GANZ NOTES
DANTE ALIGHIERI (1265-1321)

Version: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 October 2020

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

I couldn't help but imagine that this particular text may have been a favorite of Dante, one upon which he reflected for many years.

Ephesians 2 (REB) - YOU ONCE were dead because of your sins and wickedness; [2] you followed the ways of this present world order, obeying the commander of the spiritual powers of the air, the spirit now at work among God's rebel subjects. [3] We too were once of their number: we were ruled by our physical desires, and did what instinct and evil imagination suggested. In our natural condition we lay under the condemnation of God like the rest of mankind. [4] But God is rich in mercy, and because of his great love for us, [5] he brought us to life with Christ when we were dead because of our sins; it is by grace you are saved. [6] And he raised us up in union with Christ Jesus and enthroned us with him in the heavenly realms, [7] so that he might display in the ages to come how immense are the resources of his grace, and how great his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. [8] For it is by grace you are saved through faith; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, [9] not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of; [10] we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the life of good deeds which God designed for us.[1]

He Tore Down the Wall (Eugene Peterson)

Ephesians 2: [1–6] It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled

[1] *The Revised English Bible* (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; Madrid; Cape Town; Singapore; São Paulo; Delhi; Dubai; Tokyo: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Eph 2:1–10.

your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. [7–10] Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.[2]

SONG – "THE LAST GOODBYE" BY BILLY BOYD

Find Billy Boyd's lovely presentation of his song on the soundtrack of *The Hobbit* (86 songs total), soundtrack by Howard Shore, but also with songs inserted by other artists, such as Billy Boyd and Ed Sheeran, etc. This song is on the album *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (released 8 December 2014).

From *Songfacts* website (https://www.songfacts.com/facts/billy-boyd/the-last-goodbye): "**Scottish actor and musician Billy Boyd, who played Peregrin Took in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, wrote and recorded this tune for the end credits of *The Battle of the Five Armies*.** The Peter Jackson-directed movie is the final part of his six film journey based on the J.R.R. Tolkien classic novels *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. **'We focused on not just the final installment, but more so on this ten-year epic adventure," Boyd told *Billboard* magazine. 'A song to sum up the six movies.** We recorded in Wellington, New Zealand, at one point travelling to Auckland to Neil Finn's studio -- where we recorded some of the guitar.'"

[Verse 1]

I saw the light fade from the sky,
On the wind I heard a sigh,
As the snowflakes cover my fallen brothers
I will say this last goodbye.

[2] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Eph 2:1–10.

[Chorus]

Night is now falling.
So whence this day?
The road is now calling.
And I must away
Over hill and under tree,
Through lands where never light has shone
By silver streams that run down to the sea.

[Refrain]

Under cloud, beneath the stars
Over snow one winter's morn,
I turn at last to paths that lead home.
And though where the road then takes me
I cannot tell.
We came all this way
But now comes the day
To bid you farewell.

[Verse 2]

Many places I have been;
Many sorrows I have seen.
But I don't regret,
Nor will I forget
All who took that road with me.

[Chorus]

Night is now falling.
So whence this day?
The road is now calling.
And I must away
Over hill and under tree,
Through lands where never light has shone,
By silver streams that run down to the sea.

[Refrain]

To these memories I will hold.
With your blessing, I will go
To turn at last to paths that lead home.

And though where the road then takes me
I cannot tell.
We came all this way,
But now comes the day
To bid you farewell.

[Outro]

I bid you all a very fond farewell.

A POEM

What if you slept...
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

What if you slept
And what if
In your sleep
You dreamed
And what if
In your dream
You went to heaven
And there plucked a strange and beautiful flower
And what if
When you awoke
You had that flower in your hand
Ah, what then?

QUOTATIONS

Concerning Ephesians 2: – Verse 6 – Now he says more specifically that our life has come to be there, enthroned with Christ. If this is not explicitly stated elsewhere in the Pauline letters, the meaning is implicit in such a passage as Colossians 3:1–3. **Humanity, by virtue of Christ's conquest of sin and death and by his exaltation, is lifted 'from the deepest hell to heaven**

itself' (Calvin). Citizenship is now in heaven (Phil. 3:20); and there, and not under the limits imposed by the world, nor in conformity to its standards (Rom. 12:2), true life is found.[3]

Yet even a little taste of the *Comedy*, as we hope to offer in this issue, yields rewards. In the words of C. S. Lewis, "There is so much besides poetry in Dante that anyone but a fool can enjoy him in some way or another."[4]

As the *Comedy* unfolds, Dante tells the story of **a pilgrim's journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven during the Holy Week of 1300 CE.** The opening lines of the poem describe the pilgrim as "midway in life," probably referring to Dante's thirty-fifth birthday in the spring of 1300 [possibly May 29th]. Age 35 would be half the biblical life span of "three score and ten years."[5]

"T. S. Eliot, the lawgiver of early-twentieth-century poetics, placed Dante on the highest possible rung of European poetry. 'Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them,' he wrote. 'There is no third.'"[6]

"In Charles Singleton's thought-provoking formulation: "The fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not fiction." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1718.]

"Dante had an exceptional capacity to evoke the visual, the visceral; to imagine a world and give it form and substance with incredible verbal economy and precision. By conjuring up the sights and sounds and smells of the familiar world with unparalleled immediacy, he was able to lead his readers through invented worlds that were utterly convincing though infinitely strange. He populated them with individuals whose emotions and moral predicaments are tangible and compelling. Those he encounters speak with eloquence and their interchanges with Dante are full of drama. He expressed the whole range of human feelings in their raw power and endless variety: hope, fear, rage, delight, remorse, nostalgia, yearning, affection, disgust, anxiety, sorrow, astonishment, melancholy, curiosity, despair." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014, "Introduction." Kindle Edition.]

---

[3] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 82.

[4] "How Not to Read Dante," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[5] Jeanetta Chrystie, "The Pilgrim Way," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[6] See: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/05/27/what-the-hell.

Dante, Inferno, Canto III, lines 7-9, lines 1-9 are what are written on Hell's Gate through which Dante and his guide Virgil will now pass: "FROM NOW ON, EVERY DAY FEELS LIKE YOUR LAST FOREVER. LET THAT BE YOUR GREATEST FEAR. YOUR FUTURE NOW IS TO REGRET THE PAST. FORGET YOUR HOPES. THEY WERE WHAT BROUGHT YOU HERE."[7] [Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Clive James (p. 15). Liveright, 2013. Kindle Edition.

Joseph Luzzi, a review of the James Clive translation in the *New York Times* (19 April 2013), begins his review in this way – The perfect translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* remains one of literature's holiest grails. Some translators have captured facets of the poem's magic, but always at a cost: Charles Singleton conveys Dante's erudition but flattens his poetry; John Ciardi recreates his music but takes mammoth liberties with the original; and John Sinclair's "thees" and "thous" date his otherwise deft rendering. If the translator's task is "to liberate the language imprisoned in a work," as Walter Benjamin writes, then few literary strongholds come as heavily fortified as *The Divine Comedy*. Written in Dante's native Tuscan instead of the more prestigious Latin, the poem and its earthy idiom, copious allusions and other-worldly precision burden translators, especially in rhyme-poor English, which struggles to match the momentum of Dante's *terza rima* and internal rhymes. No wonder that Dante's latest translator, the eminent Australian poet and critic Clive James, feared his task would be "thankless."

Prue Shaw – "In the estrangement from Cavalcanti lie the seeds of the future. **Dante will go on to explore and express with unparalleled power the religious faith that fires him. His political commitment will come to transcend local issues and to engage with fundamental questions about *the conditions necessary for human beings to flourish wherever they live*.** And he will go on to conceive an almost unthinkably ambitious poem of encyclopedic aspirations, **which will use the vernacular speech of his native Florence in all its rich multifariousness of linguistic register to create a poetic masterpiece** that can stand alongside the epics of the great classical poets—and in so doing prove himself one of the greatest poets of all time." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright. Kindle Edition.]

"**Our sense that an acknowledgement of intellectual and psychological indebtedness is a key moral obligation in Dante's ethical universe, and ingratitude a particularly heinous moral failing**, will be confirmed when we find that at the very bottom of hell, among the traitors, the very worst of them are those who betrayed benefactors." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1611.]

[7] The Hollanders' translation of these lines stick closer to the Italian: "[7] BEFORE ME NOTHING WAS BUT THINGS ETERNAL, [8] AND ETERNAL I ENDURE. [9] ABANDON ALL HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE." These first nine lines of Canto III are capitalized in the Italian.

TIMELINE[8]

1295 – Dante joined the guild of physicians and apothecaries, an influential conglomerate that included writers (because books were sold in drugstores), painters (considered "purveyors of colors," a subset of apothecaries), and the mighty Medicis (a name that literally means "doctors").[9]

1302 – Dante banished from Florence by the Black Guelfs. He would never return there.

1306 - Probably the year in which Dante interrupts the *Convivio* and begins the *Comedy*.

1314 – *Inferno* published

1315-1321 – Dante finished the *Divine Comedy* in Ravenna, where he had lived since 1319. He dies in the same year that he finished his masterwork.

WEBSITES

The Princeton Dante Project, v2.0 – https://dante.princeton.edu. Based on the world-class work of Robert and Jean Hollander, who together made a definitive edition of the *Divine Comedy*, published by Doubleday.

Columbia University's Digital Dante site - https://digitaldante.columbia.edu. This is an especially rich website. One could spend years enjoying its abundance.

STUDIES

The books by Prue and Mazzotta are masterly, accessible, each of them full of wisdom in themselves, and elegantly presented.

[8] I am following the Timeline constructed in *Christian History Magazine* #70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell, "Dante's Turbulent World".

[9] Elesha Coffman, "The Root of All Kinds of Evil," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

Prue Shaw, *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*.
Publisher : Liveright; Reprint Edition (February 10, 2014)
Publication Date : February 10, 2014
Print Length : 352 pages
ASIN : B00EIMTTJE

Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Reading Dante*.
The Open Yale Courses Series
Paperback : 312 pages
ISBN-10 : 0300191359
ISBN-13 : 978-0300191356
Publisher : Yale University Press (January 14, 2014)

An address by Peter Kalkavage to students and faculty at Belmont University in Nashville, TN (July 2015) is worth reading. It is found published in full on *The Imaginative Conservative* website: https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2015/07/dantes-global-vision-seeing-and-being-seen-in-the-divine-comedy.html.

AT CHARTRES CATHEDRAL WITH MALCOLM MILLER

I remember visiting that Cathedral (built 12th & 13th centuries) in the summer of 1977, going with a fellow student out from Paris to experience that magnificent gothic structure. When we got there, she sheer richness of presentation on and in that edifice is simply overwhelming. Where does one start? To what in particular ought one to pay attention? As we stood gaping inside the nave, we noticed others being invited by a man to join him. His name was Malcolm Miller. Twice a day he would give a free "reading" of some part of that Cathedral. Chartres Cathedral has **175 stained glass windows** in it, most of them installed at the time of the building and completion of the Cathedral. And then there are **all of the stone sculptures**!!

Trying to figure out how to "read" Dante and his work in the span of just 90-minutes at The Night School (20 October 2020) is daunting! I learned from Malcolm Miller how instead to pay closer attention to just a few things, in which is access into Dante and his spirit.

Kathleen Lang (http://artagogo.com/commentary/miller/miller.htm): "Ask anyone who has visited Chartres Cathedral and they will tell you that no tour is complete without a lecture by Malcolm Miller. Malcolm Miller was born in England and educated at King Edward VI School, Birmingham, and Durham University. **He has lectured at Chartres Cathedral since 1958, speaking twice daily from Easter until November**. Each winter he tours outside France to lecture at art galleries and museums.... According to Mr. Miller, the 13th century Chartres Cathedral can be compared to a library. And like a library, we may visit and read many books,

maybe even re-read some books, but we will never read all the books. Chartres is much the same. Its contents: architectural design, statues, and stained glass are each like books and their respective images their text. What is remarkable in this new millennium, said Miller, is that much of Chartres can still be "read."”

Someone else noted this about Malcolm Miller: “Malcolm Miller has been granted two of the highest civic honors by the French government: a knighthood in the National Order of Merit, and a knighthood in the Order of Arts and Letters.”

Another, in a *New York Times* article, wrote: “This is no academic exercise for Mr. Miller. He does it almost every day in the vast, vaulted nave of Chartres Cathedral, where for the last 26 years he has been a tour guide and lecturer. Twice a day, seven days a week, he stands at the rear of the church and invites English-speaking visitors to accompany him on a 90-minute tour.”

A PROPOSAL ABOUT READING THE COMMEDIA

“The *Commedia* is not a political tract, just as it is not a sermon. The power with which Dante projects his vision of a world gone wrong was the only power he could call on: the power of words. **One need know very little medieval history (none at all, in fact, when one starts reading the poem) in order to appreciate the force of his vision. One merely needs to be alive to the power of his shaping imagination and his language**.” [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1409.]

> The newness of the sound and the bright light →
> lit in me such keen desire to know their cause 84
> 84 as I had never with such sharpness felt before.
>
> Dante. *Paradiso* (*The Divine Comedy* series Book 3) (Kindle Locations 719-724). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

I have begun to wonder *whether a person goes the wrong way* when he or she begins to read the Commedia at *Inferno*. I imagine it is true that the Commedia is the greatest work of Literature that almost no one has read! (Perhaps as is the case with Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.) Readers start with Inferno, **believing that one should properly begin at the beginning**.

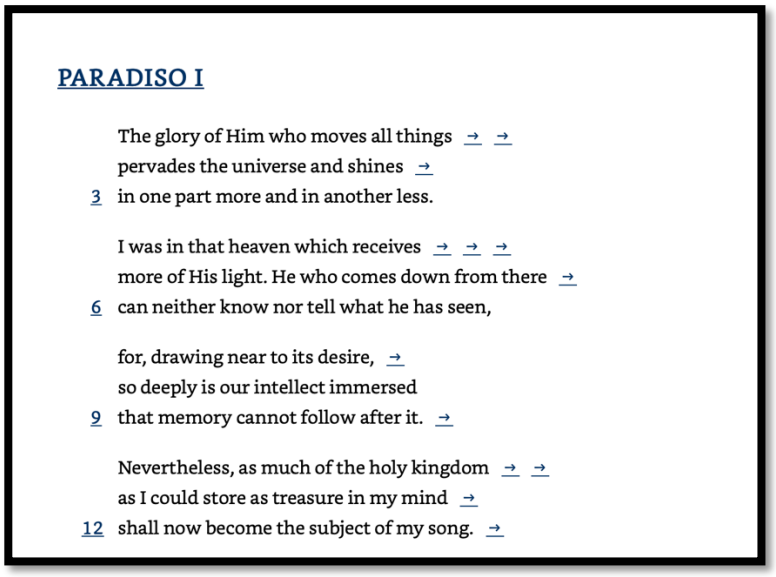
What I think ends up happening is that readers get so weighed down by the darkness of Inferno that they do not continue reading, and most likely never finish reading *Inferno*.

And so this is my growing conviction: **a reader should begin the *Commedia* at the *Paradiso***. In this way, that Reality that we are missing, forgetting is re-planted in our imagination. Only

having experienced the beauty of *Paradiso* will the contrast with Inferno be understood best. When so much, so much of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, is offered to all of us from the moment we can receive such a Gift and understand it, why is it that we end up choosing that which earns us a Ring in Hell?

And it is in *Paradiso* that we see Beatrice in all her magnificent beauty, truth, and goodness, meet her who had a care for Dante when he had learned how not to care for himself, for the beauty, truth, and goodness in himself. It is Beatrice who sends Virgil – O the courtesy of true goodness to know who would be the best emissary/guide from Beyond to send to each particular person! (Notice how God through Beatrice sends a non-Christian!)

Notice how at the beginning of Paradiso (Hollander), there is left so profound an impression on Dante's imagination and intellect and affect that he cannot imagine every forgetting it:



PARADISO I

The glory of Him who moves all things → →
pervades the universe and shines →
in one part more and in another less.

I was in that heaven which receives → → →
more of His light. He who comes down from there →
can neither know nor tell what he has seen,

for, drawing near to its desire, →
so deeply is our intellect immersed
that memory cannot follow after it. →

Nevertheless, as much of the holy kingdom → →
as I could store as treasure in my mind →
shall now become the subject of my song. →

WHY THE COMMEDIA IS A WORK OF IMAGINATION

In order to understand anything, we have to have been able to form in our imagination an accurate image of what we are trying to understand. We human beings have no capacity to think without images. Dante rightly perceived how the Florentine and European theaters of action were seriously damaged because of what this and that faction **imagined** that "their world" should be, and therefore what the world needed to be. **And so, if people have sustained the greatest damage not in their intellects or in their wills but *in what they imagine reality is*, then one desiring to help them must meet them at their imagination**.

The central issue with sin, with our sins, is not primarily that they make us **bad**, but that sin makes us unreal. **Sin is a habit of unreality, a learning how to be unreal**, turning us into shadows/shades as Dante and Virgil will find in Hell. And when we live in unreality, we do bad things to others, wrecking them as we are wrecking ourselves.

We ***imagine*** a reality that we judge better or more advantageous (for us!) than what we have, and feeling attracted to that vision, we act to make that vision happen. It never occurs to us to seek to know God Who made us, learning how to understand why and for what purpose He made us and placed us right where we are. **His will for us IS what reality is**.

Sin is a deliberate choice to become less real, to be the god of our own life, which is why sinning is bad! Jesus became human not to find a more effective means of getting into our face about how bad we can be, and too often are! Jesus came to live a real life, to demonstrate what it looks like to be – each of us – as God made us to be ... and to learn to choose that every time.

The more unreality that we build and inhabit, the more irritated or downright furious we become at those who are more real than we are. Why? Because those who have learned to live in reality can easily perceive the falseness of those who have chosen to live a "shadow/shade" life. Unreal people know this; **that they are seen for who they have become**. (T.S. Eliot famously called such people "the hollow men".) **Such people do not like at all that they are seen truly**. **Those who have made themselves so powerful in their "shadow" world find themselves feeling exposed and vulnerable and weak when those truly real, genuinely good, simply look at them**.

Think of how the demons could not help but be convulsed in fear and anger whenever Jesus came near – Jesus the most real human being ever. Why do they feel threatened? Well, one reason is that "**shadow/shade" people have to make up reality as they go, and, having to be the gods of their own self-creation, they have constantly to sustain their unreality. It is incredibly difficult to maintain falsity!** They are threatened by real people (because they are real, we also call them good) who appear to the shadow/shade people to do what they do *effortlessly*. This particularly angers the "shadow/shade" people.

Dante, who had the intellectual chops to write a learned theological tract, chose instead to write a poem, a massive one, which is a *commedia* (i.e., it is about real people, what actually real people know and struggle to figure out). And this poem is a narrative about actual people. **It is only in stories that one soul is able to give himself or herself to another**. Dante knows that he cannot think his way out of his "lost" state at the midpoint of his life. If anyone in history, we imagine, could think his way out of his or her lostness, then it would have been someone like Dante or Aquinas or Augustine, etc. But Dante knows that this "healing adventure" is only partially about the activation of his brilliant mind. He must achieve what Bernard Lonergan, SJ spoke of as ***an affect-laden insight***. An affect is activated through images (such as stories).

The weaving pattern of this poetic form is a practice of linking, of reconnecting things that stand apart. One possible understanding of the etymology of the word "religion" is that it comes from *re-* "again" and *ligare*: "to attach or connect". "Religion" is that which "reconnects" or to use the earlier metaphor, it is that which *re-weaves* what has come unwoven.

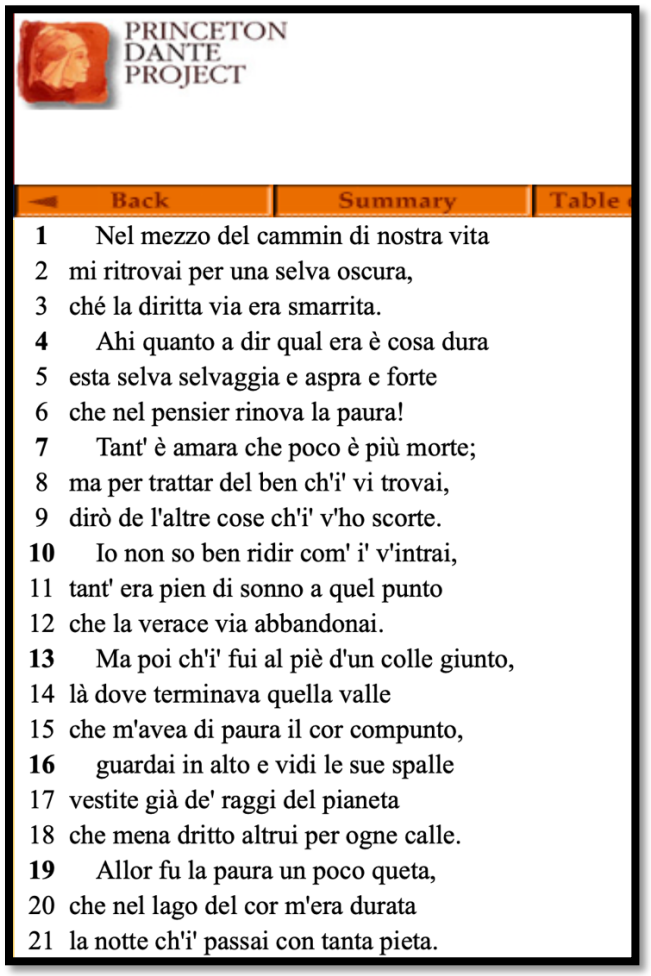
"Dante's poem is fiendishly difficult to translate into verse, partly because of its lovely, garlanded rhyme scheme, ***terza rima*—or aba, bcb, cdc**. To reproduce the *Comedy* in English *terza rima*, it has been calculated, approximately forty-five hundred triple rhymes are needed. In Italian, where almost every word ends in a vowel, you can come up with such a number. In English, it is next to impossible...."[10]

"In some periods devoted to order and decorum in literature—notably the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—many sophisticated readers scorned the *Divine Comedy* as a grotesque, impenetrable thing. **But not in our time. T. S. Eliot, the lawgiver of early-twentieth-century poetics, placed Dante on the highest possible rung of European poetry. "Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them," he wrote. "There is no third." A lot of literary people then ran out to learn some Italian, a language for which, previously, many had had scant respect, and a great surge of Dante translations began.** In some—Laurence Binyon's (1933-43), Dorothy Sayers's (1949-62)—the translator even tried to use Dante's rhyme scheme, *terza rima* (**aba bcb cdc**, etc.), a device almost impossible to manage in English, because our language, compared with Italian, has so few rhymes."[11]

Look for this rhyme scheme in the Italian of Dante, *Inferno*, Canto I, from the beginning:

[10] From https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/09/03/cloud-nine.

[11] See Joan Acocella (20 May 2013) - https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/05/27/what-the-hell.



WHY WRITE IN POETRY?

Dante speaking in Canto XIX on "Simoniacs"[12], line 21: "**and let this be my seal, to undeceive all men.**" Dante here is talking about a heroic act by which he saved someone (a boy?) who was drowning in the Baptistry (who someone fell into it), an act which some thought was sacrilegious – a violation of the structure used for holy acts. He is "undeceiving" here those who thought ill of him. However, I like this line outside of its context, because it seems to sum up a great deal of why Dante wrote the *Commedia* – for the purpose of "undeceiving" people about who they are.

[12] The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**simony**" (sourced in the Simon Magus of Acts 8:18-19) – "The buying or selling of ecclesiastical or spiritual benefits; *esp*. the sale or purchase of preferment or office in the church. Also sometimes more generally: trading in sacred things."

Concerning Dante's *Vita Nova* - "It is also, crucially, the story of his development as a poet who expresses that love and tries to understand its meaning. **The turning point in the story comes not when she dies, but when the young man realises that exalting her beauty and virtue is an end in itself. That is what his poetry is for.** Its proper end is divorced from any sense of it as a means to winning her favour. His understanding of that truth has the force of a revelation. It is enough simply to celebrate Beatrice for her numinous value as an embodiment of what is best in the world and a reflection of the goodness of her creator.... **Poetry has become an instrument of exploration**." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

"**Auden, writing in memory of Yeats on the eve of World War II, famously said that "poetry makes nothing happen." Dante thought that it could, and hoped that it would.** He did not share our modern sense of the impotence and marginality of the poet faced with the horrors of the contemporary world. **Poetry in the *Commedia* is, precisely, for changing the world**. The poet writes - he is instructed by Beatrice in the course of his journey to write - *in pro del mondo che mal vive* ("**for the benefit of the world which lives badly**"). To bring about a change he must call to account not just misguided Florentine leaders but the major political players on the European stage of his time. **Their shamelessly self-serving misconduct lies at the root of the world's ills. The popes fail in their role as spiritual guides; the secular rulers are motivated by naked ambition and greed.**" [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

MAP OF DANTE'S UNIVERSE – TRUE GLOBALISM

Peter Kalkavage (2015) – "**Dante's *globalism*, his vision of the whole, is not confined to the earth but extends to the entire universe. This includes the *invisible*, spiritual world as well as the *visible*, corporeal one.** It embraces the human and the divine, the natural and the supernatural. As we know from his writings and the events of his life, **Dante cared passionately—one might say, desperately—about community and about "how it goes" with the world**. The cosmos for him is the Community of communities. This Community affirms, rather than negates, the human individual and all the smaller, local groups to which we belong: our cities, towns, and neighbourhoods."[13]

Why is it that the Archangels (Gabriel) and the Angels of all Ranks were so personally involved in what went on in Bethlehem, in the stable there? Because all of them, because

[13] See at the Imaginative Conservative website: https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2015/07/dantes-global-vision-seeing-and-being-seen-in-the-divine-comedy.html.

they are so close to God and in the divine Light continuously, recognize how human beings, with our taste for unreality, have skewed, distorted the grace of the whole symphony of Creation.

Peter Kalkavage (2015) – "Dante's universe is not an infinite expanse but a bounded, beautifully ordered whole: **a work of art**. It is what the ancient Greeks called a *kosmos*—a term that means "ornament". Central to this idea is ***hierarchy*** or ***rank***, an order of higher and lower."

Notice how it is that we humans, when we sin in some way that really catches our attention, or exposes us to the attention of others, **we like to say "That wasn't really me. I'm not like that."** In this way we learn to excuse ourselves rather than to use our transgression as an occasion of self-knowledge. Recall Peter who said to Jesus with utter conviction, "Lord, if all else leave you, I will *never* leave you." But then in the garden that night at the palace of the High Priest, Peter "who wasn't like that" betrayed the one person whom he vowed never to leave or fail to support. Unlike Judas, who could not accept the devastating insight about something true about himself – "I deliberately sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver" – he chose to do to himself what his betrayal "with a kiss" would do to Jesus: he would murder himself. On the other hand, Peter repented, he faced his betrayal ... but only with Jesus' magnificent sweetness and insight at the Sea of Galilee that morning after breakfast (John 21). **Now, to the point here: we must not overlook how HELL is *included* in Dante's map of the universe**. Because it is the "un-Earth" and "in-human" location, we might have thought to exclude it as not part of the universe. Instead, HELL is part of the universe. Notice especially at *Inferno*, Canto III, and the middle three of the nine lines written in capital letters on Hell's Gate:

> Justice moved my Maker on high [the Gate is speaking/saying this]
> Divine power made me,
> Wisdom supreme, and primal love. (Hollander)

In other words, by God's justice, power, wisdom, and primal love, Hell was made! It is a created reality along with the rest of the created universe. And because it is, **we should not be surprised that Hell itself – the actions and attitudes of self-loving people – is very much a part of the universe, and God's "understanding" of "the whole universe" includes, it does not exclude, this fact about the universe**.

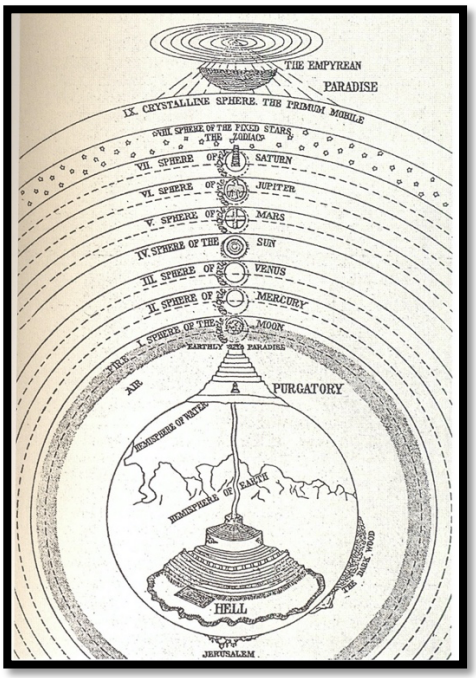
PTOLEMY[14] - "Now we move beyond the earthly paradise into *Paradiso*. As we read the third canticle, we find that Dante uses **a Ptolemaic structure of the cosmos**. For him, as for Ptolemy, **the earth is at the center of the universe—unmoved, immobile—and there are seven planets that circle around it: the moon is thought of as a planet, Mercury, the sun**

[14] *Britannica Online* - **Ptolemy, Latin in full Claudius Ptolemaeus, (born c. 100 CE—died c. 170 CE)**, an Egyptian astronomer, mathematician, and geographer of Greek descent who flourished in Alexandria during the 2nd century CE. **In several fields his writings represent the culminating achievement of Greco-Roman science, particularly his geocentric (Earth-centred) model of the universe now known as the Ptolemaic system**.

(also thought of as a planet), Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Beyond that there is the heaven of the so-called fixed stars, the Prime Mover in the ninth sphere, and beyond that the Empyrean, the heaven of fire. From the Prime Mover all motion begins, from it time starts. Out there at the edge is really where the roots of time are found, stretching out into the finite world; so that we find ourselves in the shadows of the leaves of time, which are always falling and being replaced. Such is the layout of Dante's Ptolemaic cosmos." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 181). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.

PLANETS AND REALMS & THE LIBERAL ARTS – "The structure of the heavens reflects a pedagogical structure: "**Another thing we have to keep in mind in Paradise is that Dante links each of the planets with one of the liberal arts, a propensity of his mentioned previously**. He begins with grammar in the **Moon**, and so you have to expect that you will find there the language of grammarians and a very wide definition of what grammar can be. It includes poetry. It includes history. It even includes some rhetorical tropes. And then there's the heaven of **Mercury**, tied to dialectic (which means logic here), and so you find the language of dialectic deployed throughout the canto. The heaven of **Venus** is linked with rhetoric, probably the least surprising connection, that of eros and rhetoric. They have an old kinship, and they seem to entail each other. Then Dante couples the heaven of **Mars**, the god of war, with music, in the persuasion that music is a harmony made of discordant parts. As a result, there is a kind of simultaneous attraction and strife within this heaven. Then there's geometry, linked with the temperateness of **Jupiter**, and then astronomy and **Saturn**. The heaven of the **fixed stars**, at least in *Convivio*, is tied to physics and metaphysics, and the **Prime Mover** is associated with ethics. Finally, the heaven of the **Empyrean**[15] is the heaven of metaphysics and theology, **a sign that Dante has changed his mind since writing the *Convivio*, where he had claimed that ethics was the first and most important of the arts, the discipline to which all other arts are subordinated and toward which they all point**. When Dante writes *Paradiso*, he acknowledges that you cannot quite separate ethics from a metaphysical theory about the being of the world. Dante will go on back and forth in reconfiguring the relation of those two disciplines." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (pp. 181-182). Yale University Press. Kindle Edition.]

[15] The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**empyrean**" – "The highest or most exalted part or sphere of heaven; (in ancient cosmology) the sphere of the pure element of fire; (in Christian use) the abode of God and the angels."



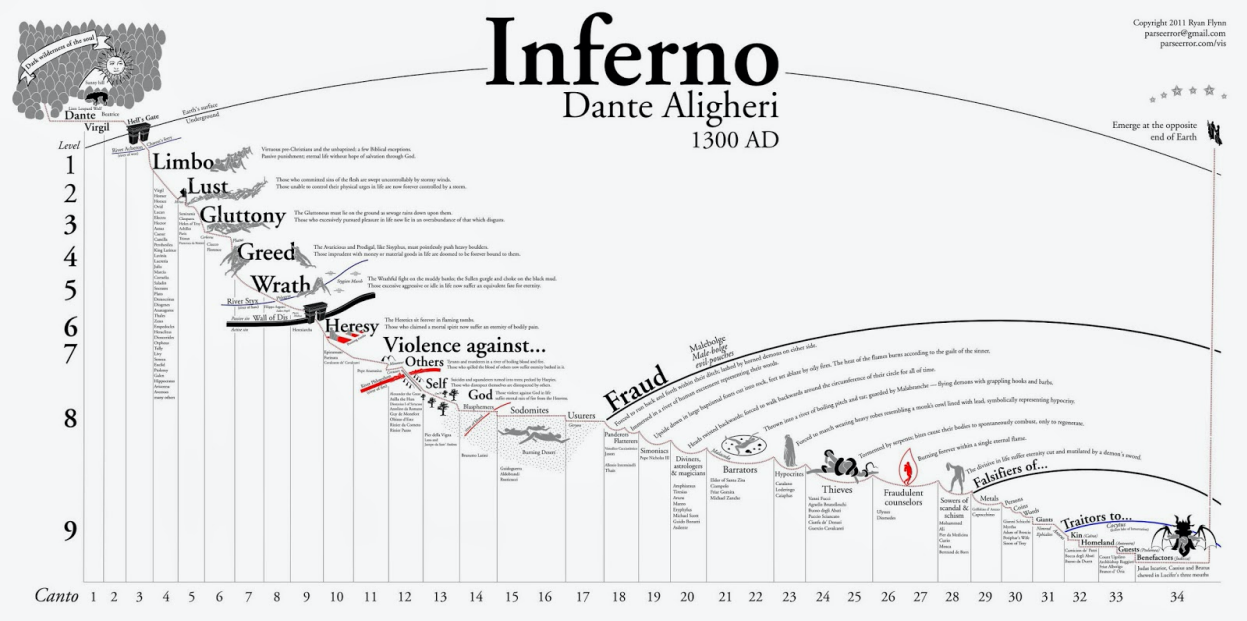
Land of Maps – Dante's Universe[16]

What I want to highlight here is how in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, the "world" was **externally** organized, whether the Greek City-States or the massive political and military structures of the Roman Empire. **In both cases, the "center" of the world was a City (and the people who ruled from there)**. But that "world", constituted by power, always collapses. What Dante does is to reconstitute the "world" as centered in the particular human soul that accepts to respond to the divine Love that "elects" him or her to embark on an (educative) adventure. The "center" is no longer a well-governed City; it is now to be a well-governed individual Soul.

But now we have Dante, who well knows the power of a City – Florence – and those who rule from three (the *grandi*, or, as contemporary Italian has it, the *pezzi grossi*). But his vision includes a profoundly massive architecture of the whole Universe, such that even the greatest earthly City or Empire is as nothing.

MAP OF DANTE'S HELL

[16] https://landofmaps.com/2016/07/04/the-universe-according-to-dante/.



DANTE'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF HELL AT FLORENCE

"Also in the archives in Florence are the key documents that tell the stark facts of Dante's banishment. **A first one records the exile imposed on him, along with other White Guelfs, on January 27, 1302. There were three charges against him: financial corruption and extortion in public office; opposition to the pope's requests for aid; connivance in the expulsion of the Black Guelphs from Pistoia.** There were three punishments: a fine of five thousand florins; exclusion from public office for the rest of his life; and banishment from Florentine territory for two years. If the fine was not paid within the space of three days, his property would be destroyed. Dante was probably on the return journey from Rome when the news reached him. He never reentered the city." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright. Kindle location, 1501.]

"Leonardo Bruni, the chancellor of Florence who lived a hundred years after Dante and wrote a brief life of the poet, had access to autograph letters which do not survive. We have his reliable description and partial translation into Italian of one such Latin letter. **It pinpoints the period Dante served as prior as marking the turning point in his life: "All my misfortunes and all my troubles were caused by and started with the ill-fated assemblies of my priorate. . . ." The point at which he achieved the highest office possible in the commune, the summit of his political ambition, was the very point at which things started to go disastrously wrong.** [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location, 1528.]

Peter Kalkavage (2015) – "The epic's inspiration was Beatrice, Dante's personal angel and beloved, whom Dante first met when they were only children. Heaven takes pity on Dante, and Beatrice, now enthroned in Paradise, descends into Hell for his sake—into Limbo, the home of virtuous pagans. There she entreats Virgil, the noble and humane poet of Rome and Dante's poetic model, to serve as Dante's mentor and guide. Virgil leads Dante through Hell and Purgatory. Beatrice, his higher guide, then takes over and leads him through Paradise. At the end of the poem, Dante reaches the end of all desire: He sees God."

It comes down to this. When we have "fallen", lost our way is some significant way (and we are meant to grasp that this was Dante's state at the midpoint of his life), we imagine that we still have the capacity to know the right way. We say to ourselves, those "fallen" things that I did *were not really me*." But that is the point. When we fall badly, we have become darkened. We deceive ourselves to conclude that we still know the right way to go. Notice how it is that when we meet Dante in this Canto I of *Inferno*, he tries to figure out the right way to go, **but he is blocked from going that way because it is in fact the wrong way, for him, Dante, to go**. He, any of us who have gotten "lost", need someone sent us to show us the right way, someone whom we have been given the ability to trust enough that we will do as he or she says even when we feel such resistance to taking their lead!

"**Virgil** undoubtedly does represent human reason, but he is first and foremost the historical Virgil, the great poet of antiquity whom Dante revered above all others. (Dante had no direct knowledge of Homer, whose reputation he took on trust.) **Beatrice** does indeed represent divine grace or revelation (or whatever is necessary for salvation in a Christian world that human beings cannot supply for themselves), but she is first and foremost the historical Beatrice, the girl Dante knew and loved in the Florence of his youth. **Virgil and Beatrice are not ciphers invented to carry a moral or spiritual meaning. To attach a label to them is to diminish them. They are real individuals who once were alive. They have names, identities and histories that are theirs and theirs alone**." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1658.]

"**And he [Dante] has a name**. Like Marcel in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* he is named just once in the text. **At the climactic moment when he is reunited with Beatrice in the earthly paradise and she speaks to him for the first time, his name, Dante, is the first word she utters**. (Botticelli, who knew the Commedia intimately, seems deliberately to echo this by signing his own name just once to his series of drawings for the poem. It is visible on a placard carried by one of the angels in the sheet devoted to Paradiso xxviii.) **Like Marcel, Dante becomes in the course of the work the writer who is capable of writing the work of which he is the protagonist. The story recounted in the work is, among other things, the story of**

how he becomes that writer." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1658.]

"Virgil and Beatrice are the two supremely meaningful figures in Dante's own poetic and emotional life, the one a literary passion, the other an enigmatic, elusive real-life relationship. Their choice as guides to the afterlife links autobiography to allegory in a powerfully original way. Dante reinvents and transcends a medieval genre, inspired in part by the account in Aeneid vi of Aeneas's visit to the underworld but also by biblical narratives and their ways of signifying. In so doing he created a poem that is in every way a match for the great classical epics of antiquity." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1855.]

VIRGIL – In her introduction to *Purgatorio*, translator Dorothy Sayers writes, "Virgil is necessary to Dante; he is his 'contact' in the world of spirits, lending him eyes to behold the secret things; he sustains and heartens him for the steep ascent, **his teachings lay the foundations for the loftier revelation to come, he is the preparation for the Gospel here as in the world of the living**."[17] And in another source, "Later Christian writers accorded Virgil a unique position among pagan authors, partly because of their naïve acceptance of the *Sibylline Oracles and the Sibylline Fourth *Eclogue*, but also because of the poet's genuine qualities. The *pietas* of Aeneas (his loyal devotion to his gods, to his father, wife, and son, and to his city and its 'remnant', his companions), his responsibility and warmth of emotion, his consideration for Dido, his goodness and wisdom in spite of lapses and errors, and his eventual faith in Providence, evince a moral standard with appeal to Christians. **Aeneas' creator could be taken as *anima naturaliter Christiana*, separated only by a few years from the faith for which he was ready**. In the **Divine Comedy* Dante makes Virgil his guide through Hell and Purgatory, but excludes him from salvation. Virgil sinks back to Limbo, but only after hearing that he has mediated the light of faith to Statius, and after seeing Beatrice's cortège in the Earthly Paradise."[18]

"Even texts which were not created by their authors to carry an allegorical meaning can lend themselves to this kind of interpretation. The *Aeneid* was often so read and understood in the Middle Ages. The surface meaning of Virgil's poem is the travels and travails of Aeneas between the time he leaves Troy and arrives in Latium, where he will found the city that is to become Rome. **But the poem also yields a second meaning—the trials and tribulations any man will face in the course of his life, which test his mettle as a moral agent**. Aeneas resists the attractions of Dido, demonstrating great self-control. He persists in his mission despite many

---

[17] Steven Gertz with Janine Petry, Boyd Jonathan, "Walk of Fame," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[18] F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1714.

obstacles, demonstrating courage and fortitude. Medieval readers evidently found this habit of reading for an underlying uplifting meaning second nature. Dante himself read the Aeneid in this way, as we learn from the *Convivio*." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1634.]

Garrison Keillor on 15 October 2020 – It's the birthday of the poet Virgil, born Publius Vergilius Maro near Mantua, Italy, 70 B.C.E. Not much is known about his early life, and although some biographers made him out to be a country bumpkin, he probably came from a well-off family who sent him off to get a good education. He may have been socially awkward and sickly, but no one knows for sure. He left behind some of the most beloved poems written in Latin: his pastoral poems, the *Eclogues*; his poems about farming, the *Georgics*; and the poem he wanted destroyed, *The Aeneid*. Emperor Augustus commissioned Virgil to write *The Aeneid*, and he worked on it for 11 years, but it still wasn't finished at the time of his death. He left behind a request that the unfinished poem be burned, but Augustus forbade this from happening. The emperor's orders were followed, and *The Aeneid* became a classic, and Virgil's best-known work.

WHY SET OUT ON THIS ADVENTURE AT ALL?

St. Augustine teaches that God works primarily *through persuasion*, which means that for him desire, and the kindling of desire in a person – the right and holy desire for God alone – is what is most important. This "unsatisfied desire more desirable than any other satisfaction" (C.S. Lewis) is what keeps "the heart restless / until it rest in Thee" (St. Augustine).

> *The newness of the sound and the bright light →*
> *lit in me such keen desire to know their cause*
> *84 as I had never with such sharpness felt before.*
>
> [Dante. *Paradiso* (*The Divine Comedy* series Book 3) (Kindle Locations 719-724). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]
>
> *The innate and never-ending thirst for God →*
> *in His own kingdom drew us up,*
> *21 almost as swiftly as you know the heavens turn.*
>
> [Dante. *Paradiso* (*The Divine Comedy* series Book 3) (Kindle Locations 967-973). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]
>
> *that, all the more, should kindle our desire*
> *to see the very One who lets us see*
> *42 the way our nature was conjoined with God.*

[Dante. *Paradiso* (*The Divine Comedy* series Book 3) (Kindle Locations 1020-1025). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]

WHAT THE POET/PILGRIM KNOWS & DOES NOT KNOW

"It's **the shipwreck of the mind**, a mind that seems to be unable to define both his whereabouts and his destination." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 28). Yale University Press, 2014). Kindle Edition.]

"So, right from the start we can see that the poem has a double narrative focus. The first focus is that Dante is going to tell us the story of a pilgrim who is caught in what we call the *diachronic*,[19] the time-bound—a number of encounters which he cannot quite understand. ***As a result, he's led by Virgil, as we're going to find out soon, but he doesn't fully comprehend what's happening to him***. Then there is the second focus, the poet who has seen it all and enjoys an omniscient perspective. The whole poem really moves around this double axis: the axis of a *synoptic*[20] view of **the poet who has become a poet because he had this experience as a pilgrim and who then tells us about this experience**." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 26). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

"If you are really wise, if you are a philosopher, then you know that you can turn your head around and see where the source of true light is [he is referring to Plato's famous allegory of the Cave], and then you are saved. **The whole experience of the cave is predicated on this premise: that knowledge saves you, that knowledge is virtue**. And knowledge does save you to the extent to which it can heal what one could call ***the wounds of the intellect*: ignorance**

---

[19] The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**diachronic**" – "*Linguistics*. [translating French *diachronique* (F. de Saussure *a*1913, in *Cours de linguistique générale*(1916) iii. 120).] Pertaining to or designating a method of linguistic study concerned with the historical development of a language; historical, as opposed to descriptive or synchronic." And as to "**synchronic**" – "*Linguistics*. [translating French *synchronique* (F. de Saussure *a*1913, in *Cours de linguistique générale*(1916) iii. 117).] Pertaining to or designating a method of linguistic study concerned with the state of a language at one time, past or present; descriptive, as opposed to historical or diachronic."

"**diachronic** [dy-ă-kron-ik] Relating to historical change over a span of time. The revolution in linguistics begun by Ferdinand de Saussure in the *Cours de linguistique générale* (1915) is founded partly on the distinction between the diachronic study of linguistic features evolving in time and the *synchronic study of a language as a complete system operating at a given moment. **Saussure argued, against the historical bias of 19th-century *philology, that the synchronic dimension or 'axis' must be given precedence**. Noun: diachrony. [Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford Quick Reference) . OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.]

[20] The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the adjective "**synoptic**" – "Of a mental act or faculty, conduct, etc.: Pertaining to, involving, or taking a combined or comprehensive mental view of something."

being the wound that knowledge, learning, education, and philosophy can cure. Dante will find out very quickly that this idea is a false promise, that in many ways his own realities are going to be a little bit more complex than what one can find in manuals of philosophy about how we get saved and how we can save ourselves." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 27). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

"**The body stands for the limit of purely intellectual journeys**. The real journey that he has to undertake is the journey of mind and body, and the body stands for the irreducible historicity of one's self. The body stands for one's own reality, the passions. It stands for one's own will. This is the difference between what the Greeks understand as the great intellectual adventure, which is one of knowledge, and Dante's idea that the real problems are problems of the will. We may not know where we are, and we may understand that we are not happy with the situation in which we find ourselves, but we cannot quite solve these problems with knowledge alone because the problems here are problems of willing." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 28). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

I have often pondered why it is that when we want to hurt someone, we attack his or her body! The "problem" that such an enemy is to us has little to do with his or her physical presence (except as deployed for malign purpose by the person). We seek to hurt a **person** (a purely spiritual reality – the unifying of the material element (body) and the spiritual element (intellect, spirit, values, affect). **The sheer physicality of *Inferno*, then, is particularly fascinating, and the creative power Dante spends describing their physical sufferings**.

"**Poetry and history deal with the world of contingency and not the world of universal, and therefore potentially empty, promises**. That's the great new interpretation of Virgil that Dante is advancing." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (pp. 31-32). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

THE MEANING OF ADVENTURE

In my way of thinking, an "adventure" is not something that one sets out to have. Rather, it is about one setting out, who has not the slightest idea what will come find him or her (Latin, *advenire*, which means "to come to a place". But I prefer to define it as "something/someone *coming towards*" a person who sets out. This is the gist of Tolkien's comment that one never knows what might happen if he, a hobbit, simply steps out the door!

A Walking Song (by Bilbo Baggins)[21] –

Upon the hearth the fire is red,
Beneath the roof there is a bed;
But not yet weary are our feet,
Still round the corner we may meet
A sudden tree or standing stone
That none have seen but we alone.
Tree and flower and leaf and grass,
Let them pass! Let them pass!
Hill and water under sky,
Pass them by! Pass them by!

Still round the corner there may wait
A new road or a secret gate,
And though we pass them by today,
Tomorrow we may come this way
And take the hidden paths that run
Towards the Moon or to the Sun.
Apple, thorn, and nut and sloe,
Let them go! Let them go!
Sand and stone and pool and dell,
Fare you well! Fare you well!

Home is behind, the world ahead,
And there are many paths to tread
Through shadows to the edge of night,
Until the stars are all alight.
The world behind and home ahead,
We'll wander back to home and bed.
Mist and twilight, cloud and shade,
Away shall fade! Away shall fade!
Fire and lamp, and meat and bread,
And then to bed! And then to bed!

Prue Shaw is the only scholar that I have read, to this point in my reading, who refers to the *Commedia* as an adventure: MOST ENGLISH READERS KNOW THAT DANTE IS A GREAT POET, but few of them have read him. His masterpiece, the *Divine Comedy*, ***is an adventure story***: a journey into the mysteries of the afterlife, a pilgrimage through hell,

[21] See: https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/A_Walking_Song.

purgatory and paradise towards a final, face-to-face meeting with God. Its broader concerns are those of any thinking person, in any time and place. **What does it mean to be a human being? How are we to judge human behaviour? What matters in a life or in a death?** These themes are explored in a gripping narrative, and in language that is uniquely vital and expressive. [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*, from the "Introduction". Liveright, 2014). Kindle Edition.]

ADVENTURE STORY – "A loose but commonly accepted term for a kind of prose *narrative addressed for the most part to boys, in which a hero or group of heroes engages in exotic and perilous exploration. It is a masculinized variety of *romance, one in which the erotic and religious dimensions common to other types are subordinated to or completely replaced by an emphasis on vigorous outdoor activity and the practical arts of survival amid unexpected dangers, along with a cultivation of such virtues as courage and loyalty. Marvellous events may be witnessed, but usually within a context provided by modern scientific knowledge. The genre flourished in the later 19th century, its most influential master being the French writer Jules Verne, whose series of eighteen *Voyages extraordinaires* include *Voyage au centre de la terre* (Journey to the Centre of the Earth, 1864) and *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea, 1870). Popular examples in English included H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1886), Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), and P. C. Wren's *Beau Geste* (1924)." [Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford Quick Reference) . OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.]

THE PROBLEM OF FINALITY – THE FALLEN WILL

If I have never been where I am striving to go, then how do I really know that I have gotten there when I arrive? From the start of *Inferno* (Canto I), the *unknowing* of Dante as to where he is or where he is going is made clear. It is Virgil, sent by Beatrice in Heaven, who comes to Dante to guide him. Virgil knows; Dante does not know.

Consider how often in the *Commedia* Dante will write: "Look and see." One can only know where one is going by going, by trying to get there.

"He draws attention to ***the essential existential problem, the problem of the self.*** **My will is divided against itself. I may know what to do, but I do not really know, and even if I do know, I am not sure that I will it.** That's the fatality of life. We all think we know what's good. How many of us go around choosing and doing what we know is not good for us, what is not the best possible thing to do in terms of our judgment of our situation? **So it's the perspective of the will that becomes Dante's perspective in coming to terms with the limitations of**

philosophy and intellectual knowledge." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 29). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.

"DANTE IS AS "ENGAGED" a political writer as there has ever been, and as brave a one. A modern parallel would be Russian writers exiled under Stalin for speaking out: Osip Mandelstam comes to mind. Dante wanted a better world for the poor and the powerless, whose lives are made wretched by the greed and corruption of the powerful, and by the endemic warfare and civic unrest entailed by their ruthless pursuit of personal ambition. His calling to account of those responsible for the sorry state of the world—religious and secular leaders who fail in their duties because of naked self-interest and greed—is as powerful a political statement as any ever penned. **The underlying aspiration is always clear: *peace*, so that human beings can lead productive and fulfilling lives; justice, so that wrongdoers are punished.**" [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

"The *Commedia* is not a political tract, just as it is not a sermon. The power with which Dante projects his vision of a world gone wrong was the only power he could call on: the power of words. **One need know very little medieval history (none at all, in fact, when one starts reading the poem) in order to appreciate the force of his vision. One merely needs to be alive to the power of his shaping imagination and his language**." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1409.]

COMEDY VS. TRAGEDY

COMEDY[22] – "A play (or other literary composition) written chiefly to amuse its audience by appealing to a sense of superiority over the characters depicted. **A comedy will normally be closer to the representation of everyday life than a *tragedy, and will explore common human failings rather than tragedy's disastrous crimes.** Its ending will usually be happy for the leading characters. In another sense, the term was applied in the Middle Ages to narrative poems that end happily: the title of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (c.1320) carries this meaning." [Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford Quick Reference) . OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.]

"**We refer to the poem as the *Divine Comedy*, but it should be just *Comedy***. That's what Dante called it, and he called it *Comedy* for a number of reasons. The first reason is that it ends

[22] The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**comedy**" – "In the Middle Ages: a narrative poem intended to entertain the hearer or reader and having a happy ending. In later use chiefly with reference to or in the title of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. *Now historical.*"

with happiness. **It's a story that begins with disorder, a catastrophe if you wish; the pilgrim is lost in the woods and then works himself out toward the light, toward the truth, toward God. In that sense "comedy" describes the thematic trajectory of the poem.** It's going from one condition to another, and from this point of view it's literally the opposite of the tragic movement. In the tragic movement, you always have an initial state of cohesion or initial state of happiness that moves toward fatality or disaster." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 23). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

INFERNO, CANTO I – A FAILED JOURNEY

Pope Francis I on 20 October 2020 – "Today we will complete the catechesis on the prayer of the Psalms. Above all, we see how there often appears a negative figure in the Psalms, called the "wicked" person, that is, he or she who lives as if God does not exist. This is the person without any transcendent referent, whose arrogance has no limits, who fears no judgment regarding what he or she thinks or does.... For this reason, the Psalter presents prayer as the fundamental reality of life. The reference to the absolute and to the transcendent – which the spiritual masters call the "holy fear of God" – and which makes us completely human, is the boundary that saves us from ourselves, preventing us from venturing into life in a predatory and voracious manner. Prayer is the salvation of the human being."

Lines 8-9 – "But to set forth the good I found / I will recount the other thing I saw." I am reminded of the hymn "Amazing Grace" – "I once was lost / but now I'm found...."

Line 11 – "I was so full of sleep". Often such an adventure in Literature recounts a dream, and all that happened in that dream, and then the protagonist wakes up. In this Telling, Dante had been "asleep" and now he will recount what happened after he woke up!

> Hollander, Inferno, Canto I, note at line 11 – "*pien di sonno* . **The date is Thursday, 24 March (or 7 April?) 1300**. As the text will later make clear (Inf . XXI.112–114), we are observing the 1266th anniversary of Good Friday (which fell on 8 April in 1300 [but see note to v. 1, above]). **This would indicate that the poem actually begins on Thursday evening, the 1266th anniversary of Maundy Thursday, when the Apostles slept while Christ watched in the garden, and continued to sleep even as He called to them to rise.** That this moment is recalled here seems likely: Dante, too, is "asleep" to Christ in his descent into sin. See Matthew 26:40–46." [Dante. *The Inferno* (Kindle Locations 23827-23831). Random House, Inc.. Kindle Edition.]

Line 65 – "**Have mercy on me**, whatever you are". These are Dante's first words spoken in the Commedia, which scholars have pointed out links him to King David and his famous Psalm 51.

Lines 91-93 – "**It is another path that you must follow**, / he answered, when he saw me weeping, / if you would flee this wild and savage place."

THE COMPLETED JOURNEY IN ONE WEEK

Related issues are also debated by the earliest commentators, in particular the date of the vision. While there has been disagreement even about the year of the journey to the otherworld, indicated at various points as being 1300 (e.g., Inf . X.79–80, XXI.113, Purg . II.98, XXXII.2), **it is clear that Dante has set his work in the Jubilee Year, proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII in February of 1300**. Far more uncertainty attends the question of the actual days indicated. Dante's descent into hell is begun either on Friday, 25 March or on Friday, 8 April, with the conclusion of ***the journey occurring almost exactly one week later***. **In favor of the March date, one can argue that Dante could hardly have chosen a more propitious date for a beginning: March 25 was the anniversary of the creation of Adam, of the conception and of the Crucifixion of Christ, and also marked the Florentine "New Year," since that city measured the year from the Annunciation.** [Dante. *The Inferno* (Kindle Locations 23781-23788), Hollander's note#1 of Canto I of *Inferno*. Random House, Inc.. Kindle Edition.]

FEAR

Lines 19-21 – "Then the **fear** that had endured / in the lake of my heart, all the night / I spent in such distress, was calmed."

> Hollander: *paura* (fear), as many have pointed out, is perhaps the key word, in the beginning of the poem, that describes Dante's perilous inner condition. It occurs five times in the canto. [Dante. The Inferno (Kindle Locations 23843-23845). Random House, Inc.. Kindle Edition.]

Fear pervades, saturates the "atmosphere" of *Inferno*, Canto I, and the associated feeling of being trapped, unable to get out. Recall how HELL is like this: a place of **circles**, where one keeps going round and round inside one's mastering sin (how psychologically perceptive of Dante to notice this about how evil "circles"). PURGATORY is a place that **spirals**.

"**Fear**" as the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes is a very early word, an Old English, appearing, for example, in Beowulf. In its earliest meaning it meant "a sudden, terrible event, calamity,

danger" but with the appended idea of *ambush*. It is easy then to understand how later "fear" came to include the anticipation of that which catalyzes fear in a person: "the emotion or pain or uneasiness caused by the sense of impending danger, or by the prospect of some possible evil."

IN MEDIA RES

The poem starts on the evening of Good Friday in the year 1300. Dante's experience is thus an imitation of the experience of Christ, because Dante will also emerge to the light of Purgatory on Easter Sunday. [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 32). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

"Dante's narrative strategy is exactly the opposite [of Medieval authors who speak of falling into a dream ... "and this is what happened"]. **The poem begins not with a moment of falling asleep but of awakening: *mi ritrovai per una selva oscura* (I found myself again, I came to myself, in a dark wood)**. By contrast, he had been *pieno di sonno*, "full of sleep," when he went astray, when he abandoned the true path and got lost in the wood. The medieval reader's comfortable narrative expectations have been turned upside down. ***This is not an account of a dream, but of something that happened when the poet woke up***." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1718.]

Remember that the Church has associated the utter "silence" and "nothing happening" of Holy Saturday as when Jesus "harrows" Hell, goes among the dead there.

> The "**harrowing of hell**" first appeared in fourth-century formulas and eventually was incorporated into the Apostles', Athanasian, and Nicene Creeds. **The concept that Jesus descended into hades between His crucifixion and resurrection is based on New Testament references to resurrection "from the dead," not just "from death" (Matt 17:9; Luke 24:5; Acts 4:10; Rom 4:24; 1 Cor 15:20)**. The idea is also reflected in early Christian texts such as the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the writings of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus describing Jesus' descent in terms of a saving mission.... This concept continued to be developed throughout church history. For example, medieval writers like Abelard spoke of Jesus' power invading hell, and Aquinas described Jesus' mission to deal with saints and sinners in Purgatory and Limbo (*Summa Theologiæ* III.52.2, 4–8).[23]

[23] Dale A. Brueggemann, "Descent into the Underworld, Critical Issues," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

"But then he [Dante] sees something: "When I was ruining down to the depth there appeared before me one who seemed faint through long silence [Virgil]. When I saw him in that vast desert, I cried to him," **and these are the first words that Dante the pilgrim will speak in the text**, "'Have pity on me whatever you are, shade or living man!'" **The words "Have pity on me" are taken from King David in Psalms, so he's prostrating himself, and I stress this because the Davidic voice will constitute an important strain in this narrative**. How does Dante talk? That's one of the ways, and we shall see how it appears again further along in the poem." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. Reading Dante (The Open Yale Courses Series) (pp. 29-30). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

Hollander in note #1 to Canto I of *Inferno* explains how widely accepted it is that Dante took his opening line from this text in Isaiah 38.

> **Hezekiah's Hymn of Thanksgiving.** [9] The song of Hezekiah, king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his illness:
>
> [10] In the noontime of life[*] I said,
> I must depart!
> To the gates of Sheol I have been consigned
> for the rest of my years.[e]
> [11] I said, I shall see the LORD[*] no more
> in the land of the living.
> Nor look on any mortals
> among those who dwell in the world. [24]

With regard to the formal structure of the poem, it's divided into three parts: Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Each of them contains thirty-three cantos, with the exception of *Inferno*. *Inferno* has thirty-four cantos, which means there's a separate one—Canto 1—plus thirty-three. They are neatly separated in that **Canto 1 represents a kind of rehearsal. It's a journey that fails. Dante's real journey will begin with Canto 2.** [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 24). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

It's a great beginning. It begins in a very extraordinary way, *in the middle*, for the beginning is the present reality of the pilgrim who finds himself lost. There's more in that first line: "Midway

---

[*] *In the noontime of life*: long before the end of a full span of life; cf. Ps 55:24; 102:25.

[e] Jb 17:11–13; Ps 102:25.

[*] *See the* LORD: go to the Temple and take part in its service.

[24] *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Is 38:9–11.

in the journey of our life"—what is he saying? I think it's fairly clear that the first conceit, the fundamental conceit, of the poem is that **life is a journey, which means that we are always on the way. We just don't know where we are going yet.** Dante will find out soon, which means that we are displaced, and we are going to have a number of ***adventures***. It means that we are not yet where we want to be. And in fact, Dante calls it *our* life. That possessive ["our"] is his way of establishing that this is not yet a unique experience. It's something we all share and something which might also concern us. We too are on the journey of life. [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 25). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

It seems significant to me that what a pilgrim is not given to understand is where he or she is bound, and what will happen as he or she strives to get there. **What, instead, he or she is given is *companionship*, a Friend – in Dante's case, it is the Roman poet Virgil.**

As soon as we read this first line, "I found myself in a dark wood," traditional commentators will tell you that Dante is here in a state of sin, that the dark wood is really the condition of spiritual despair. He's at an impasse; we know he doesn't know where to go. I, however, feel that this allegorizing is a bit too easy, and we have no evidence for this interpretation in the poem yet. **What we do know is that Dante is lost in a landscape that is terrifying. He is caught within it, and he's clueless about how he got there. He knows one thing, though: he wants to get out of it.** [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 26). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

In *Purgatorio*, we hear from Virgil how he understood Dante's "lostness" – "My Leader then with speech and hand and sign Directed me to reverence, knees and brow, And then he said: "The idea wasn't mine To come here, but a lady came to me From Heaven, and according to her prayers 60 I gave this living man my company To help him through the darkness to the stairs. But since you wish to have it made more plain How things in actual fact stand with us two, I can't deny you. **This man, in such pain, Had still not seen his last hour. It was due: Folly had brought him near, and almost all His time was gone. I was, as I said, sent To save him in the last part of his fall, And had no way except the way we went 70 To get him out.** [Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy* (pp. 176-177), trans. Clive James. Liveright, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

Hollander translates those same verses: *Purgatorio*, Canto I, lines 58-63 –

> 'This man has not yet seen his final sunset,
> but through his folly was so close to it
> his time was almost at an end.
>
> 'I was sent to him, as I have said,
> for his deliverance. No other way
> but this could he be saved.'

How Clive James embellishes that last couple of lines is marvelous, catching idiomatically the sense.

TRYING FOR SALVATION BY OUR OWN POWERS

***Inferno*, Canto I** has this at **lines 28-30** (Hollander):

> After I rested my wearied flesh a while,
> I took my way again along the desert slope,
> my firm foot always lower than the other.

Hollander – "It seems likely that the words are meant both literally and figuratively: Dante, sorely beset by his fatigue and probably by his fear as well, is inching up the slope toward the hill by planting his bottom foot firm and pushing off it to advance the higher one. As Filippo Villani was first to note, there is a Christian tradition for such a difficult progress toward one's goal, found precisely in St. Augustine, who for a long time remained a catechumen before he chose his life in Christ (Bell.1989.1, p. 109)." [Dante. *The Inferno* (Kindle Locations 23880-23884). Random House, Inc.. Kindle Edition.]

The image of "walking" up a steep slope, the anchor foot lower than the reaching foot, suggests to me the effort a person makes to try to *achieve* salvation, to make it his or her accomplishment ... rather than *accepting* it as the unmerited grace of God in Christ.

In this regard, I think of **Ephesians 2:8**, about which a commentator writes: "Anxious to emphasize with crystal clarity the nature of this faith and the nature of grace, **Paul, by his qualifying phrases in this verse and the next, excludes the possibility of anyone obtaining this salvation by any merit or self-effort**. Firstly he adds to his statement of salvation by grace through faith the words *and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God*. Sometimes this has been taken to refer to faith itself being only possible by God's gift. If we take it this way, we would need to regard the second part of verse 8 as a parenthesis, since verse 9 must refer to the salvation and not to faith. It seems better, however, especially in the light of the parallelism between verse 8 and verse 9 (*not your own doing* ... 'not because of works') to take all the qualifying clauses as simply emphasizing salvation by grace. **What the apostle wants to say is that the whole initiative and every aspect of the making available of this salvation is God's. 'God's is the gift' is the rendering that shows best the emphasis of the word order in the Greek.** 'Let a man be abandoned by God, and he is absolutely hopeless. It is the voice of God that arouses, that awakens, that causes a man to think and enquire; it is the power of God that

gives strength to act; it is the same power which makes provision for the need of the new life.'"[3] [25]

PURGATORIO – CANTO XIII: ENVY

"Unlike hell, purgatory punishes sinful dispositions, not actual sins; thus its structure and organizing principle is very different." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 2183.]

Peter Kalkavage (2015) – "What, then, is ENVY? Aquinas calls it "**sorrow at another's good**." Another word for it is *ressentiment*, the settled condition of resentment. This often finds expression in the phrase: "It's not fair." The other face of envy is **joy at another's misfortune**. This is *Schadenfreude*, a word that has passed into English usage. The Italian word for envy, *invidia*, is cognate with the verb *videre*, to see. It is derived from the Latin verb *invidere*, "to look askance at, to cast an evil eye upon." **Envy, in other words, is, like lust, a disease of the eyes.** Its opposite consists in charity, kindness, and mercy.... As I mentioned earlier, **Purgatory is the mountain where reason searches us. It is where penitent souls engage in the clear-sighted, unflinching scrutiny of their past lives. It is a penal colony where souls serve time and endure the corrective torments that restore the soul to its original integrity and health.** Souls here are not confined to a ***circle***, as they are in Hell, but ***spiral*** up the mountain as they ascend to moral perfection and rational freedom. At the top of Mount Purgatory is the Garden of Eden, the place of earthly bliss. Once there, purified souls ascend higher, as they go to the celestial Paradise, the primal home of souls.

Lines 10-21 – "O sweet light, in whose help I trust / as I set out upon this unknown road...."

Line 36 – THE VOICE OF JESUS HEARD - "Love him who has done you wrong"

> Jesus' voice is heard at this level, though He is not personally present on this level, as was the case with Mary, whose voice at Cana we heard a few lines earlier.

[*3] C. Brown, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: A Devotional Commentary (London, 1911), p. 48.

[25] Francis Foulkes, Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 83–84.

Lines 37-42 – "And the good master said: This circle / scourges the sin of envy, and thus / the cords of the scourge are drawn from love. / To rein in envy requires opposing notes. / Such other voices you will hear, I think, / before you reach the pass of pardon."

Lines 46-48 – "Then, opening my eyes still wider, / I looked ahead and now could see / shades wearing cloaks the color of the stone."

> Envy, which is so clearly aware of difference, is cloaked in a uniform that makes distinction of difference nearly impossible. As Dante interacts with these penitents, it is clear that he has a hard time making out the features of any one of them. [Dante. *Purgatorio* (The Divine Comedy series Book 2) (Kindle Locations 28478-28480). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]

Lines 70-72 – "for iron wire pierces all their eyelids, / stitching them together, as is done / to the untrained falcon because it won't be calmed."

> "The aesthetic abnegation of this terrace is eased somewhat by these two back-to-back similes. Fastening our attention on the closed eyes of the envious, Dante compares them to the sewn-up eyes of sparrow hawks, captured in their maturity and temporarily blinded in this manner so that they remain docile in the presence of their handlers. The penitents' eyes are sewn, not with the thread used on hawks and falcons, but with iron wire." [Dante. Purgatorio (The Divine Comedy series Book 2) (Kindle Locations 28511-28514). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]

FROM SPECTATOR TO COMPANION

We have noticed in Canto XIII how Dante weeps for the Envious in the process of purgation. This Dante could not do in Hell, because compassion is not a "work" of Hell. So Dante's deep-felt grief for the suffering of the Envious in this circle proves that the Holy Spirit is at work at this level, and that Dante himself is being changed by these people he meets.

Purgatorio*, Cantos 11-17** – "Dante's problem in Canto 10 of *Purgatorio* stems from the fact that ***he is initially a spectator of works of art, which he seems to have no difficulty understanding. He's witnessing what he calls visible speech, *synesthesia*, *visibile parlare* in Italian, but this is God's art and it has a precise meaning that Dante has no trouble comprehending or enjoying. **But then he has to be involved. He has to show at least some compassion to and some self-recognition in the penitent souls who are under these huge weights that they carry. *But he cannot do it.* He still has to learn what grief is and how to connect to the images that he sees.**" [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. Reading Dante (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 143). Yale University Press. Kindle Edition.]

DISPOSITION[26]: LOVE WHEN MISDIRECTED

Prue Shaw – "Slightly trickier to reconcile with a modern sense of human behaviour and psychology is **the notion of love misdirected**, the love of a *malo obbietto*, a "bad object or thing," which generates the sinful dispositions to ***pride, envy and anger. Unlike hell, purgatory punishes sinful dispositions, not actual sins; thus its structure and organizing principle is very different***. Essentially, these first three sinful dispositions consist of loving and desiring something bad for or disadvantageous to fellow human beings. **Wanting them to be inferior to ourselves (pride). Wanting them not to have the good fortune, talents or possessions they have (envy). Wanting them to be punished for some perceived wrong they have done us (anger).** So the *malo obbietto* longed for is *malo* (bad, wrong, evil) because it is injurious and harmful to others, invidiously placing self above the community of which one is a part. **Dante is particularly alert to the poisonous effect of envy on personal relationships and the social fabric.** The punishment of the envious in purgatory is peculiarly satisfying. The word envy—defined in the OED as "grudging contemplation of more fortunate persons"—is *invidia* in Italian, from Latin *invideo*, "to look askance at, to look maliciously or spitefully at." **The punishment of the envious is to have their eyelids sewn shut with iron wire so that they can no longer see the good fortune of others they were so unable to contemplate with equanimity during their lifetime**. They also wear hair shirts, whose itching expresses in concrete terms the prickling ill feeling which drove them in life. **Envy is, for Dante, the opposite of love, of *caritas*.** [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 2183.]

PARADISO – CANTO III: IN HIS WILL IS OUR PEACE

"Ultimately, this third and final canticle is a poem about beauty, in the sense that here ***Dante will try to understand what beauty really is***. **Plotinus says that it's the visibility of being**, that the whole of life becomes visible only because we have perceptions and images of it. Dante's trying to see that, but he is also exploring what it is that lies beyond what we see. He knows beauty is not skin-deep, although one of the dangers of focusing on beauty is that it can be seen as no more than the surface of things. **Dante will inhabit a space between appearances and**

[26] The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**disposition**", definition #6 – "Natural tendency or bent of the mind, *esp.* in relation to moral or social qualities; mental constitution or temperament; turn of mind. Possibly of astrological origin: cf. the description of dispositions as *saturnine*, *jovial*, *martial*, *venereal*, *mercurial*."

the idea that there are essences lying beyond them." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 183). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

HIERARCHY

This is a word – "hierarchy" - coined by Dionysius the Areopagite. The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**hierarchy**" – "Each of the three divisions of angels, every one comprising three orders,[27] in the system of Dionysius the Areopagite".

> **Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite (c. 500 CE) – "The aim of all Dionysius' works is the union of the whole created order with God, which union is the final stage of a threefold process of purification, illumination, and perfection or union: a triad which has been vastly influential in the Christian mystical tradition.** The way to such union (ἕνωσις) with God, or *deification (θείωσις) as Dionysius is fond of calling it, has several aspects. One aspect is concerned with the use of the sensible created order in achieving deification; this embraces both the use of images as metaphors in theology (e.g. 'God is a consuming fire') and the use of material elements in sacramental action: Dionysius calls this aspect 'symbolic' (συμβολική) theology. In pursuit of it, he develops a view of the cosmos as hierarchically ordered with the Trinity at the top, descending through nine choirs of angels, to the terrestrial order, where three sacraments (*Baptism, *Eucharist, and the consecration of *Chrism) are administered by three orders of clergy (bishops, priests and deacons) to the three ranks of those who receive their ministrations (monks, ordinary laity, and those excluded from communion). Another aspect concerns the perfecting of our intellectual concepts in their application to God (or in our praise of God, as Dionysius puts it): this is called 'cataphatic' (καταφατική) theology. **But both of these reveal that God is beyond symbols and concepts, and this discovery points to '*apophatic' (ἀποφατική) theology, in which the soul, passing beyond the perceptions of the senses as well as the reasoning of the intellect, is united with the 'ray of divine darkness' and comes to know God through unknowing**.[28]

[27] The nine Ranks of the Celestial Hierarchy are, from most sublime to least: (I) Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones; (II) Dominions, Virtues, Powers; (III) Principalities, Archangels, Angels.

[28] F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 488.

"The other element of this first tercet that I want to emphasize is **the principle of *hierarchy***. Light shines "more and less." This is really a great problem for Dante in other parts of the poem. **Differences are very crucial for Dante because they allow us to know things that can be known only through differences. *That's the value of hierarchy*.** It is a structure that unifies all differences according to the principle of degree and yet keeps individualities intact. And here God is diffused throughout the entirety of the hierarchy." [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 184). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

"IN HIS WILL IS OUR PEACE"

The idea of the "architecture" of reality. Things are placed exactly where they belong and in specific relation and function to everything else.

The poem has one hundred cantos, but the basic unit of his narrative is the number three. In fact, it's written in a metrical form called *terza rima*, a rhyme scheme that goes ABA, BCB, and so on. **So, the number three is the fundamental symbolic number of division within this text. What is the reason for this? There is a key aesthetic reason that we find crystallized in a verse from the Book of Wisdom, "You O God, have created everything according to number, measure, and weight." And the Divine Comedy has to duplicate the symmetry, the order, and the harmony that Dante thinks he sees in the universe.** The poem is presented and introduced as a reflection of that superior, divine order of the universe and wants to be part of it. It's ambivalent, both reflecting and aiming at *metonymy*[29]: the part that wants to be attached to a larger whole. [Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante* (The Open Yale Courses Series) (p. 24). Yale University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

> ***Paradiso*, Canto III (Hollander)** – Piccarda Donati, daughter of Simone Donati, of the celebrated Florentine family of that name, and sister of Corso and Forese Donati. Piccarda was a connection by marriage of Dante, he having married Gemma, daughter of Manetto Donati.
>
> Lines 70-73: "Brother, the power of love subdues our will / so that we long for only what we have /and thirst for nothing else.""
>
> Lines 85-87: "**And in His will is our peace** / It is to that sea all things move, / both what His will creates and that which nature makes."

[29] The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**metonymy**" - *Rhetoric*. "(A figure of speech characterized by) the action of substituting for a word or phrase denoting an object, action, institution, etc., a word or phrase denoting a property or something associated with it, e.g. as when referring to the monarchy as 'the crown' or the theatre as 'the stage'; an instance of this."

Yet tell me: happy as you are to stay In this sphere, do you not desire a post Up higher, where you can see more, and feel More loved yet?" With the others in that host She smiled at this, and answered with such real Gladness she seemed to burn in love's first fire. "Brother, our charity is calmed by will, **Willing just what we have, with no desire 80 For more.** If we wished to be higher still, Then our desire would fail to jibe with His Will that appoints us here. Such, you will find, Cannot hold in these circles, if it is Necessity, clear to the thinking mind, To be in charity, and if you well Study its nature. **No indeed, the gist Itself of this blessed state is: we compel Ourselves at all times wholly to exist Within the will divine, so that our wills 90 Are thus themselves made one.** Therefore our rank From height to height throughout the realm instils Pleasure in all of it, and so we thank The King who wills us to His will. ***For in His will is our peace***. His will is the sea Towards which all things move just to begin— The souls it makes and all the progeny Of Nature. For it is creative twice, In both these ways." [Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy* (pp. 361-362), Paradiso, Canto III, translated by Clive James. Liveright. Kindle Edition.]

Piccarda's fate raises a theological conundrum. How blameworthy are those forced by violence to break their religious vows? And there is a related question, which underlies the organisation of paradise and the Paradiso: **how can there be degrees of blessedness?** Dante meets Piccarda in the first and lowest heavenly sphere. She is there because of her broken vows, which are an imperfection in her earthly existence reflected in her position in paradise. **Her explanation, in response to a question from a puzzled Dante, is that all souls in paradise accept the station to which they have been allotted. She encapsulates this in one of the most famous, and famously simple, lines in the poem: *E 'n la sua volontade è nostra pace* ("And in His will is our peace").** For the nineteenth-century English poet Matthew Arnold this line, with its poetic limpidity and profundity, was one of his touchstones for true poetry, against which other lines could be measured and judged. T. S. Eliot, equally an admirer, said that these were "words which even those who know no Dante know." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*, Kindle location 1002. Liveright. Kindle Edition.]

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at adjective and noun "**content**" – "Having one's desires bounded by what one has (though that may be less than one could have wished); not disturbed by the desire of anything more, or of anything different; 'satisfied so as not to repine; easy though not highly pleased' (Johnson). Const. *with* (†*of*), *that* with *clause*, *to* with *infinitive*."

SHADOW

"Dante and Virgil are on the shore at the foot of the mountain, uncertain which way to go, when they encounter a group of souls who are coming hesitantly towards them, equally unsure of the way. These souls are still a good stone's throw away when they stop in a huddle against

the inner wall of the mountain. **Those at the front notice the shadow cast by Dante's body. The insubstantial bodies of the dead, by contrast, have no solidity and do not cast shadows.** The souls hesitate and draw back in wonderment. Virgil reassures them that this visit by a living man to the afterlife is willed in heaven." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle Edition.]

GRATITUDE

"Our sense that an acknowledgement of intellectual and psychological indebtedness is a key moral obligation in Dante's ethical universe, and ingratitude a particularly heinous moral failing, will be confirmed when we find that **at the very bottom of hell, among the traitors, the very worst of them are those who betrayed benefactors**." [Shaw, Prue. Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location, 1611.]

This is particularly poignant insight into Dante, who because of his exile from Florence, and the violence of it – humiliation, opprobrium, and a sentence of death – spent the rest of his life depending on the kindness of benefactors to live. And it was only at this part of his life, when his life was in the gracious hands of those who supported him, that he wrote the entire *Commedia*. As one scholar noted that perhaps we should acknowledge with gratitude the banishment/exile of Dante from Florence and those who inflicted this upon Dante, for without that experience the *Commedia* might never have been conceived and written.

"**OF DANTE'S LIFE AFTER EXILE we can say with certainty that he travelled widely throughout Italy, and in circumstances that he found humiliating**. He tells us so himself in the *Convivio*: "I have travelled through almost all the regions to which this language extends, a wanderer, almost a beggar . . ." This experience introduced him to Italian in its many dialectal varieties. It shaped his thinking about the nature of language and the question of what form of language a writer aspiring to write well should use." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1855.]

"TO LOOK AND LISTEN"

"We can say with certainly that he [Dante] had great insight into human character and motivation, and great understanding of the moral predicaments of other people. He had an astounding capacity to convey the intricacies and complexities of human behavior as he saw it reflected in real-life stories from his own lifetime, projecting them into an imagined world

where the fate in the afterlife of the protagonists conveyed their true moral essence. We can say with certainty that he believed that human actions should be judged by moral criteria, and that these criteria were objective (and divinely sanctioned)." [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1920.]

BACKGROUND

NOT GETTING LOST IN FOOTNOTES - Second, anthologies give inordinate attention to footnotes, riddling the poetry with superscripts and piling lines of explanatory text at the bottom of every page. Readers need some information on the many people, places, and events Dante mentions, because otherwise the poet's points would be entirely lost. But overemphasis on names and dates causes the Comedy to read more like an old newspaper than like an artistic masterpiece. Returning to the Route 66 analogy, footnote freaks are the well-meaning parents who stop at every historical marker along the road. Educational, yes, but also extremely jarring.[30]

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY: "In order to understand, you need to know that ***comedy*** comes from *komos*, "village," and *oda*, which means "song," whence comedy sort of means "country song." **And comedy is a kind of poetic narration, different from all others**.... It differs, therefore, from the ***tragedy***, in matter by the fact that tragedy in the beginning is admirable and quiet, in the end or final exit it is smelly and horrible; and it gets its name because of this from *tragos*, which means "goat," and *oda*, sort of like "goat-song," that is, smelly like a goat, as can be seen in Seneca's tragedies. But comedy begins with harshness in some thing, whereas its matter ends in a good way."[31]

NUMBER AND STRUCTURE – The form and structure of the *Divine Comedy* symbolize unity and completeness. The numbers three (for the Trinity), four (for man), and one (for final unity), as well as the "perfect" number ten, are omnipresent.... Consider the most obvious instances. The poem consists of three groupings of 33 cantos (poetic chapters) each, which, with the addition of the introductory canto, make 100, the square of 10. Dante's *terza rima* stanzas consist of three lines each, with interlocking rhymes; the first and third line of each stanza rhyme with the second line of the previous stanza.... Each canto ends with a one-line

[30] "How Not to Read Dante," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[31] "A Polysemantic Country Song?," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

stanza. Each of the three regions of the afterlife has ten compartments grouped into seven and three. Pythagoras is reputed to have said the world was created by number. Dante's world certainly is.[32]

DANTE'S LIFE – "IN 1300 DANTE WAS THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OLD, *NEL MEZZO DEL CAMMIN*—exactly halfway through our allotted biblical span of threescore years and ten. He was born in 1265, the biographies tell us. **Yet we have no documentary evidence for this date of birth: no register of births, no birth certificate**. We deduce it from a poetic text. **We have very little evidence about Dante's life outside the texts he wrote**. [Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*. Liveright, 2014. Kindle location 1461.]

DANTE'S ESSENTIAL CONVICTIONS – Among the basic convictions that shape the story line of Dante's great poem are these:

- People are responsible to God whether they know it or not.
- The human race was created by a loving God whose purpose was for people to choose righteously through life in order to see and be with God.
- Because people possess free will, their choices between good and evil shape their experience of life for time and eternity, and because decisions are shaped by desires, people must learn to desire God and his will.
- Right understanding leads to right conduct, while wrong choices frustrate God's intentions and justly lead to negative consequences.
- Unforgiven sin diminishes sinners, depriving them of their very humanity, whereas Christian virtues enable people to develop into the full stature God intended them to have.[33]

BEATRICE – The most important event in Dante's childhood was his first encounter with **Beatrice Portinari** at her father's house, when she was 8 and he was 9. In the Vita Nuova, Dante describes the event:

> *She was dressed in a very noble color, a decorous and delicate crimson, tied with a girdle and trimmed in a manner suited to her tender age. The moment I saw her I say in all truth that the vital spirit, which dwells in the inmost depths of the heart, began to tremble so violently that I felt the vibration alarmingly in all my pulses.... From then on indeed Love ruled over my soul.... [and] I was obliged to fulfill all his wishes perfectly.*

---

[32] Rolland Hein, "Divine Imagination," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[33] Rolland Hein, "Divine Imagination," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

Ever afterward, Dante considered Beatrice the love of his life.... He next met her nine years later, when he saw her on the street dressed in white and accompanied by two other girls. She greeted him sweetly by name, and he was enraptured. A short time later, having heard his name linked with someone else, Beatrice passed him without speaking, and Dante mourned for days.... Dante and Beatrice never shared a love affair in any modern sense. Their meetings were no more intimate than passing in the street, and both of them married other people. **Dante's feelings for her fit into the tradition of courtly love, in which the woman was idealized and eternally out of reach. A physical relationship with her was neither possible nor desirable**.[34]

DANTE IN EXILE – Dante's life changed forever when he became involved in the war between two Florentine political parties, **the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs**.... The parties had originally split over a family squabble, but they came to represent the division between the tacky, new-money Cerchi family (Whites) and the classier, old-money Donati family (Blacks). **Dante was unfortunate enough to be a White, married to a Black**, ascending to political office—Florence's priorate—just as conflict between the parties escalated into street warfare.... When the Blacks overthrew the Whites in 1302, Dante was swept up in the party purge. He was accused of barratry (the sale of political office), fined 5,000 florins, and exiled for life. He spent the rest of his years boarding with various patrons and writing. **Though the *Comedy* is set in 1300, Dante wrote the entire work after he left Florence**.[35]

RAVENNA - Eventually Dante settled in Ravenna, where, writes Boccaccio, "he was honorably received by the lord of that city, who revived his fallen hopes with kindly encouragement, and, giving him abundantly such things as he needed, kept him there at his court for many years." **Dante's sons Pietro and Jacopo and his daughter Beatrice came to live with him there**.... In the summer of 1321, while on a diplomatic mission to Venice, Dante became ill. When he returned to Ravenna, he lingered until fall, then died the night of September 13.... Ravenna buried its adopted son with honors, rebuffing Florence's request for the body. **The city fathers believed Dante would not have wished to return. He had stated his opinion clearly in the full title of his masterwork: *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Florentine by Citizenship, Not by Morals***.[36]

---

[34] Bonnie C. Harvey, "A Poet Without Honor," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[35] Bonnie C. Harvey, "A Poet Without Honor," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[36] Bonnie C. Harvey, "A Poet Without Honor," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT – Perhaps Dante's greatest achievement, aside from sheer aesthetic triumph, is to make his readers ponder what they are truly living for. James Russell Lowell[37] suggests:

> *In the company of the epic poets there was a place left for whoever should embody the Christian idea of a triumphant life, outwardly all defeat, inwardly victorious, who should make us partakers of that cup of sorrow in which all are communicants with Christ.... He who should do this would indeed achieve the perilous seat, for he must combine poesy with doctrine in such cunning wise that the one lose not its beauty nor the other its severity—and Dante has done it.* [38]

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR ON DANTE – **Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1998)** was an influential, if sometimes controversial, Catholic thinker. A doctor of literature who had also studied theology and philosophy, he drew his ideas from a range of sources. Though his thinking was broadly Thomistic, he became frustrated with Scholasticism and investigated writings of figures like Hegel and Heidegger. He conducted conferences with Martin Buber and counted Karl Barth as a friend. Von Balthasar finds a similar eclecticism and creativity in Dante, whose theological aesthetics he describes in this excerpt.... **Dante wrote his major works in the vernacular in about 1300 and, in so doing, was conscious of taking a momentous step in the history of mankind**. He was, of course, the inheritor of Latin scholasticism, but that tradition lay behind him. **Apart from Thomas Aquinas (and even he was more of a philosopher than a theologian), ... no theologian writing subsequently in Latin made a really significant contribution to the history of the human spirit....**[39] And he goes on further to write: [Even so, Dante represents] **a synthesis of scholasticism and mysticism, of Antiquity and Christianity, of the sacral concept of Empire and the spiritual Franciscan ideal of the Church, and—even more stunningly—a synthesis of the courtly world ... and the very different world of scholastic wisdom**. In his own way we can class Dante with the great cathedral builders of the

---

[37] **James Russell Lowell** (1819-1891) – *Wikipedia* notes: "James Russell Lowell (February 22, 1819 – August 12, 1891) was an American Romantic poet, critic, editor, and diplomat. He is associated with the Fireside Poets, a group of New England writers who were among the first American poets that rivaled the popularity of British poets. These writers usually used conventional forms and meters in their poetry, making them suitable for families entertaining at their fireside."

[38] Bonnie C. Harvey, "A Poet Without Honor," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[39] "A Cathedral of Ideas," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

Middle Ages, with whom for the last time ethics and aesthetics peacefully coexisted and furthered and strengthened one another.[40]

PILGRIMAGE TO ROME, NOT JERUSALEM – At first, pilgrimages focused on Jerusalem. Such journeys served to unify God's people as early as King David's reign. **After the establishment of the church, Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem continued until the latter 1200s**.... Pilgrimages changed during the Crusades, when many travelers had to arm themselves for protection. Then in 1291 Acre, the last Christian stronghold in the Holy Land, fell to the Muslims, making travel to Jerusalem perilous.... **Loss of contact with Christianity's motherland was traumatic. Pope Boniface VIII[41] responded in 1300 by establishing the first Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome.** "Jubilee" refers to the Old Testament tradition of holding a Jubilee every fiftieth year during which slaves were freed, debts were canceled, and land reverted to its original owners.... **Boniface had prepared his capital well for visitors. He was one of a series of popes who recreated Rome as a flourishing city that attracted numerous artists to work on its churches and palaces**. So when the fall of Acre made it difficult for Christians to visit the Via Dolorosa and walk in Christ's footsteps, edifices like St. John Lateran and St. Peter's Basilica stood as ready alternatives.[42]

---

[40] "A Cathedral of Ideas," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

[41] "One of the great upholders of the absolute power of the Papacy, **Boniface** was the true successor of *Gregory VII and *Innocent III, but failed to understand the growth of national feeling which had taken place in the latter part of the 13th cent., and which increasingly diminished the political influence of the Popes. Among his many achievements is the compilation of the *Sext (q.v.), the embellishment of the Roman churches, and the foundation of the Roman university, the 'Sapienza' (1303)." [F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 226.] And from another source, "**Dante had special enmity toward Boniface, for in March 1302, the pope had sentenced him to death for his political involvements in Florence**. Dante then fled into exile, where he wrote the Comedy. He accused the papacy of "fornication with the kings of the earth," believing **Boniface's use of power compromised the church's spiritual mission**.... True to Dante's assessment, Boniface showed far more interest in politics than spirituality. He desired supreme authority in Europe, but he had to fight King Philip IV of France to get it. [Steven Gertz with Janine Petry, Boyd Jonathan, "Walk of Fame," *Christian History Magazine*-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).]

[42] Jeanetta Chrystie, "The Pilgrim Way," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 70: Dante's Guide to Heaven and Hell* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2001).

THE GENEROSITY OF GOD'S PLAN (EPHESIANS 2:1-10)

Version: 7 May 2017; 19 October 2020

TEXT

Generosity of God's Plan.[*] [1] [a]You were dead in your transgressions and sins[*] [2] in which you once lived following the age of this world,[*] following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the disobedient.[b] [3] All of us once lived among them in the desires of our flesh, following the wishes of the flesh and the impulses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest.[c] [4] But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us,

[*] The recipients of Paul's letter have experienced, in their redemption from *transgressions and sins*, **the effect of Christ's supremacy over the power of the devil (Eph 2:1–2; cf. Eph 6:11–12), who rules not from the netherworld but from the air between God in heaven and human beings on earth.** Both Jew and Gentile have experienced, through Christ, God's free gift of salvation that already marks them for a future heavenly destiny (Eph 2:3–7). The language *dead*, *raised us up*, and *seated us ... in the heavens* closely parallels Jesus' own passion and Easter experience. The terms in Eph 2:8–9 describe salvation in the way Paul elsewhere speaks of justification: *by grace*, *through faith*, *the gift of God, not from works*; cf. Gal 2:16–21; Rom 3:24–28. Christians are a newly created people in Christ, fashioned by God for a life of goodness (Eph 2:10).

[a] Col 1:21; 2:13.

[*] These verses comprise one long sentence in Greek, the main verb coming in Eph 2:5, God *brought us to life*, the object you/us *dead in ... transgressions* being repeated in Eph 2:1, 5; cf. Col 2:13.

[*] *Age of this world*: or "aeon," a term found in gnostic thought, possibly synonymous with the *rulers of this world*, but also reflecting the Jewish idea of "two ages," this present evil age and "the age to come"; cf. 1 Cor 3:19; 5:10; 7:31; Gal 1:4; Ti 2:12. *The disobedient*: literally, "the sons of disobedience," a Semitism as at Is 30:9.

[b] 6:12; Jn 12:31; Col 1:13.

[c] Col 3:6–7.

[5] [d]even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ[*] (by grace you have been saved), [6] raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus,[e] [7] that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.[f] [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God;[g] [9] it is not from works, so no one may boast.[h] [10] For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.[i] [1]

From Death to Life

2 Καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, **2** ἐν αἷς ποτε περιεπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας **3** ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, καὶ ἤμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί **4** ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἣν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, **5** καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ[1],—χάριτί[2] ἐστε σεσῳσμένοι— **6** καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, **7** ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. **8** τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσῳσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον **9** οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μή τις καυχήσηται. **10** αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν. [2]

---

[d] Rom 5:8; 6:13; Col 2:13.

[*] Our relation through baptism *with Christ*, the risen Lord, is depicted in terms of realized eschatology, as already exaltation, though Eph 2:7 brings in the future aspect too.

[e] Rom 8:10–11; Phil 3:20; Col 2:12.

[f] 1:7.

[g] Rom 3:24; Gal 2:16.

[h] 1 Cor 1:29.

[i] 4:24; Ti 2:14.

[1] *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Eph 2:1–10.

[2] Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, Fifth Revised Edition. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Eph 2:1–10.

He Tore Down the Wall (Eugene Peterson)

2: [1–6] It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. [7–10] Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.[3]

We were all Dead: God Gave us Life through Christ (JB Philipps)

Ephesians 2: 1-3 - To you, who were spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you Christ has given life! We all lived like that in the past, and followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else. **4-10** - But even though we were dead in our sins God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, gave us life together with Christ—it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved—and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with him in Christ in the Heavens. Thus he shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness he has expressed towards us in Christ Jesus. It was nothing you could or did achieve—it was God's gift to you. No one can pride himself upon earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do.

[3] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Eph 2:1–10.

I began to study this passage on 19 October 2020, when I was in the process of preparing a Night School with Dante Alighieri as our guest. There was so much in this particular text that reminded me of the *Commedia*.

Verse 1 – "ALIVE" IN SPIRITUAL DEATH - The trouble with men and women is not merely that they are out of harmony with their environment and with their fellows. They are 'alienated from the life of God' (4:18), that is, with respect to their true spiritual nature they are *dead through ... trespasses and sins*. **There is probably no essential difference between the two nouns: the root meaning of the first is 'missing the mark' and of the second 'slipping' or 'falling from the way', and thus both express the failure of people to live as they could and should. They were made in God's image to live as children in his family, aware of his presence, rejoicing in his direction. Freedom was given, but with it a warning that it involved the possibility of disobedience, and that disobedience would lead to death (Gen. 2:17).** This death is not primarily physical death, but the loss of the spiritual life given, life in fellowship with God and the consequent capacity for spiritual activity and development. Thus the description here is not merely metaphorical, nor does it refer only to the future state of the sinners. It describes their present condition, and indeed **the Bible often speaks therefore of humanity in a state of spiritual death because of sin (e.g. Ezek. 37:1–14; Rom. 6:23; 7:10, 24; Col. 2:13), and needing nothing less than new life from God (cf. Eph. 5:14; John 3:3; 5:24).**[4]

Verse 2 on WALKING – "The sinful condition of humanity is **lifeless and motionless** as far as any Godward activity is concerned. Viewed from another standpoint it is a '**walk**', a taking of step after step, in evil (cf. 4:17). The Jews called their laws of conduct *Halakah*, which means 'Walking' (cf. Mark 7:5, Acts 21:21; Heb. 13:9, RV mg.). This figure is used later in this letter (2:10; 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15), as elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:7; Col. 4:5; 1 John 1:6; 2 John 4) for the progress of the Christian life; **but here it describes a life lived according to an authority contrary to God.**"[5]

Verse 2 on THIS AGE (*aion*) and THIS WORLD (*kosmos*) – "As John Stott puts it, both words 'express a whole social value-system which is alien to God. **It permeates, indeed dominates,**

[4] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 76–77.

RV Revised Version, 1881.

[5] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 77.

non-Christian society and holds people in captivity. Wherever human beings are being dehumanized—by political oppression or bureaucratic tyranny, by an outlook that is secular (repudiating God), amoral (repudiating absolutes), or materialistic (glorifying the consumer market), by poverty, hunger, or unemployment, by racial discrimination or by any form of injustice—there we can detect the sub-human values of "this age" and "this world".'[16]

Verse 2 on THE TWO SPIRITS – The old life, without the energizing of God (see 1:11 and 20) is subject to the energizing (Gk. *energountos*) of the powers of evil, controlled by *the spirit* which has the evil one as its source. **For a person's inner life must be surrendered to the working of God or to that of the powers of evil (cf. Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27; Acts 5:4; and especially see Luke 11:24–26)**. And if people are surrendered to the power of evil, they become those whose habit of life is contrary to the living God, and so they are rightly called *the sons of disobedience* (cf. 5:8).[7]

Verse 3 – FOLLOWING INSTINCTS AND FALSE IDEAS - The apostle has begun to speak of Gentiles, but now he changes to the first person (see on 1:11) and so includes himself and *all* his people as *among* the children of disobedience (cf. Rom. 2:1–9; 3:9, 23). **As Caird puts it, 'Paul the Pharisee would have hotly denied that the Jew was in these respects on a level with the Gentile ..., but Paul the Christian had come to see that the possession of the law of Moses was no protection against *desires of body and mind*, i.e. the promptings of instincts and false ideas**.'[8]

Verse 3 – THE FLESH – "The old way of life was a life in sin and disobedience following *the passions of our flesh*. The word '**flesh**', as used in the New Testament, signifies in the first place simply the matter of the body, not inherently evil—the Word of God could become flesh (John 1:14). **Then it could be used to speak of the whole lower nature of man, apart from the regenerating and sanctifying Spirit of God**. The biblical phrase 'the lusts of the flesh', as it is often translated, is not to be taken in too narrow a sense, but as **the longings and impulses of the self-centred life (cf. Rom. 8:4–9; Gal. 5:16–21)**. Apart from their restoration to God and the indwelling of God's Spirit, men and women are not only dominated by self-centred passions, but found actually *following the desires of body and mind*. The last word translates the plural of a word more commonly used in the singular (*dianoia*) meaning a 'thought' or

---

[*1] Stott, p. 73.

[6] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 77–78.

[7] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 78.

[8] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 78.

'purpose', or 'intelligence'. **It signifies clearly that the effects in human life of evil and selfishness are not limited to the emotions but embrace intellect and reasoning processes as well (cf. Col. 1:21).**"[9]

Verse 3 – ALL OF US ARE SUBJECT TO SIN – *By nature* often refers to what is **innate**, to what a person is by heredity (Rom. 2:27; 11:24; Gal. 2:15), but this is not always the case. Romans 2:14, for example, shows that **it can mean what people are by the habitual practices of their lives, what they are if left to themselves, not necessarily because of the inborn nature**. So NEB takes it here, 'In our natural condition we, like the rest, lay under the dreadful judgement of God.' Furthermore, it is asked whether what is logically prior—if 'transmitted guilt' was intended—would be set thus at the end. Instead the regular biblical order is seen—human sin, in thought and in action, and in consequence the wrath of God. In fact, we have here in just a few clauses a summing up of Paul's great treatment of sin and its consequences in Romans 1–3. Jew and Gentile alike have sinned against the light and the law that they have possessed and known, and so 'all the world' is 'brought under the judgement of God' (Rom. 3:19, RV).[10]

Verse 4 – GOD BROKE IN – "**Such was the plight of all mankind. *But God* broke in.** We have what John Stott speaks of as 'a mighty adversative'. Set against 'the desperate condition of fallen mankind' we have 'the gracious initiative and sovereign action of God'. The subject of the verb has waited from the beginning of the chapter to this point. The verb waits till the next verse, till Paul in his usual manner (cf. 1:17; 3:9, 15–16), having mentioned the name of God, speaks in glowing terms of his goodness and grace. **He is not only merciful, showing his pity to those who are totally unworthy and undeserving; he is *rich in mercy* (see on 1:7). That mercy proceeds from love, *the great love with which he loved us*.** There is longing in the heart of God for humanity—**the *us* now means Jews and Gentiles alike**—to be restored to the highest and best that he had planned for them (cf. John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–10); and so he has shown himself full of mercy, and has acted in grace towards them."[11]

Verse 5 – GOD MADE US ALIVE – "But before the apostle describes the action of the love of God, he resumes the object and emphasizes once again our human condition and desperate

---

[9] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 79.

NEB New English Bible, NT 1961, [2]1970; OT 1970.

RV Revised Version, 1881.

[10] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 79–80.

[11] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 80.

need. **His love reached down to us** *even when we were dead through our trespasses* (cf. Rom. 5:6, 8), and he *made us alive* ***together with Christ***. We have seen that new life, and nothing less, was needed. By his death and resurrection he did no less than bring 'life and immortality to light' (2 Tim. 1:10). For in his death he suffered for sin, and removed the barrier to fellowship with God that sin caused, and by his resurrection he showed his triumph over death, physical and spiritual." [12]

Verse 6 – OUR CITIZENSHIP IS NOW IN HEAVEN – ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN - Now he says more specifically that our life has come to be there, enthroned with Christ. If this is not explicitly stated elsewhere in the Pauline letters, the meaning is implicit in such a passage as Colossians 3:1–3. Humanity, by virtue of Christ's conquest of sin and death and by his exaltation, is lifted 'from the deepest hell to heaven itself' (Calvin). **Citizenship is now in heaven (Phil. 3:20); and there, and not under the limits imposed by the world, nor in conformity to its standards (Rom. 12:2), true life is found.**[13]

Verse 7 – The purpose of God for his church, as Paul came to understand it, reaches beyond itself, beyond the salvation, the enlightenment and the re-creation of individuals, beyond its unity and fellowship, beyond even its witness to the world. **The church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom and love and grace of God in Christ.**[14]

Verse 7 – KINDNESS - Once more there are shown to be *riches* of grace, the true eternal wealth (see on 1:7), *immeasurable*, exceeding, abounding, overflowing riches (the participle has been used of the power of God in 1:19) displayed towards mankind in Christ. That grace, moreover, is expressed *in* ***kindness*** (*chrēstotēs*), a word that denotes love in action (cf. Rom. 2:4; 11:22; Titus 3:4), **personal pity and help rendered where it was needed most**.[15]

Verse 8 – GOD'S IS THE GIFT – Anxious to emphasize with crystal clarity the nature of this faith and the nature of grace, Paul, by his qualifying phrases in this verse and the next, excludes the possibility of anyone obtaining this salvation by any merit or self-effort. Firstly he adds to his statement of salvation by grace through faith the words *and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God*. Sometimes this has been taken to refer to faith itself being only possible by God's gift. If we take it this way, we would need to regard the second part of verse 8 as a parenthesis,

---

[12] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 80.

[13] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 82.

[14] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 82.

[15] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 83.

since verse 9 must refer to the salvation and not to faith. It seems better, however, especially in the light of the parallelism between verse 8 and verse 9 (*not your own doing* ... 'not because of works') to take all the qualifying clauses as simply emphasizing salvation by grace. **What the apostle wants to say is that the whole initiative and every aspect of the making available of this salvation is *God's*. 'God's is the gift' is the rendering that shows best the emphasis of the word order in the Greek.** 'Let a man be abandoned by God, and he is absolutely hopeless. It is the voice of God that arouses, that awakens, that causes a man to think and enquire; it is the power of God that gives strength to act; it is the same power which makes provision for the need of the new life.'[3] [16]

Verse 10 – WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP - "The work of God in Christ has been described as the gift of new life, and as the gift of salvation. Now it is shown further that people of themselves could not accomplish it by its being described as God's new creation. **We, in this new life, this new nature that we have received, are *his workmanship*. The Greek again gains emphasis by the word order, as it makes the *his* stand first in the sentence.** The noun used (***poiēma***) is from a different root to the 'works' (*ergon*) of the previous verse, and is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in Romans 1:20, where it is used of the works of God's first creation. Humanity was his making at the first, and now, because that work of his was spoilt by sin, there is a new divine act of creation."[17]

Verse 10 – WORKS IN THE NEW LIFE – **'Works'** have been excluded as a means of amassing merit and gaining favour with God. The gulf between God and sinful humanity must be bridged by God's action. **The new life in fellowship with God must be God's creation and cannot be our work. But nevertheless the essential quality of the new life is *good works*.** The preposition here (Gk. *epi*, AV 'unto', RV and RSV *for*) shows that more is involved than saying that good works were the purpose of the new life, or that people were redeemed in order to be a people 'zealous for good deeds' (Titus 2:14; cf. Col. 1:10); **rather it is that good works are 'involved' in the new life 'as an inseparable condition' (Abbott).** His new creation must be

---

[*3] C. Brown, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: A Devotional Commentary (London, 1911), p. 48.

[16] Francis Foulkes, Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 83–84.

[17] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 84–85.

AV Authorized Version (King James), 1611.

RV Revised Version, 1881.

RSV Revised Standard Version, NT 1946, [2]1971; OT 1952.

spoken of as being 'in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph. 4:24). It is of such a kind that it must and will express itself in this way.[18]

[18] Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 85.

Dante's Global Vision: Seeing & Being Seen in the "Divine Comedy"

Peter Kalkavage July 29, 2015

THE IMAGINATIVE CONSERVATIVE

> "The things of friends are common." —Greek proverb (quoted by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*)

It is a pleasure to be with you today, to visit Belmont University and see Nashville for the very first time. My talk takes its cue from your theme for the year —"Living in a Global Community." I have chosen to speak about Dante because his global outlook is well suited to this theme. Dante dared to think the whole of all things and to capture his vision in a single poem—the *Divine Comedy*.

Dante's globalism, his vision of the whole, is not confined to the earth but extends to the entire universe. This includes the invisible, spiritual world as well as the visible, corporeal one. It embraces the human and the divine, the natural and the supernatural. As we know from his writings and the events of his life, Dante cared passionately—one might say, desperately—about community and about "how it goes" with the world. The cosmos for him is the Community of communities. This Community affirms, rather than negates, the human individual and all the smaller, local groups to which we belong: our cities, towns, and neighbourhoods. On a more intimate level, these "little platoons," as Burke called them, include our families, friendships, romantic attachments, relations with colleagues, and the communal bonds forged by students and their teachers and mentors.

The *Comedy* is a first person epic that tells, or rather sings, of a journey through the three regions of the spiritual cosmos: Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Dante appears in two guises, as both the pilgrim who makes the journey and the poet who artfully recounts it. Dante begins by recalling how he was lost in a dark wood and close to spiritual, perhaps also physical, suicide. He had lost sight of what he calls "the straight way," the path of virtue and truth.[1] The epic's inspiration was Beatrice, Dante's personal angel and beloved, whom Dante first met when they were only children. Heaven takes pity on Dante, and Beatrice, now enthroned in Paradise, descends into Hell for his sake—into Limbo, the home of virtuous pagans. There she entreats Virgil, the noble and humane poet of Rome and Dante's poetic model, to serve as Dante's mentor and guide. Virgil leads Dante through Hell and Purgatory. Beatrice, his higher guide, then takes over and leads him through Paradise. At the end of the poem, Dante reaches the end of all desire: He sees God.

I plan to take us on a much-abbreviated journey through the three parts or canticles, as they are called, of Dante's poem: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. I do so to convey a sense of Dante's global vision, his view of the whole, and how the three regions of that whole reflect different perspectives on community. I have chosen three cantos, one from each canticle: from the *Inferno*, the canto on lust; from the *Purgatorio*, a canto on envy; and from the *Paradiso*, a canto on faithfulness marred by inconstancy. A form of seeing and being seen is at work at each level. I realize that many of you have not read the *Comedy*, or perhaps are familiar only with the *Inferno*. I hope that my remarks will inspire you to read the whole poem and to regard it not as a book for class but as a book for life.

Before we begin, I want to make three observations. The first is that the *Comedy* is not a literal report on the afterlife, but rather an allegorical depiction of the whole from the perspective of eternity, a revelation in images of the way things are. Second, as the opening lines of the poem indicate, Dante's journey is ours as well—the journey of humanity:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita, / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura

"In the middle of the path of *our* life [*nostra vita*], I found myself in a dark wood." (Opening lines of the *Inferno*) My third observation grows out of the second. The ultimate goal of the *Comedy* is to educate and convert, not just individual readers, but a whole world that is lost in a dark wood and needs to return to "the straight way."

Part One: Love among the Ruins

Dante's universe is not an infinite expanse but a bounded, beautifully ordered whole: a work of art. It is what the ancient Greeks called a *kosmos*—a term that means ornament. Central to this idea is hierarchy or rank, an order of higher and lower. Hell, the place of lost souls, is the lowest region of Dante's cosmos—the underworld. Hierarchically arranged, it is an enormous funnel that reaches to the center of the earth. Lesser sins are punished higher up, in the less constrictive circles; graver sins are punished lower down, in the more constrictive. The funnel was made when Satan, now a prisoner trapped in ice at the center of the earth, was defeated in his war against God and hurled from Heaven. His fall, in making a hole, also made a mountain on the other side of the earth—Mount Purgatory, the inverted funnel where human souls, with God's help, undo the Fall of Man and escape Hell. Satan's fall in this way played into the hands of divine comedy. Tragic for him, it was comic for us because it produced—ironically and quite against Satan's will—the physical site where the human story is allowed to have a happy ending.

Hell, Virgil tells Dante, is the "the place of the woeful people who have lost the good of intellect." (*Inf*. 3, 17-18) This means two things. It means that these souls, with the exception of the virtuous pagans in Limbo, have lost the proper functioning of the intellect and are demented. It also means that all these souls, those in Limbo included, have lost all hope of experiencing the vision of God, who is the end of all desire and the source of truth, being, and good order.[2]

The second circle of Hell, the one just below that of the virtuous pagans, contains the souls of those who gave themselves unconditionally to lust. Its relatively high placement suggests that lust is the least damnable of sins. The lustful are hot-blooded rather than cold-hearted and are fittingly placed far from the ice of Hell Central, which contains the souls of the treacherous. Dante calls the lustful "the carnal sinners who subject reason to desire." (*Inf*. 5, 38-39) They inverted the natural hierarchy, the correct order of ruler and ruled.

The souls here are blown about in a chaotic storm that torments them for eternity. Dante compares the lustful shades to birds, to starlings and cranes, whose "wings" are obviously doing them no good. The shades' desire to move and to fly on their own, their freedom of motion, is constantly thwarted. The storm objectifies the violent, disordered passion to which these lovebirds freely succumbed. It is their sin made visible. Virgil identifies the many famous people here including Semiramis, the Assyrian Queen who legalized incest so that she might indulge in it and at the same time be validated. She made lust into law. There also is Dido from Virgil's *Aeneid*, Cleopatra, Helen, Achilles, Paris, and Tristan. All are connected in one way or another with betrayal and war. Dante feels great pity when he hears Virgil name "the knights and ladies of old times" and is bewildered at why they are in Hell. (70-72) However, it is the pair of contemporary Italian lovers that catches Dante's eye because somehow the lovers remain united in the storm. Dante calls them "these two that go together and seem so light upon the wind." (74-75)

The lovers are Paolo and Francesca, whose tragic romance is one of the most celebrated moments in the *Comedy*. Virgil urges Dante to call the Italian lovebirds by invoking "the love that leads them." Apparently, there is something here that Dante needs to learn at this early stage of his journey. Dante obeys, and bids the lovers speak, but only one, Francesca, replies. The other, consumed with grief, is wordless and in the end can only weep. (5, 139-142) Paolo and Francesca died at the hand of Francesca's husband, who was also Paolo's older brother, when he caught the lovers in the act. That is why Francesca introduces herself and Paolo as having "stained the world with blood." (90)

When Dante calls to the lovers, again we have the image of birds. The two lovers approach, "as doves, summoned by desire, come with wings poised and motionless to the sweet nest." (82-3) In his depiction of Francesca, Dante perfectly captures the gracious tone of a true Lady: educated, well-bred, sensitive, and well-spoken. Her words and her story melt our hearts, as they do Dante's. Dante is no easy moralist. His poetry exposes us to the pull of

Francesca's tragic tale and the tender feelings that led to her and her lover's ruin. He makes us feel what it is like to be her, to be in the very moment of love's sweet opportunity, even as we are called upon to judge her actions in the clear light of reason. It is hard to believe we are in Hell.

Francesca first tells Dante about her lovely home in Ravenna, then about how Love compelled Paolo and her to do what they did. Her story begins with the eyes. Francesca was beautiful, and Paolo, seeing her beauty, was seized by love for what Francesca calls "the fair form that was taken from me," that is, her mortal body. Then Love makes his next move—it, too, involves the eyes. Francesca, seeing Paolo's loving gaze, was compelled by Love to love him in return, since Love, she affirms, "absolves no one beloved from loving." Then the *coup de grace*: "Love brought us to one death. Caina waits for him who quenched our life." The murderous husband is punished in Caina, which is in the deepest circle of Hell. This part of Francesca's story shows that lighter sins can provoke others far heavier.

Francesca begins three tercets in a row with the word Love, *Amor*. The repetition—"*Amor*, *Amor*, *Amor*"—is an incantation and a summons. Francesca is Love's high priestess, who speaks on behalf of courtly love and its cult of adulterous "knights and ladies." Now in Hell, she eternally relives and cherishes her tragic devotion to her god of choice. She is eternally constrained, imprisoned by her passion, identical to that passion. She is unrepentant, like all the shades in Hell's "blind world." (*Inf*. 4, 13) In the moment that Francesca yielded to erotic love, her vision, narrowed and occluded, did not look past private gratification. She blinded herself to the larger communities to which she and Paolo belonged. In this blind condition, she now justifies and ennobles her carnal act, which brought misery upon herself, her lover, her family, and—from Dante's global perspective—the world.

Dante, a love poet susceptible to both feminine courtesy and erotic passion, is deeply moved by Francesca's story. He asks her a question inspired by his own overwhelming sense of tragic loss through love: "Francesca, thy torments make me weep for grief and pity, but tell me, in the time of your sweet sighing how and by what occasion did love grant you to know your uncertain desires?" (116-120) Francesca responds with one of the poem's most quoted sentences: "There is no greater pain than to recall in misery the happy time." (121-123) The

"happy time" is her union with Paolo. One might counter this nostalgia with another saying: Nothing is more horrible than recalling a time we thought was happy, but was in fact the beginning of our doom.

Francesca goes on to tell Dante how she and Paolo came to know their "uncertain desires." Again, the eyes are at work, this time in the seemingly harmless act of reading:

> 'We read one day for pastime of Lancelot, how love constrained him. We were alone and had no misgiving. Many times that reading drew our eyes together and changed the colour in our faces, but one point alone it was that mastered us; when we read that the longed-for smile was kissed by so great a lover, he who never shall be parted from me, all trembling, kissed my mouth. A Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it; that day we read in it no further.' (129-138)

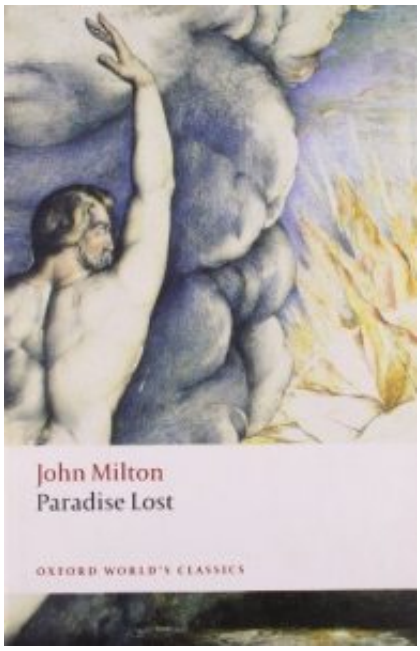
"Galeotto" is Gallehault, the knight who served as go-between for Lancelot and Guinevere. In Italian, the word came to mean pimp. The "point" in the story, the moment of the kiss, is Paolo and Francesca's moment of surrender, just as it was for the lovers in the book. In this fatal moment Francesca became Guinevere and her lover Lancelot. The line between story and life vanished, as Love cast a veil over her eyes. In this dream-state, she left reality, or rather reshaped it to make it conform to her romantic ideal. Here in Hell her delusion endures forever: Hell is the place of those who have lost the good of intellect. As Francesca reveals, it is also the cosmic repository of perverse ideologies that distort reality or nature and replace it with an artifice.

Lancelot and Guinevere are the romanticized traitors of a good and noble king. Their affair played a major role in the downfall of Arthur and Camelot. Their story brought the modern lovers together like a trusty pimp and encouraged them to yield to their conspiracy of the eyes. The book was their prompt and their validation. Here, Dante signals the danger of these sorts of love stories, which, by ennobling illicit love, invite the destruction of all trust, fellowship, and the good order on which society depends. Such stories, like Semiramis, make lust into law. They can make us blind, not in our eyes but in our minds. They beget and promulgate teachings and opinions about love that are hard to resist, but destructive of the soul's natural hierarchy of ruler and ruled. At issue here, we must note, is not pornography, whose corrupting effects are obvious, but a literary work belonging to high culture. A more contemporary example of this culture is Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, which is also about knights and ladies and the betrayal of a good king. The opera is far more dangerous than the story of Lancelot and Guinevere, since it combines the power of music with nihilism made sweet. Wagner's lovers want more than each other: They long to disappear into the Atman or World Spirit and die.

The revelation that love stories can tempt impressionable souls to their eternal loss is no doubt largely responsible for Dante's extreme emotional reaction to what he has just heard. He tells us that he swooned in pity "and fell as a dead body falls." Trochees and alliteration mirror the act of Dante's death-like fall: *e caddi come corpo morto cade*. (142) Dante here makes himself into a symbol. His fall recapitulates the Fall of Man, which resulted from the improper desire for knowledge, and combines it with a swoon that mimics the "little death," as it is called, of sexual release. With this *Liebestod* or love-in-death, the canto of Francesca reaches its end.

Part Two: If Thine Eye Offend Thee

We now go from the seductive beauty of transgressive love to the ugliness of envy. Pride can be beautiful—recall Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Anger, too—think of Achilles, beautiful in his youthful rage. Sloth (in French, *ennui*) has its lazy, languorous charm. Lust, as we have seen, can all too easily be romanticized. Gluttony can take on the attractive look of fastidious, opulent dining. Greed can be made to sound heroic—think of Gordon Gekko's rousing ode to greed in the Oliver Stone movie *Wall Street*. But envy does not have any heroes. There is something cringing, shrivelled, and mean-spirited about it that defies beautification. We do not want to look at it, let alone acknowledge it in ourselves.



What, then, is envy? Aquinas calls it "sorrow at another's good." Another word for it is *ressentiment*, the settled condition of resentment. This often finds expression in the phrase: "It's not fair." The other face of envy is joy at another's misfortune. This is *Schadenfreude*, a word that has passed into English usage. The Italian word for envy, *invidia*, is cognate with the verb *videre*, to see. It is derived from the Latin verb *invidere*, "to look askance at, to cast an evil eye upon." Envy, in other words, is, like lust, a disease of the eyes. Its opposite consists in charity, kindness, and mercy.

As I mentioned earlier, Purgatory is the mountain where reason searches us. It is where penitent souls engage in the clear-sighted, unflinching scrutiny of their past lives. It is a penal colony where souls serve time and endure the corrective torments that restore the soul to its original integrity and health. Souls here are not confined to a circle, as they are in Hell, but spiral up the mountain as they ascend to moral perfection and rational freedom. At the top of Mount Purgatory is the Garden of Eden, the place of earthly bliss. Once there, purified souls ascend higher, as they go to the celestial Paradise, the primal home of souls.

At the first level or terrace, Dante witnesses the purgation of pride. This occurs at the base of the mountain because pride, arrogance, is the foundation of all sin and rebellion against God's law. The proud carry enormous stones on their backs. The heavy burden subdues pride and teaches humility. The terrace of pride, as Dante discovers to his amazement, is adorned with beautiful sculpture—sights to behold. There are murals depicting acts of humility and a carved pavement depicting the consequences of pride.

Just above the terrace of pride is the terrace of envy. There is no artwork here, only barren rock, livid in color. It has the black-and-blue hue traditionally associated with envy—the color of a bruise. This is truly the psychic color of the envious, who are always bruised, always offended at something. Of all the purgatorial torments, the purgation of envy is the most disturbing and the most like something in Hell. At first, Dante does not see but only hears the souls as they pray and lament. Their livid cloaks make them indistinguishable from the stone bank on which they lean. Their being seen by others, at least readily, has been taken away from them. When Dante does manage to see the penitents, he weeps out of pity. They wear "coarse hair-cloth" and seem like blind beggars asking for alms at a church door. The envious are indeed blind. They have their eyelids sewn shut with an iron wire, "as is done to an untamed falcon when it will not be still." (13, 70-72) When Dante sees this, he feels as though he is committing an outrage, "seeing others without being seen." (*veggendo altrui, non essendo veduto*, 74) His bad conscience reminds us that human fellowship depends on mutual recognition or regard—shared seeing; to see others without being seen is to spy on them. There is something indecent about it, and Dante is right to feel uncomfortable.

In their blind and beggarly condition, the envious are made to feel the need for other human beings. They are all leaning on each other: "the one supported the other with his shoulder and all were supported by the bank." (59-60) In this way, Purgatory re-establishes the lost habit of seeing and cherishing the natural goodness and necessity of human interdependence, of human community. As

for the most gruesome aspect of their purgation, the sewn up eyelids, this could be taken cynically as no more than divine payback: The envious looked askance at the goods of others and now must pay the price, but that ignores the therapeutic function of the torment. Like every other sin, envy hurts the soul of the sinner; in particular, it hurts the soul's rational capacity for seeing what is naturally good. Envy makes this aspect of sin explicit. The envious have damaged their capacity to see properly and to rejoice at the sight of other people's good. The wire through the eyelids is the violent cure for violent seeing: When the envious one wishes to see a good—whether wealth, success, power, position, looks, talent, or popularity—but instead sees it destroyed and negated simply because it is not his. Envy is a self-inflicted wound, a self-blinding, and the wire through the eyelids functions to stitch up the wound and ultimately restore clear sight of what is good, good apart from its possessor.

In this canto and throughout the *Comedy*, natural goodness finds its image in the Sun, which ungrudgingly bestows its gift of light and warmth on all alike. The Sun, for Dante, is the image of natural reason. At the very opening of the canto, Virgil addresses the Sun in a beautiful prayer as he acknowledges the liberality that envy destroys:

> 'O sweet light by trust in which I enter on this new road…do thou guide us with the guidance that is needful in this place. Thou givest warmth to the world, thou sheddest light upon it. Unless other reason urge the contrary thy beams must always be our guide.' (13, 16-21)

"Other reason" here refers to the agents of supernatural light, the angels whom Dante and Virgil meet along the way.

Dante sees the penitents force tears out from under their sewn up lids. He addresses the group in words of hope: "O people assured of seeing the light on high which alone is the object of your desire." (85-87) He then asks, in effect: "Any Italians here?" Dante wants to know so that he might help his fellow countrymen by praying that their torment may be quickened.

The soul first to respond is that of Sapia, a noblewoman from Siena. Her political affiliation led her to being exiled from her native city—just as Dante, for similar reasons, was exiled from his native Florence. Sapia addresses Dante graciously, as Francesca had done. But she also corrects what she perceives as too strong an emphasis on political identity, which is often the source of envy. "O my brother," she says, "we are every one citizens of one true city." (94-95) Sapia speaks as though she is already in Heaven, the City of God, where political identity and identity politics are meaningless. And well she might, since those in Purgatory are assured of eternal bliss. Her mild correction of Dante's nationalism springs from her newfound wisdom, her on-going education in the transcendence of envy. It recalls the vicious rivalries among cities that plagued Italy in Dante's day. The lesson is not that love of one's own is bad, but rather that, when corrupted by envy, it leads to partisan hatred and outright war. In the two cantos devoted to envy, politics is at the forefront. Politics is the realm of human experience in which envy and the will to demonize and destroy are most active, as the exiled Dante knew all too well.

Sapia puns on her name, which resembles *savia*, sapient or wise. "Sapient I was not though I was called Sapia," she says, "and I rejoiced far more at others' hurt than at my own good fortune." (108-111) She tells Dante that she was mad, *folle*, since at a mature age, when she ought to have been thinking about her final end, she indulged infinite, insatiable envy. She tells the story of how, from her castle near the city of Colle, she saw the battle in which the army of her townspeople, those of the political party that had driven her out, was defeated by Florentines of her own party. She had prayed that this day would come, and it did—not because she prayed, but because God willed it. (117) She saw one of the Sienese leaders, her nephew and political enemy, Provenzan Salvani, killed in the battle, and she rejoiced, or, as she puts it, "was filled with gladness beyond all bounds." She was so glad that she no longer cared what happened to her. She turned her "bold face" to God and prayed: "Now I fear Thee no more!" Salvani, the nephew, appears in an earlier canto, on the terrace of pride. (11,

109 ff.) The twisted political situation shows how envy pits city against city, party against party, in the madness of invidious one-upmanship. Envy destroys natural unity. It rips families apart and even causes family members to rejoice in the death of their own flesh and blood. Witness Cain, the exemplar of envy, who killed his brother when Abel's sacrifices were accepted and his were not.

Late in life, Sapia repented of her envy, which by that time had become a hardened habit. She would have repented even later and would have had to wait in the antechamber of Purgatory with the other late repentants, had it not been for Peter the comb seller, a poor and saintly hermit who prayed for her change of heart. The efficacy of intercession through prayer is a recurring theme in the poem and is prominent in the *Purgatorio*. As we hear lower down the mountain from one of the penitents, "much is gained here through those yonder," that is, those who are still living. (3, 145) Dante's rescue from the dark wood began with a chain of female intercessors: Mary pleaded with Lucy, who pleaded with Beatrice to help Dante. (*Inf*. 2, 94-104) Prayer is an example of Dante's global vision and his passionate concern for community. Interceding prayer affirms the Community of the Living and the Dead. The Living and the hopeful Dead pray on each other's behalf. In so doing, each side enacts the virtue of seeing beyond one's self-interest and of actively caring about one's fellow man. Each wills the good of another, indeed that other's highest good. Intercession is the acknowledgment that we are all connected in spirit. It is the bond of all hopeful souls and the means by which they partake actively in, and in some mysterious way affect, the will of God. Prayer is both rational and profoundly humane within the grace-governed world that Dante embraces.

In the final moments of her speech, Sapia asks Dante to pray for her and to restore her name among her surviving family members by informing them that in spite of her sinful life she dwells among those destined for bliss. But then there is a shift in tone as Sapia takes a parting shot at her fellow Sienese, who in their vanity tried to establish a port to rival those of other cities and build an impressive fleet to go with it. (151-154) They will fail miserably, as she observes. We might infer that Sapia here shows that she is still in the grip of envy, but it is probably more accurate to regard her attack as springing from her clarified vision of envy and of events on earth. As an authority on envy, she no doubt reflects Dante's own judgment of the vain Sienese.

In the second canto on envy, Dante meets a Italian nobleman, Guido del Duca, who expresses dismay at the fate of his now-degenerate district of Romagna. Guido's tone is not resentful but grief-stricken and is mixed with nostalgia for the virtue and glory of bygone days. Sapia's envy was joy at the suffering of others; Guido confesses to envy's other side: sorrowing at another's good. The emphasis is once again on the eyes, this time with an added physiology of envy: "So enflamed with envy was my blood that if I had seen a man make merry thou hadst seen me suffused with livid color. Of my sowing I reap such straw." (14, 82-85) He goes on to say: "O race of men, why do you set your hearts where must needs be exclusion of partnership?" (86-8)

This phrase, "exclusion of partnership" (*di consorte divieto*), will be our transition from the *Purgatorio* to the *Paradiso*. In the very next canto, Dante asks Virgil to explain these words, which baffle him. (15, 44-45) Virgil responds by telling Dante that humans fix their desires on goods that cannot be shared—things like wealth, reputation, and political power. Some can have more only if others have less. And even if these goods were equally distributed, the little I have, while I have it, is mine and not yours. This reveals the ultimate human blindness, blindness to that good which is by nature shareable and communal. It is a good that one has more of the more one gives it away. This miraculous good is envy's opposite: love as charity. It is the highest principle of fellowship and the supernatural wellspring of all lesser forms of human community.

Virgil, though himself pagan, is surprisingly wise in the ways of the Christian Heaven. He directs Dante's attention to "the highest sphere," where, he says, "the more they are who say *ours*, the more good does each possess and the more of charity burns in that cloister." (55-57) Virgil goes on to describe the love that emanates from God, "that infinite and unspeakable good." This Highest Good gives itself infinitely and, in leaving itself, returns to itself magnified by those to whom it is given: "and the more souls that are enamoured there above the more there are to be rightly loved and the more love there is and like a mirror the one returns it to the other." (73-75) Virgil then points beyond himself to Beatrice, the incarnation of supernatural light. He tells Dante that she "will deliver thee from this and every other craving." (77-78) We shall follow Virgil's lead.

Part Three: The Community of Hearts and Minds

At the top of Mount Purgatory, Virgil leaves Dante without saying good-bye. He just—disappears. Dante is devastated. It is, however, a necessary parting. Dante now needs a higher guide, someone who can take him beyond the realm of natural reason. Virgil led Dante by means of his enlightened speech; Beatrice, too, speaks to Dante with words of light, but she also guides because Dante is in love with her—she guides by virtue of her beauty, which manifests God's grace.

Throughout the *Paradiso*, Dante lays special emphasis on the eyes of Beatrice. They are an image of divine intellection—the intuitive apprehension of truth. We are not told what color or shape her eyes are. What is important is their focus: They are firmly fixed, like the eye of an eagle, on that point of the highest Heaven from which Beatrice descended for Dante's sake and to which she longs to return. Her gaze leads her lover not by a return gaze, but by directing his gaze upward and beyond Beatrice herself. As she tells Dante at one point: "Not only in my eyes is Paradise." (18, 21) The eyes of Beatrice direct Dante's vision to the whole of all things and ultimately to God. They are a corrective to the constrictive, possessive seeing of Paolo and Francesca.

Heaven, like Hell and Purgatory, has levels. This is a stumbling block for most readers. How can Heaven, the place of perfect happiness, have degrees or ranks? To use a verb that Dante invents, what does it mean for some souls to be more "imparadised" than others? Dante discusses this very problem with one of the blessed, Piccarda Donati, who occupies the lowest degree of bliss and is the first soul Dante meets in this final part of his journey. She is the herald of Heaven. Piccarda will complete my Triad of Gracious Women in the *Comedy*. She will initiate us into the realm of perfect community and perfect seeing.

In the *Paradiso*, we accompany Dante as he flies through the visible heavens. These are arranged according to the Ptolemaic astronomy of Dante's day. In this scheme, the cosmos is a rotating sphere with the Earth at its center. Seven celestial bodies orbit around the Earth: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun,

Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The sphere of the fixed stars comes next, and finally the outer shell of the visible universe. This is the so-called Crystalline, the first bodily sphere to be touched and moved by God's love. Each orbit corresponds to a level of Paradise; that is, to a mode of being imparadised: the Moon to faith marred by inconstancy, Mercury to service marred by ambition, Venus to love marred by wantonness. In the upper regions, the Sun represents wisdom, Mars courage, Jupiter justice, and Saturn temperance. Dante does not set foot on these bodies, as we might imagine. The bodies are made of matter that is permeable and receptive—an image of the spiritual condition of receptiveness to God's grace, and the openness that the blessed have to each other and to newcomers. Dante enters each celestial body, to which the souls of Paradise have descended in accommodation to Dante's as yet imperfect faculties.

We meet Piccarda in the sphere of the Moon, the lowest of the heavenly bodies. The Moon's luminous look has dark spots or blemishes—a feature well suited to faith marred by inconstancy. The souls here are eager to speak with Dante, who is in turn aroused by their eagerness. He is bursting to know the identity of one soul in particular that seems "most desirous of speech." He addresses her in gracious terms: "O spirit made for bliss, who in the beams of eternal life knowest the sweetness which, not tasted, never is conceived, it will be a kindness to me if thou satisfy me with thy name and with your lot." (37-41) Piccarda answers "with smiling eyes." She tells Dante that in the world she was "a virgin sister," and that if he searched his memory he would remember who she was. Piccarda had taken vows as a Poor Clare but was forced by her brother, Corso, to leave the convent and enter into a marriage that would advance the family's political prospects. She died soon after the wedding. For her broken vows she occupies the least degree of Heaven. Piccarda then answers the second part of Dante's question, the one about the lot of all the souls at this level:

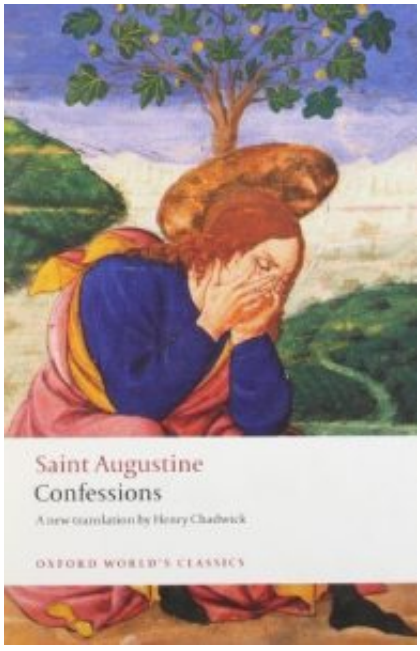
> 'Our affections, which are kindled only in the pleasure of the Holy Spirit, rejoice in being conformed to His order, and this log which seems so low is given us because our vows were neglected and in some part void.' (52-7)

The language of being conformed to an order fits Piccarda's vocation as a nun. Since affections, or feelings, have themselves been altered in the ascent to Paradise, conformity is not submission to a tyrant or mere duty, but rather the joyous yielding of one's will to the Being who wills only what is good. In this perfected community of wills, each will celebrates its freedom of movement. It becomes eternally unerring. We might object that the will cannot be free if it no longer makes choices and has options. But that would be like criticizing a violinist who was so good that she was never even tempted to play badly and was beyond mistakes. While we live in mortal bodies, our freedom of will is the freedom to choose, but the perfection of the will consists in always willing the good that one clearly sees. Freedom, here, is an actuality, not a mere potential.

Dante then asks Piccarda what we would ask if we were in his place: "But tell me, do you who are happy here desire a higher place, that you may see more and become more dear?" (64-6) This question takes us back to the cantos on envy, and betrays Dante's still imperfect seeing. His thinking is still earthly and political (in the corrupted sense). If souls in this region of Heaven did in fact desire more, they would be like us—prone to ambition, lust, and envy. Here we touch on one of the main functions of Dante's Paradise. Paradise is the "place" of individual souls, who had faith in Christ and are purged of sin, but it is also the model of an ideal city or kingdom—a community of hearts and minds that has been purged of covetousness, envy, partisan strife, and the insatiable desire for *more*. As Dante rises through the heavenly ranks, he is initiated into that ideal of perfected fellowship so dismally absent in his beloved Italy and in the world at large.

Piccarda answers Dante's question "with such gladness that she seemed to burn in the first fire of love." His question gives her an opportunity to recollect the temporal beginning of her eternal bliss, the moment she fell in love with God:

> 'Brother, the power of charity quiets our will and makes us will only what we have and thirst for nothing else. Did we desire to be more exalted, our desire would be in discord with His will who appoints us here, which thou wilt see cannot hold in these circles if to be in charity is here *necesse* [necessary] and if thou consider well its nature. Nay, it is the very quality of this blessed state that we keep ourselves within the divine will, so that our wills are themselves made one; therefore our rank from height to height through this kingdom is pleasing to the whole kingdom, as to our King who wills us to His will. And in His will is our peace. It is that sea to which all things move, both what it creates and what nature makes.' (70-87)



The passage contains one of the most beautiful lines in the *Comedy*: "and in His will is our peace." (*E'n la sua volontade è nostra pace*, 85) The line echoes the famous sentence from Augustine's *Confessions*: "Our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." Piccarda's answer, which recalls Sapia's address to Dante as a brother, combines ardor and intellectual clarity, heat and light. The marriage of ardor and clarity is typical of the souls in Paradise. Without clarity, ardor would be mere feeling with no anchor in the truth. It would be blind. Without ardor, clarity would be joyless—mind without heart. It would be like getting the point of a really good joke but not finding it funny.

Piccarda speaks authoritatively of the perfected will, not simply because she is humble but because she is suffused with the light of knowledge, which informs her teaching about the will and the community of wills. Piccarda's intellectual vision is not confined to her level but extends to all of Paradise. This is made

evident when she says that the hierarchical scheme of Heaven "is pleasing to the whole kingdom." Piccarda speaks on behalf of the entire heavenly community, which is made one and harmonious by the unerring will of God. Some souls may be limited in their degree of bliss, but all have access to God, one another and the whole of Paradise. Souls at every level—that is, in every mode of being imparadised—enjoy the unity and happiness of the whole kingdom. They are not spatially confined to levels, as the astronomical image depicts them, but spiritually connected to all the levels. God wills each soul into its proper place, its true place, and each soul rejoices in being where it is because it sees with perfect clarity that its assignment is pleasing to the whole community and to God. Knowledge sweetened by charity lifts the burden of selfish desire and makes the soul free to see and love the good of another and of the whole. Piccarda not only rejoices to be where she is; she also rejoices that souls "higher up" are where they are. In her perfect transcendence of envy and her clear intellectual vision of the whole, she is not almost but fully imparadised in the sense that she enjoys the greatest happiness her nature allows.

Dante understands. "It was clear to me then," he says, "that everywhere in heaven is Paradise, although the grace of the Supreme Good does not rain there in one measure." (3, 88-89) His realization echoes the opening lines of the *Paradiso*: "The glory of Him who moves all things penetrates the universe and shines in one part more and in another less." Dante then asks Piccarda to tell him how it came about that she was inconstant in her vow. She tells her story, which we already know, and then dives back into the sea of her unspeakable joy while singing the *Ave Maria*.

But Piccarda's story troubles Dante, as Beatrice sees by the look on his face. He wonders, as do we, how Piccarda can be faulted for her broken vow, since she was forced to leave the convent. Beatrice responds with a harsh teaching that reveals the terrifying seriousness of vows. She tells Dante that Piccarda, by yielding to the force done to her, seconded that force. There was a way in which she might have kept her vow and remained constant: she might have "fled back to the holy place," defying her brother and risking martyrdom. (4, 81) Had she done this, she would have imitated St. Lawrence, who mocked the tormentors who were burning him for his faith ("Turn me over: I'm done on this side!"), or the Roman general Mucius Scaevola, who stuck his own hand into the flames when he was captured by his enemies. True faith is itself like fire—no matter

how much it is wrenched this way and that by violent circumstance, it resists being diverted from its natural impulse to burn up toward Heaven. This is the faith in which Piccarda and those like her were deficient.

My intention, however, is to praise Piccarda, not criticize her. True, she lacked fire and overestimated her the power of her lungs, her natural capacity for breathing in the Spirit of God; she made a vow she couldn't keep. But her very limit, which is part of her whole personality, adorns Heaven and fills out the heavenly hierarchy, the range of possible blessed types and blessed conditions. Heaven does not merely allow Piccarda to be among the blessed; it rejoices in seeing her there. God, we must imagine, rejoices in seeing her there. She is one of the gems of Heaven who adds to the joy of all, like the Moon that adorns the night sky. Her special charm lies in her sublime transcendence of envy and her capacity to rejoice from her modest position in her complete self-knowledge and in the communal nature of the whole.

Throughout, I have emphasized seeing, in particular, reciprocal or mutual seeing. This is the mutual regard and good will that hold a community together. This seeing requires the capacity to acknowledge the virtues of others. The *Paradiso* dramatizes this mutual recognition in the speeches of St. Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican, and St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan, whom Dante meets in the sphere of the Sun. Thomas and Bonaventure are the standard bearers, respectively, for Knowledge and Love. Thomas sings the praises of St. Francis, his other (11), and Bonaventure sings the praises of Dominic, his other. (12) This mutual recognition—the generous act of stepping aside and putting another in the limelight—recalls the charity that Virgil beautifully described on the terrace of envy. Thomas and Bonaventure see past the sectarianism of their orders, which on earth were often rivals. Their dance-like reciprocity provides a model for the earthly reconciliation between virtuous and diverse individuals and between worthy and diverse doctrines. This delight in the complementarity of diverse aspects of a single truth pervades the whole of Paradise, where every soul sees and enjoys what very different souls contribute to the common good and the common vision. Each sees and is seen, acknowledges and is acknowledged. This metaphysical transparency is grounded, we must note, in the very nature of the Christian God, who is a community of Persons. God's joyous self-relation and perfected self-love are, for Dante, the ultimate cause and principle of the luminous interrelations and the complementarity of perfected souls.

Conclusion: Dante's Poetic Synthesis

Higher up in Paradise, closer to the first principle of all things, Beatrice utters one of the poem's central teachings. Seeing, she tells Dante, is the true measure of blessedness. Intellectual vision, personified in the intuitive knowledge enjoyed by the angels, always leads and love always follows. (28) This is true to our ordinary experience: We love what has already presented itself to us and made itself apparent as beautiful. So too, the light of knowledge must come before and ground the warmth and longing of love. Seeing is primary. If this were not the case, if love as feeling were primary, then love would easily degenerate into the voluptuous self-worship of Francesca. We would be in love with our feelings, not with the object of our feeling. Only love guided by a clear mind is genuine openness to things as they are and to the true being of others. This love is aroused by Beatrice, whom Dante calls at one point "she who imparadises my mind." (*Par*. 28, 1)

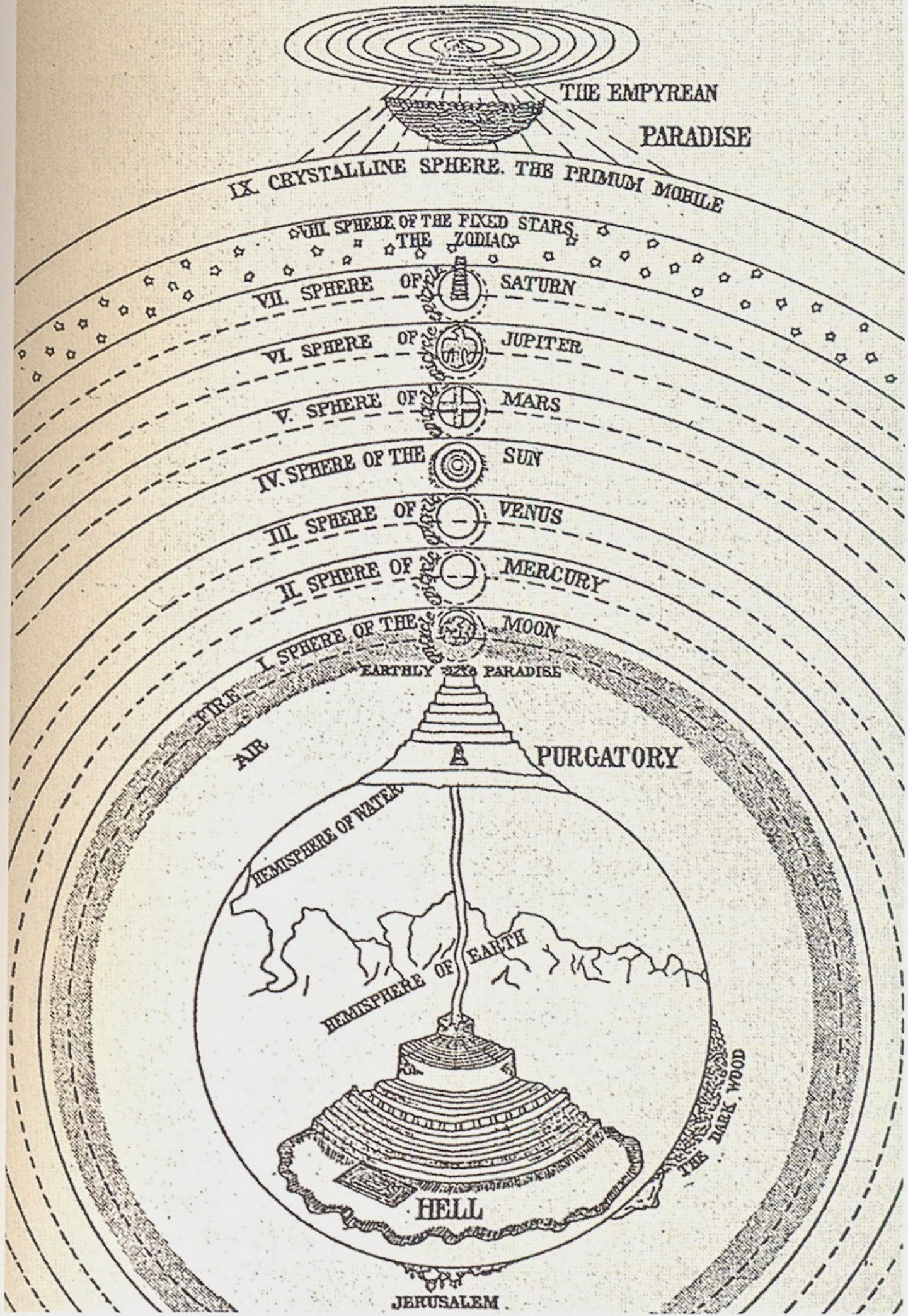
Dante's global vision finds its clearest expression in a Latin prose work, which Dante wrote while he was composing the *Paradiso*. Its title is *Monarchy*. In this work, which is devoted to world government, Dante emphasizes two important things. The first is that our highest vocation is the cultivation of our intellects—the part of us that is both distinctively human and divine. The second point is that humans are by nature communal and best actualize their intellectual potential in common. No one human intellect is self-sufficient, for then it would be God. We need each other, not just for the basics of life, or because we are social beings, or even for moral action, but also for the enrichment and expansion of our minds. This global cooperation—the transparency of all minds that love truth—is impossible, Dante argues, without world peace, which is the primary goal of sound politics. He argues further that this peace cannot come about without a single virtuous emperor who enforces the rule of law and puts an end to conflict and war.

Dante's *Comedy* is a tribute to human intellectual interdependence. It is the synthesis of everything Dante learned from other great minds. In its vision of an ordered whole or cosmos, the poem celebrates the definitive victory of a comic over a tragic sense of life—the victory of hope over despair. The *Comedy* inspires us to share its hope, to imitate its global vision and promote the common good. It exhorts us, exhorts the whole world, to leave the dark wood of self-enclosure and to practice the gracious but often demanding movements of good will and shared seeing.

[1] Author's Note: Translations of the *Comedy* are from John Sinclair's version (Oxford, 1939), which I have occasionally modified.

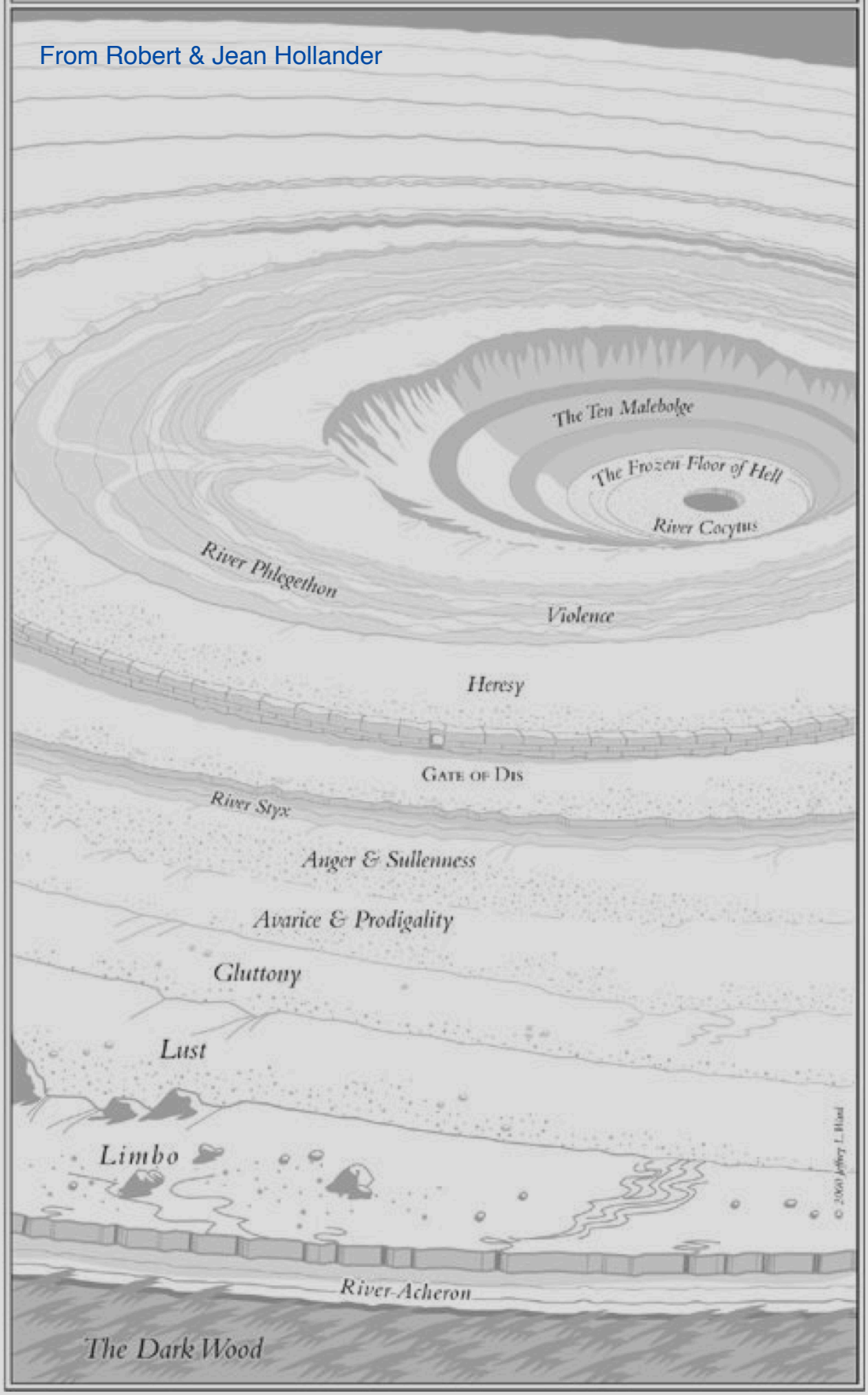
[2] All three regions of the whole are defined with respect to the intellect—the highest, most God-like part of us. Hell is the place of those who have lost the good of intellect. It is regularly associated with blindness. Purgatory is the mountain "where reason searches us" (*Purg*. 3, 3). Paradise is where the intellect, in community with other intellects, flourishes.

Books on the topic of this essay may be found in The Imaginative Conservative Bookstore. This essay was presented at the Belmont Undergraduate Research Symposium, Belmont University, April 16, 2015 and is published by permission of the author.


THE EMPYREAN
PARADISE
IX. CRYSTALLINE SPHERE. THE PRIMUM MOBILE
VIII. SPHERE OF THE FIXED STARS.
THE ZODIAC
VII. SPHERE OF SATURN
VI. SPHERE OF JUPITER
V. SPHERE OF MARS
IV. SPHERE OF THE SUN
III. SPHERE OF VENUS
II. SPHERE OF MERCURY
I. SPHERE OF THE MOON
EARTHLY PARADISE
FIRE
AIR
PURGATORY
HEMISPHERE OF WATER
HEMISPHERE OF EARTH
THE DARK WOOD
HELL
JERUSALEM

Map of Dante's Hell

From Robert & Jean Hollander



Inferno

Dante Alighieri

1300 AD

Virgil · Hell's Gate · Earth's surface · Underground · Emerge at the opposite end of Earth

Level

1 Limbo — Virtuous pre-Christians and the unbaptized; a few Biblical exceptions. Passive punishment; eternal life without hope of salvation through God.

2 Lust — Those who committed sins of the flesh are swept uncontrollably by stormy winds. Those unable to control their physical urges in life are now forever controlled by a storm.

3 Gluttony — The Gluttonous must lie on the ground as sewage rains down upon them. Those who excessively pursued pleasure in life now lie in an overabundance of that which disgusts.

4 Greed — The Avaricious and Prodigal, like Sisyphus, must pointlessly push heavy boulders. Those imprudent with money or material goods in life are doomed to be forever bound to them.

5 Wrath — The Wrathful fight on the muddy banks; the Sullen gurgle and choke on the black mud. Those excessive aggressive or idle in life now suffer an equivalent fate for eternity.

River Styx · Wall of Dis

6 Heresy — The Heretics sit forever in flaming tombs. Those who claimed a mortal spirit now suffer an eternity of bodily pain.

7 Violence against...

- **Others** — Tyrants and murderers in a river of boiling blood and fire. Those who spilled the blood of others now suffer eternity bathed in it.
- **Self** — Suicides and squanderers turned into trees; preyed by Harpies. Those who disrespect themselves are disrespected by others.
- **God** — Those violent against God in life suffer eternal rain of fire from the Heavens.

8 Fraud — Malebolge / Male bolge / evil pouches

- Panderers / Flatterers — Forced to run back and forth within their ditches lashed by horned demons on either side.
- Simoniacs — Upside down in large baptismal fonts cut into rock, feet set ablaze by oily fires. The heat of the flames burns according to the guilt of the sinner.
- Diviners, astrologers & magicians — Head twisted backwards; forced to walk backwards around the circumference of their circle for all of time.
- Barrators — Immersed in a river of human excrement representing their words.
- Hypocrites — Forced to march wearing heavy robes resembling a monk's cowl lined with lead, symbolically representing hypocrisy.
- Thieves — Thrown into a river of boiling pitch and tar; guarded by Malabranche — flying demons with grappling hooks and barbs.
- Fraudulent counselors — Tormented by serpents; bites cause their bodies to spontaneously combust, only to regenerate.
- Sowers of scandal & schism — Burning forever within a single eternal flame.
- Metals — The divisive in life suffer eternity cut and mutilated by a demon's sword.

The Falsifiers of...

- Persons
- Coins
- Words
- Giants
- **Traitors to...**
  - Kin (Caïna)
  - Homeland (Antenora)
  - Guests (Ptolomea)
  - Benefactors (Judecca)

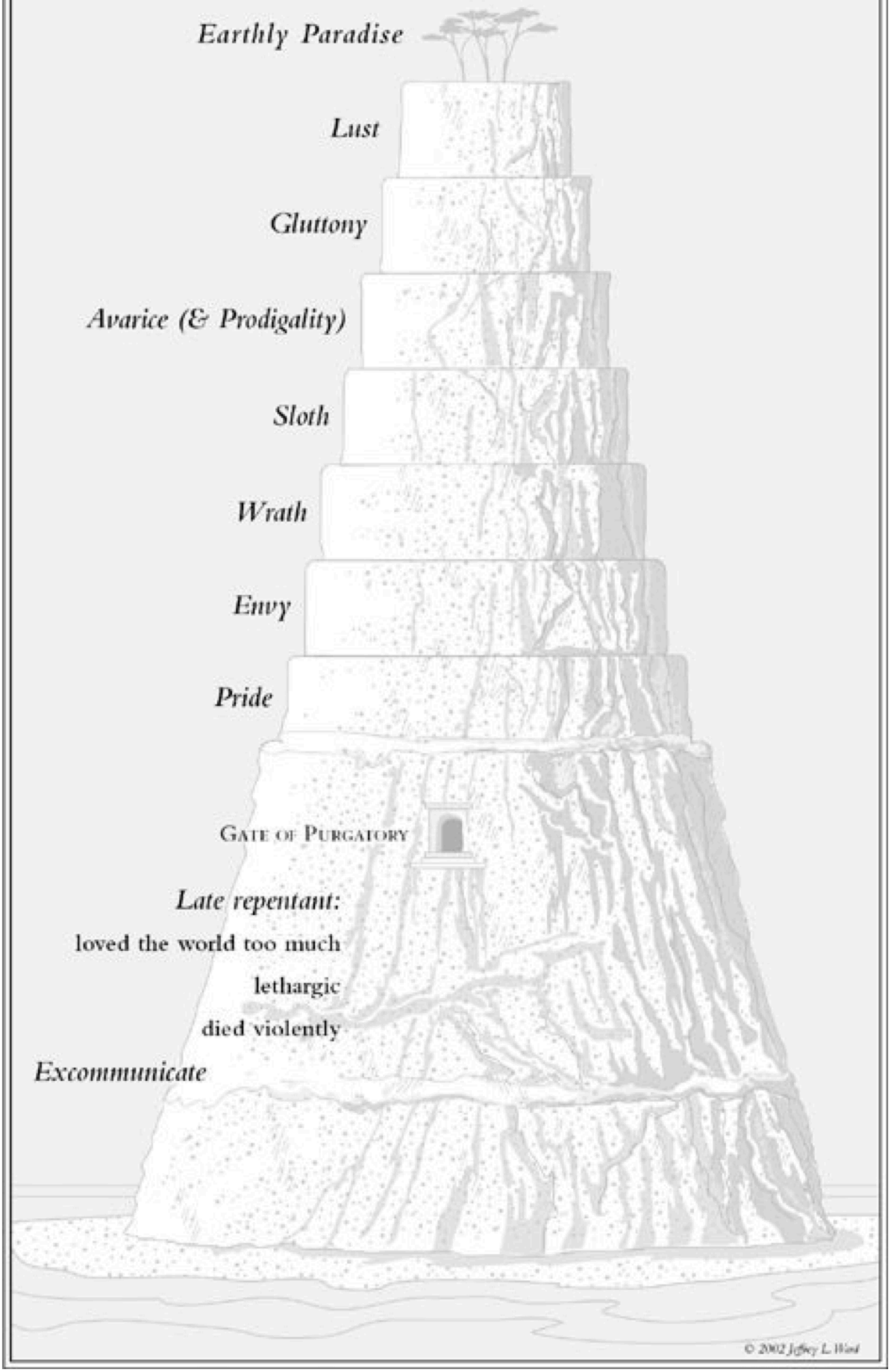
Judas Iscariot, Cassius and Brutus chewed in Lucifer's three mouths

Sodomites · Usurers · Sodomites · Blasphemers

Canto 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34

Map of Dante's Purgatory

From Robert & Jean Hollander



Map of Dante's Paradise

From Robert & Jean Hollander