



“Sinners and Saints in Dante’s *Commedia*”

Anthony Nussmeier (University of Dallas)
Online Course: Archdiocese of San Francisco
Week Six: *Paradise* 15-17, 23, 25, 33
30 August 2022

Ave Maria di San Bernardo (*Par.33.1-39*)

«Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,
umile e alta più che creatura,
termine fisso d'eterno consiglio,

3

tu se' colei che l'umana natura
nobilitasti sì, che 'l suo fattore
non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura.

6

Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore,
per lo cui caldo ne l'eterna pace
così è germinato questo fiore.

9

Qui se' a noi meridiana face
di caritate, e giuso, intra ' mortali,
se' di speranza fontana vivace.

12

Donna, se' tanto grande e tanto vali,
che qual vuol grazia e a te non ricorre,
sua disianza vuol volar sanz' ali.

15

La tua benignità non pur soccorre

Or questi, che da l'infima lacuna
de l'universo infin qui ha vedute
le vite spirituali ad una ad una,

24

supplica a te, per grazia, di virtute
tanto, che possa con li occhi levarsi
più alto verso l'ultima salute.

27

E io, che mai per mio veder non arsi
più ch'i' fo per lo suo, tutti miei prieghi
ti porgo, e priego che non sieno scarsi, 30
perché tu ogni nube li dislegghi
di sua mortalità co' prieghi tuoi,
sì che 'l sommo piacer li si dispieghi. 33

Ancor ti priego, regina, che puoi
ciò che tu vuoi, che conservi sani,
dopo tanto veder, li affetti suoi.

36

Vinca tua guardia i movimenti umani:
vedi Beatrice con quanti beati
per li miei prieghi ti chiudon le mani!». 39

St. Bernard's *Ave Maria* (Par. 33.1-39)

'Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son,
more humble and exalted than any other creature,
fixed goal of the eternal plan,
'you are the one who so ennobled human nature
that He, who made it first, did not disdain
to make Himself of its own making.
'Your womb relit the flame of love --
its heat has made this blossom seed
and flower in eternal peace.
'To us you are a noonday torch of charity,
while down below, among those still in flesh,
you are the living fountainhead of hope.
'Lady, you are so great and so prevail above,
should he who longs for grace not turn to you,
his longing would be doomed to wingless flight.
'Your loving kindness does not only aid
whoever seeks it, but many times
gives freely what has yet to be implored.
'In you clemency, in you compassion,
in you munificence, in you are joined
all virtues found in any creature.

'This man who, from within the deepest pit
the universe contains up to these heights
has seen the disembodied spirits, one by one,
'now begs you, by your grace, to grant such power
that, by lifting up his eyes,
he may rise higher toward his ultimate salvation.
'And I, who never burned for my own seeing
more than now I burn for his, offer all my prayers,
and pray that they may not fall short,
'so that your prayers disperse on his behalf
all clouds of his mortality and let
the highest beauty be displayed to him.
'This too, my Queen, I ask of you, who can achieve
whatever you desire, that you help him preserve,
after such vision, the purity of his affections.
'Let your protection rule his mortal passions.
See Beatrice, with so many of the blessed,
palms pressed together, joining me in prayer.'

Recapitulation of Week One

- Dante is the father of Italian, though not the inventor of Italian, nor is he the first Italian poet. He is part of a “fourth wave” of Italian poets ([1] the first Italian poets write in Old Occitan, [2] Sicilian poets at the court of Federico II, [3] *siculo-toscani* and Bolognesi in the Communes of northern Italy, [4] Dante & Company])
- Dante writes the *Comedy* while in exile and amidst a fractured and divisive political background
- both Liberal Italy and the Church claim Dante
- Italy’s literary unification precedes and perhaps supercedes its political unification (1861)
- The Church calls Dante “ours” (Pope Paul VI, Pope Benedict XV) despite Dante’s willingness to condemn popes and others to hell in the *Comedy*, and despite Dante’s argument, in the *De monarchia*, that the pope ought to concentrate on being Christ’s vicar on earth (“the two suns [Emperor and Pope]”)
- the *Comedy* presents a unified cosmos, consisting of “death, love, and God” that ends with God himself, who has “bound the universe in a single volume” (see also *Letter to Cangrande*)
- the *Inferno* is not enough - we must read on through *Purgatory* and *Paradise*
- “From the abyss of crimes punished, through the serene realms where human spirits purify themselves, toward the arduous summits of perfection, to which a multiplicity of ways lead to holiness and splendor, there are those who model the many different forms that holiness takes -- panegyrics woven for St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Peter Damian, St. Benedict of Norcia, St. Romuald, St. Bernard -- all rising toward a summit.” (*motu proprio* of Pope Paul VI, 1965, VII centenary of Dante’s birth)

Recapitulation of Week Two

- the formal structure of the *Commedia* (canti, canticles, *terza rima*, hendacasyllables)
- The division and circles of *Inferno*
- Dante's careful attention to each word, each phoneme in the poem
- “Vertical readings”
- Description of sinners and Hell in *Inferno*
- *Inferno* 1 and 2: prologue, invocation, meeting with Virgil
- *Inferno* 3: the first sinners (neutrals)
- *Inferno* 5: Francesca and Paolo
- The first saints of Hell (St. Paul, St. Lucy)
 - “Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono”, he says (*Inferno* 2.32) (‘I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul.)
 - [Beatrice speaks, reported by Virgil to Dante] “She [Mary] summoned Lucy and made this request: / “Your faithful one is now in need of you and I commend him to your care.” / Lucy, the enemy of every cruelty arose and came to where I [Beatrice] sat at venerable Rachel’s side” (*Inferno* 2.97-102)

Recapitulation of Week Three

- Inferno and its structure
- *Inferno* 26
- Primo Levi and *Se questo è un uomo*
 - the influence of Dante's poem on Levi's book
 - Dante's *Commedia* as means of survival
 - Primo Levi's memory of *Inferno* 26
- Varying interpretations of Ulysses/Odysseus in Hell
- *Inferno* 33 and Conte Ugolino

Recapitulation of Week Four

- move from Inferno to Purgatory
- structure of Purgatory (Ante-Purgatory, Purgatory)
 - Seven terraces mirroring - more or less - the seven deadly sins
- changed environs of Purgatory (“better waters”)
- distinctive characteristic of Purgatory: prayer
 - Inferno: blasphemy, discordant sounds
 - Purgatory: prayer and more polyphonic music, **movement** towards unity
- Jacques Le Goff’s history of the concept in *The Birth of Purgatory* (1984)
 - spatialization of Purgatory
 - Purgatory’s concretization in the century before Dante (1150-1200)
 - the ascension of Purgatory reflected in Dante’s poetry (*salire* et al)
 - Purgatory: individual responsibility and free will (in Dante “libero arbitrio”, an expression found at the literal center of the poem)
 - Purgatory as an intermediary between Hell and Heaven that is closer to Heaven than to Hell
- *Purgatory* 11 and Dante’s *Our Father*

Recap of Week Five

- we moved “from the abyss of crimes punished, through the serene realms where human spirits purify themselves, toward the arduous summits of perfection”
- discussed the parallel structures of the three canticles (*Paradiso*, like *Purgatorio*, opens with [the nautical metaphor](#))
- *Inferno* is characterized by perversion, blasphemy, nonsensical language; *Purgatory* by ascension and constant intercessory prayer; *Paradise* by blessedness and great joy, symbolized by polyphonic music, dancing, and overabundant light
 - Example from *Paradiso* 10 and the Heaven of the Sun ([link](#))
- Reading “key” to *Paradise* is theology. Reason is not enough. As Beatrice says to Dante in *Paradise* 2: “ragione ha corte l’ali” (‘reason has short wings’)
- The intertextual relationship between St. Francis’ *Laudes creaturarum* and Dante’s version and gloss of the *Our Father* in *Purgatorio* 11.
 - (much recent research has demonstrated Dante’s use of, in particular, Franciscan sources in relevant canti like *Purgatorio* 11 and *Paradiso* 11 and 12)
- the specular complementarity of *Paradise* 11 and 12: in the former, a Dominican, St. Thomas Aquinas, recounts the exemplary life of a Franciscan, St. Francis of Assisi, while in the latter, a Franciscan, St. Bonaventure, recounts the exemplary life of a Dominican, St. Dominic

Paradise 1-2

1. “O you, eager to hear more,
who have followed in your little bark
my ship that singing makes its way,
turn back if you would see your shores again.” (*Par.* 2)

1. “Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo
per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale
vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,
metter potete ben per l'alto sale
vostro navigio, servando mio solco
dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna eguale. (*Par.* 2.10-15)

(You other few who craned your necks in time
reach for angels' bread, which gives us life on earth,
yet never leaves us satisfied,
you may indeed set out, your ship afloat
upon the salty deep, keeping to the furrow
I have made, before the sea goes smooth again.)

1. “He who comes down from there [the highest heaven]
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 it” (*Par.* 1.5-9).

1. “Devoid of its principal reason of increasing closeness to God, prayer in paradise needs to find creative forms of expression. It is a manifestation of the souls’ gratitude for their salvation and for God’s goodness, an exaltation for their communion as heavenly souls, for the pilgrim’s miraculous visit, and for their ability to escort him to the utmost revelation of the Trinity in the Empyrean.” (Alessandro Vettori, *Dante’s Prayerful Pilgrimage*, Brill, 2019, p. 12)

“If prayer is a tension toward the divine and an expressed desire to be closer to God or even to become like God, what is the sense of its presence in heaven? In Dante’s *Paradiso*, prayer loses its basic quality of being an attempt to reestablish lost contact with God, of being a more or less successful “dialogue with divinity,” which were some of its fundamental qualities on earth and in purgatory. Since heavenly souls enjoy full communion with God, they no longer need prayer to increase their closeness to him, and theologically prayer has no reason to exist. The blessed souls of heaven have accomplished what they were striving to achieve with prayer in their lives; in a way, they have become the object of their prayer. In Dante’s *Paradiso*, prayer becomes a purely poetic device that serves the purpose of describing in human words the beauty and harmony of eternal life in full communion with divinity. It also creates a rhetorical continuum with *Purgatorio*, since for the purging souls and certainly for the pilgrim, heaven represents the goal of their purgatorial journey, which they have achieved in part also through prayer. The poet transforms the previous types of prayer into a thankful song of joy for being in paradise, and a general glorification of God’s love, beauty, and goodness.” (Vettori, *Dante’s Prayerful Pilgrimage*, p. 175)

Reading “key” to *Paradiso*

In *Paradise* 2, *Dante* asks Beatrice about the Moon with a constellation of words that recalls his conversation with Casella: “Io rispuosi: “Madonna, sì devoto com’esser posso più, ringrazio lui lo qual dal **mortal mondo** m’ ha remoto. Ma ditemi: che son li segni bui di **questo corpo**? *Par.* 2.46-50) - ‘I replied: My Lady, with absolute devotion I offer thanks to Him who has removed me from the world of death. But tell me, what are the dark spots on this **body**?’ Both *Purgatory* 2 and *Paradise* 2, then, are concerned with **materiality**. The question of materiality and bodies also brings us back to earlier moments in the *Inferno*—think about the astonishment of the shades when they realize that Dante possesses a human body. So how does Dante understand the materiality of the Moon in *Paradise*? Dante-character, following Aristotle, first proposes that the dark spots on the moon are the fruit of the relative differences in the weight of matter: “The different shadings,” he tells Beatrice, “here are caused, I think, by bodies rare or dense.” Beatrice chides him. She is unequivocal. She doesn’t take on the role of supportive teacher who says, “well, that’s a good start, but not quite right.” Instead: “No doubt but you shall see that this belief lies deep in error” (v. 62). The moon’s dark spots, she counters, cannot be due to “rare matter”, for if they were, light from the sun would shine through the “rare matter” during the eclipse (v. 81). She then takes down his argument by way of the “mirror experiment” in vv. 94-105. If “dense” and “rare” matter determined the “dark” and “bright”, she says, then the light generated by two equidistant mirrors and a third one behind and in the middle of them would not be equal. Beatrice ultimately resolves Dante’s question by turning to theology. Whereas Dante-character had tried to account for the Moon’s dark spots from a purely physical point of view, Beatrice argues that observation and physical science are not enough. “[R]agione ha corti le ali,” ‘reason’s wings fall short’ when dependent on the senses alone, she says to him (v. 57). Forget about density of matter; the differentiations on the moon’s surface have their origins in theology: it is angelic intelligence that determines light and dark. **Metaphysics, not physics**. The “bread of the angels,” and not bread in substance. The Angels of the Ninth Sphere are responsible for the varying shades on the Moon: the nature of each star—Dante refers to the Moon alternately as “star”, “planet”, and “body”—marries its angelic partner, and this creates dark and light: “so angelic intelligence unfolds its bounty...[and] makes a different alloy with each precious body. [...] From this power is derived the difference seen from light to light, and not from dense and rare” (vv. 136-146). In the end, in all its laboriousness, this canto, *Paradiso* 2, is significant: In it, Dante says, we have the key to Paradise: **theology**. Later, in *Paradiso* 25, Dante will cement this reading-key when he calls his epic the “**poema sacro**”, ‘sacred poem, / to which Heaven and earth have set their hand’ (*Par.* 25.1-2).

Heaven of the Sun

- *Par.* 10. 64-81:

Io vidi più **folgór vivi e vincenti**
far di noi centro e di sé far corona,
più **dolci in voce che in vista lucenti:**

66

così cinger la figlia di Latona
vedem talvolta, quando l'aere è pregno,
sì che ritenga il fil che fa la zona.

69

Ne la corte del cielo, ond' io rivegno,
si trovan **molte gioie care e belle**
tanto che non si posson trar del regno;

72

e 'l **canto di quei lumi era di quelle;**
chi non s'impenna sì che là sù voli,
dal muto aspetti quindi le novelle.

75

Poi, **sì cantando,** quelli ardenti soli
si fuor girati intorno a noi tre volte,
come stelle vicine a' fermi poli,

78

I saw many living lights of blinding brightness
make of us a center and of themselves a crown,
their voices sweeter than the radiance of their faces.
Thus ringed we sometimes see Latona's daughter
when the air has grown so heavy
that it retains the thread that forms her belt.
In the court of Heaven, from which I have returned,
there are many gems of such worth and beauty
that they may not be taken from the realm.
These lights were singing of those jewels.
He who fails to wing himself to fly there
might as well await the dumb to tell the news.
When, with just such songs, those blazing suns
had three times made their way around us,
like stars right near the still and steady poles,
they seemed to me like ladies, poised to dance,
pausing, silent, as they listen,
until they have made out the new refrain.

We have gone from the “eterno dolore” (‘eternal pain’, *Inf.* 3.2) and the “tenebre etterne” (‘eternal darkness’, *Inf.* 3.87) of *Inferno*, to the “eterno consiglio” (‘eternal plan’, *Par.* 33.3), “eterna pace” (‘eternal peace’, *Par.* 33.8) and “eterno lume” (‘eternal Light’, *Par.* 33.42).

St. Thomas, St. Francis, and St. Dominic

La provedenza, che governa il mondo
con quel consiglio nel quale ogni aspetto
creato è vinto pria che vada al fondo, 30
però che andasse ver' lo suo diletto
la sposa di colui ch'ad alte grida
disposò lei col sangue benedetto, 33
in sé sicura e anche a lui più fida,
due principi ordinò in suo favore,
che quinci e quindi le fosser per guida. 36
L'un fu tutto serafico in ardore;
l'altro per sapienza in terra fue
di cherubica luce uno splendore. 39
De l'un dirò, però che d'amendue
si dice l'un pregiando, qual ch'om prende,
perch' ad un fine fur l'opere sue. (*Par.* 11.28-42)

The providence that rules the world
With such deep wisdom that any God-created eye
must fail before it reaches to the very depth --
'so that the bride of Him who, crying out
in a loud voice, espoused her with His sacred blood,
should go in joy to her beloved
'sure of herself and now to Him more faithful --
ordained in her behalf two princes,
one on this side, one on that, to serve as guides.
'One was all seraphic in his ardor,
the other, by his wisdom, was on earth
resplendent with cherubic light.
'I shall speak of one, since praising one,
whichever one we choose, is to speak of both,
for they labored to a single end.

Dante's "Life of St. Francis" in *Paradise* 11

Non era ancor molto lontan da l'orto,
ch'el cominciò a far sentir la terra
de la sua gran virtute alcun conforto;
ché per tal donna, giovinetto, in guerra
del padre corse, a cui, come a la morte,
la porta del piacer nessun diserra;
e dinanzi a la sua spirital corte
et coram patre le si fece unito;
poscia di dì in dì l'amò più forte.
Questa, privata del primo marito,
millecent' anni e più dispetta e scura
fino a costui si stette senza invito;
né valse udir che la trovò sicura
con Amiclate, al suon de la sua voce,
colui ch'a tutto 'l mondo fé paura;
né valse esser costante né feroce,
sì che, dove Maria rimase giuso,
ella con Cristo pianse in su la croce. (*Par.* 11.55-72)

57 'Not much time as yet had passed
when he first lent his comfort to the earth
by the greatness of his virtuous power.
'For, still a youth, he fought against his father's wish
for the favor of a lady to whom, as to death,
60 no one unlocks the door with gladness,
'and before his spiritual court *et coram patre*
he joined himself to her and, from then on,
63 each passing day, he loved her more.
'She, bereft of her first husband, scorned and unknown
one thousand and one hundred years and more,
66 remained without a suitor till he came.
'Nor did it profit her when men heard that she stood
unmoved, with Amyclas, despite the voice
69 of him who put the whole wide world in fear.
'Nor did it profit her when, being fiercely loyal
and undaunted, while Mary stayed below,
she wept with Christ upon the cross.

Dante's "Life of St. Francis" in *Paradise* 11

Ma perch' io non proceda troppo chiuso,
Francesco e Povertà per questi amanti
prendi oramai nel mio parlar diffuso.
La lor concordia e i lor lieti sembianti,
amore e meraviglia e dolce sguardo
facieno esser cagion di pensier santi;
tanto che 'l venerabile Bernardo
si scalzò prima, e dietro a tanta pace
corse e, correndo, li parve esser tardo.
Oh ignota ricchezza! oh ben ferace!
Scalzasi Egidio, scalzasi Silvestro
dietro a lo sposo, sì la sposa piace.
Indi sen va quel padre e quel maestro
con la sua donna e con quella famiglia
che già legava l'umile capestro.

87

Né li gravò viltà di cuor le ciglia
per esser fi' di Pietro Bernardone,
né per parer dispetto a meraviglia;
ma regalmente sua dura intenzione
ad Innocenzio aperse, e da lui ebbe

But, lest I make my meaning dark,
let it be understood, in all that I have said,
75 that these two lovers are Francis and Poverty.
"Their happy countenances and their harmony,
their love and wonder and sweet contemplation
78 made them a cause for holy thoughts,
'so that the venerable Bernard was the first
to shed his shoes and run, pursuing such great peace,
81 and, running, thought himself too slow.
'O unknown riches and prolific good_ Barefoot goes Giles,
barefoot goes Sylvester, following the groom,
84 so greatly pleasing is the bride.
'Then that father and teacher went his way
in company of his lady and that family,
each one girt with the same humble cord.
'Nor did an unworthy shame weigh on his brow
for being Pietro Bernardone's son,
nor for being an object of amazed contempt,
90 'but he regally laid bare his stern resolve
to Innocent and, from him, he received
the first seal of his order.

Dante's "Life of St. Francis" in *Paradise* 11

Poi che la gente poverella crebbe
dietro a costui, la cui mirabil vita
meglio in gloria del ciel si canterebbe, 96
di seconda corona redimita
fu per Onorio da l'Etterno Spiro 99
la santa voglia d'esto archimandrita.
E poi che, per la sete del martiro,
ne la presenza del Soldan superba
predicò Cristo e li altri che 'l seguio, 102
e per trovare a conversione acerba
troppo la gente e per non stare indarno, 105
redissi al frutto de l'italica erba,
nel crudo sasso intra Tevero e Arno
da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo,
che le sue membra due anni portarno. 108
Quando a colui ch'a tanto ben sortillo
piacque di trarlo suso a la mercede
ch'el meritò nel suo farsi pusillo, 111
a' frati suoi, sì com' a giuste rede,
raccomandò la donna sua più cara,
e comandò che l'amassero a fede; (Par. 11.94-114)

When his followers, sworn to poverty,
increased their number, he, whose admirable life
were better sung in the glorious realm of Heaven,
'was affirmed with a second crown
by the eternal Breath, through Honorius,
in his holy purpose as shepherd of this flock.
'And when, in his thirst for martyrdom,
he preached Christ and the Apostles who came after
in the proud presence of the Sultan,
'finding the people unripe for conversion
and unwilling to remain to no good purpose,
he returned to reap the harvest of Italian fields.
'On the harsh rock between the Tiber and the Arno
from Christ he had the final seal, then for two years
he bore His wounds upon his limbs.
'When He who had chosen him for so much good
was pleased to take him to the high reward
that he had won with his devoted meekness,
'he recommended his most cherished lady
to his brothers, as to his rightful heirs,
commanding them to love her faithfully.

Dante's "Life of St. Francis" in *Paradise* 11

e del suo grembo l'anima preclara
mover si volle, tornando al suo regno,
e al suo corpo non volle altra bara. 117
Pensa oramai qual fu colui che degno
collega fu a mantener la barca
di Pietro in alto mar per dritto segno; 120
e questo fu il nostro patriarca;
per che qual segue lui, com' el comanda,
discerner puoi che buone merce carica. 123
Ma 'l suo pecuglio di nova vivanda
è fatto ghiotto, sì ch'esser non puote
che per diversi salti non si spanda; 126
e quanto le sue pecore remote
e vagabunde più da esso vanno,
più tornano a l'ovile di latte vòte.

129

Ben son di quelle che temono 'l danno
e stringonsi al pastor; ma son sì poche,
che le cappe fornisce poco panno. (*Par.* 11.115-132)

From his lady's bosom the illustrious soul
chose to set forth, returning to its kingdom,
and for its corpse would have no other bier.
'Now think what kind of man it took
to be a fit companion to maintain
the steadfast course of Peter's bark upon the sea,
'and just such was our patriarch. From this
you may perceive that he who follows him
as he commands is freighted with good cargo.
'But his flock has grown so greedy
for new sustenance that it is forced
to scatter through remote and distant pastures,
'and the farther his sheep go wandering off
from him, the emptier of milk
do they at last come back into the fold.
'There are some, indeed, who, fearing harm,
huddle near the shepherd, but these are so few
that a tiny piece of cloth can furnish all their cowls.

Laudes creaturarum di San Francesco d'Assisi (c. 1224)

Altissimu, onnipotente bon Signore,
Tue so le laude, la gloria e l'honore et onne benedictione.

Ad Te solo, Altissimo, se konfano,
et nullu homo ène digne te mentouare.

Laudato sie, mi Signore cum tucte le Tue creature,
spetialmente messor lo frate Sole,
lo qual è iorno, et allumini noi per lui.

Et ellu è bellu e radiante cum grande splendore:
de Te, Altissimo, porta significatione.

Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora Luna e le stelle:
in celu l'ài formate clarite et pretiose et belle.

Laudato si, mi Signore, per frate Uento
et per aere et nubilo et sereno et onne tempo,
per lo quale, a le Tue creature dà sustentamento.

Laudato si, mi Signore, per sor'Acqua,
la quale è multo utile et humile et pretiosa et casta.

Laudato si, mi Signore, per frate Focu,
per lo quale ennallumini la nocte:
ed ello è bello et iucundo et robustoso et forte.

Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora nostra matre Terra,
la quale ne sustenta et gouerna,
et produce diuersi fructi con coloriti fior et herba.

Laudato si, mi Signore, per quelli ke perdonano per lo Tuo amore
et sostengono infirmitate et tribulatione.

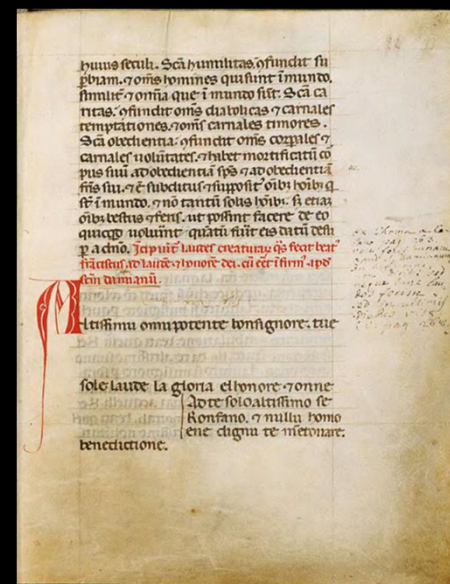
Beati quelli ke 'l sosterranno in pace,
ka da Te, Altissimo, sirano incoronati.

Laudato si mi Signore, per sora nostra Morte corporale,
da la quale nullu homo uiuente pò skappare:

guai a quelli ke morrano ne le peccata mortali;
beati quelli ke trouarà ne le Tue sanctissime uoluntati,
ka la morte secunda no 'l farrà male.

Laudate et benedicite mi Signore et rengriate
e seruiteli cum grande humilitate.

"O Padre nostro, che ne' cieli stai,
non circunsritto, ma per più amore
ch'ai primi effetti di là sù tu hai,
laudato sia 'l tuo nome e 'l tuo valore
da ogne creatura, com'è degno
di render grazie al tuo dolce vapore.
(Dante, *Purg.* 11.1-6)



More reading on Dante and the ‘Spiritual Franciscans’

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Paradiso 12: Dante's "Life of St. Dominic"



Basilica di San Domenico in Bologna.

The *arca* of St. Dominic in Bologna.





Paradiso 12: Dante's "Life of St. Dominic"

Poi che 'l **tripudio** e l'**altra festa** grande,
sì **del cantare** e sì del fiammeggiarsi
luce con luce gaudiose e blande,
insieme a punto e a voler quietarsi,
pur come li occhi ch'al piacer che i move
conviene insieme chiudere e levarsi;
del cor de l'una de le luci nove
si mosse voce, che l'ago a la stella
parer mi fece in volgermi al suo dove;
e cominciò: [...] (*Par.* 12.22-31)

When the dance and all the other celebration --
the singing and the brilliant blaze of flames,
light with light blent in ardent joy --
came to a stop together and of one accord,
as eyes, when beauty moves them,
must open wide or close as one,
from the core of one of these new lights,
as the north star makes a compass needle veer,
rose a voice that made me turn to where it came from.
And it began: [...]

Cacciaguida and the triptych: *Paradiso* 15-17

Cacciaguida evokes Florence's "Golden Age":

Florence, within the circle of her ancient walls
From which she still hears tierce and nones,
Dwelt then in peace, temperate and chaste.
No bracelet, no tiara did she wear,
No embroidered gown, no waistband
More striking to the eye than was its wearer.
[...]

I saw Bellincion Berti wear a belt of leather
And plain bone, and saw his lady step back
From the glass, her face untouched by paint.
And I saw one of the Nerli and a del Vecchio
Content with wearing simple, unlined skins,
Their ladies busy with their spindles and their flax.'
(*Par.* 15.97-102; 112-117)

Cacciaguida references the civic and the sacred:

A così riposato, a così bello
viver di cittadini, a così fida
cittadinanza, a così dolce ostello,¹³²
Maria mi diè, chiamata in alte grida;
e ne l'antico vostro **Batisteo**
insieme fui cristiano e Cacciaguida.
(*Par.* 15.130-135)

"It was to a municipal life so peaceful
And so fair, to a citizenry so loyal,
To so sweet a place to live
that Mary gave me when invoked with cries
Of childbirth, and in your ancient baptistry,
I was at once Cacciaguida and Christian.

Cacciaguida and *Paradise* 17

indi rispuose: «Coscienza fusca
o de la propria o de l'altrui vergogna
pur sentirà la tua parola brusca.

126

Ma nondimen, rimossa ogne menzogna,
tutta tua vision fa manifesta;
e lascia pur grattar dov' è la rogna. 129
Ché se la voce tua sarà molesta
nel primo gusto, vital nodrimento
lascerà poi, quando sarà digesta.

132

Questo tuo grido farà come vento,
che le più alte cime più percuote;
e ciò non fa d'onor poco argomento. 135

Però ti son mostrate in queste rote,
nel monte e ne la valle dolorosa
pur l'anime che son di fama note, 138
che l'animo di quel ch'ode, non posa
né ferma fede per essempro ch'aia
la sua radice incognita e ascosa,

141

and then made this reply: 'A conscience dark,
whether with its own or with a kinsman's shame,
is sure to feel your words are harsh.

'Nonetheless, forswear all falsehood,
revealing all that you have seen,
and then let him who itches scratch.

'For, if your voice is bitter at first taste,
it will later furnish vital nourishment
once it has been swallowed and digested.

'This cry of yours shall do as does the wind
that strikes the highest peaks with greater force --
this loftiness itself no little sign of honor.

'That is why you have been shown, within these
wheels,

upon the mountain, and in the woeful valley,
those souls alone that are well known to fame,

'since the mind of one who listens will not heed
nor fix its faith on an example
that has its roots in things unknown or hidden
or on some other proof not clearly shown.'

PARADISO XXV

3 Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro
al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra,
sì che m'ha fatto per molti anni macro,

6 vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra
del bello ovile ov' io dormi' agnello,
nimico ai lupi che li danno guerra;

9 con altra voce omai, con altro vello
ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte
del mio battesimo prenderò 'l cappello;

12 però che ne la fede, che fa conte
l'anime a Dio, quivi intra' io, e poi
Pietro per lei sì mi girò la fronte.

15 Indi si mosse un lume verso noi
di quella spera ond' uscì la primizia
che lasciò Cristo d'i vicari suoi;

18 e la mia donna, piena di letizia,
mi disse: "Mira, mira: ecco il barone
per cui là giù si vicita Galizia."

21 Sì come quando il colombo si pone
presso al compagno, l'uno a l'altro pande,
girando e mormorando, l'affezione;

24 così vid' io l'un da l'altro grande
principe glorioso essere accolto,
laudando il cibo che là sù li prande.

27 Ma poi che 'l gratular si fu assolto,
tacito *coram me* ciascun s'affisse,
ignito sì che vincëa 'l mio volto.

Paradiso 25

Should it ever come to pass that this sacred poem,
to which both Heaven and earth have set their hand
so that it has made me lean for many years,

3 should overcome the cruelty that locks me out
of the fair sheepfold where I slept as a lamb,
6 foe of the wolves at war with it,

9 with another voice then, with another fleece,
shall I return a poet and, at the font
where I was baptized, take the laurel crown.

12 For there I came into the faith
that recommends the soul to God, and now,
because of it, Peter encircled thus my brow.

15 At that a light moved toward us from the circle
out of which had come the first-fruit of the stock
of vicars Christ did leave for us on earth,

18 and my lady, brimming with joy, said to me:
'Look, look, here is the nobleman
who down below draws pilgrims to Galicia.'

21 As, when the dove alights beside its mate
and each displays, circling and cooing,
its fondness for the other,

24 so I saw one great and glorious prince
welcomed by the other, both giving praise
for the feast that there above they share.

27 But after they had shown their pleasure in each other,
they both stopped, silent, *coram me*,
so brightly flaming that they overcame my sight.

Inferno 19 + *Paradiso* 25 (+*Paradiso* 15): union of the sacred and the civic

Non mi parean men ampi né maggiori
che que' che son nel mio bel San Giovanni,
fatti per loco d'i battezzatori;
l'un de li quali, ancor non è molt'anni,
rupp'io per un che dentro v'annegava:
e questo sia suggel ch'ogn'omo sganni.
(*Inf.* 19.16-21)

("They seemed to me as wide and deep
as those in my beautiful Saint John
made for the priests to baptize in,
one of which, not many years ago,
I broke to save one nearly drowned in it—
and let this be my seal, to undeceive all
men.")

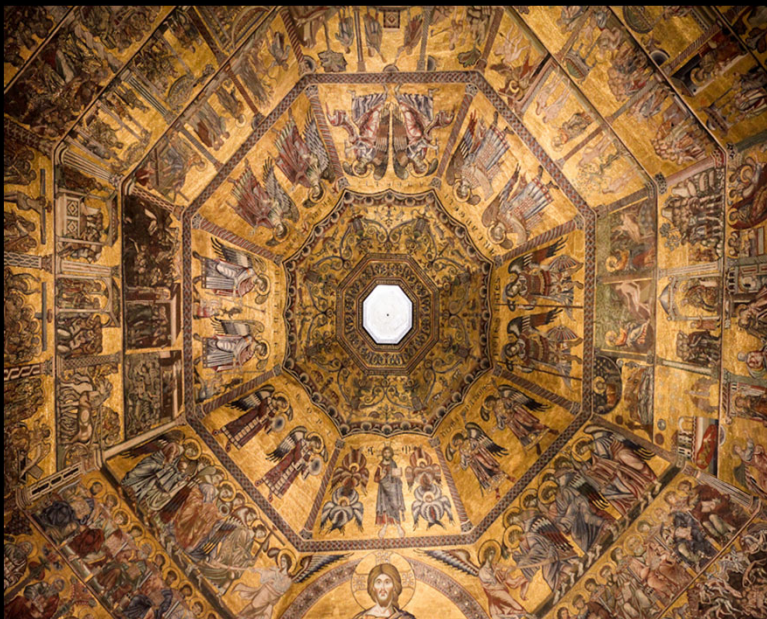
[R]itornerò **poeta**, e in **sul fonte**
del mio battesimo prenderò 'l cappello;
però che ne la fede, che fa conte
l'anime a Dio, quivi intra' io, e poi
Pietro per lei sì mi girò la fronte.
(*Par.* 25.8-12)

("I shall return a poet and, at the font
where I was baptized, take the laurel crown.
For there I came into the faith
that recommends the soul to God, and now,
because of it, Peter encircled thus my brow.")



Santa Maria dei Fiori, *aka*, il Duomo di Firenze (begun *c.* 1296)

San Giovanni a Firenze





Il carroccio fiorentino, a four-wheeled 'war altar' (from a manuscript of Giovanni Villani's *Cronica nuova*, c. 1348)

Paradiso 33

Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio
Che 'l parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede,
e **cede la memoria** a tanto oltraggio. (*Par.* 33.55-57)

[From that time on my power of sight exceeded
That of speech, which fails at such as vision,
As memory fails at such abundance. (*Par.* 33.55-57)]

Perché appressando sé al suo disire,
nostro intelletto sì profonda tanto,
che dietro **la memoria non può ire**. (*Par.* 1.7-9)

[for, drawing near to its desire,
so deeply is our intellect immersed
that memory cannot follow after it. (*Par.* 1.7-9)]

8. Et quia, invento principio seu primo, videlicet Deo, nichil est quod ulterius queratur, cum sit Alfa et O, idest principium et finis, ut visio Iohannis designat, in ipso Deo terminatur tractatus, qui est benedictus in secula seculorum. (**Dante's *Letter to Cangrande*, par. 90**)

("And since, when the Beginning or First, which is God, has been reached, there is nought to be sought for beyond, inasmuch as He is Alpha and Omega, that is, the Beginning and the End, as the *Vision* of John tells us, the work [the *Comedy*] ends in God Himself, who is blessed for evermore, world without end.")

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