heresy is interesting, and indicates Dante's endorsement of the need for intellectual vigour, and his sympathies with the intellectually adventurous, but also recognition of the ultimate inferiority in the spiritual sphere of intellect to grace, intercession and revelation.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Suicide is normally an abuse of free-will.

*MedXIV:1* [p. 52] Despite Cato's suicide he was a champion of freedom and virtue, and his suicide was perhaps a virtuous exercise of free-will for a greater cause. Note that his suicide harmed only himself and not others.

*MedXXXI:1* [p. 73] The Giants represent the malicious abuse of power and free will.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] The worst abuse of free will is treachery, since it destroys the closest bond, attacks faith and trust, and renders the salvation of the invidual impossible. The abuse is punished in the deepest pit of Hell.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] Cato, who committed honourable suicide, represents the right use of the free will in Classical times, and the type of the moral lover of freedom.

*MedXLI:1* [p. 102] There is a degree of freedom in Purgatory, witness the extent to which Sordello can wander and guide the Poets. However the will is not yet wholly free, and night inhibits the Poets from climbing further, just as intercession and grace from above is needed to guard the approach to Purgatory proper.

*MedXLII:3* [p. 105] Ethical progress through the right active use of free will is possible during the day on the Mount. It is presided over by the Southern Cross, its four stars symbolic of the theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity.

*MedXLII:4* [p. 106] Conrad Malaspina wishes Dante may have the will power needed for the ascent.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] The Angels sacrifice their free will to God in humility.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Though the stars have divine influence on fate, the will is free, and divine goodness creates the mind which has moral awareness.

*MedLI:2* [p. 118] Free-will is in abeyance at night on the Mount, and the Poets cannot progress upwards on foot during the night.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] The free-will which is abused or misused among others in Hell, is purged and re-oriented in Purgatory, and expressed fully in Paradiso.

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] Freewill is an innate virtue, allowing the power of self-control, and the refusal of assent to wrong objectives. It is 'the noble virtue' to Beatrice.

*MedLV:2* [p. 128] In Purgatory the free will is made eager for punishment as before it was desirous of sin, until it is finally purged of its sin and feels free, and is empowered to progress onwards. At this point the Mount quakes and the spirits celebrate. So Statius can now go upwards with the Poets.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will, and around it a 'shadow' or 'shade' is manifested that reflects its desires and affections. Freewill can therefore be exercised after death.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] At the summit of the Mount the will is freed, and is directed towards the good, making it right to follow its promptings. The spirit has attained moral innocence, and earthly knowledge. This was the purpose of the journey through Inferno and along the Mount.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] The reason that there are so few great poets is in Dante's eyes due to a failure of will. It is significant that the Paradiso ends with the energising of Dante's will (to write the *Commedia*).



*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Piccarda answers his question concerning the desire of spirits in Paradise, which is that they desire what they have and possess no other desires. Their will is subsumed in the Divine will.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Dante accepts the view that the stars influence human propensities, but not the idea, an interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*, that would imply the soul being split from a star at birth, and returning to it at death. He is always concerned to follow the 'soft' astrological view of planetary influence on human life but not pre-determination of it, so leaving room for the key human attribute of free will. Mucius Scaevola and Saint Lawrence are given as example of the power of the free will to remain loyal to an ideal.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] Beatrice extols free will as the greatest gift of God, most matched to Him, and most valued by Him. It is possessed by intelligent creatures. A vow is a pact between God and the self, made freely, and therefore breaking the vow is an abuse of freewill and a severance of the pact made, which was an act of self-sacrifice and self-dedication.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Adam condemned the race to exile as a result of his original sin in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. His sin was an abuse of free will since he failed to restrain his will appropriately.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Cacciaguida emphasises that knowledge of the future in Paradise, does not imply pre-destination. God and Paradise are extra-temporal.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] Dante once more toys with the issue of pre-destination. God seems to pre-ordain certain things, but not all. Prayer can fulfil what is ordained but not alter it. God's justice can ordain things that seem unjust or inscrutable to the human mind. Trajan was pre-destined to be saved therefore. Ripheus is saved even though technically a pagan unaware of Christ. God seems to guide history but not fully determine it.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] God is ultimate truth. Blessedness depends on the vision of truth, on seeing, rather on the degree of love. Love is a consequence of being blessed, rather than a cause of it. The extent of vision depends on grace and right use of the will.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Beatrice now rests as Dante's guide, and Dante in gratitude celebrates her goodness, and her grace that has led him to freedom and the hope of salvation, and asks for her protection.

## Future

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Part of the *Triplicity* [p. 340] of *Time* [p. 339] which the 'copyist' will capture in the DC.

## Gluttony

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] A sin arising from excessive love for what should be loved only in moderation, food. It is related to Avarice and Lust. A wrong response of Rational love to desire for the good.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] The Siren symbolizes the temptation towards this excessive desire among others.

*MedLVI:2* [p. 131] Examples of temperance, counter to gluttony. The Virgin at Cana: the Roman women: Daniel: The Golden Age: John the Baptist.

*MedLVII:1* [p. 131] The gluttonous have mouths freed now to praise. They hunger and are filled with desire for food and drink by the perfume of the tree. Like Tantalus they are tormented by the inaccessibility of what they desire.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] Examples of gluttony at the exit from the sixth terrace: the Centaurs: the followers of Gideon. Dante links excessive desire to excessive eagerness for Knowledge.

*MedXCIV:2* [p. 224] Beatrice condemns human greed.

## God

*MedI:4* [p. 23] All-present, though his city and throne is in Paradise. God is therefore present everywhere in the architecture of the universe, including Hell and Purgatory, as the supreme Maker.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] The divine power does not will that the workings of itself and the universe should be fully understood by human beings.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] God willingly pardons the repentant spirit.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] God fills the penitents with desire to see Him.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante calls on God to turn his eyes towards Italy. He is the deity who was crucified in his son Jesus Christ, and the 'highest Jupiter' having authority over Empire and Church, and superseding the Pagan Gods.

*MedXLII:2* [p. 104] He hides his first cause so that there is no path to it. Dante journeys through His singular grace.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] God is associated with the starry Heavens, not because he is limited in Space, but because he loves His first sublime creations most.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] The soul, beloved of God, issues from his hands like a little child, in simplicity, and draw towards the good.

*MedLI:1* [p. 118] Imagination operates on the rapt mind, as a light formed from heaven, or a Divine will from there. Dante implies the revelatory and inspirational

God-given nature of his Vision.

*MedLIV:2* [p. 125] Hugh Capet's speech conjures the idea of an angry and vengeful Old Testament God. Dante is not speaking in the first person.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will, and around it a 'shadow' or 'shade' is manifested that reflects its desires and affections. It is God who breathes the rational spirit into the human brain, delighting in it as a work of nature.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda explains that God created Man good, and for goodness.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] God is the source of Love, and his glory fills the universe. He most influences the world through the four Cardinal virtues (Temperance, Fortitude, Justice, and Prudence) when they are joined to 'form' the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity). The happiest constellation is therefore Aries, the sign in which the Sun was at the Creation, when the spring equinox fell there, making this configuration of four celestial circles joined in three crosses.

*MedLXVIII:3* [p. 167] The higher creatures with intellect see the stamp of the Maker in the order of the universe, for which purpose the order was created. God created the (Neo-platonic) structure, and the intellect is drawn towards Him.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Blessed spirits in Paradise take their being from Divine Love and therefore cannot be in conflict with God's will.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] Beatrice extols free will as the greatest gift of God, most matched to Him, and most valued by Him. It is possessed by intelligent creatures. A vow is a pact between God and the self, made freely, and therefore breaking the vow is an abuse of freewill and a severance of the pact made, which was an act of self-sacrifice and self-dedication.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] God as an act of love mercy and justice sent Christ, his Word, his messenger, to Earth, taking on human nature with the divine nature, since only by Himself incurring punishment through the Crucifixion could reparation be made for original sin, that reparation being beyond Man's power alone.

*MedLXXIV:2* [p. 182] God breathes life into human beings directly, and the body will be resurrected as Adam and Eve were first created, directly.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Divine providence structures and controls the creation in its nature and its continuing welfare. This is achieved through the angelic intellects present in the planetary spheres. Since God and they are perfect then the results must be regular and not chaotic, art and not disorder. Dante expresses his belief in

the completeness of this created Nature.

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] The human mind is not adequate to understanding the Divine Will, since even the spirits cannot do that. Nor should human beings presume to try.

*MedXCIII:1* [p. 221] God is the supreme Good, and therefore the object of supreme Love, since we yearn for what is good, and what the mind sees as the highest good is therefore the most desired.

*MedXCIII:2* [p. 223] Everything is reflected perfectly in God, while nothing itself perfectly reflects God.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] God is the prime Mover, the ultimate Truth, centre and circumference of the universe, but outside it in the spaceless and timeless Empyrean.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] God created his creatures out of Love, so that they could know existence.

### **Golden Age, Utopianism, Primal Innocence**

*MedXIV:2* [p. 53] The Old Man of Crete is a metaphor of the decline of man from the Golden Age of Saturn.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Gudio del Duca's lament for a lost golden age of the Romagna and its past virtues.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] Virgil's Eclogue IV predicts the return of the Golden Age.

*MedLVI:2* [p. 131] The Golden Age, as a time when the human race lived on natural plenty as described by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (I 103 et seq.)

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] The wood before the Earthly Paradise, and the scene beyond the stream of Matilda gathering flowers, invokes the primal innocence of nature, the uplifting dawn beauty of resurrection and regeneration.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda suggests that ancient poetic ideas of the Golden Age were dreams of the Earthly Paradise. This invokes a smile from Virgil and Statius, poets who referenced the Golden Age in their works.

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] The seventh sphere of Saturn with its golden light is associated with the Golden Age of simplicity, moderation, and innocence.

## Goodness, The Good

*MedI:3* [p. 22] As an objective of the political saviour of Italy who is yet to come.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda explains that God created Man good, and for goodness. The Earthly Paradise was created as a home for that goodness.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] What conforms most closely to the Divine Good is most pleasing to God since it reflects Himself. Sin is what clouds human nature, and makes it dissimilar to the Good. An action is more gracious if it reveals more of the goodness of the heart it comes from. Christ was wholly pure and good, representing the state of Man before the Fall.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] Dante implies that one is not condemned for an action intended to do good that has evil consequences. So Constantine is not to blame for the evil effects of the (unhistorical) Donation.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] Dante unites Truth and Goodness, to be known by the intellect, out of which flows the transcendent joy of Love. Though Truth and Love coexist in God, intellect and knowledge in Man is the cause of human love.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Beatrice now rests as Dante's guide, and Dante in gratitude celebrates her goodness, and her grace that has led him to freedom and the hope of salvation, and asks for her protection.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] Dante's final Vision, in the moment of supreme stillness, beyond time, is of a universal unity, bound together by Love in a simplicity of Light. Within it is the concentrated and perfect Good, the object of will and desire, which the eye cannot turn away from to another sight. Outside it all things are in some way defective in their goodness.

## Grace

*MedII:2* [p. 26] Divine grace enables *Beatrice* [p. 245] to visit Virgil in Limbo without fear of Hell's flames.

*MedV:2* [p. 35] Bernard regarded Divine grace as necessary to achieve salvation.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The Eagle in Dante's dream is symbolic of regeneration through Divine Grace, and of Rome and Imperial law.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] Peace is an act of grace.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] Grace illuminates those who are blessed with moderate desires and hunger for what is right and just.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] Beatrice reveals her face and her smile out of grace which is needed to supplement human wisdom, prompted by the three theological virtues

who are also the three dancing Graces.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] An action is more gracious if it reveals more of the goodness of the heart it comes from. God displayed His divine goodness, in the Incarnation, by acting with maximum grace to reveal the maximum goodness, employing both mercy and justice.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] God is ultimate truth. Blessedness depends on the vision of truth, on seeing, rather on the degree of love. Love is a consequence of being blessed, rather than a cause of it. The extent of vision depends on grace and right use of the will.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] Unlike Satan who fell through pride the other Angels opened themselves to God, and understood their place humbly, and it is a virtue to open oneself to grace likewise.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Beatrice now rests as Dante's guide, and Dante in gratitude celebrates her goodness, and her grace that has led him to freedom and the hope of salvation, and asks for her protection.

## Gratitude

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] Praise of the divine is a natural act of gratitude for the gifts of the Creation.

*MedLXIX:1* [p. 169] Beatrice directs Dante to show gratitude for God's grace.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Beatrice encourages Dante to show gratitude for his ascent into the sphere of the Sun.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Beatrice now rests as Dante's guide, and Dante in gratitude celebrates her goodness, and her grace that has led him to freedom and the hope of salvation, and asks for her protection.

## Guides, Spirit-Guides

*MedI:3* [p. 22] Virgil appears as the spirit guide for the Inferno and most of the Purgatorio. He is qualified as poet, moral teacher, Imperial Roman, and writer of the fertile sourcebook the Aeneid. He represents human philosophy.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Beatrice who appeared to Dante in the Earthly Paradise, is his guide through Paradiso. She represents Divine Philosophy and Grace, and carries the charge of the living and beloved Beatrice while incorporating the attributes of saint and blessed spirit.

*MedLXXVIII:1* [p. 191] Aquinas identifies Dominic and Francis as the two

guides of the Church in both realms.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Beatrice now rests as Dante's guide, and Dante in gratitude celebrates her goodness, and her grace that has led him to freedom and the hope of salvation, and asks for her protection.

## Heresy

*MedV:2* [p. 35] The Paolo and Francesca episode parallels the history of Abelard and Heloise, where Heloise's love at least can be considered heretical in its preference for a secular passion over religious dogma. Abelard was separately condemned as a heretic by Bernard on theological grounds.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] The sixth circle holds the heretics, including the free-thinking Epicureans who denied the immortality of the soul, according to Dante.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] Dante treads a careful path in the *Commedia* between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy. How acceptable was his claim to have seen Hell, Purgatory and Paradise in his Vision, or his use of prophetic statement, frowned on by the Church, even though it is often merely a literary device? How acceptable was his nearness to the radical Franciscans in his condemnation of the Papacy, or his view of Classical Roman history as evidence of Divine providence at work?

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] Examples of opposing heresies, those of Arian and Sabellius. Sabellius, denied the separate persons of God and his son Christ though they are unified in essence, Arius denied the essential unity of God and his Son though they differ in person.

## Hierarchy

*MedII:3* [p. 27] The Virgin's intercession on Dante's behalf is passed down the hierarchy, from Virgin, to Saint (Lucia), to *Beatrice* [p. 245], to Virgil (in Limbo).

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] The implied hierarchy of God, Nature and Human Art by which the divine power flows to human society.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] The lower realm of Marcia's Limbo cannot influence Cato at the foot of Purgatory. The lower cannot move the higher.

## Hope

*MedI:4* [p. 23] A major dimension of Dante's understanding of Purgatory. *Faith* [p. 264], Hope and *Pity* [p. 302] align with Paradise, Purgatory and Hell.

*MedX:3* [p. 47] Virgil offers Dante hope by holding out a promise of seeing

Beatrice, and learning his own fate.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Hope is the keynote of the Purgatorio, and Virgil is a guide who gives Dante hope, both of reaching the summit of Purgatory and seeing Beatrice.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Virgil gives Dante renewed promise of seeing Beatrice, and hope eases his weariness.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] Virgil replaces Dante's fear with hope, when he wakes startled, after the dream of the Eagle.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Virgil gives Dante renewed hope of seeing Beatrice.

*MedLV:2* [p. 128] Statius gives Dante hope of gaining knowledge.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] Virgil reassures Dante with hope of seeing Beatrice and her eyes that represent the cardinal virtues, beyond the purging fire.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] Virgil's last speech sends Dante onwards, beyond his own knowledge, into the beatitude of the Earthly Paradise. It is full of the hope and promise of seeing Beatrice and reaching Divine wisdom that the journey through Inferno and Purgatory has presaged.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Indicated by green leaves, and the colour green generally.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] The sphere of Mercury represents hope, and its imperfection earthly ambition.

*MedLXXIII:1* [p. 178] Dante stresses the hope of peace under the law that the Empire represents. Justinian his spokesman offers hope that the factional quarrels of Italy will cease with the Ghibellines purifying their cause, and the Ghelph threat allied to France going the way of all the greater historical threats to the Empire.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Beatrice explains the Incarnation and Crucifixion bringing hope of redemption.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante is unable to express the brightness of the sphere of the Sun by any known means, intellect, art, or knowledge, but it can be a subject of faith and hope.

*MedXCII:1* [p. 219] Dante expresses hope of returning to Florence, and is examined on the subject of Hope by Saint James, who is appropriate for a number of reasons mentioned. He replies in words closely resembling Peter Lombard's 'Hope is the certain expectation of future bliss, coming from the grace of God and preceding merit.' He goes on to explain that his hope is of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Beatrice now rests as Dante's guide, and Dante in gratitude celebrates her goodness, and her grace that has led him to freedom and



the hope of salvation, and asks for her protection.

## Humility

*MedI:2* [p. 21] Dante is humble before his master and guide Virgil. He exhibits anti-hero traits in this journey of a sinner. He is different from the heroes of previous epics in the nature of his destiny. Yet he is himself the protagonist of his own epic.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] In his exchange with Virgil, Dante demonstrates his humility and willingness to expose his inner thoughts. Virgil is in the role of father, friend, master, guide, teacher and confessor.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] Dante is cleansed and a rush, the symbol of humility, is bound round him by Virgil.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] Dante addresses the spirit of Manfred, humbly.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] The Angel at the Gate of Purgatory has robes of ashen grey signifying the humility of the penitent and of the confessor.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 108] Examples of Humility: The Annunciation: David before the Ark: Trajan and the widow.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] The Angels sacrifice their free will to God in humility.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] Provenzan Salvani as an example of humility. He played the part of a beggar to raise money for a friend's ransom.

*MedLV:3* [p. 129] The passage between Virgil and Statius expresses the humility and equality of the spirits after death.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] A flash of pride in his own poetic abilities escapes the net, even in Paradise!! It is quickly followed by a humble corrective statement.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] Unlike Satan who fell through pride the other Angels opened themselves to God, and understood their place humbly, and it is a virtue to open oneself to grace likewise.

## Imagination

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] Dante invokes the Reader's powers of Imagination, when words fail him.

*MedLI:1* [p. 118] Imagination operates on the rapt mind, as a light formed from heaven, or a divine will from there. Dante implies the revelatory and inspirational nature of his Vision.

## Individual, The

*MedI:1* [p. 19]. The author as Individual. The DC as history, biography, and spiritual journey of the living author.

*MedI:4* [p. 23] The spirit-guides provide help and sympathy to the Individual who is no longer totally isolated.

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Nevertheless the journey of the spirit is essentially that of the single one, the 'one, alone'.

*MedVIII:1* [p. 43] Filippo Argenti is one of a long line of memorable individuals conjured up by a situation, phrase, mini-biography, interrogation, command, plea etc. They usually embody some generic quality or drama.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata as the example of aristocratic pride, tradition, magnanimity and free-thinking obduracy.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Piero Delle Vigne is the example of a wronged man, the victim of envy, who was a suicide.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] Brunetto Latini the sodomite's 'baked visage' begins a subtle tribute to an individual who influenced and possibly taught Dante.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] Pope Nicholas III represents the corrupted Papacy. His acceptance of bribery by the Eastern Emperor, Michael Paleologus, enables Dante via the Donation of Constantine to point up the involvement of the Church wrongly in temporal matters.

*MedXXII:1* [p. 63] Ciampolo and the demons provide a moment of burlesque concealing a serious thrust at the Florentines who exiled Dante partly on trumped-up corruption charges.

*MedXXIV:1* [p. 65] Vanni Fucci bitten by a serpent is transformed to ashes and remade like the phoenix. He prophesies the defeat of Dante's party. He represents the most arrogant of spirits towards God, brutish, angry, bitter, and vindictive.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Ulysses tells the story of his own final end, and in doing so points to the existence of the Mount of Purgatory in the Southern Ocean. He was over-reliant on human knowledge and cunning, that lead to deceit.

*MedXXVII:2* [p. 68] Guido da Montefeltro, a mercenary turned Franciscan, relied too much on Papal authority, leading him to give a counsel of deceit.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] Casella appears as Dante's friend, musician and new arrival at the shores of Purgatory.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] Manfred, a type of the noble Ghibelline warrior.

*MedXXXVIII:2* [p. 96] Belacqua, a type of the lazy mind, here beautifully

captured by Dante.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] A trio of vivid vignettes of individuals who died by violence, Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte, and La Pia.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] Sapia de' Saracini, one of the characterful portraits of individual women in the *Commedia*.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] In Purgatory the individual self is renewed and cleansed, and re-oriented towards relationship and community. *Inferno* reveals the divided community, *Paradiso* the united city of God.

*MedLVII:2* [p. 132] Forese Donati gives us a picture of one of Dante's friends in the period of moral unworthiness after Beatrice's death.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] The parting with Forese, and in fact the whole conversation, is deeply felt, and echoes the parting with Brunetto Latini.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Piccarda Forese is the first individual spirit recognised in *Paradiso*. Her story is one of broken vows.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] As Dante ascends in *Paradise* the light grows brighter, hiding the features of individual spirits. Justinian is the last who reveals his features before hiding them again.

*MedLXXIII:1* [p. 178] Justinian, Emperor and Lawgiver, represents the noble individual who sought earthly honour and fame.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] Charles Martel who befriended Dante represents friendship and intense earthly love.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] The world drives people into roles not suited to them, and Dante's love of order suggests it would be best for individuals to realise their inborn qualities (an interesting forerunner to the nature-nurture argument). Society would then take account of individual variability in the optimum manner.

*MedLXXXI:1* [p. 197] Solomon confirms the resurrection of the body, and the retention of complete individuality.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Cacciaguida, Dante's ancestor, represents the Christian warrior and Fortitude. He confirms Dante's destiny and mission.

## **Intellect, Knowledge, Understanding**

*MedIII:1* [p. 28] The inhabitants of Hell have lost the good of the intellect, that power of Reason, which is through philosophy and theology an aid to human redemption.

*MedIV:3* [p. 33] Dante sees the philosophers in Limbo, who have exercised the intellect within earthly philosophy, but not through theology or the Christian

spiritual experience. These are the Classical and Islamic authorities.

*MedV:2* [p. 35] The Paolo and Francesca episode hints at a parallel with Abelard and Heloise. Abelard was condemned by Bernard of Clairvaux for the excessive questioning use of the intellect, believing that contemplation and Divine grace were required for salvation.

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] Dante's concept of sin is primarily as an intellectual failing, a misuse of reason, the gift that distinguishes man. Adam's was the first sin, and all other sins derive from that eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The greater the abuse of intellect the greater the sin. This rationale may help explain the gradations in Hell, and why Dante's gradations often do not square with our own criminal codes and moral systems.

*MedX:2* [p. 47] Cavalcante hints that Dante's journey is accomplished through the power of his own intellect. Dante is quick to point out that Divine intervention was required in the form of Virgil's guidance. Intellect is powerful but grace is also needed.

*MedXXVII:2* [p. 68] Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro are testimony to the inadequacies of human reason and intellect, and the dangers of cunning leading to deceit.

*MedXXXV:1* [p. 87] Dante compares the human intellect to a little boat.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] The self-questioning intellect examines itself, morally this is conscience which elicits self-reproach. Limited by the extent of human knowledge, faith is needed to accept the workings of the Universe.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Dante displays but must also transcend purely human reason in progressing towards Divine knowledge.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Divine Philosophy, personified in Beatrice, is 'the light linking truth to intellect'.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] Human intellect is limited, and peace is an act of grace.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] Rational Love unlike natural love may err, through desiring the wrong objective (Pride, Envy, Wrath), an inadequate response (Sloth), or an excessive response (Avarice, Gluttony, Lust).

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] The rational mind may withhold assent from wrong objectives of desire, from excess or inadequacy. The virtue of freewill is innate and allows the power of self-control.

*MedLIV:3* [p. 126] Dante is constantly the enquirer, the student. Desire for knowledge is a legitimate desire, so long as the right authorities are consulted. Dante's adherence to the orthodox mainstream is clear throughout the *Commedia*, though illuminated by Neo-platonism, Franciscan radical fervour, and Classical

teaching. The right use of the intellect, through freewill, leads to divine truth, the union of light, reason, and love.

*MedLXVIII:3* [p. 167] The higher creatures with intellect see the stamp of the Maker in the order of the universe, for which purpose the order was created.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] Intelligent creatures are endowed with free will. Beatrice sees the progress of understanding in Dante since the eternal light of love and truth is reflected by his intellect (in asking the question he has asked). Understanding without retention is not knowledge. Truth must be inwardly digested.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante is unable to express the brightness of the sphere of the Sun by any known means, intellect, art, or knowledge, but it can be a subject of faith and hope.

*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] God's justice informs the intellect which then creates the conditions for it on earth.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] Dante unites Truth and Goodness, to be known by the intellect, out of which flows the transcendent joy of Love. Though Truth and Love coexist in God, intellect and knowledge in Man is the cause of human love.

## Joy

*MedLXIX:1* [p. 169] Beatrice, Divine Philosophy, is both beautiful to contemplate, and filled with joy.

*MedLXIX:3* [p. 170] The joyful nature of the Divine source is revealed in the way the Angelic virtues shine through their planetary spheres like joyful light through the eye.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Blessed spirits in Paradise take their being from Divine Love and therefore cannot be in conflict with it. They are joyful at being in their proper state.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Dante's joy is increased by mutual awareness of it, and of its divine inspiration.

## Justice, Law

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Divine Justice is without *Pity* [p. 302] in Hell. Pity is invoked in the spectator.

*MedIII:1* [p. 28] The Gate of Hell declares itself an emblem of God's Justice.

*MedIV:1* [p. 31] Divine Justice is merciless and implacable. For example the spiritually neutral who have failed to use the intellect live without hope, as do the

unbaptised and pagan who are condemned to Limbo. Dante is orthodox and symbolic in his use of punishments to indicate dogmatic rules of his religion or abuses of freewill and intellect.

*MedVII:2* [p. 42] The initial entry into Hell and the passing of Minos the Judge has been carried out while the sign of Libra, the Scales of Justice, is in the sky. The whole chronology and position of the heavens and star signs in the DC is carefully worked out.

*MedXXIX:2* [p. 71] Dante emphasizes the infallible nature of Divine Justice.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] Divine Justice is inexorable in placing Cato and Marcia on opposite sides of the waters of Lethe, Marcia in Limbo, Cato at the foot of the Mount of Purgatory. The lower realm cannot influence the higher.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 108] Trajan and the widow, an example of Imperial justice and compassion.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] God's justice is not according to what we deserve by our actions but according to penitence and intention.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Law is necessary to curb sin, and ensure the innate good of the soul is not destroyed.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] The Mystic Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents Justice and the Empire, bound in turn to the spiritual Chariot of the Church.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Beatrice indicates that Divine Justice is a matter for faith, and may occasionally seem unjust to human beings.

*MedLXXIII:1* [p. 178] Dante interprets the Crucifixion as a just revenge for the Fall, and the destruction of the Temple by Titus as a just revenge for the Jewish betrayal of Christ to the Romans.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Beatrice explains the Crucifixion as just in divine terms, since it punished (or revenged) Adam's original sin, while unjust in human terms given the divine goodness of Christ.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] We should be prudent in making judgements of others, since God's justice may be at work, which is not human justice.

*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] Jupiter is associated with Justice and Wisdom, with Jupiter the Roman god, and therefore with the Roman Emperors, and with the Christian God. God's justice informs the intellect which then creates the conditions for it on earth.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] The evil recognise Justice even if they don't follow it. God's Justice is beyond human understanding. Dante asks the question concerning

the denial of salvation to those who do not know Christianity, and is told that it is a matter of God's justice and faith in that justice. Even Lucifer was too limited to see all, and fell through his own impatience for greater knowledge.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] Six examples of just spirits.

## Light/Darkness

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Light fades on the evening of Good Friday as the poets prepare to enter Hell. The Inferno holds many images of darkness.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] The light of the Southern Cross illuminates Cato's face, symbolising the light of virtue.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Virgil is a guiding light to Dante.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] Lucia who aids Dante as she did in Inferno Canto I, is associated with light and eyesight. Dante had trouble with his eyes, so that Lucia both aids him in the Vision and in the actual writing.

*MedLI:1* [p. 118] Imagination operates on the rapt mind, as a light formed from heaven, or a divine will from there. Dante implies the revelatory and inspirational nature of his Vision.

*MedLI:2* [p. 118] The Angels (here the Angel of Meekness) emit intense light, as receptacles and transmitters of God's light.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] The light of the sun signals the Earthly Paradise.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] A great light precedes the Chariot of the Church.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] God is the Aristotelian prime mover whose glory manifested as light permeates the Universe, to varying degrees.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] As Dante ascends in Paradise the light grows brighter, and the features of individual spirits are hidden in their radiance.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante is unable to express the brightness of the sphere of the Sun by any known means, intellect, art, or knowledge, but it can be a subject of faith and hope.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] Dante's final Vision, in the moment of supreme stillness, beyond time, is of a universal unity, bound together by Love in a simplicity of Light. Within it is the concentrated and perfect Good, the object of will and desire, which the eye cannot turn away from to another sight. Outside it all things are in some way defective in their goodness.

## Love

*MedI:3* [p. 22] A source of sustenance to the political saviour of Italy who is yet to come.

*MedII:2* [p. 26] Beatrice is moved by Love to help Dante.

*MedIII:1* [p. 28] Love is one of the shaping forces of the Gates of Hell, and Hell itself, an ethically difficult philosophy for our age.

*MedV:1* [p. 33] Love coupled with Intellect provides the dual basis for Dante's ascent towards the Godhead. Dante's concept of Love derives partly from the Troubadour tradition but he spiritualises the concept. *Beatrice* [p. 245] therefore has attributes of saintliness as well as the erotic charge derived from secular and pagan Amor.

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] The sub-divisions of the malicious within Hell, reflect the bonds of love which are broken there.

*MedXII:1* [p. 50] Christ is identified with the universal Love that even disturbed Hell.

*MedXXXVI:1* [p. 89] As with Brunetto Latini, here with Casella, Dante renews the bonds of affection, but in Purgatorio this is expressed with embraces, smiles, and mutual love.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Dante went beyond the Courtly Conventions of the troubadour poets, and of his friend Guido Cavalcanti, which represented Love as an irrational force, entering through the eyes at the sight of beauty, attacking the heart, creating the ache and pain of desire and longing, depressing the natural, vital, and animal spirits, of liver, heart and brain, a destructive power, forming a hell of unrequited passion, bringing the lover near death. Dante transcended this with his ideas of spiritualised Love, linking it to the rational capabilities, and in the *Commedia* must go a stage further to the contemplation of Beatrice, Divine Philosophy, beyond Human Philosophy, and a form of Divine not Human Love.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] Divine love is turned towards all those who repent, even the excommunicated.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Love as evidenced in prayer for the departed may intercede and redeem.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] God loves the starry spheres, the primal creation, most. The nearer to the heavens the nearer to the source of Love, in Dante's hierarchical view of the Universe.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] Sapia regards Dante's journey as evidence of God's love for him.



*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] A crucial interchange with Virgil on the nature of shared good. Shared is not less, since what is shared spiritually increases through being shared. Divine goodness is attracted to love, and gives more by finding more response. The wider love is spread the greater it is in sum: the greater the mutual understanding, the more spirits there are imbued with that understanding, the more love there is: and understanding and love mutually reflect one another.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] A second crucial explanation related to the structure of Purgatory. Love is in the human being as natural love that is error free and rational love, which may err. The Love abused and betrayed in Inferno, is strengthened and healed in Purgatorio, and fully revealed in Paradiso. This mirrors the Crucifixion, Descent, and Ascent of Christ. Love is expressed in the community of spirits, and Purgatory is a personal cleansing and re-orientation towards mutual and communal Love. Rational Love may be wrongly directed (Pride, Envy, Wrath), inadequately expressed (Sloth), or excessive in its manifestation (Avarice, Gluttony, Lust).

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] A further crucial discourse by Virgil on Love. It arises naturally through the senses, and causes desire for the beloved object, but the object of desire is subject to assent by reason. Freewill is an innate virtue that allows judgement to be exercised, and self-control is a power available to the individual. Freewill is 'the noble virtue' to Beatrice. Dante thus goes beyond the tradition of Courtly Love.

*MedLV:3* [p. 129] Statius expresses the love (for Virgil in this case) that is generated by intellectual affinity and respect.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] Love inspired by virtue always inspires reciprocal love when it is known. Virgil refers to Statius as a friend. Friendship is an expression of mutual love and an aspect of love's liberality and warmth.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] The heart of the *dolce stil nuovo* was that Love itself dictated to the poets and inspired their words, rather than mere literary desire or ambition.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] On the seventh terrace Dante invokes the poetic tradition of Troubadour poetry with its adulterous love, the later schools with their view of unrequited Love as a destructive force, and his own transcendent poetry where Love becomes a path to the spiritual life. He is effectively describing his own poetic and personal journey, from Beatrice as a source of unrequited, potentially adulterous, love, to her transformation after her death into an expression of Divine Philosophy and a symbol of sublimated Love, turning and guiding the Intellect and Free Will towards the ultimate source of Love, in the Godhead. It is his journey from Love as a force beyond reason, potentially destroying through passion and lust, to Love as a redeeming power, bound to the rational intellect.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] The power of Divine Love creates that longing and desire that draws the spirit upwards towards itself.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Blessed spirits in Paradise take their being from Divine Love and therefore cannot be in conflict with it.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] The overpowering effect of her eyes Beatrice attributes to increased understanding of love, that itself generates greater love.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] Love increases love, and the spirits feed on love so that they welcome the arrival of loving spirits.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] God as an act of love mercy and justice sent Christ, his Word, his messenger, to Earth, taking on human nature with the divine nature, since only by Himself incurring punishment through the Crucifixion could reparation be made for original sin, that reparation being beyond Man's power alone.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] The third sphere is that of Love, and of Venus the planet and the ancient Goddess of love. Dante deals with imperfections of love here, mainly that of excessive earthly love. Charles Martel explains that the spirits are so filled with love that to give pleasure is also to receive it. This is the divine aspect of love that it increases by being mutually experienced, and that shared love is not a loss but an addition.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The Holy Spirit of the Trinity is identified with the 'breath' of Love.

*MedLXXVIII:2* [p. 192] The concept of the idealised Beatrice may have a source in Saint Francis's embrace of 'Lady Poverty', the facets of Courtly Love being transferred to a purely spiritual symbol.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] An intense moment where Dante is overcome by Beatrice's eyes and smile, so that she has to draw his attention away to other aspects of Paradise. The intense feeling here is more than a merely spiritualised encounter, or an allegorical masque. 'Not only in my eyes is Paradise.'

*MedXCIII:1* [p. 221] Dante asserts his continuing love for Beatrice (and Divine philosophy). Love is the yearning for the good, which must be loved by a mind that perceives it. Supreme love is therefore desire for the supreme Good that is for God. The whole true creation is filled with the good, and therefore inspires love. Dante however does not explore the nature of the Good except inasmuch as it has been revealed in the Vision. He distinguishes goodness from Love, Love being the desire for the Good, and that is a thought from Plato and from Aristotle.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] God is ultimate truth. Blessedness depends on the vision of truth, on seeing, rather on the degree of love. Love is a consequence of being blessed, rather than a cause of it. The extent of vision depends on grace and right use of the will.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] God created his creatures out of Love, so that they could know existence.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] Dante unites Truth and Goodness, to be known by the intellect, out of which flows the transcendent joy of Love. Though Truth and Love coexist in God, intellect and knowledge in Man is the cause of human love.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] Dante's final Vision, in the moment of supreme stillness, beyond time, is of a universal unity, bound together by Love in a simplicity of Light. Within it is the concentrated and perfect Good, the object of will and desire, which the eye cannot turn away from to another sight. Outside it all things are in some way defective in their goodness. The Love that moves the stars, the Promover, also drives his will and desire to attain salvation and write the Commedia.

## Lust

*MedI:1* [p. 19]. The leopard as a symbol of the Lust which afflicted Dante and which will be referenced later.

*MedV:2* [p. 35] The Paolo and Francesca episode indicates a deep conflict in Dante, between the urges of the tradition of courtly love, and normal sexual and erotic human relationship, and the spiritualised message of the orthodox church. The implication is that sexual love, and deep passion, without the correct exercise of freewill according to the rules of spiritual law, is destructive.

*MedXXXVI:1* [p. 89] The sun banishes Capricorn, the sign associated with cold and goatish lust, from the sky, at the start of the Purgatorio, as it will be the last sin purged before Dante's transit through the flames near the summit of the Mount.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] Philosophy and art enable desire to be contained and the suffering of erotic love and longing to be endured, and made a subject for knowledge.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] Dante's first dream carries associations of lust: Scorpio, Procne and Tereus, Ganymede. The fire at the top of Purgatory is here echoed in the fiery associations of the phoenix-like eagle.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] A sin arising from excessive love for what should be loved only in moderation, the pleasures of the body. It is related to Gluttony and Avarice. A wrong response of Rational love to desire for the good.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] The Siren symbolizes the temptation towards this excessive desire. She seduces to Lust in particular, and Dante grieves over episodes in his past life, as he moves onwards after waking.

*MedLIX:2* [p. 137] As Dante's major failing of pride links Purgatory's first terrace to the Inferno, so his purging of his major failing of Lust links the last

terrace to Beatrice and Paradiso. Lust is purged by fire analogous to the fire of passion. He looks at his own feet both to escape the heat and flame, and to look backwards into his own past in humility. Examples of chastity, counter to lust, follow: Mary at the Annunciation: Diana chasing away the fallen Callisto from her virgin band.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] Dante's conscience reminds him of his own moral failings concerning lust, he uses a metaphor of himself as a goat, traditionally associated with that failing, and knows that he must return at death through the purging fire.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Dante is stunned as he was in *Inferno* Canto V in the circle of Lovers, now with remorse rather than pity. Lust is a primary sin he confesses to Beatrice. There are numerous hints that this was his chief moral failing.

## Malice

*MedV:1* [p. 33] The sinners in the lower section of Hell are guilty of malice.

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] Virgil explains that malice is more serious than incontinence, and is punished in the lower circles, divided between malicious violence and fraud, with treachery as the lowest form of fraud.

## Memory

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Invoked by Dante. More vital than Invention, the DC reflects a sense of 'copying' as a copyist from the book of the universe. Much of Dante's material feels inevitable and gifted to him, though endless construction is apparent in the work.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Memory is inadequate to the task of description in the *Inferno*.

*MedXLVI:1* [p. 111] The reliefs on floor tombs designed to prompt memory and recognition among the merciful.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will, and around it a 'shadow' or 'shade' is manifested that reflects its desires and affections. Individual memory therefore persists beyond the grave.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The singing is so sweet, the sweetness evades the powers of memory.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] One can penetrate to the highest Heaven nearest to God as Dante has, but one is then unable to remember the nature of the experience of the ultimate vision, lacking power or knowledge to relate it.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] Beatrice's beauty is too great for memory.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] The Angels are all-seeing and do not require memory.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] The final Vision is beyond speech and memory.

## Mercy

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] A reciprocal grace. Mercy breeds mutual mercy, and counters human envy and antagonism.

## Metamorphoses

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] The suicides are changed into trees. Dante uses a metamorphosis common in Ovid, derived from Virgil's Aeneid.

## Muses

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Invoked by Dante to inspire poetry, but Memory is perhaps more crucial.

## Nature

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] Natural Love is free of error. Rational love may err.

*MedLV:2* [p. 128] Natural causes are inoperative beyond the Gate of Purgatory, and Divine causes alone cause phenomena there.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. It is God who breathes the rational spirit into the human brain, delighting in it as a work of nature. The embryo shares life with the vegetable kingdom, and added to that feelings and sensations with the animal kingdom.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] The beauty of nature signifies the Earthly Paradise.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] The wood before the Earthly Paradise invokes the innocence of nature, the uplifting dawn beauty of resurrection and regeneration.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Divine providence structures and controls the creation in its nature and its continuing welfare. This is achieved through the angelic intellects present in the planetary spheres. Since God and they are perfect then the results must be regular and not chaotic, art and not disorder. Dante expresses his belief in the completeness of this created Nature.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] Nature reflects the varying state of the spheres, and therefore a variety of qualities in transient things. Nature operates like an artist, the

execution always more or less imperfect, unlike that divine creation of Adam and Christ where it was perfect.

*MedLXXXIX:2* [p. 216] Natural law includes the effects of gravity.

## Neo-Platonism

*MedVII:2* [p. 42] Virgil gives a description of Fortune which involves the first hints of Dante's neo-Platonic view of a hierarchical universe, with Divine power emanating from the Godhead and penetrating downwards to all parts of Creation. His thinking stemmed from reading Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, and other works. This hierarchy is symbolically reversed in Hell in the descent to Satan, while the re-ascent to the Godhead is imitated in the Mount of Purgatory. This concept of circles or spheres, contracting to, or expanding from, a point is a major feature of Dante's and the Medieval imagination.

*MedXLII:1* [p. 104] The spirits in ante-Purgatory gaze upwards to the eternal spheres as the source of hope, light, love and help.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] Dante's neo-platonic thinking, taken from Boethius, Albertus Magnus and other sources, is revealed. God is nearest to his first creations, the starry spheres, and not limited in Space. The spirits will issue purified 'to the starry spheres'.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Virgil recalls Dante to the eternal splendours of the circling Heavens.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] Virgil again points Dante towards the eternal spheres.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] Paradiso begins with a Neoplatonic statement: God is the prime mover, whose light permeates the universe to varying degrees. Dante has been in the highest Heaven nearest to God, who is the object of the intellect's longing.

*MedLXVIII:3* [p. 167] Beatrice explains the order and structure of the Universe centred on God in the timeless, motionless Empyrean. From there, Light and love flows down through the Primum Mobile the ninth and fastest moving of the spheres, through the Stellar Heavens to the seven planetary spheres, and eventually to Earth. The power emanating from the source is mediated by an Angelic presence wedded to each sphere that determines its virtues and motion.

*MedLXIX:3* [p. 170] Beatrice explains and reinforces the concept of the flow of divine power downwards through the spheres, creating various forms and essences differing in quality not just quantity, mediated by the Cherubim and Angelic presences. The spheres 'receive from above, and work downwards.' The comparison is made with the human body empowered by its soul, and this is a key

concept, 'what is above that is below'. The human order of the individual mirrors the Divine order.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Piccarda confirms that the Moon is the slowest sphere in Paradise, being nearest Earth and furthest from the Empyrean. The heavens whirl faster as we ascend, while the Empyrean itself is paradoxically both the still circumference and the centre.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Divine providence structures and controls the creation in its nature and its continuing welfare. This is achieved through the angelic intellects present in the planetary spheres. Since God and they are perfect then the results must be regular and not chaotic, art and not disorder. Dante expresses his belief in the completeness of this created Nature.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] Aquinas gives another emphasis of the Neo-Platonic hierarchy, Love and Light flowing down through the nine emanations, the moving spheres and their angelic presences, to stamp the wax and create transient things, varying in their qualities.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] The universe is compared to a tree, with God as the crown of the tree, and each sphere below a layer of the canopy.

*MedXCIV:2* [p. 224] Dante and Beatrice reach the Primum Mobile, the moving sphere from which all the other lower spheres derive their motion. Time begins there. It has its place, its *where* within the Divine Mind. Love and Light clasp it, Love moves it, and it disperses Divine Power downwards through the spheres.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] Beatrice's reconciliation of the heavenly spheres with the angelic orders, a spiritual equivalence. The Universe hangs from the central point of the Primum Mobile. God is both centre and circumference.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] The ranks of the blessed are arranged hierarchically, following the structure of Dante's universe.

## Order

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] A major aspect of Dante's thought process is his desire for order, shared with his Age and with the Renaissance that followed. His love of courtesy is one example of it. More important is his desire for a single authority in each of the Empire, and Church, with separated domains, temporal and spiritual respectively. His Neoplatonic leanings indicate this love of order, and so does the whole structure of the *Commedia* with its numeric patterns, formal echoes and meticulous construction. God is the source for him of ultimate order.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Divine providence structures and controls the creation in its nature and its continuing welfare. This is achieved through the angelic intellects

present in the planetary spheres. Since God and they are perfect then the results must be regular and not chaotic, art and not disorder. Dante expresses his belief in the completeness of this created Nature. Order would be best achieved in society by exploiting each man's individual talents.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante stresses order, and reconciliation, in the sphere of the Sun, that of practical wisdom. He uses the clock, and the 'dance' of the months, as metaphors of order.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] Order and substance were created instantaneously in the form of the Angelic presences.

### Original Sin

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Adam lost the special gifts which were granted to humanity in the Earthly Paradise through his primal sin.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Adam condemned the race to exile as a result of his original sin in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. His sin was an abuse of free will since he failed to restrain his will appropriately.

*MedXCIII:2* [p. 223] The original sin lay in disobedience. Aquinas interpreted it as pride in desiring spiritual good beyond what was owed.

### Papacy, The Church, Religion

*MedI:2* [p. 21] The failings of the current papacy under Boniface at the time of the vision in 1300 are evident to Dante.

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] He envisages a purified Papacy, freed from secular political involvement, with jurisdiction over spiritual affairs. Similarly he envisages a central political authority, the Empire, modeled on Imperial Rome, and uninvolved in Papal and spiritual matters.

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] Dante singles out the Popes and Cardinals consumed by avarice. The papacy has denied the way of poverty and humility, and embraced the culture of 'getting and spending'.

*MedXIV:2* [p. 53] The Old Man of Crete represents the degeneracy of Empire and Papacy.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] An ironic reference to the corrupt Pope Boniface.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] The simonists are an opportunity for Dante to expose Papal corruption and its erroneous role as a temporal power, severing its links with Rome.



*MedXXVII:1* [p. 68] *MedXXVII:2* [p. 68]. Dante attacks Boniface and the corrupt Papacy via the story of Guido da Montefeltro, and the nonsense of prior absolution. The danger of the confusion of spiritual and temporal powers, and the contrasting approach of the radical Franciscans is hinted at.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] Judas Iscariot, the arch-traitor, who gave up Christ to his enemies, is tormented eternally by Satan.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante condemns the clergy for having usurped secular power, which should belong to the Emperor.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] The adamantine threshold of the gate of Purgatory signifies the rock of the Church.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Marco Lombardo condemns the corrupt Papacy, that has confused the temporal and spiritual spheres.

*MedLIV:2* [p. 125] Dante uses Hugh Capet's speech to condemn the French interference with and corruption of the Papacy, complicity in the death of Pope Boniface, and the attack on the Order of the Templars.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] At the summit of the Mount, radical moral innocence is recovered, and the institutions of earth are superseded by Divine Philosophy. Empire and Church are therefore symbolically superseded by the freed, innocent spirit, with control over itself, and directed towards the good.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] The Divine Pageant represents the Church in glory.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] The Chariot of the Church is attended by symbols of Christianity, is drawn by Christ, and contains Beatrice who is Divine Philosophy. The Church is the Bride of Christ.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Dante sees the relationship between Church and Empire and their history revealed in the symbolism of the Mystic Tree of Empire and the Chariot of the Church. The Church in its proper spiritual sphere enriches the Empire in its temporal sphere.

*MedLXVI:2* [p. 154] Dante watches a symbolically enacted history of the Church and Empire. The Church is attacked, corrupted and divided, acquiring temporal power in a fatal confusion of the spiritual and earthly spheres. The vision culminates in the whorish mating of a French pope to the French court, and the transfer of the Papacy from its true home, Rome, to Avignon.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] Beatrice prophesies the coming of an Imperial saviour to cleanse the Church and Empire, and restore them to their respective roles. The French connection will be broken, and the Papacy restored to Rome.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Dante blames the machinations of Boniface and the corrupt Papacy for his exile from Florence.

*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] Dante asks God to turn His Mind to the corruption of the Papacy, its selling of indulgences, use of excommunication to wage war, and seduction by gold.

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] Peter Damian, supported by the spirits, condemns the excess of the contemporary Church, which has abandoned the simplicity and moderation of the early Fathers.

*MedLXXXIX:1* [p. 215] Benedict condemns the contemporary laxity of his Order and the state of the Church.

*MedXCIV:1* [p. 223] Saint Peter as the head of the Church condemns the corrupt Papacy.

## Past

*MedI:2* [p. 21] Dante concatenates past and present, so that Virgil becomes contemporaneous. Christianity is the timeless sphere of the spirit where

all souls inhabit the same Moment.

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Part of the *Triplcity* [p. 340] of *Time* [p. 339] which the 'copyist' will capture in the DC.

## Peace

*MedXXXVII:2* [p. 93] The final state which the spirits in Purgatory wait for and desire. The end of purgation.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] An act of grace, otherwise unachievable by the limited human intellect.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] The Earthly Paradise was prepared by God as a place of peace.

*MedLXXIII:1* [p. 178] Peace was declared by Augustus, as master of the Empire to the remotest ends of Egypt when the gates of the Temple of Janus were closed for the third time in Roman history. Dante takes that as a symbol of the peace he hopes for in Italy and the wider Empire.

## Penitence, Repentance, Purgation, Absolution

*MedXIV:2* [p. 53] The penitence performed on the Mount of Purgatory absolves the spirits of their sins.

*MedXXVII:2* [p. 68] Absolution requires repentance, which in turn takes place

after the deed repented of, since a thing cannot be both willed and repented of simultaneously.

*MedXXXV:1* [p. 87] Dante declares the task of the Purgatorio, a description of the realm where the human spirit is purged of sin.

*MedXXXVII:2* [p. 93] To end life in repentance is to have ended well, according to Virgil, as he speaks to the excommunicated but repentant spirits in Purgatory. It indicates that ultimately the soul will find peace which is the goal of purgation.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] The excommunicated but repentant spirits must spend thirty times their lifetime in Purgatory unless the prayers of the living intercede for them and reduce the duration. God's love and pardon and ultimate peace are not denied the excommunicated so long as there is repentance.

*MedXXXVIII:2* [p. 96] The late-repentant must spend a time equal to their lifetime prior to repentance before they can enter Purgatory proper. Purgation requires effort, willpower, steadfastness. The descent to Hell is easy but Purgatory is an ascent.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] God fills the penitents with desire to see Him. They chant the Miserere, Psalm 51, a psalm of repentance.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] Buonconte calls on the Virgin in dying, and crosses his arms on his chest indicating his repentance.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The Eagle in Dante's dream is symbolic of regeneration and of Rome and Imperial law, therefore of the purgation of lust from himself and from the world.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] The Gate of Purgatory symbolises the stages of Penance.

*MedXLIV:2* [p. 109] The burden of purgation is a debt to be paid which though it involves suffering cannot last beyond the Day of Judgement.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] Justice is tempered by penitence.

*MedLIII:2* [p. 124] There is perhaps a hint in the words of Adrian V that the absence of a failing speeds one through the respective terrace of the Mount.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Dante must confess to Beatrice, demonstrate his penitence and receive her forgiveness, before he can enter the Earthly Paradise of innocence regained.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Dante undergoes the sacrament with Beatrice as confessor, the three stages of penitence, confession and forgiveness.

## Philosophy

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] Dante's reference to his own poem, annotated in the *Convivio*, indicates that in Purgatory the free will may utilise the intellect via philosophy to achieve knowledge of the Divine. Philosophy mediates between the Divine truth and the material world. It is personified in Lady Philosophy who represents Human Philosophy and is superseded by Beatrice, who is Divine Philosophy, in the *Commedia*. It enables the intellect to control desire and learn from suffering. Dante came to philosophy after Beatrice's death, reading Boethius and Cicero, and attending the Franciscan and Dominican schools so that 'that love drove out and destroyed all other thoughts.' The 'Lady' of Courtly Love was replaced by the inspiring memory of Beatrice, and the love of Lady Philosophy.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Human Philosophy is inadequate. Though Dante had transcended the ideas of Courtly Love with its sensual, worldly ethos, and gone on to a spiritualised Human Love, linked to the rational mind, and to Lady Philosophy a personification of Human Philosophy, he must now go a stage further and reach Beatrice who is Divine Love and Philosophy, and a pointer towards the source of Divine Love which is a stage for Dante beyond her, where her own presence is no longer actively necessary.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] A discourse on the unity of the soul, correcting Plato's error. If the soul were not unified we would not be so focused on a thought as to lose track of time. Purgatorio shows an increasing interest in topics of human reason, as Dante progresses in understanding towards Divine knowledge.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Human philosophy as evidenced in the Classics is limited. Beatrice represents Divine Philosophy, the authority on matters of religion.

*MedXLII:2* [p. 104] Nino de' Visconti subscribes to the view that female love is fickle, and physical rather than intellectual. This derives from Virgil and others, and shows the limitations of a rigid tradition.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will, and around it a 'shadow' or 'shade' is manifested that reflects its desires and affections. Dante rejects the Averroist view that the intellect is a temporary offshoot of the universal intellect and returns to it immediately on death, and that the intellect is not located in the physical organs. The intellect as the unified soul is located in the brain, and the unified soul retains intellectual identity after death. The intellect is 'breathed into' the brain by God.

*MedLXI:2* [p. 141] There are two paths to the good, that of the active and that of the contemplative life, symbolised by Leah and Rachel (or Martha and Mary). *Convivio* celebrates the supremacy of the contemplative life, but here Dante balances the two. Note that Beatrice, as a symbol of Divine Philosophy, sits with

Rachel in Heaven.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] Virgil's last speech sends Dante onwards, beyond his own knowledge, into the beatitude of the Earthly Paradise. Earthly philosophy must now be taken up into, and expanded by, Divine Philosophy.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] According to Aristotle's philosophy, God causes the eternal movement of the celestial spheres through the love and longing he inspires in the universe.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] Beatrice satisfies his questioning using philosophical method. Proof by refutation of alternatives.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Dante follows Aristotle's theory of the dual will, an absolute will that does not consent to evil coupled with a practical will that chooses the lesser of two evils. The former may remain intent on its goal, while the latter compromises, and that is a failing. See Aristotle's *Ethics* III, where the example of Alcmaeon is also mentioned. Inasmuch as the practical will allows violence to succeed, it aids and abets it, and is culpable. The absolute will may continue though to adhere to its ideal, which was the case with Constance, according to Piccarda.

*MedLXXIII:1* [p. 178] Dante refers to Aristotelian logic, where the propositions that this is so, and this is not so, cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time. Related propositions are termed contradictories e.g. if 'some swans are not white' is true, then 'all swans are white' is false, since a black swan would be white, and not white, if both statements were true simultaneously.

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] Dante employs Aristotle's argument that human society requires varied conditions and qualifications amongst its members. In the *Politics* he shows that the individual is not self-sufficient but a part of a whole, and a State is a group of citizens providing all the necessary variety for a complete life. Functions and duties are distributed so that the State can be self-sufficient where the individual is not.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante groups together a number of philosophers and theologians who attempted to reconcile or deploy pagan philosophy, predominantly Aristotle, in the service of Christian thought. Interestingly Dante brings Sigier together with Aquinas, in the spirit of reconciliation, and perhaps acknowledging Sigier's deference to faith above rational dispute and the syllogistic method where there was conflict.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] Examples of logical and philosophic issues: limitation in a premise limits the conclusion: the need for a first mover. Aquinas gives examples of philosophers who reasoned falsely (from Aristotle), Parmenides, Melissus, Bryson.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] Dante refers to the concept of *quiddity* (the whatness of

a thing) as opposed to its name. One can recognise the name without fully understanding the reality.

*MedXCI:1* [p. 218] References to Aquinas on substance and quality, Aristotle on the Prime Mover, Aquinas on the existence of God.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] Reference to Aristotle (Metaphysics xxx) on the Prime Mover, and the unified but dimensionless point from which the Universe hangs.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] The lower creatures and matter are potential, and the material heavens and human beings are a binding together of act and potential. So human intellect can know in actuality things which it did not know, that is knew potentially; and create what it has not created.

### **Pity, Compassion, Intercession, Mercy**

*MedI:4* [p. 23] A major dimension of Dante's response to Hell. Faith, Hope and Pity align with Paradise, Purgatory and Hell.

*MedII:1* [p. 24] A keynote of the journey through Hell. Pity not embodied in the structure of the Inferno, but the response of the Individual to it.

*MedIII:3* [p. 27] Beatrice has compassion on Dante, inspired by the Virgin and Lucia.

*MedIV:1* [p. 31] Virgil indicates that Hell creates pity within him. Pity and Mercy are not embodied in the structure of Hell itself, but in the response of Virgil and Dante to it. Divine Justice is implacable and merciless.

*MedV:2* [p. 35] The Paolo and Francesca episode allows Dante to show Pity as an appropriate human response to the punishment of a natural human impulse towards Love, but indulged in without the proper constraints of the intellect, and therefore ultimately a misuse of freewill. Dante faints out of pity, revealing the conflict within himself that he requires to resolve and transcend.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Dante feels Pity at the prompting of Piero Delle Vigne in the Wood of Suicides.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] His meeting with Brunetto evokes an empathetic response, and a wistful parting. Here is one who should have been a spiritual winner.

*MedXVI:1* [p. 55] Further pity for the fate of worthy men who were flawed by sodomy. And a hint perhaps of Dante's own weaknesses of the flesh.

*MedXX:1* [p. 61] Dante shows pity again, and is rebuked by Virgil. Is there a conflict here that Dante wishes to show between the orthodox line and innate Christian compassion, between the law and the individual response?

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Dante feels sadness, past and present, at the spectacle of noble spirits like Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro consumed by flames.

*MedXXIX:1* [p. 70] Dante weeps with pity at the sights of the wounded spirits in the ninth chasm of the Eighth Circle. He also pities his own relative Geri de Bello still lost in the desire for his death in a blood feud to be avenged.

*MedXXIX:2* [p. 71] Dante again feels pity, at the sicknesses of the tenth chasm.

*MedXXXIII:1* [p. 76] Ugolino challenges Dante (and ourselves) not to feel Pity at the torment of the innocent children. Even in this deepest circle of Hell, the Christian response is called for.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] On leaving Hell Dante is still stained with the tears of Pity which Virgil cleanses from his face.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante calls on the Emperor Albert to take pity on Italy.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] Dante asks pity of the Angel at the Gate of Purgatory, to allow him entrance.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 108] Trajan and the widow, an example of Imperial justice and pity.

*MedXLVII:1* [p. 112] Dante is moved to pity at the sight of the envious doing penance, their eyes sealed with wire.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Guido del Duca invokes Dante's compassion.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Indicated by the colour red, and normally leading the three theological virtues.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Beatrice pities Dante's state of mind, and the Angels show compassion for the shame she invokes in him for his past life.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] God as an act of love mercy and justice sent Christ, his Word, his messenger, to Earth, taking on human nature with the divine nature, since only by Himself incurring punishment through the Crucifixion could reparation be made for original sin, that reparation being beyond Man's power alone.

## Poetry

*MedI:4* [p. 23] Dante links to the poetry of the past, by taking Virgil as his spirit-guide. He proclaims himself thereby an heir to the Classical poets. Two poets can undertake the journey that one alone cannot. The Tradition is alive in him. Virgil is his author and his master, a fountain of poetic art.

*MedIV:3* [p. 33] Dante meets the great Classical poets in Limbo and is accepted

into their circle. He is next in chronological line after Lucan in terms of those mentioned by name, no other poet is worthy of mention in the intervening 1200 or so years.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Bertrand de Born, one of the greatest of the troubadour poets.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante is inspired by Sordello's famous Provençal lament for Blacatz to a prolonged invective against the current state of Italy.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] A reference to the order of poets in Italy. Guido Cavalcanti superseded Guido Guinicelli, and Dante both of them.

*MedLVI:2* [p. 131] Dante listens to Virgil and Statius conversing about poetry.

*MedLVIII:1* [p. 133] Forese points out Bonagiunta of Lucca, one of the poets whose style was superseded by the *dolci stil nuovo*, the new sweet style.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] The heart of the *dolce stil nuovo*, created by Guido Cavalcanti and Dante, developing the work of Guido Guinicelli, was that Love itself dictated to the poets and inspired their words, rather than mere literary desire or ambition.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] Dante effectively traces the poetic past from Giraut de Bornel and Arnaut Daniel, the Troubadors, through Fra Guittone and the Sicilian School, to Guido Guinicelli and the philosophic poetry that led to the *dolce stil nuovo*. These are the schools of (ultimately erroneous) love poetry, transcended by Dante's own spiritual poetry of Divine Love. Despite the praise given to minor talents the truth will out, Dante asserts, and the greater poets in the tradition will be acclaimed.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Dante invokes the Muses, patronesses of poetry and literature, and Urania mother of Linus the poet in particular. He has previously invoked them in Inferno II, Inferno XXXII, and Purgatorio I, where he invoked in particular Calliope, mother of Orpheus the poet, who in Ovid's Metamorphoses sings the story of Persephone and Dis.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The power of those who have 'grown pale in the shadow of Parnassus', the Muse's mountain, i.e. the poets, is insufficient to describe Beatrice's beauty.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] Dante invokes Apollo, symbolically equated to Christ, and God of poetry. The reason that there are so few great poets is in Dante's eyes due to a failure of will. It is significant that the Paradiso ends with the energising of Dante's will (to write the Commedia).

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] Charles Martel refers to Dante's opening line of the first canzone of the Convivio: '*Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete*. You who by understanding move the third circle'



*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] Dante calls on the Muse for poetic inspiration, who glorifies the intellect, cities and countries and gives them enduring life.

## Power

*MedIII:1* [p. 28] God's Power with *Love* [p. 288] and *Wisdom* [p. 349] shaped the Gates of Hell and Hell itself.

## Prayer

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] The prayers, for them, of the living can reduce the time that the spirits spend in Purgatory.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Virgil explains that prayer was ineffective in the Pagan world. But that Christian prayer, showing Love of the departed, can discharge the debt of sin, and speed purgation.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 108] Pope Gregory's intercession by prayer on behalf of Trajan so that he might have time for repentance.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] The Proud spirits pray that the living be protected from sin though they themselves are beyond it. Dante suggests that prayer for them to speed their progress is the proper reciprocation.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] The power of prayer to intercede on behalf of Sapia.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Marco Lombardo asks Dante to pray for him when Dante ascends.

*MedLVII:2* [p. 132] The prayers of Forese Donati's wife Nella have speeded his passage through Purgatory.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] Dante prays to God on entering the sphere of Mars.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] Prayer does not alter God's intent but fulfils it, since God wishes to be swayed by prayer, and responds with grace and kindness.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] Bernard's prayer to the Virgin is on Dante's behalf, and therefore a loving act. The prayer touches on the incarnation and redemption, the hope of salvation, the end of Dante's mission, the grace he needs to achieve it and be true to it, the sympathy of the blessed, and Bernard's own praise and devotion.

## Present

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Part of the *Triplicity* [p. 340] of *Time* [p. 339] which the 'copyist' will capture in the DC.

## Pride

*MedI:1* [p. 19] The lion as a symbol of the Pride which is one of Dante's failings and which will be referenced later.

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Dante's innate sense of poetic and political pride, contrasted with his spiritual humility as Christian and lover.

*MedIV:2* [p. 32] Dante, with some false modesty apparent, is accepted into the ranks of the great poets. He is aware already of his own worth and ability. Justified Pride struggles with necessary humility.

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Highlighted by Ciaccio as a root of the political evils in Florence.

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] The Archangel Michael is referred to, and his fight against Satan who fell through the sin of Pride.

*MedVIII:2* [p. 44] After the arrogant Filippo Argenti, we find the Fallen Angels, followers of Satan who fell for the sin of Pride.

*MedIX:1* [p. 45] Medusa signifies obduracy a facet of pride that stifles conscience and delays repentance.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata, as an example of traditional Florentine aristocratic pride.

His sin was that of the intellect, free-thinking Epicureanism, leading to the denial of the immortality of the soul.

*MedXIV:1* [p. 52] Capaneus as an example of pride, and 'violence' against God.

*MedXVI:2* [p. 56] Florentine pride and excess is condemned. The new men and the sudden wealth have brought it about.

*MedXXV:1* [p. 66] Vanni Fucci, the Pistoian, surpasses even Farinata and Capaneus in pride and arrogance. Pride is not punished in one specific place in the Inferno, but, as Lucifer's great sin, is visible throughout.

*MedXXXI:1* [p. 73] The Giants, and Ephialtes in particular, represent pride, having attacked the heavens.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Dante begins to display his learning in Purgatory. While he appears to learn, there are also traces of that intellectual pride which he must transcend in order to progress.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] Virgil tells Dante to avoid the crowd, in a proud statement, which makes Dante ashamed. Christian humility clearly does not imply swaying with the currents of the populace. The tension between pride and humility is interesting in Dante, as the innately proud man bows to his Master, to Beatrice, and to God.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] The proud, self-absorbed Sordello becomes a temporary guide.

*MedXLIV:2* [p. 109] The sin of Pride, a perverted love or desire, like envy and anger, directed against others, is purged on the first terrace of the Mount of Purgatory. Pride is a weakness of Dante himself. The proud are burdened with stones, and the cornice is carved with examples of Humility.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] Dante attacks the sin of artistic pride, and highlights the transience of fame, while ensuring his own position in the order of poets!

*MedXLVI:1* [p. 111] The pavement shows many examples of pride alternating between sacred and classical sources.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] A sin arising from a wrong objective of rational Love. Related to Envy and Anger. An error in relationship in the presence of others, it is divisive of community. It wishes the reduction of others.

*MedLIX:2* [p. 137] As Dante's major failing of pride links Purgatory's first terrace to the Inferno, so his purging of his major failing of Lust links the last terrace to Beatrice and Paradiso.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] A flash of pride in his own poetic abilities escapes the net, even in Paradise!! It is quickly followed by a humble corrective statement.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] Aquinas warns against intellectual pride and false reasoning.

*MedLXXXII:2* [p. 200] Dante's great-grandfather Alighiero is in Purgatory on the first terrace of Pride, clearly a family trait!

*MedLXXXIII:1* [p. 201] In talking of the Florentine families, pride is stressed. The Uberti including Farinata, and the Adimari who included Filippo Argenti, both of whom we met in the Inferno, displaying proud traits. Cacciaguida was also born under Leo the sign of pride.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] Satan fell through pride. The other angels remained humble.

## Prophecy, Prediction

*MedI:3* [p. 22] Virgil prophesies the coming of a Greyhound (possibly Can Grande della Scala) who will banish Avarice from the world. This is the first of a number of expressions of Dante's desire and hope for a saviour of Italy.

*MedIV:2* [p. 32] Dante uses prophecy in both a vague sense, for example the prophecy of an unspecified future saviour of Italy, and a specific sense in pretending to 'predict' real events after April 1300 that he already has knowledge of.

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Ciaccio's prophecy highlights the political divisions in Florence, between Blacks and Whites, broadly the parties of Papacy and Empire, and points to Dante's own exile.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata predicts Dante's imminent exile in 1302, finalised in 1304.

*MedX:2* [p. 47] Dante's slip of the tongue 'predicts' Guido Cavalcanti's imminent death in August 1300.

*MedX:3* [p. 47] Farinata explains the nature of the prophetic abilities of the souls in Hell, they can see distant events but not current ones. Their ability will cease when earthly time ceases at the Last Judgment, and futurity is no more.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] Brunetto prophesies the Florentines' enmity towards Dante.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] Pope Nicholas III anticipates the arrival of Boniface (1303) and Clement (1314) in Hell.

*MedXXIV:1* [p. 65] Vanni Fucci prophesies the defeat of the Whites outside Pistoia in 1306.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] Dante, as narrator, prophesies the future punishment of Florence for its sinfulness, and links himself indirectly to Elijah and Elisha, true Biblical prophets, thus further authenticating his journey.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Mahomet and Pier della Medecina make minor prophecies.

*MedXXXII:1* [p. 74] Camicion anticipates the arrival of Carlino in the Ninth Circle.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] How orthodox and acceptable was Dante's use of prophecy in the *Commedia*, even though it is often merely a literary device? Prophecy along with astrology was certainly condemned by the Early Church.

*MedXLII:4* [p. 106] Conrad Malaspina prophesies Dante's being hosted by the Malaspini in Valdimagra in 1306.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The dream of the eagle is tentatively ('almost') prophetic of the purging of Dante's lust and the regeneration of the world through Roman law and justice.

*MedXLV:2* [p. 110] The illuminator Gubbio prophesies Dante's need to beg for hospitality in exile.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Guido del Duca prophesies Fulcieri da Calboli's ravages of the Florentine Whites in 1303.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Dante's assertion of free will despite divine stellar influence

follows the teachings of the Church against prophecy using astrology.

*MedLII:2* [p. 122] Gherardo, Abbot of San Zeno, prophesies the shameful behaviour, in that post, of Guiseppe della Scala.

*MedLIV:1* [p. 124] Dante again expresses (a disillusioned?) hope for a saviour of Italy who will banish Avarice. Perhaps here associated with the Emperor Henry VII and his failed attempt to win Italy (elected 1308, died 1313).

*MedLIV:2* [p. 125] Hugh Capet's prophecies concerning his own Capetian line of rulers: the Flemish revenge at Courtrai in 1302 for the treachery of Philip IV: Charles de Valois's entry into Florence in 1301: Charles the Lamé's 'sale' of his daughter in 1305: Philip IV's attack on the Papal wealth through engineering the death of Boniface in 1303, and his subsequent attack on the Order of the Templars coveting their wealth from 1307.

*MedLV:1* [p. 127] *MedLVI:1* [p. 129] Virgil was treated as a prophet in the Middle Ages, the fourth Eclogue being treated as presaging the Incarnation.

*MedLVII:2* [p. 132] Forese Donati prophesies an imminent decree against the immodesty of the Florentine women.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] Bonagiunta prophesies, in contrast, Dante's meeting with the virtuous Gentucca of Lucca, who will give him patronage in 1314-1316.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] Forese prophesies the death of Corso Donati, his brother in 1308.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] Beatrice prophesies the coming of an Imperial saviour. This echoes Virgil's prophecy in *Inferno* I, and anticipates that of Saint Peter in *Paradiso*.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] Dante invokes Apollo, significantly the god of prophecy.

*MedLXXVI:1* [p. 185] Cunizza da Romano prophesies Folco's fame and a number of incidents related to Can Grande and his territories near Verona.

*MedLXXIX:1* [p. 193] Bonaventura relates the prophetic dreams associated with the birth of Saint Dominic. Dante endorses Joachim of Flora's prophetic spirit.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] Cacciaguida implicitly prophesies Dante's return to Heaven after death.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Cacciaguida prophesies Dante's exile, the patronage of the della Scala's, the virtues of Can Grande, and Clement's betrayal of Henry of Luxembourg, Henry VII. He also prophesies Dante's future fame.

*MedLXXXIX:1* [p. 215] Beatrice vaguely prophesies retribution on the corrupt Papacy in Dante's lifetime.

## Prudence

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The cardinal virtue of practical wisdom. Dante treats it as indicating also order and reconciliation, and sees it embodied in the work of great theologians who reconciled philosophy and theology, and in the founders of monastic orders.

## Punishment

*MedIII:2* [p. 29] Dante fits the punishment to the crime in the *Commedia*, crime being punished eternally in Hell, and expiated in Purgatory. This can create a strange effect to modern eyes. He is oriented towards imaginative parallels rather than a strict grading of degrees of torment and pain relative to the crimes. His grading is intellectual, based on the concepts of free will and the distinctions between incontinence, violence and fraud.

*MedIV:1* [p. 31] The emphasis is often on physical torment, but those in Limbo seem to suffer mental torment worse than many lower down by having to live in desire without hope.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] The insubstantial bodies of the spirits though casting no shadow are capable of undergoing punishment and suffering.

*MedLV:2* [p. 128] Divine Justice creates the desire for punishment in Purgatory, where previously there was desire for sin, until the soul is purged, and the will then feels free to progress and is empowered to do so.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will, and around it a 'shadow' or 'shade' is manifested that reflects its desires and affections. It can therefore feel and suffer, and undergo punishment and purgation.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] God as an act of love mercy and justice sent Christ, his Word, his messenger, to Earth, taking on human nature with the divine nature, since only by Himself incurring punishment through the Crucifixion could reparation be made for original sin, that reparation being beyond Man's power alone.

## Recognition, Remembrance, Prayer for the Dead

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Ciacco is the first of the spirits Dante meets who asks to be recalled to others in the world above. The spirits will request remembrance, and intercession through prayer, for the transmission of messages, and for news etc.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Piero Delle Vigne asks for the memory of him to be renewed.

*MedXXVII:1* [p. 68] Guido da Montefeltro is one of many spirits who ask about the state of their homeland. Here it is the Romagna.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Pier della Medecina and Mosca ask to be remembered. Bertrand de Born expects Dante to carry news of him to the world above.

*MedXXXI:1* [p. 73] Virgil reminds Antaeus that Dante can renew his memory on earth.

*MedXXXII:2* [p. 75] Dante offers Bocca and Ugolino recognition above. Bocca refuses in his hostility, but his identity is betrayed. Ugolino accepts in order to complain of injustice.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] The spirit of Manfred seeks recognition, and intercession by his daughter Costanza's prayers.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] The crowd of penitent spirits seek recognition, and for news of them to be carried to the other side.

*MedXLII:2* [p. 104] Nino de' Visconti asks to be remembered to his daughter Giovanna so that her prayers might intercede for him. His wife Beatrice has forgotten him.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] Sapia wishes to be remembered among the Sienese.

*MedLIII:2* [p. 124] Pope Adrian V wishes to be remembered to his niece Alagia.

*MedLVII:2* [p. 132] Dante recognises his friend Forese Donati, by his voice alone.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] Bonagiunta recognises Dante as the author of the first canzone of the *Vita Nuova*, and a proponent of the *dolce stil nuovo*.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Dante recognises Beatrice, in an emotionally profound moment of revelation, as she appeared at the time when he last saw her (see the *Vita Nuova*).

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Dante recognises Piccarda ultimately, she being transformed to greater beauty by her blessedness.

## Revelation

*MedI:2* [p. 21] The revelatory rather than mystical nature of the Divine Comedy. Dante's task is to show reality, rather than invent. The Divine Comedy is a commentary on the Truth rather than an experiment in thinking. It is poetically but not intellectually creative. Its creativity is structural, an unfolding, a gothic cathedral, ornamented, solidified.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Beatrice appears in a moment of revelation. Her advent is

symbolised by the presence of Saint John the Divine in the procession of the Divine Pageant. There is an echo, since Dante has mentioned Ceres and Persephone, of the great Eleusinian ritual of the Mysteries, where the eternal resurrection of the earth was revealed to the initiate through symbolic representations of things seen, things heard and things done. Dante regains his transformed Beatrice, as Demeter-Ceres regained Persephone-Proserpine.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] The purified Dante is ready to understand revelations concerning Church and Empire.

### **Rome, The Romans, The Empire**

*MedI:3* [p. 22] As the model for Empire ruled by law, controlling the temporal world but without sway over the spiritual.

*MedII:1* [p. 24] One of the *three* [p. 340] *cities* [p. 248], *Florence* [p. 267], Rome, and the City of *God* [p. 274] reflecting the personal, political, and spiritual life of Dante.

*MedIV:2* [p. 32] Dante cites examples from the Roman and Christian past to set himself also in the line of Aeneas and Paul and assert continuity.

*MedIV:3* [p. 33] \_ He sees the Roman (and Trojan) heros and heroines in Limbo.

Again asserting the importance of Rome and the Imperial Past. Roman history is the result of Divine providence. The events of that history are evidence of God's intervention in human destiny as the events of the Old Testament are. The Roman Empire, ruling the known world, creates the conditions for the Advent and Crucifixion of Christ, an event in history divinely ordained to make atonement, and redeem the human race.

*MedXIV:2* [p. 53] Rome is the natural heir of Crete and Troy (via Teucer and Aeneas) but now represents the degeneracy of Empire and Papacy. (The Old Man of Crete)

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] Dante has revived the spirit of the ancient Roman seed of Florence in his support for a reformed Empire in the Roman style.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] Dante's theme again of a desired temporal Empire and spiritual Papacy, reviving ancient Rome's virtue and the Early Roman Church of Saint Peter. Virgil is pleased by the diatribe against the Papacy.

*MedXXXI:1* [p. 73] Scipio cited as a champion of Rome when under attack, in his defeat of Hannibal and Carthage at Zama. Hercules is indirectly celebrated as a saviour of Evander and protector of the site of ancient Rome, Dante deriving this view of Hercules from Virgil's Aeneid Book VIII (108 et al). This explains the use of Geryon, Cacus and Antaeus as figures in the Inferno.



*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante regards Rome as 'widowed' from the Empire, due to the neglect of the Hapsburg Emperor Albert.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The Eagle in Dante's dream is symbolic of regeneration and of Rome and Imperial law.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] The Gate of Purgatory opens to the treasury of the spirit, as the gate Metellus clung to guarded the Roman treasury.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 108] Dante constantly emphasises the divinely ordered nature of Roman history as the matrix of Christianity.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 148] The quotation of Virgil's passage regarding Ascanius links Roman and Christian history, and the advent of Christ and the Imperial succession, both historically necessary and inevitable in his view.

*MedLXVI:2* [p. 154] Dante watches a symbolically enacted history of the Church and Empire. The Church is attacked, corrupted and divided, acquiring temporal power in a fatal confusion of the spiritual and earthly spheres. The vision culminates in the whorish mating of a French pope to the French court, and the transfer of the Papacy from its true home, Rome, to Avignon.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] The references to Aeneas and Anchises tie in the Trojan and Roman history to Christian history, and Dante's role to that of Aeneas.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] The ancient barbarians amazed by seeing Rome's palaces.

## Saints

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] The Saints will rise 'ready' from their tombs at the Day of Judgement, singing 'Halleluiah'. This is the Christian promise of the spirit re-united with the flesh, and therefore the continuance of the individual soul and body.

## Science

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] Dante gives an account of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation illustrating the learning appropriate to a right use of human reason, which will later be extended by Divine knowledge.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Reflected light rays (the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection). Astronomical knowledge.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul and its nature in the afterlife. This involves some 'immature' knowledge of embryology, and, importantly, the location of the rational intellect and the unified soul in the brain. There is also a comment on the refraction of light into component colours in

saturated air. The process of fermentation however is seen as the direct effect of sunlight on grape-juice.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Dante evidences his knowledge of the water cycle of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation, and gives contemporary though spurious interpretations of seedless plant propagation, and wind formation due to the rotation of the atmosphere around a fixed earth.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] The Medieval concept of the four elements (derived from the Greek) is evidenced. Also the harmony of the spheres. Neither view is in any real sense 'scientific' but passed for Medieval science.

*MedLXVIII:3* [p. 167] Dante's 'instincts' provide a rudimentary concept of physical forces, the movers of natural phenomena.

*MedLXIX:1* [p. 169] The interpenetration of solid bodies is inconceivable in nature, but realised in the divine Essence.

*MedLXIX:2* [p. 169] Dante questions Beatrice as to the dark shadows on the Moon. Her reply uses scientific reasoning from observation and experiment, and indicates that the answer lies in qualitative rather than merely quantitative variation. The specific 'three mirrors' experiment in optics is quoted.

*MedLXXIV:2* [p. 182] Corruptible matter is composed of the four elements, earth, air, fire and water. The effect of the heavenly influences mediated by the planets and the sun forms vegetable and animal life from compounds of elemental matter. (Human life is directly breathed into it by God.)

*MedLXXV:2* [p. 184] The variability seen among and between generations is perceived but explained at this early date not on the basis of genetics but by Divine Providence.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] A reference to Euclid's Elements iii.31, a triangle drawn within a semi-circle always contains a right-angle.

*MedLXXXIX:2* [p. 216] An apparent recognition of the law of gravity, as a 'natural' law.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] Light requires no time to travel through a translucent medium in the Aristotelian teaching.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] The irrational nature of pi intuited, the inability to exactly measure a circle's circumference in terms of its radii.

## Self-Control

*MedV:1* [p. 33] The sinners in the upper section of Hell from Minos downwards are guilty of weakness, incontinence, lack of self-control. See also Temperance, and

Freedom.

## Shame

*MedXVI:1* [p. 55] The sodomites betray their shame in their attitude.

*MedXXX:1* [p. 72] Dante reveals his shame at too avidly watching a quarrel. The evident blush proclaims his shame, though he himself is too tongue-tied, despite his wish, to apologise.

*MedXXXIII:1* [p. 76] Pisan actions in tormenting the children are condemned by Dante as shameful.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] Dante is shamed by Virgil's admonition to ignore the crowd and focus his thoughts.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] The Hapsburg Emperor Albert should be ashamed at the state of Italy and the Empire.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Beatrice shames Dante with her knowledge of his failings, moral and intellectual, following her death. The shame manifests itself as an inner frozenness that is melted by the compassion of the Angels, who echo his shame in the Psalm they sing.

## Simile, Analogy, Metaphor

*MedII:3* [p. 27] Beatrice: 'no one on earth was ever so quick'. Dante makes constant use of simile and analogy, as well as example, and symbol.

*MedV:1* [p. 33] Dante employs extended bird similes, starlings, cranes, and doves to describe the carnal sinners.

*MedVII:2* [p. 42] Dante makes use of a Virgilian simile, of the snake in the grass.

*MedXII:1* [p. 50] Dante uses a topographical reference, the landslide by the Adige, to compare with the gully leading down to the Seventh circle.

*MedXIV:2* [p. 53] The Old Man of Crete is an extended metaphor (or allegorical representation) of the degeneracy of Empire, Papacy and the race.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] A cluster of metaphors and similes around the incident of Brunetto Latini: the sea-walls, the moonlight, the tailor, the fig-tree, the goat, the sacred seed, Fortune's wheel, and the race at Verona.

*MedXVI:1* [p. 55] A trio of similes: the sound of water like a beehive, the three famous Florentine sodomites like cautious wrestlers, their winged feet.

*MedXVI:2* [p. 56] The sodomite trio vanish as quickly as an *Amen*. Dante uses

an extended topographical and river simile to qualify the noise of the plunging water. And then the simile of the diving man to illustrate our and Geryon's passage through the depths.

*MedXVII:1* [p. 57] Much use of natural and mythological simile to liven the scene, boats, beavers, and scorpion, dogs, eel, and falcon, Phaethon and Icarus (both fire and flight myths, to complement the fiery rain and Geryon's descent), and an arrow from a bow.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] A comparison to assassins executed by being buried in the ground, who would try to delay their moment of burial by calling back the priest performing the last rites.

*MedXXI:1* [p. 62] Another cluster of similes: the boiling pitch in the Venetian Arsenal, the pitch a metaphor for barratry, the cook's boys pushing down the hunks of meat, dogs attacking a beggar, the surrendering soldiers at Caprona.

*MedXXII:1* [p. 63] A naturalistic simile cluster: dolphins, frogs, otter, boar, cat and mouse, duck and sparrowhawk. And a further reference to Dante's military observations.

*MedXXIII:1* [p. 64] Continuous use of similes: the minor friars, a comparison to an Aesop's fable, hounds and hare, mirror glass, mother and child, father and son, water in a mill race.

*MedXXIV:1* [p. 65] Winter and the peasant: swiftly written letters: the phoenix: falling sickness: life vanishes like smoke in air, foam on water.

*MedXXV:1* [p. 66] Ivy on a tree: melted wax and burning paper: a lizard in the Dog Days, black as peppercorn: a snail and its shell.

*MedXXVI:1* [p. 66] The flames veiling the spirits of evil counsellors, Ulysses etc, are likened to summer fireflies, and to the dwindling fire of Elijah's chariot.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Comparison of the scene with the aftermath of famous battles. Mahomet split like a wine-cask.

*MedXXIX:2* [p. 71] The tenth chasm likened to a vast hospital.

*MedXXX:1* [p. 72] Parallels drawn with myth. (Athamas and Hecuba)

*MedXXXI:1* [p. 73] Achilles's spear and Virgil's words: Roland and his horn: The towers of Monteregegione: The Pine-cone of St Peter's and the Frieslanders: the leaning tower of Bologna: the mast of a boat.

*MedXXXII:1* [p. 74] Icy rivers and mountains: frogs at the edge of a pond.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] Satan is like a giant mill, greater than a giant in size, his black face dark as an Egyptian, his bat-like wings greater than a ship's sails.

*MedXXXV:1* [p. 87] The metaphor of the intellect as a little boat.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] A simile of lost travellers, returning to their road.

*MedXXXVI:1* [p. 89] Travellers contemplating their journey: Mars reddening: the bird-like Angel.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] The spirits like doves, scattered at a signal.

*MedXXXVII:2* [p. 93] The spirits like a flock of sheep, alarmed.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] The peasant hedging, steep tracks in Italy, desire as a swift bird, the steepness of the slope, the sun as a mirror.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] The steadfast man is like a tower unshaken by the blasts of wind. The crowd of spirits wheel like cavalry, swift as evening cloud.

*MedXL:1* [p. 99] An extended analogy of the gambling game, to depict the crowd of spirits who died of violence.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Sordello is like a couchant lion: Italy as slave, inn of grief, ship without helmsman, brothel mistress: an extended analogy of Italy as a riderless horse: Italy as the garden of the Empire that has become a wasteland: an ironic comparison of Florence with Athens and Sparta: Florence as a sick patient.

*MedXLI:2* [p. 103] The description of the colours in the valley of Negligent Rulers.

*MedXLII:1* [p. 104] Evening: absent friends, the pilgrim hearing the distant chimes. Sight like a sense confounded by excess.

*MedXLII:3* [p. 105] The Angels are like falcons, driving off the serpent. The serpent licks itself like a beast grooming.

*MedXLIV:1* [p. 108] The carving of the first cornice compared with the art of Polycletus: the clashing rocks like a wave ebbing and flowing: the cornice lonelier than a desert road.

*MedXLIV:2* [p. 109] The proud spirits in Purgatory are hunched like the figures on Medieval corbels: the Christian soul is a weak caterpillar that can become the butterfly of the transformed soul, *l'angelica farfalla*. The image of the soul as a butterfly is ancient and pre-classical.

*MedXLVI:1* [p. 111] The proud bowed like oxen under the yoke: each man a journeying boat: the reliefs like floor-tombs carved in relief.

*MedXLVI:2* [p. 112] The steps at San Miniato: a man groping at something on his face.

*MedXLVII:1* [p. 112] The envious with eyes sealed like blind beggars, or wild hawks.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] Metaphor: conscience is a dark film, memory is a stream that may flow clear.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Virtue, persecuted like a snake: the citizens of the Val d'Arno transformed to beasts: Fulcieri as a hunter of the Florentine wolves: the Romagna as a choked garden.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] The zodiac skips like a child: the splendour of light is reflected to Dante's eyes like a light ray from water: goodness is drawn to love like a light ray: understanding and love reflect each other like a mirror.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] The smoke of the Third Terrace and the Inferno's gloom compared: a blind man with his guide: the 'knot' of anger: the soul as a little child: the Shepherd and the flock: the 'two Suns' of Empire and Church.

*MedLI:1* [p. 118] Mist in the mountains: moles breathing through their skin: imaginative vision bursting like a bubble.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] The Poets grounded like boats (see also the Geryon episode in Inferno)

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] Desires burning like a fire: the seal and the wax: the spirit's stance in walking: life in green leaves: the bees drive to make honey: judgement sieving the desires.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] The angel's wings like a swan's: Dante like a falcon lured by its food.

*MedLIV:3* [p. 126] A comparison of the earthquake to that at the birth of Apollo and Artemis: the Poets as still as the shepherds hearing of Christ's birth.

*MedLV:1* [p. 127] Metaphor: the water of Truth.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] The sunlight and candlelight of Truth: the lamp held by a spiritual leader: the world pregnant with belief: the Inferno a dark goal.

*MedLVI:2* [p. 131] The hours as handmaidens of the day.

*MedLVIII:1* [p. 133] They move onwards like a ship in a favourable wind.

*MedLVIII:2* [p. 133] Birds that winter on the Nile flying in files: Forese like a straggler from a crowd of runners: Corso Donati's death evokes an equine metaphor of ambition as a runaway horse: Forese as a different kind of horseman galloping after honour.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] The Angel of Temperance glowing like molten glass or metal: the wind of its wings like the perfumed May breeze.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] The young stork's tentativeness: the arrow of speech: Meleager's life linked to the firebrand, the reflection in the mirror linked to the

object reflected: sunlight and grape juice forming wine: light refracted into its colours in saturated air.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] The spirits like ants: like flights of cranes (compare the starlings of *Inferno* V): the mountain man amazed by the city: beasts that follow their appetites: the spirit in the flames like a fish diving through water. And a metaphor of Christ as the head of the college of redeemed spirits.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] Dante like a child tempted by an apple, and like a once-lustful goat between the two shepherds.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] The breeze likened to the Sirocco near Ravenna: Matilda like Proserpine: the contrast in the wood here to that dark wood of *Inferno* I: the water of Lethe purer than earthly waters: the amazement of a new sight.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda turns like a lady dancing, like a modest virgin.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Matilda sings like a lady in love, since forgiveness is an aspect of love: she is like a classical nymph: the candlesticks are like seven golden trees: the procession moves slower than a new bride: the water is like a mirror: the flames are like trailing banners coloured like the rainbow or the moon's halo: the sky is as lovely as he could describe: the creatures resembling those in *Ezekiel* and *Revelations* follow each other as star follows star: the eyes of their wings are like those of Argus: the sun's chariot is referenced, more magnificent than those of Scipio or Augustus, or the sun's in the myth of Phaethon: the ladies are red as fire, green as emerald and white as snow.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] The candlesticks spiritual guides as Ursa Minor guides sailors: the saints at the Last Judgement: the sight of Beatrice like the dawn sky veiled with cloud: Beatrice like an admiral, inspecting the ships: like a mother admonishing a child: Dante melting into tears like the melting snow on the Apennines: the untrue 'road' of illusions.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] Beatrice's accusation like a sharp blade: Dante stressed like a breaking crossbow: the grindstone of confession blunting the sharpness of the sword of Justice: the young bird compared with mature knowledge: Dante like a child mute with shame: his head lifted more easily than an uprooted tree: the 'nettle' of repentance: remorse 'gnawing' the heart.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] Matilda speeds along like a shuttle ower the loom: Beatrice's eyes are bright emeralds: knowledge is a food that satisfies and causes more hunger.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] The Pageant like a military formation: the vegetation in Spring: Argus's many eyes falling into sleep: the Disciples waking after the Transfiguration.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] Themis and the Sphinx and Oedipus's solving of the riddle: life as 'a race towards death': the petrifying waters of the River Elsa: the stain like Pyramus's blood staining the mulberry: Dante's mind like a stone: the symbol like the symbol of the palmer's staff: wax imprinted with a seal: fire deduced from smoke.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] The earthly wax stamped by the impress of the divine: Beatrice gazing like an eagle: the reflected ray like a pilgrim wishing to return: the sun sparkling like molten iron: the second sun: Dante transformed like Glaucus: the light greater than the widest expanse of water: they ascend like lightning.

*MedLXVIII:3* [p. 167] Beatrice like a mother over her child: the sea of being: beings fired like arrows from the Divine bow: the signature, stamp and sometimes imperfect impression of the Maker: the natural order like a river falling under gravity: the 'living' flame.

*MedLXIX:1* [p. 169] The reader's little boat, the *Commedia* as a voyage: divine knowledge as the 'bread of angels': desire as a thirst: swiftness likened to an arrow's speed: the Moon like diamond, or pearl.

*MedLXIX:3* [p. 170] Dante's mind stripped like snow by the light: the living light: the 'organs of the universe' in analogy with human structure: the pass and ford of knowledge: the blacksmith's art derived from his effort: analogy between the human soul and body and the cascade of virtue in the universe: the mingling as an 'alloy', pursuing the blacksmith's image: the angelic virtue shining joyfully like joyful light in the eye.

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] God's will as the 'sea' to which all the things he has created flow: answering questions is like the passage of a shuttle through the warp in weaving: Constance's vows are her heart's 'veil': Piccarda vanishes like a heavy weight through water.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Dante between doubts like a man between foods, or a lamb between wolves, or a dog between hinds.

*MedLXXII:1* [p. 176] The light of intellect: 'digesting' tough knowledge: the gold and silver keys of knowledge and authority: feathers blown in the wind: the Pope as the shepherd of the Church: the foolish like mindless sheep or silly lambs.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] Beatrice and Dante like arrows ascending: feeding fish: the anguish of expectation: the spirit 'nested' in its own light: the sun burning away thick cloud.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] Sparks in flames, voices among voices: a silkworm cocooned in its own silk.

*MedLXXVI:2* [p. 187] Folco shining like a ruby.



*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The twelve spirits like a coronet: like a halo round the moon: like stars around the pole: like a clock movement. Aquinas a lamb of Dominic's flock.

*MedLXXVIII:2* [p. 192] Francis as a 'master shepherd': the Dominican 'sheep' straying: the Church as Peter's boat.

*MedLXXIX:1* [p. 193] The sacred millwheel: song beyond that of the Muses and Sirens: the double rainbow, the echo, the covenant with Noah: the compass needle: Dominic as holy wrestler: the vineyard and the vine-dresser: the torrent and the watered garden: the two Orders as wheels of the Chariot: the harvest and the tares.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] The double ring of stars, Ariadne's crown (*Corona Borealis*): the wax and the stamp: feet weighed with lead: fishing for the truth and the angler's skill: the prematurely counted harvest, the latent rose, the doomed ship.

*MedLXXXI:1* [p. 197] The water vibrating in a dish: the festival of Paradise.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] The whitening horizon: rays like the Milky Way: the spirits like motes in a ray of sunlight: the melody of harp and viol tuned in harmony: one who hears but does not understand: Beatrice's eyes like living seals.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] The Divine lyre: Cacciaguida's spirit like a meteorite, like fire through alabaster: the bow of love: the wings of desire: the living topaz.

*MedLXXXII:2* [p. 200] Dante a leaf of the ancestral tree: the body as a robe.

*MedLXXXIV:1* [p. 205] Phaethon: obtuse angles in a triangle: the eyes and the river: sweet harmony from an organ: Hippolytus: the bow and arrow of exile.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] The mirror of the blessed: the tree of the universe: the whip and spinning top.

*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] Virtue increased by delight in virtue: the changing light like a lady's blushing face: Jupiter like a joyous torch: the spirits like a flock of birds (cranes? See Lucan *Pharsalia* V 711-716): sparks used for numeric augury: the Christian vineyard.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] The spirits like rubies, like flowers: the hawk unhooded: the labyrinth of knowledge: human perception lost like the sight of the seafloor in deep water: the stork sweeping over her nest.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] The stars when the sun vanishes: divine chimes and flutings: sound like a river: form from the lute's neck, or the unstopped pipe: the pupil of the eye shining: the lark ascending in sweetness: Dante's doubts transparent through glass: words as sweet medicine: the harpist matching notes to the singer.

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] Beatrice's smile would be like Jupiter's fire destroying

Semele, or thunder shattering the leaves: Saturn coloured like gold: the spirits like a flock of rooks: the sweet symphony of Paradise: the abyss of Eternal law: the shepherds of the Church.

*MedLXXXIX:1* [p. 215] Beatrice and Dante like Mother and child: the Sun expanding the rose: images of waste and neglect.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] Beatrice the bird of dawn: the full moon: lightning: the singing of Polyhymnia and her sister Muses: the bold keel of Dante's poetic boat: the Garden of Christ, the meadow full of flowers: Gabriel like a coronet: the Primum Mobile a royal mantle: the child and the mother: the saints as rich cofferers: earthly life as an exile in Babylon.

*MedXCI:1* [p. 218] The Feast of the Lamb: wheels turning in a clockwork mechanism: Dante a student before examination: the water of the inner fountain: the coins and purse of the mind: miracles beyond nature's anvil and iron: the Church a vine and now a thorn.

*MedXCII:1* [p. 219] Florence the sheepfold: the Apostles like doves cooing and billing: the journey from Egypt to Jerusalem signifying the redemption and liberation of the soul from the earthly life: the palm of martyrdom.

*MedXCII:2* [p. 220] A star in Cancer: the virgin at the dance: the bride: Christ the Pelican: temporarily blinded by gazing at a solar eclipse: resting oars.

*MedXCIII:1* [p. 221] Sieve, bow and target: the Garden of God.

*MedXCIII:2* [p. 223] A man waking from sleep: a branch in the wind: the Glass of God.

*MedXCIV:1* [p. 223] The Universe's smile: Peter like Jupiter, and the planets like birds: the Vatican made a sewer: the blush of dawn: the modest woman hearing another's fault: wolves and shepherds.

*MedXCIV:2* [p. 224] The spirits like snowflakes: the Earth as a threshing-floor: Gemini as Leda's fair nest of the Twins: rain ruins plums: the lisping babe as an adult: The Human Race as the daughter of the Sun: the reversed fleet.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] A candle in a mirror: moon size comparison: a halo in vapour: the size of the rainbow: the angelic temple: clear skies in a north-easterly wind: the sparks from molten iron: the doubling of the chessboard: the eternal spring: the dance-circles of the Orders.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227]: The sun and full moon rising and setting together.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] The stars at dawn: the brightness of the sun: the limitations of the artist: the fanfare: a flash of lightning: the candle and its flame: the River of Light: the child wanting to be fed: the hillside and its reflection: the eternal rose: the wedding feast: the child that chases its nurse away.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] The angels like bees: the pilgrim gazing: the sea's depths: the Eternal fountain: the Garden: the pilgrim seeing Veronica's cloth: the rising Sun: the flame of peace.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] Similes for the Virgin: the dreamer's impressions: snow in the sun, the Sybil's leaves: the universal volume and its leaves: the universal bond: the Argo's ancient voyage: the babe's speech: the rainbow: the geometer and the circle: the rolling wheel.

## Singing, Biblical and Classical Quotation

*MedXXXVI:1* [p. 89] Psalm 114 is sung by the spirits arriving at Purgatory, a song of liberation from the flesh, and in the Poets' case from the journey through the Inferno.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] Casella's singing of Dante's poem seduces the listeners.

*MedXXXIX:1* [p. 97] The crowd of penitents chant the Miserere, Psalm 51, a psalm of repentance.

*MedXLI:2* [p. 103] The souls in the valley of Negligent Rulers sing the *Salve Regina* (*Salva Regina, mater misericordiae: Save us, O Queen, mother of mercy*), the antiphon sung after Vespers, invoking the aid of the Virgin.

*MedXLII:1* [p. 104] A spirit among the late-repentant sings the '*Te lucis ante terminum: We pray to You before the ending of the light*' the Ambrosian hymn sung at Compline, the last office of the day, which is appropriate for evening, but also for those who repent at the last.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] The great cathedral of the Mount is alive with an indistinct music, with the *Te Deum Laudamus: We praise You Lord*, the Ambrosian hymn sung at Matins, and on solemn occasions, appropriate therefore for this Tuesday dawn in Dante's Vision, and his entry into Purgatory proper.

*MedXLVI:2* [p. 112] '*Beati pauperes spiritu, Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*', the First Beatitude from (appropriately) the Sermon on the Mount, see Matthew v 3. A Beatitude is voiced on each of the terraces of the Mount, signifying the virtue opposing the sin purged on that terrace. Here humility counters pride.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] '*Beati misericordes, Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy*', the Fifth Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount Matthew v 7. (For the words '*Rejoice you who conquer*' refer to Matthew v 12, Romans xii 21 and Revelation ii 7.) Mercy, a reciprocal virtue counters envy.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] A prayer from the Latin Mass is heard, '*Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis, dona nobis pacem*. Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the

world, have mercy on us, give us peace.’ See John i 29. The lamb signifies meekness, the reciprocal virtue to wrath.

*MedLI:2* [p. 118] The Third Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount Matthew v 5, is spoken, not sung. ‘*Beati pacifici*: blessed are the meek’ (for they shall inherit the earth.) Meekness counters wrath.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] The Siren sings in Dante’s dream. The Second Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount Matthew v 4, is affirmed by the Angel of Zeal. ‘*Beati qui lugent*: blessed are they that mourn’ (for they shall be comforted.)

*MedLIII:2* [p. 124] The avaricious repeat Psalm 119 v25. ‘*Adhaesit pavimento anima mea*, my soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken thou me according to thy word.’

*MedLIV:3* [p. 126] The spirits shout out the ‘*Gloria in excelsis Deo, pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to all men.’ See Luke ii 8-14.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] The Angel of Liberality says ‘*Sitiunt*’: this is in the Fourth Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew v 6, ‘*Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam*: Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.’ The Beatitude both approves Dante’s hunger and thirst for knowledge and virtue, and anticipates the excessive hunger and thirst of the gluttonous on the next terrace.

*MedLVII:1* [p. 131] The spirits purging their gluttony sing: ‘*Labia mea Domine*. O Lord open thou my lips (and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise).’ Psalm 51 verse 15. A verse of the *Miserere*, see above. The mouths once dedicated to gluttony are now freed for praise.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] A second reference, see above, to the Fourth Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew v 6, ‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.’

*MedLIX:2* [p. 137] The Poets walk along the narrow path by the cliff, hearing the spirits singing in the fire: they sing the Matin hymn, with its opening words, as given prior to the revision of the Breviary by Pope Urban VIII in 1631: ‘*Summae Deus Clementae*: God of supreme mercy,’ which contains a prayer for protection against lustfulness. The third verse ran ‘*Lumbos iecurque morbidum Flammis adure congruis, Accincti ut artus excubent Luxu remoto pessimo*: burning the loins and unwholesome passion with like flames, so that the limbs purged might sleep free of evil Lust.’

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] The Angel of Chastity sings ‘*Beati mundo corde*: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ The Sixth Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew v 8. And its voice beyond the fire sings the division of the sheep and goats at the last day, when the King shall say to the sheep on the right: ‘*Venite benedicti patris mei*: Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for

you from the foundation of the world.' Matthew xxv 34. Dante contrasts Lust and righteousness.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] '*Delectasti me, Domine in factura tua*: For, thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work.' Psalm 92 v4 is referred to by Matilda.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Matilda confirms her role as the keeper of the threshold of forgiveness by singing: '*Beati, quorum tecta sunt peccata*: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.' Psalm 32: verse 1.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] '*Hosanna*' is being sung, the word with which the Jews hailed Jesus on entering Jerusalem (Matthew xxi:9, Mark xi:9, John xii:13). The Elders sing 'Blessed art thou among women' the words of the Angel Gabriel, and of Elizabeth, to Mary. See Luke i 28 and 42.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] The Elder representing the books of Solomon sings '*Veni sponsa de Libano*: Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon.' from the Song of Solomon iv 8. Dante mentions that the Saints will sing *Alleluia*, on the Day of Judgement, an un-translated Hebrew word used as a chant of praise, taken over from synagogue usage (the Hebrew *halleluyah* meaning 'praise ye Jehovah')

Those in the chariot, sing the Benedictus, prescribed for Lauds, the first day-hour, by St Benedict: '*Benedictus qui venit*: Blessed is he that comest in the name of the Lord.' See Matthew xxi 9, Mark xi 9, Luke xix 38, John xii 13.

The Angels sing Psalm 31 lines 1-8. '*In te, Domine, speravi*: In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be ashamed...thou hast set *my feet* in a large room.'

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The singing: '*Asperges me*: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' Psalm 51 verse 7.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] The virtues sing Psalm 79: '*Deus, venerunt gentes*: O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled..'

*MedLXX:2* [p. 171] Piccarda sings the '*Ave Maria*: Hail Mary'.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Justinian sings the Hosanna. '*Osanna Sanctus Deus Sabaoth, superillustrans claritate tua felices ignes horum malachoth!* Hosanna, Holy God of Sabaoth, illuminating the blessed fires of these kingdoms, with your brightness from above!' to introduce Beatrice's speech regarding the Incarnation.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] The spirits in the sphere of Venus sing the Hosanna.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The spirits in the sphere of the Sun sing as they dance around Beatrice and Dante.

*MedLXXXI:1* [p. 197] The spirits sing of the Trinity.

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] There is no singing in the seventh sphere since it

would overpower Dante's mind.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] The *Regina Coeli laetare*. O Queen of Heaven: the Easter antiphon of the Blessed Virgin is sung by the Apostles in the Stellar Heaven.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] The angelic Orders sing *Hosanna*.

*MedXCIX:1* [p. 230] Gabriel sings the 'Ave Maria:Hail Mary' accompanied by the ranks of the redeemed.

## Sleep

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] Dante passes through the Inferno without sleeping, and therefore without dreaming also. He sleeps the night of Easter Monday, and has his first dream, of the three in Purgatory, that of the Eagle of regeneration and justice.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] Dante falls asleep on his third night on the Mount and has his third and final dream.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Overpowered by the burden of trying to understand the hymn sung, he falls asleep.

## Sloth

*MedXXIV:1* [p. 65] Virgil exhorts Dante to avoid sloth and seek fame.

*MedXXXVIII:2* [p. 96] Belacqua illustrates the lazy mind, unprepared for the effort of learning or purgation.

*MedXLIX:2* [p. 116] Virgil exhorts Dante to evade sloth and exert himself to achieve purgation.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] The fourth terrace of the Mount is where sloth is purged. It is classified as an aspect of inadequate love. The rational mind should see the good and be drawn to it. Sloth is a failed response to this attraction.

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] Dante's intellectual eagerness contrasted with the sloth purged on the fourth terrace.

*MedLII:2* [p. 122] The slothful spirits appear running like a Bacchic chorus in their new zeal.

## Smile

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] The start of the Purgatorio is marked by Dante's meeting with his beloved friend Casella, who smiles. Beatrice's smile is that of the theological virtues and the smile in general indicates empathy, hope, and trust, reflecting

charity, hope and faith.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] Manfred smiles, indicating the hopes of the repentant spirits in Purgatory, and perhaps seeking Dante's goodwill in speaking to his daughter Costanza on his behalf when Dante returns to the world.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Virgil promises Dante he will see Beatrice again, and she will be smiling and blessed, the smile denoting virtue, forgiveness, encouragement and faith.

*MedXLVI:2* [p. 112] At the conclusion of the visit to the first terrace of the Mount, Virgil smiles as Dante finds one of the seven letter P's erased from his forehead, signifying the victory of hope and will.

*MedLV:3* [p. 129] Dante smiles at Statius's not realising that it is Virgil before him. The smile can be misinterpreted, and Dante hastens to explain when Virgil allows.

*MedLVI:1* [p. 129] Statius smiles at Virgil's mistaking his major sin for Avarice. The smile expresses error, but is softened by love.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda smiles at Dante, and makes clear to him that her smile is at the works of God around her.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Matilda suggests that ancient poetic ideas of the Golden Age were dreams of the Earthy Paradise. This invokes a smile from Virgil and Statius, poets who referenced the Golden Age in their works.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] Beatrice reveals her smile, that of the theological virtues, now that Dante has confessed and has regained his state of innocence.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] Beatrice's smile (associated with the theological virtues: here, faith) expresses compassion for Dante's lack of trust and belief in the truth revealed directly to him.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Beatrice smiles with laughing eyes, her smile being a symbol of the theological virtues, her eyes of the cardinal virtues.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] Beatrice's smile in her eyes overpowers Dante. The depth of emotion unites the physical presence with the intellectual symbol, in a profound way that suggests the incarnation of grace, and the elevation, rather than transcendence, of earthly love within the divine.

*MedLXXXIII:1* [p. 201] Beatrice smiles at Dante's intimate acknowledgement of Cacciaguida, as the Lady Malehaut coughed when Guinevere acknowledged Lancelot.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] An intense moment where Dante is overcome by Beatrice's eyes and smile, so that she has to draw his attention away to other

aspects of Paradise. The active life complements the contemplative life, and Divien Philosophy is not the only path to God, as the presence of the warriors evidences.

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] In the seventh sphere of contemplation Beatrice's smile is too intense to allow Dante to see it.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] In the stellar heavens Dante having seen the vision of Christ is able to see her smile once more.

*MedXCIV:1* [p. 223] As the Trinity is celebrated Dante seems to see the Universe's smile. The Trinity is identified also with the three theological virtues.

## Space

*MedVI:2* [p. 38] Hell is a place of spiritual stasis. The doomed spirits can neither go backwards nor forwards, but effectively repeat their punishment in an eternal recurrence. The descent into it is also a narrowing and confining. Space becomes more constrained as the Poets travel downwards.

*MedXXIII:1* [p. 64] Dante emphasises that the Malebranches, as *guardians* [p. 337] of a location in Hell, cannot leave the confines of that place.

## Speech, Language

*MedIII:3* [p. 30] The souls blaspheme, a misuse of language, the use of which is a facet of free will.

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] Language itself is abused and corrupted in Hell. Plutus speaks a debased tongue.

*MedVIII:1* [p. 43] Dante's use of dramatic conversation, monologue, examination etc to bring life to the situations and personalise the Commedia.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Language is inadequate to the task of description.

*MedXXXI:1* [p. 73] Nimrod speaks a corrupted language, representing the Babel of tongues.

*MedXXXII:1* [p. 74] Dante is unable once more to find a suitable language to describe the extremes of Hell.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] In the deepest level before Satan, Dante's words are once more inadequate.

*MedXLII:1* [p. 104] Dante builds word patterns in the ante-Purgatory to express the radical change from the language of Hell: words like sweet, love, tender, devout, humble, eternal, hope, trust, joy.



*MedXLVII:1* [p. 112] The voices that signify fraternal love. Also Dante's courtesy and generosity in using speech to make himself known to the blind spirits purging themselves of envy.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] In Hell the spirits use language against one another, here in Purgatory they enjoy fraternal conversation, across the divides of factional strife, Ghelph and Ghibelline. At the end of the Poets' visit to the terrace, the voices in the air signify envy.

*MedLVII:2* [p. 132] A strong desire for something else takes away the power of fluent speech.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Once more it is hard to express in words the things seen, in this case the Divine Pageant.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The singing is so sweet, the sweetness evades the powers of speech to describe it.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Dante cannot understand the nature of the hymn sung, which overpowers his mind.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Speech cannot communicate the nature of Dante's inward transformation, gazing at Beatrice.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] Beatrice urges Dante to speak, in the sphere of Mercury the messenger god, and planet of communication.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Dante urges himself to speak to Beatrice, in the same sphere of Mercury the planet of communication, with a three times repeated *dille*.

Christ was God's Word, his messenger to Earth, incarnated as Man, mingling divine and human nature.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante is unable to express the brightness of the sphere of the Sun by any known means, intellect, art, or knowledge, but it can be a subject of faith and hope.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] The vision of Christ on the Cross is beyond Dante's powers of description.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] Cacciaguida's speech (after its Latin opening) is initially beyond Dante's understanding. This should be compared with Nimrod's appearance in the three Cantiche. In Babel speech cannot be understood because it has been corrupted. Here the lack of understanding is because language has been elevated beyond mortal comprehension.

*MedLXXXIII:1* [p. 201] Cacciaguida speaks in the ancient Tuscan dialect of two hundred years previously. Dante indicates how language changes with time, a theme acknowledged by Chaucer after him, in Troilus and Criseyde.

*MedLXXXVI:1* [p. 210] Dante is trying to express what has never been written, spoken or imagined before.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] Beatrice's smile is beyond his powers and those of the Muses, to describe, even the powers of Polyhymnia the Muse of sacred song.

*MedXCIII:2* [p. 223] Human language changes with time. Examples of word-change are the names of God.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] The final Vision is beyond speech and memory.

## Spirits, the Soul

*MedX:3* [p. 47] Farinata explains the nature of the prophetic abilities of the souls in Hell, they can see distant events but not current ones. Their ability will cease when earthly time ceases at the Last Judgment, and futurity is no more.

*MedXXXIII:2* [p. 76] The spirits of the treacherous may be dragged down to the Ninth Circle, while their bodies inhabited by demons continue to live on above until physical dissolution.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] The spirits who await purification linger by the shores of the Tiber, until the Angel of God ferries them across the ocean to the Mount. They are amazed at Dante's breathing form. His attempts to embrace Casella reveal their insubstantial nature (see Homer: *Odyssey* II 205, and Virgil: *Aeneid* VI 700, for the triple clasp).

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] The spirits cast no shadows, transparent like the heavenly spheres, yet their pseudo-bodies are capable of undergoing punishment and feeling pain. This is a divine mystery.

*MedXXXVII:2* [p. 93] These excommunicated spirits, dying in repentance, have entered Purgatory. Virgil comments that they are chosen, have ended their lives well by repenting, and are destined to find peace at last.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] The spirits in Purgatory are chosen or of the elect.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Love increases through mutual understanding, and understanding through love. Shared is not less. The more spirits with shared understanding the more love there is in the universe.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] The soul as a child, issuing from the hands of God, in primal simplicity.

*MedLIII:2* [p. 124] Adrian V reminds Dante that all formal relationships, such as the Papal Offices or the institution of marriage are meaningless beyond the grave.

*MedLVII:1* [p. 131] The cavernous faces of the spirits purging themselves of

gluttony form the word 'omo' or 'Man'.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will, and around it a 'shadow' or 'shade' is manifested that reflects its desires and affections.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] At the summit of the Mount, radical moral innocence is recovered, and the institutions of earth are superseded by Divine Philosophy. Empire and Church are therefore symbolically superseded by the freed, innocent spirit, with control over itself, and directed towards the good.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] The soul is a new creation of God's, not generated by nature, but breathed into the embryo.

*MedLXVIII:3* [p. 167] The blessed spirits manifest themselves in the sphere of the stars, the Stellar Heaven, and in the planetary spheres but are really existent in the Empyrean. They manifest themselves to Dante in the lower spheres as appropriate.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] The blessed spirits, including Piccarda, all inhabit the Empyrean along with other great souls, though they differ in the degree to which they experience God's power. Piccarda for example does not inhabit the sphere of the Moon but has manifested there in human semblance to allow Dante's intellect to receive information through the senses.

*MedLXXVI:2* [p. 187] The outward appearance of the spirits reflects their inner state: their brightness revealing joy in Paradise: their darkness revealing sadness in Hell.

*MedLXXXI:1* [p. 197] Solomon confirms the resurrection of the body, and the retention of complete individuality.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] The spirits who see God possess intelligence equal to their love, and execution matches will.

*MedLXXXIX:1* [p. 215] Benedict confirms that saints like himself will be visible with the other spirits in the Empyrean, which is outside space.

## **Stars, Constellations, Astrology, Astronomy, Planets**

*MedII:2* [p. 26] Beatrice's eyes compared to stars, like those twin stars of Dante's Gemini birth-sign.

*MedXV:1* [p. 54] Beatrice is Dante's star, but his star represents his fate also.

*MedXX:1* [p. 61] The astrologers are in Hell. Dante elsewhere acknowledges the power of the stars over fate, but this is a facet of God's will, while using astrology for specific prophecy is against the teachings of the Church.

*MedXXXV:1* [p. 87] Dante sees Venus, the planet of Love, in Pisces, as the sun rises in Aries, at the foot of the Mountain of Purgatory. Pisces is associated with the Christian era as the constellation in which the spring equinox fell. The four stars of the Southern Cross represent the cardinal virtues.

*MedXXXVI:1* [p. 89] Dante determines place and time by use of his astronomical knowledge. He uses Jerusalem and the Ganges as reference longitudes and latitudes, and the position of the zodiacal constellations to confirm the chronology.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] The reason the sun appears in the north, south of the equator. Dante displays his knowledge of the Ecliptic and Equatorial Circles, the solstices, equinoxes, and effect of the seasons due to the tilt of the earth. The sun is a mirror that reflects the heavenly light downwards.

*MedXLII:3* [p. 105] The stars near the pole travel shorter arcs in the same time so travel less quickly to the observer. Three unknown stars represent the theological virtues, replacing the four dawn stars of the Southern Cross.

*MedXLV:1* [p. 110] The starry spheres are closer to God.

*MedXLVI:2* [p. 112] The Angel of Humility has a face that shines like the Morning 'star', the planet Venus once attributed to Lucifer, but now to Divine Love.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] The zodiac 'skips like a child' as the circle of the sun's daily path tilts higher or lower with respect to the celestial equator. Here at the spring equinox the noonday sun lies on the Celestial Equator.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Dante attributes divine influence to the planetary spheres, but insists on free will. Prophecy through astrology is against the traditional teachings of the Church. Divine goodness creates mind in us and therefore moral awareness and free will. The causes of events are in ourselves.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] A reference to *Fortuna Major*, the geomancer's formation of the last stars in Aquarius and the first in Pisces.

*MedLXI:1* [p. 141] At the exit from the seventh terrace, Dante sees the promise and hope of the stars which appear bigger and brighter, as he understands more deeply and nears the Heavens.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Dante invokes Urania, the muse of Astronomy, the Heavenly Spheres, and their Music.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] Ursa Minor as a guide to sailors.

Dante acknowledges the power of the stars within their heavenly spheres to influence human disposition. This is a Neo-Platonic vision of the Universe, where the Divine influence permeates through the spheres. It is not therefore a simplistic

belief in astrological destiny where free-will is negated, but a sophisticated belief in which the Divine influence creates pre-dispositions which interact with free choice and events to determine individual fate. Astrological prediction of events is condemned in *Inferno*.

The Angels are tuned to the harmony of the Eternal Spheres.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The cardinal virtues are the four stars of the Southern Cross in the heavens.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Springtime in the Christian era coincides with the vernal equinox occurring in the constellation of Pisces, the Fishes.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Dante displays his knowledge of the intersection of the celestial circles with the circle of the Horizon at the equinox. The equinox was in Aries at the Creation and in the Vision.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] Dante uses traditional associations of the planets. Here the Moon's variability and inconstancy.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Dante accepts the view that the stars influence human propensities, but not the idea, an interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*, that would imply the soul being split from a star at birth, and returning to it at death. He is always concerned to follow the 'soft' astrological view of planetary influence on human life but not pre-determination of it, so leaving room for the key human attribute of free will.

*MedLXXII:2* [p. 177] Dante refers to the Sun at the equinox as it meets the celestial equator, the swiftest circle (see *Convivio* ii 4 52-62). Mercury is its close companion, on its 'inner' orbit within that of Earth, and so is rarely visible, and is hidden in the Sun's light. Mercury is associated with intellect, changeability, and communication as Mercury was the messenger of the gods in Greek Mythology.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] Venus is in inner orbit around the sun and therefore appears close to it in the sky, either as an evening star setting after the sun, or as a morning star in the dawn sky. Venus is associated with love, and Venus Aphrodite was the goddess of Love in Greek Mythology.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante shows his knowledge of the tilted ecliptic, and indicates the Divine necessity of the angle, in order to produce the varying effects of the planets on earthly things (including creating the seasons). The Sun is associated with Prudence, or practical wisdom.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] The double crown of stars likened to components of the heavens including Ursa Major and Minor, and to Ariadne's Crown, the Corona Borealis.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] Mars is associated with Fortitude, and with the Church

Militant through its traditional associations with the war god.

*MedLXXXII:1* [p. 199] Dante suggests the planet Mars was in Leo (signifying courage and pride) at the birth of Christ, and calculates Cacciaguida's birth date from the known periodicity of Mars orbit. In fact Mars was in Aries the Ram, the sign ruled astrologically by Mars, and signifying Christ the Lamb. It is conceivable, but unlikely, that Dante may have been aware of this from calculation, and that this is what he means by 'his own Lion'.

*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] Jupiter is associated with Justice and Wisdom, with Jupiter the Roman god, and therefore with the Roman Emperors, and with the Christian God.

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] Saturn is associated with self-control, moderation, temperance and the Golden Age of simplicity and innocence. Saturn in Leo indicates strength of will in astrology.

*MedLXXXIX:2* [p. 216] Dante and Beatrice enter the stellar heavens in the sign of Gemini, Dante's birth sign, associated with intellect and language. The seven 'planetary spheres' signify the seven virtues. Dante looks back to see the full structure of the solar system in the Ptolemaic arrangement.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] Beatrice looks eastwards towards the vision of Christ in Cancer the place of the summer solstice.

*MedXCII:2* [p. 220] A star in Cancer would be in the midwinter sky, the Sun being in Capricorn.

*MedXCIV:2* [p. 224] Gemini separated by Taurus from the sun in Aries.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] All three Cantiche end with the same word *stelle* stars.

## Symbol, Symbolic Metaphor, Allegory

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] Satan's three faces have an allegorical role, signifying Hatred, Powerlessness and Ignorance. The three winds generated by his wings signify lust, pride and avarice.

*MedXXXV:1* [p. 87] The four stars of the Southern Cross, symbolise the four cardinal virtues, Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude. The Poets stand on the eastern shore at the foot of the Mount of Purgatory, the east being the direction of the rising sun and symbolically of the risen Christ.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] The marsh rush is a symbol of humility.

*MedXLII:3* [p. 105] Three unknown evening southern polar stars represent the theological virtues.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The Eagle in Dante's dream is symbolic of regeneration and of Rome and Imperial law. Lucia's eyes signify the cardinal virtues, by whose light the Poets can climb the Mount.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] The complex symbolism of the Gate of Purgatory, signifying the stages of Penance.

*MedLVI:2* [p. 131] The fruit tree and stream, symbolic of tempting (cultivated?) plenty whose perfume causes the desire for food and drink in those spirits who are purging themselves of gluttony.

*MedLXI:2* [p. 141] There are two paths to the good, that of the active and that of the contemplative life, symbolised by Leah and Rachel (or Martha and Mary). Convivio celebrates the supremacy of the contemplative life, but here Dante balances the two. Note that Beatrice, as a symbol of Divine Philosophy, sits with Rachel in Heaven.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] At the summit of the Mount, radical moral innocence is recovered, and the institutions of earth are superseded by Divine Philosophy. Empire and Church are therefore symbolically represented by the freed, innocent spirit, with control over itself, and directed towards the good.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] Matilda symbolises the active life of the spirit, and is Leah to Beatrice's Rachel. She counterpoints St. Bernard's position in Paradise, he a symbol of the contemplative life. The historical Matelda also signifies pardon and reconciliation, with Church and Empire independent within their proper spheres.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] The Divine Pageant is a symbolic representation of the Church.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] The Mystic Tree represents Justice and the Empire, bound to the Chariot of the Church.

*MedLXVI:2* [p. 154] Dante watches a symbolically enacted history of the Church and Empire. The Church is attacked, corrupted and divided, acquiring temporal power in a fatal confusion of the spiritual and earthly spheres. The vision culminates in the whorish mating of a French pope to the French court, and the transfer of the Papacy from its true home, Rome, to Avignon.

*MedLXVII:1* [p. 155] Beatrice has explicitly used the symbolism of the Divine Pageant and the Mystic Tree to impress a complex truth on Dante's mind. Dante is both inviting interpretation of the symbolism and implying the true prophetic nature of its purpose.

*MedLXVIII:1* [p. 165] Apollo is symbolically equated with Christ.

*MedLXXI:1* [p. 174] Dante emphasises that the representation of God, the Angels etc in human form is symbolic and not actual.

*MedLXXVI:2* [p. 187] Rahab, as a symbol of the victory of the Crucifixion, for her recognition of the Jewish God, elevated by Christ and redeemed.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] The triple circles signify the Trinity. The Cross within Mars signifies both the Crucifixion and the blood of Christ, and the Church Militant.

*MedLXXXV:2* [p. 209] The eagle symbolises the Empire, Divine Justice and Power, the Roman Emperors, God Himself, and Can Grande via his coat of arms. The letter M symbolises Monarchia, kingship, as in Dante's treatise so titled, and Mente, the Mind of God that inspires the intellect to justice.

*MedLXXXIX:2* [p. 216] The mystic ladder symbolises Contemplation. The planetary spheres signify the seven virtues, theological and cardinal.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] The Sun is Christ, the Rose Mary, and the lilies are the Apostles.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] The ranks of the blessed are the glowing petals of an eternal Rose.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] The river of the water of life symbolises the flow of Divine Grace.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] The angels' colours flame, gold and white symbolise love knowledge and purity. Bernard is a symbol of loving contemplation, and adoration of the Virgin.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] The triple rainbow symbolising the Trinity.

## Tears

*MedII:3* [p. 27] Beatrice's tears of compassion as she intercedes on Dante's behalf and makes her request of Virgil.

## Temperance

*MedLXXXVIII:1* [p. 214] The fourth cardinal virtue, *temperantia*, indicating self-control, patience, simplicity and contemplation.

*MedLXXXIX:1* [p. 215] Saint Benedict signifies the temperance and self-discipline of religious order.

## Terza Rima

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Dante's *triple* [p. 340] rhyming verses symbolic of the Trinity, and



compounding the recurrence of the numbers three and nine throughout his works. For example the thirty-three Cantos of each section of the DC to which is added the introductory Inferno Canto I. And the nine-fold plus one structure of the three spaces of the Vision themselves, Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. See also the Vita Nuova II for the significance of number in the first meeting of Dante and Beatrice, and Vita Nuova XXIX for the significance of number in the date and time of her death.

The terza rima verse form consists of verses of three eleven-syllable lines (the three Cantiche consist of thirty three, = three times eleven, cantos of these triplets, plus the introductory canto to Inferno). The rhyme scheme of ABA BCB CDC etc means that each verse links to and embraces the following verse's middle line, almost like hands clasping. The triplets mirror the Trinity.

## Thresholds, Guardians

*MedIII:1* [p. 28] The Gate of Hell is the first threshold Dante passes. (Earth)

*MedIII:3* [p. 30] The Acheron is the second barrier into Hell proper. Charon is the ferryman. (Water)

*MedV:1* [p. 33] Minos sits at the threshold of the Second Circle, judging the spirits and sending them onwards to their appropriate place. He judges the sinners, those who have abused *freewill* [p. 271] through lack of *self-control* [p. 314], or through *violent* [p. 345] or *fraudulent* [p. 270] *malice* [p. 292]. (Mythological Human/Monster)

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Cerberus guards the threshold of the Third Circle, his cruel greed

corresponding to the sin of Gluttony punished there. (Mythological Monster)

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] Plutus guards the threshold of the Fourth Circle, his derivation from gods of wealth and the underworld corresponding to the sins of avarice and prodigality. (Pseudo-Mythological Monster)

*MedVIII:1* [p. 43] The Styx is the threshold of the Fifth Circle and the city of Dis. Phlegyas, who scorned Apollo, is its boatman. (Water/Earth)

*MedVIII:2* [p. 44] The gate guarded by the Fallen Angels is the entrance to the City of Dis and the lower circles of Hell. (Earth/Fire/Mythological Figures)

*MedIX:1* [p. 45] The Furies and Medusa also guard the gate of Dis, and a Heavenly Messenger is required to open it and aid the poets. (Mythological figures)

*MedXII:1* [p. 50] The unnatural Minotaur guards the way down to the seventh circle of the violent. The bull signifies violent rage, and also the deceit attending his conception, as well as hinting at the labyrinth of Hell. (Mythological Hybrid)

*MedXII:2* [p. 50] The unnatural Centaurs are the police of the first ring of the seventh circle, that of the violent against others. (Mythological Hybrid). They fought the Lapiths and signify violence themselves.

*MedXVII:1* [p. 57] Geryon is the guardian of the threshold of the Eight Circle. (Mythological semi-human). He signifies Fraud.

*MedXXI:1* [p. 62] *MedXXIII:1* [p. 64] The Malabranche are the Demon police of the ditch containing the barrators. (Mythological semi-humans).

*MedXXXI:1* [p. 73] The Giants are the guardians of the Ninth Circle, signifying pride and the malicious abuse of power.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] Cato is the guardian of the Mount of Purgatory. Dante is cleansed by Virgil at the foot of the Mount, in a rite of passage.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] The Tiber is a threshold for those spirits who do not sink to Acheron. They wait there for the Angel to carry them across the ocean to the Mount of Purgatory. The Jubilee provides a time for transit. The Angel of God is the ferryman, the guardian of the sea passage.

*MedXLII:1* [p. 104] The two Angels, dressed in green robes, sent by the Virgin, protect the ante-Purgatory, where the will can still be assailed by doubt. Their faces dazzle the observer.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] An Angel with a face again too bright to endure sits at the threshold of Purgatory, its three steps signifying the stages of Penance.

*MedXLIX:1* [p. 115] Each terrace of the Mount of Purgatory is watched over by an Angel, of the opposite virtue to the sin purged there.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] Matilda (historically Matelda di Canossa, *Grancontessa* of Tuscany) attends the threshold of the Earthly Paradise, the River of Lethe. She symbolises the active spiritual life, the active religious will, the spirit of forgiveness, and the reconciliation of an independent Church and State each in their proper sphere.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Aquinas acts as intellectual guardian of the threshold to the four higher spheres, those beyond the shadow of the Earth in the Prolemaic system.

*MedXC:1* [p. 217] After his journey and his 'education' below, Dante is examined by the Apostles (Saints Peter, James and John) concerning his understanding of the theological virtues. The Saints hold the threshold of the Primum Mobile of the Angels.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Bernard the symbol of loving contemplation stands at the final threshold of the Divine.

## Time

*MedIV:2* [p. 32] The Vision is set at a specific point in time (April 1300) and time passes to a careful chronology, yet time for the dead spirits is also in a sense contemporaneous in the *Commedia*, allowing historical characters to appear together from all the ages. In Hell time can be said to be an eternal recurrence, in Purgatorio it is a progress towards redemption, and in Paradise it is an eternal moment of true contemporaneousness where all the ages are ever-present. Earthly time however unfolds normally and Dante takes care to avoid anachronism, through the use of prophecies, and expectation, otherwise concealing the knowledge of events after the time of the Vision.

*MedX:3* [p. 47] Earthly time will end at the Last Judgement when futurity ceases.

*MedXXI:1* [p. 62] Virgil frequently asserts (Cantos VII, XI, XX) the position of moon and stars, invisible in Hell, but here it is the Demon Malacoda who enables the chronology to be established.

*MedXXXIV:2* [p. 78] Virgil once more shows his special knowledge of the time. The Poets' journey through Hell has taken from dawn of Good Friday to the evening of Saturday. The climb to the foot of the Mountain of Purgatory takes till the dawn of Easter Monday.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Dante's argument for the unity of the soul. A multiple soul would not lose track of time when absorbed in a topic of interest.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Purgatory takes a length of human time to traverse. Virgil warns Dante that purgation is not a matter of hurrying through. A carefully established chronology sees the Poets climb the Mount, from East through North to finally ascend the Western Slope between Monday and Thursday morning.

*MedXLIV:2* [p. 109] Purgatory is bounded in time and its sufferings cannot last beyond the Day of Judgement. Hell is eternal recurrence.

*MedLIII:2* [p. 124] The anti-clockwise journey round the Mount signifies the soul's return to first innocence, and childhood purity, 'setting the clock back', though in the southern hemisphere it does in fact follow the sun.

*MedLXVIII:2* [p. 166] Dante rises into Heaven at midday on Thursday (in Purgatory: it is midnight at Jerusalem). He then goes round the world with the day, so that, for him, it remains mid-day, and no 'earth-time' passes.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The sun measures time, and Dante complements the timeless nature of Beatrice's grace and movement with the regularity of practical wisdom and order as measured by solar time and the clock.

*MedXCIV:2* [p. 224] Time has its origin in the *Primum Mobile*, the moving sphere 'below the Empyrean' (or in the Mind of God).

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] Time was created in the instant of God's Creation.

## Treachery

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] The lowest form of malicious fraud and therefore punished in the deepest circle of Hell, the Ninth. It breaks both natural and human bonds.

*MedXXXII:1* [p. 74] Treachery breaks the bond of trust which is an aspect of Faith. Treachery is an un-faith, and therefore represents an intellectual and emotional opposite to the heights of Paradise, placing it in the deepest parts of Hell.

*MedXXXII:2* [p. 75] Dante chooses traitors near to home to people the lower reaches of Hell. Treachery, which is composed of un-faith and malice, engenders other sinful behaviours, anger, pride, violence and cruelty, as though the deepest sin encompasses wider sin.

*MedXXXIII:1* [p. 76] The Ninth Circle is full of Italian examples of treachery. Ugolino's is the most powerful tale that shows innocent children dragged within the net of evil.

*MedXXXIII:2* [p. 76] More Italian examples people the Ninth circle, where some treacherous spirits have left behind their demon-inhabited bodies on earth. Treachery is an absence of soul, unlike the union of souls represented by faith and trust.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] The arch-traitors to Empire and Religion, Brutus, Cassius and Judas, are tormented eternally by Satan, in the pit of Hell. Treachery is the antithesis to the trust and faith on which temporal and spiritual life must be founded, their institutionalised forms being Empire and Church.

## Triplicities

*MedI:3* [p. 22] The three predictions of 'a saviour of Italy'.

*MedII:1* [p. 24] The three strands of his life, Spiritual, Political, Personal (Soul, Mind and Body, Heart). The three cities corresponding, those of God, Rome and Florence. The terza rima structure of the verse. The handling of past, present and future. The triplicities in the whole work. All symbolic of the Trinity.

*MedII:3* [p. 27] The three ladies who intercede for Dante, the Virgin, Lucia and Beatrice.

*MedIII:1* [p. 28] The Gate of Hell was created by the Holy Trinity of Power, Wisdom and Love.

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Appearance of the personal, political and spiritual strands in the Francesca episode and Ciacco's prophecy.

*MedVII:1* [p. 40] The Archangel Michael is mentioned, the first of the three archangels referred to in the *Commedia*.

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] The violent are divided into those violent against God, the self, and society, reflecting the triple radiance of God's love from the soul, to the self, to one's neighbours.

*MedXXXIV:1* [p. 77] Satan's three faces signify Hatred, Powerlessness and Ignorance. The three winds generated by his wings signify lust, pride and avarice. The antithesis to faith and trust are the three greatest traitors, Brutus, Cassius and Judas, chewed by Satan's three mouths.

*MedXXXIV:2* [p. 78] The journey with Virgil to the foot of Purgatory takes the Poets three days. Each of the three cantica: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* ends with the word *stelle*, stars, indicating that the Divine Love manifests itself as light. Each is also composed of thirty-three cantos (Christ's age at the Crucifixion, by tradition, was thirty three in 33 AD.)

plus the initial introductory canto to *Inferno*, and written in terza rima, triplets of eleven syllable lines.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] Dante clasps Casella three times, proving the insubstantial nature of the spirits, as in Homer (*Odyssey* XI) and Virgil (*Aeneid* VI). This makes the third use of the image in a major epic poem.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] A trio of vivid vignettes of individuals who died by violence, Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte, and La Pia.

*MedXLI:1* [p. 102] Limbo is a place for those who did not attain the Christian triad of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

*MedXLI:2* [p. 103] Sordello, Dante and Virgil form a trio of Poets.

*MedXLII:2* [p. 104] Dante takes three paces down into the valley of Negligent Rulers.

*MedXLII:3* [p. 105] Three unknown evening southern polar stars represent the theological virtues.

*MedXLIII:1* [p. 106] The first of Dante's three dreams in Purgatory, one for each night he spends on the Mount: the regenerative Eagle.

*MedXLIII:2* [p. 107] The three steps of the Gate of Purgatory, signifying Confession, Repentance and Forgiveness.

*MedXLVI:2* [p. 112] On each of the seven terraces of the Mount of Purgatory, the Poets encounter an Angel, a Beatitude is voiced, and one of the letter P's on

Dante's forehead is erased.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Dante celebrates three virtuous contemporaries, Corrado, Gherardo and Guido.

*MedLI:1* [p. 118] Dante continually winds together the three strands of history, Classical and Imperial, Biblical and Christian, and Contemporary.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] Inferno the divided community, Purgatorio the self re-oriented to community, Paradiso the expression of community.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] The second of Dante's three dreams, on the second night: the Siren. Virgil calls him 'at least three times' to wake him from it.

*MedLV:1* [p. 127] Dante triply highlights Statius's Christian status, referring to the Woman of Samaria and the water of Truth, Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus, and Statius's Christian greeting to the Poets.

*MedLVI:2* [p. 131] Statius, Virgil and Dante travel on: a trio of Poets.

*MedLXII:1* [p. 143] The three days penance of Henry IV in the snow, prior to his pardon by Gregory VII, echoes Dante's three day purgation on the Mount prior to his confession to Beatrice.

*MedLXII:2* [p. 144] Dante and Matilda are three steps apart across the river, the 'three steps' of repentance, confession and forgiveness.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] The Elder representing the Books of Solomon, three times asserts the Church as the Bride of God. Beatrice is clothed in the colours white, green and red of Faith, Hope and Charity the three theological virtues. Beatrice asserts her reality with a triply repeated '*ben*'.

*MedLXV:1* [p. 151] At this crucial moment of Dante's personal and spiritual existence the triplicities are interwoven: Past, Present and Future: Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso: Repentance, Confession and Forgiveness.

*MedLXV:2* [p. 152] The four cardinal virtues appear in three forms, as Beatrice's eyes on earth: as nymphs her helpers in Purgatory: and as the stars of the Southern Cross in Heaven.

*MedLXVI:1* [p. 153] Beatrice descends from the Chariot after three flights of an arrow.

*MedLXXIV:1* [p. 181] Dante urges himself to speak to Beatrice, in the same sphere of Mercury the planet of communication, with a three times repeated *dille*.

Dante's text links Word, Creator and Love in an expression of the Trinity.

*MedLXXV:1* [p. 183] Dante refers indirectly to the three hierarchies of Angels, each of three Orders.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] The trinity, referred to as Primal Power, the Son, and the breath, or holy spirit, of Love. The lights circle three times around Dante and Beatrice.

*MedLXXX:1* [p. 196] *MedLXXXI:1* [p. 197] The spirits sing of the Trinity.

*MedLXXXI:2* [p. 198] The triple circles signify the Trinity.

*MedLXXXVII:1* [p. 211] The three theological virtues are celebrated again, in that faith can be generated through hope and love, as in the cases of Trajan and Ripheus. Note that faith, hope and charity or love, also correspond to the Trinity: the Father in whom faith is demanded, the Son who brought hope of redemption, and the Holy Spirit which infuses the mind with love.

*MedXCI:1* [p. 218] Saint Peter sweeps round Beatrice three times, and after Dante's successful explanation of faith and his belief, around Dante in the same manner. Dante expresses his belief in the Trinity, and the sources in Scripture from which the belief arose are given here.

*MedXCII:1* [p. 219] The three occasions when Christ allowed the Apostles near to him: at the Transfiguration, the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and the Agony at Gethsemane.

*MedXCII:2* [p. 220] The three Apostles Peter, James and John representing faith, hope and love.

*MedXCIV:1* [p. 223] Peter's condemnatory triple repetition of 'my place'.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] The Angelic Orders are arranged in three triplets.

*MedXCVI* [p. 227] The Creation involved the triple creation of form, matter and being. Beatrice explains the triple where, when and how of the Angel's creation.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] The angels' colours flame, gold and white symbolise love knowledge and purity. Dante has made a triple journey from from the human to the divine, from time to eternity, and from Florentine chaos to Heavenly order.

*MedXCIX:1* [p. 230] Lucia has appeared three times in the Commedia, once in each of Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] The triple rainbow symbolising the Trinity. All three Cantiche end with the same word *stelle*: stars.

## Troubadours

*MedII:1* [p. 24] Dante inherited the poetic tradition of Provence influenced by Arabic sources.

*MedV:1* [p. 33] Dante supersedes the Troubadour tradition of courtly love. He

retains and absorbs the concepts of that love as embodying Courtesy, Humility and a Religion of Love, but opposes its condonement of adultery.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Bertrand de Born, one of the greatest of the troubadour poets.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Dante had gone beyond Courtly Love and Troubadour poetry, and the new sweet style of Tuscany, with its emphasis on unrequited irrational passion, and the tormented and depressed spirit, to a spiritualised celebration of human Love, still humble and still religious in feeling, but now focused away from the flesh and towards Lady Philosophy, Human Philosophy, enabling Love to be a question of reason as well as passion. The Purgatorio expresses his further movement beyond this to Divine Love and Philosophy embodied in Beatrice, and a rejection or transcending of his Troubadour heritage, of the pursuit of purely human reason, and of his earthly loves.

*MedXL:3* [p. 101] Dante is inspired by Sordello's famous Provençal lament for Blacatz to a prolonged invective against the current state of Italy.

*MedXLVIII:1* [p. 114] Guido del Duca's lament, like a Troubadour *planh*, for the lost virtues of the Romagna, a forerunner of many a medieval lament for the 'ladies and the knights' of 'love and courtesy'.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] Virgil's explanation of rational love goes beyond the tradition of Courtly Love. Love is not necessarily destructive or irrational. Where it is so it is due to a misuse of freewill and the choice of wrong objectives, or an inadequate or excessive desire. Natural love is error free, but Rational love may err. True love is creative. It nurtures relationship and generates spiritual community.

*MedLII:1* [p. 121] The further explanation by Virgil that not all the objects of desire are acceptable, and that we have the power of self-control, and the freewill to withhold assent goes beyond the tradition of Courtly Love, where the lover is merely ravaged by the irrational external force.

*MedLX:1* [p. 138] The representatives of the Troubadours and the school of adulterous love appear: Giraut de Borneil and Arnaut Daniel: as well as their successors Fra Guittone and Guido Guinicelli.

*MedLXXVI:1* [p. 185] The troubadour Folco of Marseilles appears, as a follower of earthly love, subsequently penitent.

## Truth

*MedI:3* [p. 22] As an objective of the political saviour of Italy who is yet to come.

*MedXL:2* [p. 100] Divine Philosophy, personified in Beatrice, is 'the light linking



truth to intellect’.

*MedL V:3* [p. 129] In the truthful spirit feeling follows passion and is manifest (in laughter and tears etc) despite the controlling will.

*MedLXIX:3* [p. 170] Dante (through Beatrice’s words) presents the Neo-platonic order of the Universe as a revealed Truth, a matter in which the intellect should trust (an aspect of faith), and which it will find realised self-evidently hereafter.

*MedLXX:1* [p. 171] Beatrice smiles at Dante’s inability to see as self-evidently true what appears to him in Paradise.

*MedXCV:1* [p. 225] God is ultimate truth. Blessedness depends on the vision of truth, on seeing, rather on the degree of love. Love is a consequence of being blessed, rather than a cause of it. The extent of vision depends on grace and right use of the will.

*MedXCVII:1* [p. 228] Dante unites Truth and Goodness, to be known by the intellect, out of which flows the transcendent joy of Love. Though Truth and Love coexist in God, intellect and knowledge in Man is the cause of human love.

## Violence

*MedV:1* [p. 33] One of the divisions of the malicious is those who are guilty of forms of violence.

*MedXI:1* [p. 48] Virgil explains the nature of violence subdivided into violence against others, self and God.

*MedXII:1* [p. 50] The Minotaur signifies violence and guards the way down to the seventh circle.

*MedXII:2* [p. 50] Dante’s non-individualistic treatment of the violent against others suggests his implicit recognition of the banality of that violence, and the lack of individuality it represents. It does not interest him intellectually.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Florence as a violent city.

*MedXIV:1* [p. 52] Capaneus as a type of the violent against God.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] A trio of vivid vignettes of individuals who died by violence, Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte, and La Pia.

*MedXL:1* [p. 99] Dante has no difficulty illustrating his violent times from the crowd of spirits around him. The Italy and France of poison, vendetta, factional fighting, murder and intrigue.

## Virgil

*MedVII:3* [p. 42] Dante was highly indebted to Virgil's Aeneid Book VI for the early imagery of the Inferno, and the concept of assigned punishments.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Dante uses the imagery of people turned to trees from Aeneid Book II.

*MedXIX:1* [p. 60] Virgil is pleased at Dante's support for Empire and Early Church, the Roman roots. He symbolically clasps him in his arms.

*MedXX:1* [p. 61] Virgil gives an account of the founding of his birthplace Mantua that differs from his own version in the Aeneid. Also Virgil is aware of the moon and star positions, here and in Cantos VII and XI.

*MedXXIII:1* [p. 64] Virgil's attitude to Dante, like mother and child, father and son, reflecting the relationship of master and pupil, precursor and protégé. Dante denotes intellectual 'paternity' and 'maternity' as a dimension of the linkage of ideas, and causes, between individual related minds.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Virgil lends Dante hope, and is a light to him.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] La Pia's words echo the inscription on Virgil's tomb at Naples.

*MedXLIX:2* [p. 116] Dante's thoughts are visible to Virgil, who continually gives him hope and exhorts him to exert himself.

*MedLIII:1* [p. 123] Virgil, representing earthly reason, alerted by a saintly lady representing heavenly grace, appears within Dante's dream, and wakes him to true good from the seductive apparition of the Siren.

*MedLV:1* [p. 127] Virgil is literary master, historian of Imperial Rome, prophet and guide, but is limited by his paganism to earthly knowledge. He therefore does not know the cause of the earthquake.

*MedLXI:3* [p. 142] Virgil's last speech sends Dante onwards, beyond his own knowledge, into the beatitude of the Earthly Paradise. His own art, skill and earthly philosophy have taken Dante as far as he himself can go. Beatrice will be the new guide through the Earthly Paradise and the Paradiso.

*MedLXIII:1* [p. 146] Virgil, like Dante, is stunned, as a pagan, by the Divine Pageant of the Church.

*MedLXIV:1* [p. 148] As Beatrice appears to guide Dante onwards, Virgil vanishes. Dante's last words directed towards him are a quotation from the *Aeneid*.

The pagan Virgil's presence is neither necessary nor possible from this point on. We are at the limit of earthly wisdom.

## **Virgin Mary, The Goddess, Feminine Influence**

*MedII:3* [p. 27] The Virgin intercedes to bring Dante help, via Lucia, *Beatrice* [p. 245], and ultimately Virgil.

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] Buonconte dies repeating the Virgin's name, a sign of his repentance.

*MedXLI:2* [p. 103] The Virgin protects the lower slopes on the approach to Purgatory proper, where the will may still be assailed by doubt and temptation, and negligence is contrasted with her endless care.

*MedXLIX:2* [p. 116] At the entrance to each terrace of the Mount, an incident from the life of the Virgin is referred to, demonstrating her role as the expression of all the virtues.

*MedXCVIII:1* [p. 229] Bernard, who in life adored the Virgin, now brings Dante to the vision of her to receive the benefits of her grace, the feminine aspect of Divine protection.

*MedC:1* [p. 231] Bernard's prayer to the Virgin associates her with Love, Hope, Grace, Kindness, Pity, Generosity, and other human excellences. She is an embodiment of nurturing, empathetic, and loving humanity, taking on many of the positive and benign attributes of the ancient goddesses. Bernard asks the Virgin for her grace towards Dante so that he might see the final vision, and his protection afterwards.

## **Virtues**

*MedXXXV:1* [p. 87] The cardinal virtues (Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude) are symbolised by the stars of the Southern Cross.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] The rays of the cardinal virtues strike Cato's face.

## **Voice**

*MedII:2* [p. 26] Beatrice's voice is angelic.

*MedXXVII:1* [p. 68] Guido da Montefeltro's voice issues from the flame distorted like the bellows of the Sicilian bull.

## **Walking, travellers**

*MedI:1* [p. 19] As a metaphor of spiritual effort, personally chosen direction, ascent and descent, speed or slowness, ease or difficulty. It is the nature of his progression in the Inferno and Purgatorio. Poetic and physical 'feet'.

*MedXXXV:2* [p. 88] A simile of lost travellers returning to their road.

*MedXXXVI:1* [p. 89] Travellers contemplating their journey.

*MedXXXVI:2* [p. 90] Travellers unsure where they will emerge.

*MedXXXVII:1* [p. 92] Virgil slows his pace to one which lends dignity to action.

*MedXXXVII:2* [p. 93] Dante's knowledge of the rough tracks of Italy, here that between Lerici and Turbia in Liguria.

*MedXXXVIII:1* [p. 95] Steep tracks in Italy, near Urbino and Reggio. Purgatory requires the effort of climbing, which eases nearer the summit.

*MedLI:1* [p. 118] Dante measures his steps by those of his master, Virgil.

## War, Civil Strife

*MedVI:1* [p. 37] Ciacco prophesies continued civil strife between Blacks and Whites.

*MedX:1* [p. 46] Farinata's presence brings to mind Montaperti in 1260, and the bloodshed by the Arbia.

*MedXII:2* [p. 50] The violent against others. A depressing list of historical tyrants, murderers, and war-mongers.

*MedXIII:1* [p. 51] Various references to Florentine civil strife.

*MedXXI:1* [p. 62] Dante as witness to the incidents at Caprona in 1289, and others on Aretime territory.

*MedXXIV:1* [p. 65] The civil strife of 1302-6 between Whites and Blacks in Florence and Pistoia.

*MedXXVII:2* [p. 68] Guido da Montefeltro, the mercenary captain, involved at Forlì, and at Palestrina in 1297. A type, like Farinata, of the noble warrior, who could not be redeemed by wisdom, nobility and courtesy alone.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] A string of famous wars and battles mentioned: the Roman Samnite and Punic Wars, including the Roman defeat by Hannibal at Cannae: the Sicilian wars of Robert Guiscard: the betrayal of the pass at Ceperano to Charles of Anjou leading to Manfred's defeat and death at Benevento in 1266: and the defeat of Manfred's nephew Conradin at Tagliacozzo in 1268.

*MedXXVIII:1* [p. 69] Julius Caesar's march on Rome, initiating Civil War, and Mosca's involvement in the factional strife in Florence are mentioned.

*MedXXIX:1* [p. 70] In this Canto and the previous one Dante has circled in from wider warfare and its history to Florence, and finally his own family, in giving examples of civil strife and discord. Conflict is ubiquitous.

*MedXXXVII:3* [p. 93] Manfred died at Benevento in 1266, a defeat for the Italian Ghibelline cause in its struggle with the Papacy (Charles of Anjou being backed by Pope Clement IV).

*MedXXXIX:2* [p. 98] Buonconte serves to remind the reader of Campaldino in 1289 and the Ghibelline defeat, where Dante is said to have fought on the Florentine Guelph side.

*MedXLVII:2* [p. 113] One of a number of references to Siennese battles. The Siennese Ghibellines routed at Colle in 1269 by the Guelphs. Previously, Umberto Aldebrandesco's death at Campanatico in 1259.

*MedLXXXV:1* [p. 207] The warriors of the old and new faith are honoured in Paradise. The sphere of Mars is that of the Church Militant.

## Wisdom, Knowledge

*MedIII:1* [p. 28] Divine Wisdom was one of the shaping forces of the Gates of Hell, and Hell itself.

*MedLVIII:3* [p. 135] Dante associates excessive desire on the terrace where gluttony is purged, with the Tree of Knowledge in Eden, and the excessive desire for knowledge, and the disobedience, of the Fall. In turn this is linked to Satan's disobedience, in the verses of the Inferno.

*MedLIX:1* [p. 136] Statius explains the origin of the individual, unified, soul. After death it retains intellect, memory and will. The rational soul breathed into the individual by God persists after death, along with wisdom.

*MedLXXVII:1* [p. 188] Dante is unable to express the brightness of the sphere of the Sun by any known means, intellect, art, or knowledge, but it can be a subject of faith and hope. The sphere of the Sun is that of prudence, practical wisdom.

## Wrath, Anger

*MedVII:3* [p. 42] The Wrathful in the fifth circle are the last of the sinners punished for their lack of self-control in the upper reaches of Hell.

Lust, Gluttony, Avarice and Anger are these sins of incontinence.

*MedXII:2* [p. 50] The Centaur Nessus signifies the anger involved in the violence of vengeance and other crimes involving force against others.

*MedL:1* [p. 116] Marco Lombardo on the Third Terrace of the Mount of Purgatory expresses that anger that condemns the modern age, with its corrupted Empire and Papacy. This political wrath Dante must leave behind, untying the

knot, and progressing to a calm understanding of existence.

*MedLI:3* [p. 119] A sin arising from a wrong objective of rational Love. Related to Envy and Pride. An error in relationship in the presence of others, it is divisive of community. It wishes harm to others.

## **About the Author**

Anthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.