

**Dante's *Paradise*:
A Discussion Guide**

**David
Bruce**



Dedicated with Love to Josephine Saturday Bruce

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I also recommend the course on Dante's *Divine Comedy* by William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, which is available from the Teaching Company.

I recommend that you read the translation by Mark Musa.

The translation by John Ciardi is also very good.

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Preface

The purpose of this book is educational. I have read, studied and taught Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and I wish to pass on what I have learned to other people who are interested in studying Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In particular, I think that the readers of this short introduction to Dante's *Paradise* will be bright high school seniors and college first-year students, as well as intelligent adults who simply wish to study *The Divine Comedy* despite not being literature majors.

This book uses a question-and-answer format. It poses, then answers, relevant questions about Dante, background information, and *The Divine Comedy*. This book goes through the *Paradise* canto by canto. I recommend that you read the relevant section of the *Paradise*, then read my comments, then go back and re-read the relevant section of the *Paradise*. However, do what works for you.

Teachers may find this discussion guide useful. Teachers can have students read cantos from the epic poem, then teachers can ask students selected questions from this discussion guide.

It helps to know something about Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Greek and Roman mythology, the Bible, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and other works such as Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, but this background reading is not strictly necessary. You have to begin reading great literature somewhere, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a good place to start. (Come on in! The water's great! And later you can go and read the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, etc.)

This book uses many short quotations from Mark Musa's translation of *The Divine Comedy*, as well as from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The Longfellow translation is no longer under copyright.

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Paradise

CHAPTER 1: “Canto 1: Beatrice and Dante Rise from Eden”

- **We are finally going to experience Paradise.**

This is Canto 68 of the 100 cantos in *The Divine Comedy*. Of course, we have seen a lot in the previous cantos. We began in the dark wood of error in Canto 1 of the *Inferno*, the canto in which Dante the Pilgrim tried unsuccessfully to climb to the light. Beginning now, he is going to travel to the light, but of course he first had to travel down into the Inferno, climb up the other side of the Earth, and climb up the Seven-Storey Mountain of Purgatory until he reached the Forest of Eden, where he made his final preparations for climbing to the light.

- **What do the first three lines of Paradise mean?**

These are the first three lines of the *Paradise*:

The glory of the One Who moves all things
penetrates all the universe, reflecting
in one part more and in another less.

(Musa 1.1-3)

The glory of Him who moveth everything
Doth penetrate the universe, and shine
In one part more and in another less.

(Longfellow 1-3)

Mark Musa writes that he is translating the Italian closely here and that if he were to translate in an interpretative manner, he would have translated in this way:

The glory of the One Who moves all things
 shines through the universe and is reflected
 by all things in proportion to their merit.

(Musa 6)

Two main ideas are here:

1) *God is the Prime Mover.*

Here is a definition of Prime Mover:

first cause: an agent that is the cause of all things but does not itself have a cause; “God is the first cause”

Source: wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

Christians and Jews believe that God created the universe. Furthermore, many Jews and Christians believe that God keeps on continually creating the universe each and every moment. If God did not do this, the universe would cease to exist.)

I once read a science-fiction story (“The Nine Billion Names of God” by British writer Arthur C. Clarke) about a Tibetan lamasery whose monks believed that if all of God’s many names were written down, then the universe would cease to exist. For some reason, they wanted the universe to cease to exist. For centuries, the monks of the cult had been writing down God’s many names. The invention of computers speeded up the process considerably. At the end of the story, the protagonist is outside at night looking at the sky, and he notices the stars blinking out of existence as if a giant hand were sweeping across the sky putting out candles.

By the way, God has what philosophers call *aseity*, or necessary existence: Think of a continuum. On one side are objects whose existence is impossible. For example, it is

impossible for a square triangle to exist. Also, because a bachelor is an unmarried man, it is impossible for a married bachelor to exist (unless you twist the meanings of words and commit the fallacy of equivocation).

In the middle are contingent beings. You and I are contingent. We exist for a while, and then we die. (According to a computer program that predicts lifespans, I am supposed to die on Wednesday, April 26, 2028.) Eventually nothing will be left of our bodies, not even bones. (Well, our atoms will still exist.) Some people argue that the universe itself is contingent because everything in it appears to be contingent.

On the other side of the continuum is necessary existence. A being with necessary existence is one that has always existed and will always exist. Its nonexistence is impossible, just as the existence of a square triangle is impossible. The being with necessary existence is what we call God.

Captain Jean-Luc Picard of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* can state that religion is a superstition of the past, but philosophers of the twenty-first century are still taking the question of the existence of God seriously. One contemporary philosopher who believes he has a good argument for the existence of God is Richard Taylor, who makes what is known as the argument from contingency.

Mr. Taylor starts with a plausible principle: The Principle of Sufficient Reason. To illustrate the principle, he asks us to imagine that we are walking in the woods and we come across a translucent ball. (*Translucent* means “transmitting light but causing sufficient diffusion to eliminate perception of distinct images” — *The American Heritage Dictionary*.) Of course, we would ask, “Why is that translucent ball here?” In doing this, we are asking for a reason sufficient to explain the translucent ball’s existence.

Mr. Taylor explains the Principle of Sufficient Reason “by saying that, in the case of any positive truth, there is some sufficient reason for it, something which, in this sense, makes it true — in short, that there is some sort of explanation, known or unknown, for everything.”

Of course, the translucent ball is unusual and so we do not expect to see it in a woody setting, and so we ask where it came from. But if we were unfamiliar with rocks in a woody setting, and had come across a rock instead of the translucent ball, we would be asking why the rock was there. Mr. Taylor makes this point to show that even though we ask for reasons for the existence of unusual things, we could also ask for reasons for the existence of things we are used to.

One thing that we are used to is the existence of the world. (The world is everything that exists, except for God, if a god should exist.) Everything in the world is contingent; that is, its existence is dependent on something other than itself. For example, I am contingent. I exist because my parents brought me into being. Of course, my parents are also contingent; they exist because *their* parents brought them into being.

One question we should ask is, Why does anything exist? Why should there be a world at all? We can certainly imagine the world not existing. As you can see, Mr. Taylor is using the Principle of Sufficient Reason on a grand scale: What is a reason sufficient for explaining the existence of the world?

Please note that the complexity of the universe is not a sufficient reason for its existence. Suppose the universe consisted entirely of a translucent ball. We would still want to know the reason for its existence. The same thing applies to our world of many and complex objects, including billions and billions of stars, as Carl Sagan might say.

Please also note that even if the world is old, that still is not a sufficient reason for its existence. We would still want to know why there is a world. Just to say that something is very old does not explain why it exists.

Please also note that even if the world does not have a beginning, that still is not a sufficient reason for its existence. We would still want to know why there is a world. Just to say that something has always existed does not explain why it exists.

Our world could have always existed (as in the Steady State theory), or it could have had a beginning (as in the Big Bang theory). Either way, it is proper to speak of the world as being created. Mr. Taylor points out that people have been confused by the word “creation,” incorrectly assuming that “creation” implies a beginning in time. Mr. Taylor writes, “Now if the world is the creation of God, its relationship to God should be thought of in this fashion; namely, that the world depends for its existence upon God, and could not exist independently of God.” It is possible that both God and the world are eternal, but that the world is contingent upon God. (Or, alternatively, it is also possible that God is eternal, the world had a beginning in time, and the world is contingent upon God.)

So, what is the reason sufficient for explaining the existence of the world? Two answers suggest themselves. One is that the world is responsible for its own existence; that is, that it has aseity (necessary existence). Mr. Taylor finds this implausible because everything in the world appears to be contingent. (If the Big Bang theory is true, then even time and space are contingent.)

Mr. Taylor writes, “It would be a self-contradiction to say of anything that it exists by its own nature, or is a necessarily existing thing, and at the same time to say that it comes into

being or passes away, or that it ever could come into being or pass away. Nothing about the world seems at all like this, for concerning anything in the world, we can perfectly easily think of it as being annihilated, or as never having existed in the first place, without there being the slightest hint of any absurdity in such a supposition.”

The second possibility, and the only one that remains, is that a self-caused, necessary being is responsible for the existence of the world. This being, of course, is God. Mr. Taylor attempts to clear up some confusion over the terms we apply to God. For example, to say that a self-caused being brings itself into being is absurd. Mr. Taylor writes, “To say that something is self-caused (*causa sui*) means only that it exists, not contingently or in dependence upon something else, but by its own nature, which is only to say that it is a being which is such that it can neither come into being nor perish.”

Is the idea of a self-caused, necessary being absurd? Taylor writes that it is apparently not. If we can think of objects whose existence is impossible, such as a square circle or a formless body, why not of a being whose existence is necessary?

Mr. Taylor also attempts to make clear the notion of a first cause. He points out that “first” does not mean “first in time.” Rather, he writes, “To describe God as a first cause is only to say that he is literally a *primary* rather than a secondary cause, an *ultimate* rather than a derived cause, or a being upon which all other things, heaven and earth, ultimately depend for their existence.”

One important point to note is that though Mr. Taylor has argued that God exists, his argument does not establish that God has all the attributes that religion says that God has. Mr. Taylor has argued that God is the Creator of the world and

that God has aseity (necessary being). However, his argument does not show that God, for example, is benevolent. Still, Mr. Taylor shows that modern philosophers do not simply assume that God does not exist; indeed, many believe that good arguments can show that God exists.

Captain Picard talks about philosophy; however, he seems to assume that God does not exist (without presenting any arguments to show that this is actually the case). That is not philosophical.

Mr. Taylor writes his argument in this book:

Taylor, Richard. *Metaphysics*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1992.

2) *All Things Can Reflect God's Glory.*

Each of us can reflect God's glory differently. A morally good person would reflect God's goodness well; a morally bad person would reflect God's goodness badly. Martin Luther King, Jr. reflected God's goodness well; Adolf Hitler reflected God's goodness badly.

• Why can't Dante the Poet tell us everything that he saw in Paradise?

This is what we read at the very beginning of the *Paradise*:

The glory is the One Who moves all things
penetrates all the universe, reflecting
in one part more and in another less.

I have been in His brightest shining heaven
and seen such things that no man, once
returned

from there, has wit or skill to tell about;
 for when our intellect draws near its goal
 and fathoms to the depths of its desire,
 the memory is powerless to follow;
 but still, as much of Heaven's holy realm
 as I could store and treasure in my mind
 shall now become the subject of my song.

(Musa 1.1-12)

The glory of Him who moveth everything
 Doth penetrate the universe, and shine
 In one part more and in another less.
 Within that heaven which most his light receives
 Was I, and things beheld which to repeat
 Nor knows, nor can, who from above
 descends;

Because in drawing near to its desire
 Our intellect ingulphs itself so far,
 That after it the memory cannot go.

Truly whatever of the holy realm
 I had the power to treasure in my mind
 Shall now become the subject of my song.

(Longfellow 1-12)

The most important thing here is that Dante the Poet cannot remember everything he experienced in Paradise. This is as

it should be and as it has to be. God created the universe, which means that he created everything in the universe, including both space and time. This is something that we finite human beings are unable to understand. Indeed, we find it difficult to even speak about God. For example, we may say that God is outside space and time, but of course the word “outside” is a spatial term. When we speak about God, we cannot always speak literally. Often, we are forced to speak metaphorically. When we say that God is outside space and time, we are speaking metaphorically.

What we read in the *Paradise* is what Dante remembers of his trip to Paradise. He is unable to tell us everything that he saw and that he experienced.

• Much of what Dante sees in Paradise is ineffable. What does “ineffable” mean?

If something is ineffable, it cannot be explained in words. Much of what Dante sees and experiences in Paradise is ineffable. In this canto, Dante lets the reader know that.

• Why does Dante invoke the help of the Muses and Apollo in telling his story?

Epic poets often invoke the Muses for help in telling their story. In both the *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, Dante asked the Muses for help. However, explaining what he saw in Paradise will be so difficult — actually, impossible — to explain in words that he needs extra help, so he invokes Apollo as well as the Muses. Dante refers to the two peaks of Parnassus, one of which is dedicated to the Muses and the other of which is dedicated to Apollo. An oracle of Apollo was located at Delphi, an ancient Greek religious sanctuary on Mount Parnassus. The oracle — a priestess — would answer questions brought to her. Mount Parnassus is associated with inspiration — the kind of inspiration that

results in art. So, of course, are the Muses, and Apollo, the god of poetry and music.

• **How does Dante’s language change through the three parts of *The Divine Comedy*?**

We see that Dante’s language changes throughout the three parts of *The Divine Comedy*.

Inferno:

In the *Inferno*, Dante uses some very coarse language, including some four-letter words. We remember Malacoda, the devil who uses the hole in his butt as a bugle.

Purgatory:

The language in *Purgatory* is more refined. We have a lot of language that is used in religious ritual. We have many quotations from the Bible. We have psalms and prayers. Also, occasionally we have quotations from the *Aeneid*.

Paradise:

In the *Paradise*, much of the language is philosophical and theological and difficult to understand. Much of what Dante is describing is ineffable. In an effort to have language describe what is in essence ineffable, Dante creates many new words.

• **What does Dante the Poet mean by the word “transhumanized”?**

The first word that Dante creates is “transhumanized,” a word that Dante created because what it means cannot be explained in other words, although, of course, I would love to do just that.

We read:

Gazing at her, I felt myself becoming
 what Glaucus had become tasting the herb
 that made him like the other sea-gods there.
 “Transhumanize” — it cannot be explained
per verba, so let this example serve
 until God’s grace grants the experience.

(Musa 1.67-72)

Dante looks at Beatrice, and he finds himself being “transhumanized,” just like Glaucus had been. Glaucus is a fisherman who appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The experience of being “transhumanized” is ineffable — it cannot be explained through words (*per verba*). Because the word “transhumanized” cannot be explained in words, Dante gives us an example and hopes that we understand the word by understanding the example.

• How does Dante use Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to make a comparison?

The story of Glaucus appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In this myth, Glaucus is a fisherman who notices that an herb has a miraculous effect on fish. When a fish is placed on the herb, it revives and jumps back into the sea. Glaucus then eats some of the herb, and he becomes a sea-god who lives in the sea.

Similarly, Dante becomes a new being. He has been purged of sin as preparation to make this journey to see God. Glaucus became a god; Dante becomes a being worthy of visiting Paradise. He has been transformed, and he is no longer a sinful human being.

We learn the importance of experience. Paradise has to be experienced for oneself; what Dante is doing in words cannot substitute for the true experience of Paradise.

• **How can Dante rise upward?**

Dante rises upward, and he wonders how he can do this. Beatrice, like Virgil (and like the other souls in Paradise) knows what he is thinking. Also like Virgil, Beatrice will often answer Dante's questions even before he asks them. In this case, Dante has been purified by climbing the Mountain of Purgatory, confessing his sins, and drinking from Lethe and Eunoë. He is no longer burdened by sin, and therefore he rises in the air.

It is left ambiguous whether it is only Dante's soul who is rising, or whether his body and soul are rising together as one.

In II Corinthians, chapter 12, Saint Paul wrote about one who rose to Heaven, but Saint Paul was uncertain whether the man's body rose with his soul (King James Version):

1: It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

2: I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

3: And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4: How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

5: Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

CHAPTER 2: “Canto 2: Moon — Dark Spots”

• Why does Dante encourage many readers not to read further?

Dante warns many of his readers not to follow him further:

O Ye, who in some pretty little boat,
 Eager to listen, have been following
 Behind my ship, that singing sails along,
 Turn back to look again upon your shores;
 Do not put out to sea, lest peradventure,
 In losing me, you might yourselves be lost.

(Longfellow 2.1-6)

It may seem as if the hard work has been done already; after all, we have traveled into the depths of the Inferno and climbed up the Seven-Storey Mountain of Purgatory. However, Dante says that the hardest work is still to be done. The hardest part is the intellectual part. Many of the ideas that Dante will be writing about are difficult to understand. If you are not ready, you can go astray.

• Which kind of reader should read further, according to Dante?

Dante writes:

Those few of you who from your youth have raised
 your eager mouths in search of angels' bread
 on which man feeds here, always hungering.
 You may, indeed, allow your boat to sail
 the high seas in the furrow of my wake

ahead of parted waters that flow back.

Those heroes who once crossed the deep to Colchis,
and saw their Jason put behind a plow,
were not amazed as much as you will be.

(Musa 2.10-18)

What is “angels’ bread”? It is wisdom; it is knowledge of God. A reader of the *Paradise* should have long sought angels’ bread.

Some readers are prepared to follow Dante into these uncharted waters. Those are the readers who have been searching for truth for years. They will learn in the *Paradise* things more amazing than the followers of Jason (of Jason and the Argonauts fame) ever did. Of course, the followers of Jason saw some pretty amazing things. For example, one of his tasks when he arrived in Colchis (which borders the Black Sea) was to plow a field with fire-breathing oxen. He then planted the teeth of serpents; from these seeds he harvested fully armed warriors. Jason also saw the Harpies (who were half-bird, half-women), the Sirens (whose call lured sailors to their island, where they would be shipwrecked), and the Symplegades (huge rocks that crashed together, crushing any ship in between them — perhaps an early account of icebergs). In other words, Dante is going to take his readers on quite a journey in *Paradise*.

We should note the references to the sea in the early parts of the *Paradise*. Another person who made a sea voyage was Ulysses, whom we saw in the *Inferno*. If you are the wrong kind of reader, if you are someone like Ulysses, you should not read the *Paradise*, for you will go astray. Readers of the *Paradise* need to undertake the journey for the right reasons, not for the reasons that Ulysses undertook his final journey.

This is quite a journey, and Dante now is getting a lot of help. Already in his invocation in Canto 1, he asked for help from the nine Muses and from the god Apollo. Here he is receiving more help as “Minerva fills my sails” (Musa 2.8).

Minerva is the goddess of wisdom. Her Greek name is Athena.

• **Why is the *Paradise* the most difficult part of *The Divine Comedy*?**

The *Paradise* is perhaps the most difficult part of *The Divine Comedy* because of these reasons:

- 1) The *Paradise* is going to be about ideas, many of them difficult to understand.
- 2) The *Paradise* is going to try to talk about what is ineffable.
- 3) Paradise itself is outside of space and time.

• **If you feel like doing research, what is the Ptolemaic view of the universe?**

The Divine Comedy, of course, is set in 1300, when the Ptolemaic view of the universe was still accepted. The astronomer Ptolemy lived in ancient times, and he believed that the Earth was at the center of the universe and that the Sun, planets, and stars all revolved around the Earth. That is the astronomical view that Dante was familiar with, and that he accepted as true. (Dante uses the words “star” and “planet” interchangeably.)

We, of course, believe that the Sun is at the center of our solar system and that the Earth revolves around the Sun. This is view was popularized by Nicolaus Copernicus, who lived from 1473-1543.

Dante was well educated, but of course the science of his age was not nearly as advanced as the science of our age. Some of his ideas about the universe will be mistaken.

• **Which places will Dante visit in the *Paradise*?**

Dante will visit the seven planets known to Ptolemy (counting the Sun as a planet). As a purified spirit, he will rise into the air and visit the various planets. This is a way for Dante to write about what is beyond space and time.

These are the places that Dante will visit:

Earth (his starting point)

1. Moon (associated with faith)
2. Mercury (associated with hope)
3. Venus (associated with love)
4. Sun (associated with wisdom)
5. Mars (associated with courage)
6. Jupiter (associated with justice)
7. Saturn (associated with contemplation)

Gemini, aka Fixed Stars

Primum Mobile (the outermost moving sphere; the Empyrean does not move)

Mystic Empyrean (the dwelling place of God)

The seven planets are numbered; note that the Sun is a planet in the Ptolemaic view of the universe. In addition, Dante uses the words “star” and “planet” interchangeable. Thus, he refers to the Moon as a “star” (Musa 2.30).

The fixed stars are the constellations and other stars. The planets move around the sky, but the stars of The Big Dipper

and other constellations are always fixed in position relative to each other.

The Primum Mobile gives the planets and fixed stars their motion.

The Empyrean is the dwelling place of God; it is beyond space and time.

Just as Dante visited the various circles of the Inferno and the various stories of the seven-story mountain, he will visit the various planets as well as the fixed stars, the Primum Mobile, and the Empyrean. In each place, he will see souls with whom he will speak. Dante the Pilgrim is still learning stuff.

Note that the planets are only a kind of temporary dwelling place for the saved souls. They are really in the Empyrean, but they are willing to speak to Dante. Just like the saved souls in Purgatory, the saved souls in Paradise are very willing to help Dante.

Many of the planets will have souls that correspond to the traditional quality that is associated with a particular planet. We associate Venus with love, and we associate Mars with war/courage. The souls we see on those planets will be associated with those particular qualities.

• **Why does Dante visit the various planets?**

On the various planets, Dante will talk to souls, and he will learn from those souls. This is exactly what he did in the Inferno and on the Mountain of Purgatory.

In the Inferno, Dante learned basically what not to do. He learned what he needed to avoid doing. The examples in the Inferno were mainly negative. For example, do not avoid taking responsibility for your actions the way that Francesca da Rimini did. For example, do not commit suicide the way

that Pier delle Vigne did. For example, do not use misuse your genius the way that Ulysses did.

In Purgatory, Dante learns from both positive and negative examples. For example, in Pre-purgatory he talks with many Late Repentants. From them he learns to repent quickly and to not put off repentance. The Late Repentants did something right — they repented. They also did something wrong — they put off repenting. One major theme of the *Purgatory* is to not waste time.

In Paradise, we will see many positive examples of people who have done things right. However, early in the *Paradise*, on the planets that are closest to the Earth, we see some people who have done things wrong. Paradise is not reserved for perfect people; if it were, it would be empty. After all, everyone has sinned.

In Paradise, Dante's conversations will sometimes be more difficult to understand than they were in the *Inferno* and the *Purgatory*. Why? The souls whom Dante speaks to now assume that he has learned some things by traveling through the *Inferno* and through *Purgatory*. They believe that he is capable of understanding difficult subject matter.

Dante is still going to be talking about religion, about politics, and about poetry, but often he will be examining these subjects from a more encompassing view. For example, in the *Inferno* he learned about politics in Florence. In the *Purgatory* he learned about politics in Italy. Now, in the *Paradise* he will learn about politics in the empire. The *Paradise* shows the big picture.

In the *Paradise*, Dante is going to be looking at some big topics. For example, he will be looking at salvation. We will see some people in Paradise whom we would not expect to see here.

• **What do you need to remember to read the *Paradise* well?**

We need to remember what we learned in the *Inferno* and in the *Purgatory*. Often, we will be making comparisons among all three canticles.

• **The Moon has some markings that are visible from Earth. According to Beatrice, what causes those markings?**

Beatrice explains that the various physical bodies of the universe, including the planets, are under the influence of angels. Apparently, the Moon is under the influence of many different angels, thus accounting for its various markings.

This explanation does not speak to modern readers. We, of course, would say that the Moon is made up of various kinds of rock and has various geographical features, and those cause the markings we see on the Moon. We know, for example, that the Moon has mountains and those mountains cast shadows.

However, Beatrice does make an important point. The first three lines of the *Paradise* are these:

The glory of the One Who moves all things
penetrates all the universe, reflecting
in one part more and in another less.

(Musa 1.1-3)

This is true of the Moon and accounts for its dark spots.

We can learn from what Beatrice says. God is intelligent, and His infinite intelligence is reflected in our finite intelligence. God is infinitely good, and His goodness is reflected in our finite goodness.

Each of us can reflect God's glory differently. A morally good person would reflect God's goodness well; a morally bad person would reflect God's goodness badly. Martin Luther King, Jr. reflected God's goodness well; Adolf Hitler reflected God's goodness badly.

So what Dante says here may not be scientifically true, but if you are religious, for you it may be spiritually true.

The Moon is associated with faith. By having faith in God, you can reflect God's goodness. The conversations that Dante has with saved souls are about having faith in God and about religious vows.

Saint Paul defines faith in Hebrews 11:1 (King James Version):

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Beatrice also says this:

“Different virtues mingle differently
with each rich stellar body that they quicken,
even as the soul within you blends with you.”

(Musa 2.139-141)

Here we see that the planets will each have a traditional quality that is associated with it. We associate Venus with love, and we associate Mars with war/courage. The souls we see on those planets will be associated with those particular qualities.

In addition, each of the heavenly spheres has a different order of angel associated with it. This also accounts for the light and the dark spots on the Moon.

Each order of angel is associated with a heavenly sphere:

9. Primum Mobile

The order of Angels is Seraphim.

8. Fixed Stars

The order of Angels is Cherubim.

7. Saturn

The order of Angels is Thrones.

The trait associated with this sphere is Contemplation.

6. Jupiter

The order of Angels is Dominions.

The trait associated with this sphere is Justice.

5. Mars

The order of Angels is Virtues.

The trait associated with this sphere is Courage.

4. Sun

The order of Angels is Powers.

The trait associated with this sphere is Wisdom.

3. Venus

The order of Angels is Principalities.

The trait associated with this sphere is Love.

2. Mercury

The order of Angels is Archangels.

The trait associated with this sphere is Hope.

I. Moon

The order of Angels is Angels.

The trait associated with this sphere is Faith.

CHAPTER 3: “Canto 3: Moon — Piccarda and the Empress Constance (Unfulfillment of Religious Vows)”

• Which kind of souls can be found on the Moon?

Many souls are found on the Moon. The two souls who are identified are women who have left their religious vows unfulfilled.

• Is Heaven (Paradise) reserved for those who have lived perfect lives?

No. All of us have sinned. If Paradise were reserved for people who have led perfect lives, it would be empty.

Of course, it may seem odd that we meet people in Paradise who have done such things as leave their religious vows unfulfilled; however, one thing we can learn from these souls is that God can forgive any sin.

• Which qualities are associated, respectively, with the Moon, Mercury, and Venus?

The first three planets we will visit are the Moon, Mercury, and Venus. Christians of the Middle Ages associated these planets with the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.

The souls we meet on these first planets were lacking in those particular virtues. Thus, the souls we meet on the Moon were lacking in faith.

Why is the Moon associated with faith? It waxes and wanes, and throughout our lives our faith in God can also wax and wane. It can grow or diminish.

Following Venus we will visit the Sun, where the souls will be known for their positive virtue (in the case of the Sun, wisdom). Before that, we will see souls who in some ways are lacking in a certain virtue.

Dante is clever in the way he organizes *The Divine Comedy*. In the *Inferno*, in Canto 9 we go through the Gates of Dis. In the *Purgatory*, in Canto 9 we go through the gates of *Purgatory* (we go from Pre-purgatory into Purgatory Proper). In the *Paradise*, in Canto 9 we go from the planets that are touched by the shadow of the Earth to the Sun, which is not touched by the shadow of the Earth (and thus is purer, according to Dante).

• **Write a short character analysis of Piccarda Donati.**

Piccarda Donati is someone whose brother we have met in the *Purgatory*. Her brother is Forese Donati, who while alive exchanged comic insult poems with Dante. Forese was being purged of gluttony in Canto 23 of *Purgatory*.

Cianfa Donati, another member of the Donati family, was among the thieves in the *Inferno*.

We learned from Forese Donati that Corso, his brother, will end up in Hell. Piccarda had entered a nunnery, but Corso, a brute (and her brother), forced her to leave the nunnery and make a political marriage — a marriage that politically benefited Corso. Corso was the leader of the Black Guelfs in Florence, and he was the person who persuaded Pope Boniface VIII to send Charles of Valois and his troops to Florence — the military action that led to the exile of Dante from Florence. Corso attempted to gain control of Florence, but he failed. He was captured, and when he tried to escape, he took a spear to the throat and died. He died on 6 October 1308.

Once again, we learn that family does not get you into Heaven or Hell; your own freely willed actions do that.

• **Write a short character analysis of the Empress Constance.**

Constance, of course, is in Paradise, but her son, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, is in the Inferno with the other heretics.

Constance's grandson, Manfred, is among the Late Repentant (the excommunicated) in Purgatory.

Dante believed that Constance was also forced out of a nunnery.

Thus, neither Piccarda nor Constance was able to keep the religious vows she had made.

• **Do Piccarda Donati and the Empress Constance wish to be in a higher sphere in Paradise?**

We read:

“But thou shalt recognise I am Piccarda,
 Who, stationed here among these other
 blessed,
 Myself am blessed in the slowest sphere.”

(Longfellow 3.49-51)

This means that Piccarda knows that she is associated with the lowest sphere of Paradise. She adds,

“And this allotment, which appears so low,
 Therefore is given us, because our vows
 Have been neglected and in some part void.”

(Longfellow 3.55-57)

This is interesting. Some people in Paradise are higher than others. However, we learn that everyone in Paradise is

perfectly happy and blissful. No one wishes to be elsewhere than where they are.

Dante asks Piccarda and the other souls here:

“But tell me, ye who in this place are happy,
 Are you desirous of a higher place,
 To see more or to make yourselves more friends?”
 (Longfellow 3.64-66)

Piccarda replies:

“Brother, our will is quieted by virtue
 Of charity, that makes us wish alone
 For what we have, nor gives us thirst for
 more.”
 (Longfellow 3.70-72)

She adds,

“In His will is our peace — it is the sea
 in which all things are drawn that it itself
 creates or which the work of Nature makes.”
 (Musa 3.85-97)

“And his will is our peace; this is the sea
 To which is moving onward whatsoever
 It doth create, and all that nature makes.”
 (Longfellow 3.85-97)

So the answer is that Piccarda and Constance and the other souls are happy exactly where they are. Their will is in

accordance with the will of God. All of these souls experience all the happiness that they are capable of experiencing.

I don't see the souls in Paradise as lacking free will. Instead, they have perfected their wills. They always want the right thing. Who has free will? The obese person who sees a doughnut and eats it although he knows that he should refrain from snacking? Or the person with a healthy weight who sees a doughnut and refrains from eating it in order to maintain her good health although she knows it will be tasty. Of course, the person who has free will is the person who is able to resist temptation. The person who sees a doughnut and eats the doughnut, then hates himself for his weakness is the person who lacks free will. (Am I confusing free will and willpower here? I don't think so. If you lack the willpower to do what ought to be done, then you lack free will. Free will involves making a choice. If you are unable to do something that you want to do, such as refrain from eating a doughnut, then you lack freedom.)

These souls are at peace. Beatrice tells Dante early in the canto:

“Therefore speak with them, listen and believe;
For the true light, which giveth peace to them,
Permits them not to turn from it their feet.”

(Longfellow 3.31-33)

• **Does art exist in Paradise?**

Note that lots of art — singing and dancing — exist in Paradise, as does lots of happiness and peace.

When Piccarda and Constance and the other souls leave, we hear the first song of the *Paradise*: “Ave Maria.” Here is the

original Latin and an English translation of one version of the “Ave Maria”:

LATIN:

Ave Maria

[G]ratia plena

Dominus tecum

Benedicta tu

Et benedictus

Fructus ventris tui.

Sancta Maria

Mater Dei

Ora pro nobis

Peccatoribus

Nunc et in

Hora mortis nostrae.

ENGLISH:

Hail Mary

[with] grace filled

the Lord [is] with you

Blessed [are] you

And blessed

[Is] the fruit of the womb of you.

Holy Mary

Mother of God

Pray for us

Sinners

Now and in

The hour of the death of us.

Source: <http://www.hartenshiel.com/avemaria.html>

**CHAPTER 4: “Canto 4: Moon — Location of Souls
(The Absolute Versus the Conditional Will)”**

• **What is the true dwelling place of the saved souls?**

The true dwelling place of the saved souls is outside of space and time. They are in the presence of God in the Mystic Empyrean. Beatrice tells Dante,

“Not the most Godlike of the Seraphim,
not Moses, Samuel, whichever John
you choose — I tell you — not Mary herself
has been assigned to any other heaven
than that of these shades you have just seen
here,
and each one’s bliss is equally eternal;
all lend their beauty to the highest Sphere,
sharing one same sweet life to the degree
that they feel the eternal breath of God.
These souls appeared here not because this sphere
has been allotted them, but as a sign
of their less great degree of blessedness.”

(Musa 4.28-39)

Souls in Paradise are helpful, and they are willing to put in an appearance on various planets in order to enlighten Dante.

• **How do we use language to talk about God?**

The saved souls are in the presence of God in the Mystic Empyrean. Of course, that is metaphorical language. If

something is outside of space and time, how can it be in the “presence” of something? Our minds are finite, and so we have to think in terms of space and time.

God, of course, is aware that our minds are finite, so He takes trouble when communicating to us to make sure that we are capable of understanding. Beatrice tells Dante,

“For this same reason Scripture condescends
to your intelligence, attributing
with other meaning, hands and feet to God;
and Holy Church presents to you archangels
with human features: Gabriel and Michael
and that one who made Tobit see again.”

(Musa 4.43-48)

God does not have hands and feet because He is a non-physical being, but Scripture refers to God having hands and feet. Why? This is a metaphorical use of language that is intended to help us understand. We cannot understand God’s being, so we use metaphorical language to speak of God. Similarly, the archangels are given human features.

Note that Beatrice does a very good job of answering Dante’s unspoken questions. She is like Virgil and knows what he is thinking.

• **What is Tobit?**

Tobit is a book that is part of the Apocrypha. The archangel Raphael cured Tobit’s blindness by telling Tobias, Tobit’s son, to cover Tobit’s eyes with a substance and after a while to peel it off.

Excerpt from Chapter 12 of Tobit:

1: After these things Tobias went his way, praising God that he had given him a prosperous journey, and blessed Raguel and Edna his wife, and went on his way till they drew near unto Nineve.

2: Then Raphael said to Tobias, Thou knowest, brother, how thou didst leave thy father:

3: Let us haste before thy wife, and prepare the house.

4: And take in thine hand the gall of the fish. So they went their way, and the dog went after them.

5: Now Anna sat looking about toward the way for her son.

6: And when she espied him coming, she said to his father, Behold, thy son cometh, and the man that went with him.

7: Then said Raphael, I know, Tobias, that thy father will open his eyes.

8: Therefore anoint thou his eyes with the gall, and being pricked therewith, he shall rub, and the whiteness shall fall away, and he shall see thee.

9: Then Anna ran forth, and fell upon the neck of her son, and said unto him, Seeing I have seen thee, my son, from henceforth I am content to die. And they wept both.

10: Tobit also went forth toward the door, and stumbled: but his son ran unto him,

11: And took hold of his father: and he strake of the gall on his fathers' eyes, saying, Be of good hope, my father.

12: And when his eyes began to smart, he rubbed them;

13: And the whiteness pilled [peeled] away from the corners of his eyes: and when he saw his son, he fell upon his neck.

14: And he wept, and said, Blessed art thou, O God, and blessed is thy name for ever; and blessed are all thine holy angels:

15: For thou hast scourged, and hast taken pity on me: for, behold, I see my son Tobias. And his son went in rejoicing, and told his father the great things that had happened to him in Media.

Source: Standard King James Version (Pure Cambridge)

<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/book.php?book=Tobit&chapter=11&verse=>

Excerpt from Chapter 12 of Tobit:

1: Then Tobit called his son Tobias, and said unto him, My son, see that the man have his wages, which went with thee, and thou must give him more.

2: And Tobias said unto him, O father, it is no harm to me to give him half of those things which I have brought:

3: For he hath brought me again to thee in safety, and made whole my wife, and brought me the money, and likewise healed thee.

4: Then the old man said, It is due unto him.

5: So he called the angel, and he said unto him, Take half of all that ye have brought and go away in safety.

6: Then he took them both apart, and said unto them, Bless God, praise him, and magnify him, and praise him for the things which he hath done unto you in the sight of all that live. It is good to praise God, and exalt his name, and honourably to shew forth the works of God; therefore be not slack to praise him.

7: It is good to keep close the secret of a king, but it is honourable to reveal the works of God. Do that which is good, and no evil shall touch you.

8: Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with unrighteousness. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold:

9: For alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin. Those that exercise alms and righteousness shall be filled with life:

10: But they that sin are enemies to their own life.

11: Surely I will keep close nothing from you. For I said, It was good to keep close the secret of a king, but that it was honourable to reveal the works of God.

12: Now therefore, when thou didst pray, and Sara thy daughter in law, I did bring the remembrance of your prayers before the Holy One: and when thou didst bury the dead, I was with thee likewise.

13: And when thou didst not delay to rise up, and leave thy dinner, to go and cover the dead, thy good deed was not hid from me: but I was with thee.

14: And now God hath sent me to heal thee and Sara thy daughter in law.

15: I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.

Source: Standard King James Version (Pure Cambridge)

<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/book.php?book=Tobit&chapter=12&verse=>

• Is it just to blame people for committing an act that they were forced to commit?

We can certainly ask this question about Piccarda and Constance. After all, weren't they forced out of the nunneries they entered?

Beatrice gives an interesting answer here. Both Piccarda and Constance consented in part to be removed from the nunneries. All of us have free will, and if we wish to use our free will fully we can avoid consenting, even in part.

Beatrice says,

“Had they been able to maintain their will
 intact, like that of Lawrence on the grid,
 and Mucius cruel to his own hand in fire —
 it would have forced them back, once they were free,
 back to the path from which they had been
 drawn.
 But such firm will as this is seldom found.”

(Musa 4.82-87)

Beatrice says that they could have resisted. Even if they were forcibly taken from the nunnery, they could have fled back to the nunnery the moment they were not watched. However,

they did not do that, so they consented in part. Of course, they made a compromise. They felt that they were faced with a decision between death and a forced marriage, and they chose (in part) a forced marriage.

Piccarda said in Canto 3 about the Empress Constance:

“But even when forced back into the world
 against her will, against her sacred vows,
 she always wore the veil over her heart.”

(Musa 3.115-117)

The Empress Constance’s Absolute Will was good: “she always wore the veil over her heart” (3.117). However, her Conditioned Will gave in to circumstances out of fear. The choice was death or marriage, and out of fear of death, the Empress Constance consented (at least in part) to be married. If she had followed her Absolute Will, she would have returned to the convent even if it meant that she would be killed.

Conditioned Will compromises. Conditioned Will sometimes chooses the lesser of two evils.

Unfortunately, sometimes we do the wrong thing out of fear even though we may think that we have a good reason. Alcmeon killed his own mother at the request of his father. His father, Amphiaraus, was a seer who foreknew that if he fought at Thebes that he would die. However, his wife (and Alcmeon’s mother), Eriphyle, betrayed him, and therefore Amphiaraus told Alcmeon to avenge him by killing Eriphyle. Alcmeon did so, reluctantly, because he wanted to observe piety toward his father and was afraid that he would not be showing piety toward his father if he did not obey him. Alcmeon’s Conditioned Will led him to kill his own mother.

• **Explain the two examples of a firm will: Lawrence and Mucius.**

Saint Lawrence

Saint Lawrence was entrusted with Church treasures by Pope Sixtus II. He was ordered to give up the treasures, which had been hidden, but he refused. As punishment, he was grilled to death. Dying, he told his tormentors that he was done on one side so turn him over and eat. AmericanCatholic.org has this information:

A well-known legend has persisted from earliest times. As deacon in Rome, Lawrence was charged with the responsibility for the material goods of the Church, and the distribution of alms to the poor. When Lawrence knew he would be arrested like the pope, he sought out the poor, widows and orphans of Rome and gave them all the money he had on hand, selling even the sacred vessels to increase the sum. When the prefect of Rome heard of this, he imagined that the Christians must have considerable treasure. He sent for Lawrence and said, “You Christians say we are cruel to you, but that is not what I have in mind. I am told that your priests offer in gold, that the sacred blood is received in silver cups, that you have golden candlesticks at your evening services. Now, your doctrine says you must render to Caesar what is his. Bring these treasures — the emperor needs them to maintain his forces. God does not cause money to be counted: He brought none of it into the world with him — only words. Give me the money, therefore, and be rich in words.”

Lawrence replied that the Church was indeed rich. “I will show you a valuable part. But give me time to set everything in order and make an inventory.” After

three days he gathered a great number of blind, lame, maimed, leprous, orphaned and widowed persons and put them in rows. When the prefect arrived, Lawrence simply said, “These are the treasure of the Church.”

The prefect was so angry he told Lawrence that he would indeed have his wish to die — but it would be by inches. He had a great gridiron prepared, with coals beneath it, and had Lawrence’s body placed on it. After the martyr had suffered the pain for a long time, the legend concludes, he made his famous cheerful remark, “It is well done. Turn me over!”

Source: “St. Lawrence”

<http://www.americancatholic.org/features/saints/saint.aspx?id=1103>

Mucius

Mucius was an early Roman citizen who attempted to assassinate Porsenna, King of the Etruscans, when the Etruscans were besieging Rome. However, he was captured and sentenced to be burned to death. Therefore, to show the fortitude of the Romans he thrust his right hand in a fire and burned it off. Porsenna was impressed by this act of courage and freed him. Afterward, Mucius was known by his nickname: Scaevola (Left-handed).

The story is told in Book 2 of Livy’s *History of Rome*:

[2.12] The blockade, however, continued, and with it a growing scarcity of corn at famine prices. Porsenna still cherished hopes of capturing the City by keeping up the investment. There was a young noble, C. Mucius, who regarded it as a disgrace that whilst Rome in the days of servitude under her kings had

never been blockaded in any war or by any foe, she should now, in the day of her freedom, be besieged by those very Etruscans whose armies she had often routed. Thinking that this disgrace ought to be avenged by some great deed of daring, he determined in the first instance to penetrate into the enemy's camp on his own responsibility. On second thoughts, however, he became apprehensive that if he went without orders from the consuls, or unknown to any one, and happened to be arrested by the Roman outposts, he might be brought back as a deserter, a charge which the condition of the City at the time would make only too probable. So he went to the senate. "I wish," he said, "Fathers, to swim the Tiber, and, if I can, enter the enemy's camp, not as a pillager nor to inflict retaliation for their pillagings. I am purposing, with heaven's help, a greater deed." The senate gave their approval. Concealing a sword in his robe, he started. When he reached the camp he took his stand in the densest part of the crowd near the royal tribunal. It happened to be the soldiers' pay-day, and a secretary, sitting by the king and dressed almost exactly like him, was busily engaged, as the soldiers kept coming to him incessantly. Afraid to ask which of the two was the king, lest his ignorance should betray him, Mucius struck as fortune directed the blow and killed the secretary instead of the king. He tried to force his way back with his blood-stained dagger through the dismayed crowd, but the shouting caused a rush to be made to the spot; he was seized and dragged back by the king's bodyguard to the royal tribunal. Here, alone and helpless, and in the utmost peril, he was still able to inspire more fear than he felt. "I am a citizen of Rome," he said, "men call me C. Mucius. As an enemy I wished to kill an enemy, and I have as much courage to meet death as

I had to inflict it. It is the Roman nature to act bravely and to suffer bravely. I am not alone in having made this resolve against you, behind me there is a long list of those who aspire to the same distinction. If then it is your pleasure, make up your mind for a struggle in which you will every hour have to fight for your life and find an armed foe on the threshold of your royal tent. This is the war which we the youth of Rome, declare against you. You have no serried ranks, no pitched battle to fear, the matter will be settled between you alone and each one of us singly.” The king, furious with anger, and at the same time terrified at the unknown danger, threatened that if he did not promptly explain the nature of the plot which he was darkly hinting at he should be roasted alive. “Look,” Mucius cried, “and learn how lightly those regard their bodies who have some great glory in view.” Then he plunged his right hand into a fire burning on the altar. Whilst he kept it roasting there as if he were devoid of all sensation, the king, astounded at his preternatural conduct, sprang from his seat and ordered the youth to be removed from the altar. “Go,” he said, “you have been a worse enemy to yourself than to me. I would invoke blessings on your courage if it were displayed on behalf of my country; as it is, I send you away exempt from all rights of war, unhurt, and safe.” Then Mucius, reciprocating, as it were, this generous treatment, said, “Since you honour courage, know that what you could not gain by threats you have obtained by kindness. Three hundred of us, the foremost amongst the Roman youth, have sworn to attack you in this way. The lot fell to me first, the rest, in the order of their lot, will come each in his turn, till fortune shall give us a favourable chance against you.”

[2.13] Mucius was accordingly dismissed; afterwards he received the soubriquet of Scaevola, from the loss of his right hand.

Source: <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/livy/livy02.html>

CHAPTER 5: “Canto 5: Moon — Compensation for Broken Vows”

• In Canto 4, Dante the Pilgrim asks if the transgression of the breaking of one’s vow can be compensated for in some way. (Can a person substitute some other good work for an unfilled vow?) How does Beatrice answer that question in Canto 5?

Free will is important in the *Paradise*. It is important throughout *The Divine Comedy*.

Free will is the greatest gift of God to us. When we make a religious vow, we are giving back to God that gift — we are sacrificing our freedom for God. It is wrong to take back that gift. We do sacrifice free will when we make a vow. For example, we are free to make as much money as we can. However, if we make a vow of poverty, we give up part of our free will — we are no longer free to make as much money as we can.

Be aware that we can substitute another vow for the vow we made. However, the second vow must require a greater sacrifice than the first vow.

Here is a summary of some of the main points in this discussion:

- Free will is God’s greatest gift to human beings.
- When human beings make a vow, they give back to God a part of their free will. For example, if you take a vow of poverty, you give up the pursuit of money.
- If we break our vow, the only way to make that up is to give up something of even greater worth than what we vowed.

- Sometimes, what we vow is so important that we cannot substitute anything in its place. Piccarda and the Empress Constance made vows of that kind.
- God does not accept all vows; some vows result in evil.
- We need to be careful when we make vows because vows are so important.
- We do not need to make vows to be saved. We have the Bible and the Church; these are enough for us to be saved.

• What does Dante need to learn from his visit to the Moon?

Beatrice emphasizes the importance of not taking vows lightly. If you make a vow that is not sinful, keep it. Beatrice says,

“Christians, beware of rushing into vows.

Do not be like a feather in the wind,

or think that every water washes clean!”

(Musa 5.73-75)

• Which kind of vow should not be kept?

The only kind of vow that should not be kept is a sinful vow; for example, a sinful vow is one that would result in the deaths of your children.

Beatrice gives us two examples of sinful vows:

Jephthah

This judge of Israel fought the Ammonites and vowed to God to sacrifice, if he won, the first living thing that came out from his house after the battle to greet him. That living

thing turned out to be his daughter. It is unclear whether he killed her as a human sacrifice or simply gave her to God and let her die an unmarried virgin. This story is told in Judges 11:30-40 (King James Version):

30: And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

31: Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

32: So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

33: And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

34: And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

35: And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

36: And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy

mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

37: And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

38: And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

39: And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

40: That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Iphigenia

Agamemnon killed a stag that was loved by Artemis/Diana, and she stopped the winds that were needed to carry the Greek ships to Troy. Calchas, Agamemnon's seer, told him to sacrifice Iphigenia, one of Agamemnon's daughters. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, and favorable winds arose.

• What happens as Beatrice and Dante draw near to and arrive at Mercury?

Beatrice glows more brightly. In addition, more than a thousand souls come toward Dante and Beatrice, each of them saying, "Behold one more who will increase our love" (*Musa Paradise* 5.105). One of these souls ("splendors") talks to Dante and offers to answer any questions he may

have. Dante asks who the soul is and why he is assigned to Mercury. The soul makes his answer in Canto 6.

We will see that the souls who appear on Mercury are those who sought too eagerly for fame on Earth.

CHAPTER 6: “Canto 6: Mercury — Roman Emperor Justinian”

- What do *Inferno*, Canto 6 (Florentine politics) and *Purgatory*, Canto 6 (Italian politics) and *Paradise*, Canto 6 (the politics of the empire) have in common?

Obviously, they have the topic of politics in common. Note that in *Paradise* we get the big picture; we learn about the politics of the empire as a whole. In the *Inferno*, we get the small picture; we learn about the politics of one city only: Florence. In the *Purgatory*, we get the middle picture; we learn about politics in Italy.

- Write a short character analysis of Justinian. Who is he, historically?

Pretty obviously, Justinian is an important character. We know that because here in Canto 6 of the *Paradise* he is the only speaker. In all other cantos of *The Divine Comedy*, we have more than one speaker.

The Roman Empire was huge, and in order to better manage it, it was divided into two centers of power. One was the Western Roman Empire, which we call the Roman Empire. Its center was at Rome. Eventually, Rome fell as Germanic tribes made war against the Western Roman Empire. However, the other empire continued.

The other empire was the Eastern Roman Empire, which we call the Byzantine Empire. Its center of power was at Byzantium. In Roman times, it was known as Constantinople. Today it is known as Istanbul. The supremacy of the Eastern Roman Empire ended in 1204, when Constantinople was sacked in the Fourth Crusade.

Justinian (485-565) was one of the Byzantine emperors. Two centuries before, Constantine had moved to the Eastern

Roman Empire, making his home in Constantinople, which of course was named after him.

Justinian is known as a lawgiver and Roman emperor. His upbringing was humble. He was born a peasant, but he was adopted at age eight by his uncle Justin. Justin took him to Constantinople and renamed him Justinian. (The boy's original name was Petrus Sabbatius.)

Justinian does have a connection with Ravenna, Italy, where Dante died. In Ravenna Justinian had beautiful buildings created; they are decorated with mosaics. Dante wrote most of the *Paradise* in Ravenna near the end of his life. Justinian's general, Belisarius, was able to conquer Rome, thus making it part of the empire again and allowing Justinian to create magnificent buildings in Ravenna.

• At the end of Canto 5, Dante and Beatrice rose to the planet Mercury, where Dante saw “more than a thousand splendors” (Musa 5.103) or souls. One soul invited Dante to ask questions, and Beatrice also urged Dante to ask questions of the soul. Which two questions did Dante ask?

The souls in Paradise are helpful, as we see here when a soul — and Beatrice — invite Dante to ask questions. Dante in fact asks two questions of the soul:

- 1) Who are you?
- 2) Why are you assigned to Mercury?

The soul, who is Justinian, answers Dante's questions in Canto 6. In fact, Justinian is the only speaker in Canto 6, which consists of a monologue by him.

• How does Justinian identify himself?

Justinian's way of identifying himself is not direct:

“After that Constantine the eagle turned
 Against the course of heaven, which it had
 followed
 Behind the ancient who Lavinia took,
 Two hundred years and more the bird of God
 In the extreme of Europe held itself,
 Near to the mountains whence it issued first;”
 (Longfellow 6.1-6)

One thing we see here is a strong sense of history. Justinian’s story is one that is connected to centuries of history; in fact, it goes back to mythic as well as to historic times. Aeneas is the “warrior who wed Lavinia” (Musa 6.3), and he brought “the bird of God” (Musa 6.5) — that is, the eagle, which represents the Roman Empire — westward, from Troy to Italy.

Constantine, however, reversed that direction. He took the eagle eastward, from Rome to Constantinople. In doing so, he went “against the course of Heaven” (Musa 6.2) — the sun travels from east to west, and taking the eagle to Constantinople reversed that course.

Justinian adds:

“And under shadow of the sacred plumes
 It governed there the world from hand to
 hand,
 And, changing thus, upon mine own alighted.
 Caesar I was, and am Justinian,
 Who, by the will of primal Love I feel,

Took from the laws the useless and
redundant;”

(Longfellow 6.7-12)

Note the line “Caesar I was, Justinian I remain” (Musa 6.7). Earthly office is not important in Paradise. What is important is person — how did you use your free will while you were alive on Earth?

• **What was the Justinian Code?**

Lines 11-12 of Canto 6 of the *Paradise* are very important:

“Caesar I was, Justinian I remain
who, by the will of the First Love I feel,
purged all the laws of excess and of shame.”

(Musa 6.10-12)

Here we have Justinian’s major Earthly accomplishment. He had the Roman law codified — put in an orderly fashion. Before Justinian, Roman law was disorderly. Many emperors had made many laws, and no one really knew what the law was, and so no one had any way of knowing what was legal and what was illegal. Justinian had people clean up the law — get rid of the old, outdated laws, and make sure that the current laws made sense. In addition, he had a commentary and a textbook of the law created — that way, people could study the law and so know what was legal and what was illegal.

Dumb laws do occur, and occasionally it can be a good idea to weed out dumb laws. Here are dumb laws in Ohio, according to <http://www.dumblaws.com/laws/united-states/ohio/>:

- It is illegal to fish for whales on Sunday.

- It is illegal to get a fish drunk.
- Participating in or conducting a duel is prohibited.
- Breast feeding is not allowed in public.
- It is illegal for more than five women to live in a house.

Chances are, these dumb laws are no longer in effect. The law “It is illegal to fish for whales on Sunday” is rather silly, I think. I doubt that there are whales in Lake Erie. (By the way, “Erie” is a Native American name that denotes a member of an Iroquois tribe living on the southern shores of the lake.) Also by the way, a man in Athens, Ohio, markets a T-shirt that says, “Surf Ohio.” One of the Beach Boys has worn that T-shirt during a concert. In addition, Arnold Schwarzenegger ordered that logo to be put on some of his T-shirts. (Mr. Schwarzenegger is so big that he had to bring in some of his specially made T-shirts so that the logo could be put on it. I have seen a photograph of Mr. Schwarzenegger holding up a regular X-tra Large T-shirt with the “Surf Ohio” logo on it — the T-shirt is much too small for him to wear.)

One important effect of the Justinian Code is that people began to study it in the 12th century, as city-states and national monarchies developed in Europe. Dante studied the Justinian Code in Florence, and he believed that Italy needed a Roman emperor to enforce the law. He felt that the Roman law of the Justinian Code was good.

Today, Justinian is probably best known for the Justinian Code — it is his best achievement.

• **How was Justinian able to create the Justinian Code?**

Before Justinian was able to create the Justinian Code, he had to get a few other things right first. He had to think

correctly about God, and he had to have the right relationship between church and state.

Justinian tells Dante:

“And ere unto the work I was attent,
 One nature to exist in Christ, not more,
 Believed, and with such faith was I
 contented.”

(Longfellow 6.13-15)

Before creating the Justinian Code, Justinian had to learn to think correctly about God. In fact, he had to get rid of his heresy. (This heresy is known as the Eutychian or Monophysite Heresy.) Christian dogma regards Christ as having two natures: He is fully human, and He is fully divine. However, Justinian regarded Christ as having only one nature — Dante thought that Justinian believed that Christ was divine, not human.

• **How is Pope Agapetus I able to help Justinian?**

Fortunately, a Pope — Agapetus I — was able to correct Justinian’s heretical thinking:

“But blessed Agapetus, he who was
 The supreme pastor, to the faith sincere
 Pointed me out the way by words of his.”

(Longfellow 6.16-18)

Dante seems to be saying that to be a great ruler, you have to get the answers to the ultimate questions right. If you are going to be a great ruler, you have to think correctly about God.

Pope Agapetus I really was a good spiritual leader, and we see that Justinian has established the right relationship between church and state. The Pope handles religious questions, while Emperor Justinian handles legal, secular questions. And now that Justinian is in Paradise, he can see clearly that the Pope got the answers to the religious questions right.

• **How is Belisarius able to help Justinian?**

Another thing that Justinian did was to give (to delegate) his war powers (“arms”) to a great general named Belisarius. By allowing Belisarius to wage war when needed, Justinian was able to focus on codifying the Roman law. Justinian says,

“And to my Belisarius I commended

The arms, to which was heaven’s right hand
so joined

It was a signal that I should repose.”

(Longfellow 6.25-27)

Belisarius really was a good general. He was able to recover Italy, which had been overrun by Germanic tribes, and thus Justinian was able to build beautiful buildings in Ravenna.

By allowing Belisarius to handle war, Justinian is able to devote himself to something that is more valuable: law. Justinian would like the world to be well governed. To do that, you need to have both the right faith and the right laws.

We should note that Justinian is allowing people to do what they do best. The Pope is the authority in spiritual matters, and Justinian does not challenge him for power. Belisarius is a very competent general and Justinian allows him to lead the troops into battle. Justinian himself is the right person to codify the Roman law, and Justinian does that.

• **How does Virgil's *Aeneid* influence the way that Justinian tells his story?**

Justinian has been talking about himself, but now he goes back to ancient times and Aeneas, and then he will carry the story forward to then-modern times — that is, the time of Dante.

This technique of starting in the middle is known as *in medias res*, and it is the technique that is used in the *Aeneid*. Virgil starts the story in the middle. Aeneas and his men go to Carthage, then there is a flashback to Troy and their adventures following the fall of the city, and then he picks up his story again and we learn about Aeneas' adventures in Italy. Of course, Homer started both of his epic poems — the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* — *in medias res*. Virgil followed the same tradition. In a way, Dante did, too, since *The Divine Comedy* is set in the midpoint of his life. However, Dante does not go back and tell us what happened in the first part of his story (except that we know that he fell in love with Beatrice but she died).

It is interesting also that Book 6 of the *Aeneid* is about history. Aeneas goes to the Underworld and sees his future descendants and learns something about the future history of Rome. We have a linkage among *Inferno* 6 and *Purgatory* 6 and *Paradise* 6 and *Aeneid* 6.

• **Justinian first tells the early history of Rome, starting before Rome was Rome. First, however, he states that no one has the right to oppose the Roman standard (Musa 6.30-33).**

Justinian does not believe that anyone has the right to resist the “sacred standard” (Musa 6.32) of Rome. A standard is the flag carried by a Roman legion. Often, the flag had the letters “SPQR” a Latin abbreviation for *Senatus Populusque*

Romanus, which can be translated as “The Senate and People of Rome.”

Dante believed that God supported the Roman Empire. We recall that in two of the mouths of Lucifer in the deepest part of the Inferno are Cassius and Brutus, two people who opposed Julius Caesar. By doing that, they opposed the coming into existence of the Roman Empire.

Justinian tells Dante,

“[...] I am forced to add on something more
to make it plain to you how little cause
have those who move against the sacred
standard,
be it the ones who claim it or disdain it.”

(Musa 6.30-33)

“[T]he ones who claim it [the Roman standard] or disdain it” (Musa 6.33) are the Ghibellines and the Guelfs. Mark Musa writes,

The Ghibellines, who supported the Empire, retained the imperial standard as their own, but not necessarily because they supported the ideal of the Empire. The Guelphs, who supported the French emperor and the papal party, attempted to suppress the imperial standard and replace it with their own. Disapproval here is expressed for *both* groups. (75)

• **What is the story of Pallas?**

Justinian mentions Pallas, whose story is recounted in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Pallas’ father was Evander, the King of Latium. Latium was a city that was founded on the site of what later became Rome. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is shown

around Latium, and several important sites of Rome are mentioned during the tour. Pallas was old enough to go to war, and his father entrusted him to Aeneas. Unfortunately, Pallas was killed in battle by Turnus, the leader of the forces arrayed against Aeneas. At the end of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas avenges Pallas' death by killing Turnus.

• **What is the rape of the Sabine women?**

The early Romans were mainly men (basically, a band of robbers), and they needed wives. They invited their neighbors, the Sabines, who would not allow their daughters to marry Roman men, to a festival, and when Romulus (the founder of Rome) gave a signal, the Romans fought off the Sabine men and kidnapped the young Sabine women. The word "rape" has the meaning of "kidnap" here. Romulus talked to the young Sabine women and convinced them to marry Roman men.

• **What is the story of Lucretia?**

Here there really is rape. Lucretia, a Roman noblewoman, was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, son of King Tarquinius Superbus. She committed suicide, and her brother led a rebellion that cast out King Tarquinius Superbus, who was the last King of the Romans. The kingdom was replaced by a republic. A republic is a kind of democracy in which leaders are elected by the people (or at least some of the people).

• **What is the story of Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus?**

Lucius Quinius Cincinnatus is the Roman after whom Cincinnati, Ohio, is named. He was a great general. He was also a simple farmer. When the Romans ran into trouble, they requested that he leave his farm and lead the Roman soldiers against the enemy. After defeating the enemy, he retired again and worked on his farm.

• **What is the story of Hannibal crossing the Alps?**

Justinian makes a number of references to Roman history, including a reference to a great Carthaginian general named Hannibal who warred against Rome.

Hannibal was a great Carthaginian general. (He came from the city that Dido founded.) He went to war against Rome, and he achieved a notable feat. He brought war elephants to Italy by crossing the Alps from Spain into Italy. For years he roamed up and down Italy, but he was eventually defeated in Africa by Scipio Africanus.

• **What is the story of Pompey?**

Pompey fought Julius Caesar for power in Rome. Julius Caesar defeated him at the Battle of Pharsalia in 48 B.C.E., Pompey fled to Egypt, and he was killed there by Ptolemy. Julius Caesar gained all the power, but he was then assassinated by a number of Romans, including Brutus and Cassius.

• **Dante is a part of a much larger story, and so are we.**

Justinian tells an awful lot of Roman history, and his main purpose is to glorify the Roman Empire. However, he mentions a seemingly trivial event that happened at Fiesole, which is a hill above Florence. Justinian says,

“Under the eagle, triumphed in their youth
 Scipio and Pompey, and it showed its wrath
 against the hill against which you were born.”

(Musa 6.52-54)

In ancient times, Catiline tried to take over political power, but the Roman orator Cicero stopped him. Catiline took refuge in Fiesole, but he was defeated.

Justinian is bringing Dante into the story. All of us are a part of a much larger story. We ourselves are a part of the story of the United States (or whatever your country is) and of God.

In addition, we learn that big stories have consequences on the local level. What happens in Washington, D.C. has consequences in Athens, Ohio (my home). National politics has consequences on the local level.

United States President Barack Obama is aware that he is part of a much larger story. In a speech, he said,

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations.

— Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union," 18 March 2008

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/18/obama-race-speech-read-th_n_92077.html

• What do we learn about Brutus and Cassius from Justinian?

We read,

“From what it wrought with the next standard-bearer
 Brutus and Cassius howl in Hell together,
 And Modena and Perugia dolent were;”

(Longfellow 6.73-75)

Justinian tells a lot about Roman history. We read about Cassius and Brutus, the sinners who are in two of Lucifer's mouths in the Inferno. They went against the divinely appointed Roman Empire, and thus God harshly punishes them.

Following the assassination of Julius Caesar, lots of people suffered and died. At Modena, Augustus defeated Marc Anthony. At Perugia, Augustus defeated Lucius, Anthony's brother. Because of the actions of Cassius and Brutus, civil war continued in Rome.

Please note Justinian's great knowledge. Souls in Paradise have a broader perspective than souls in other places.

• **What is the story of Cleopatra?**

Following the death of Julius Caesar, another power struggle broke out, this time between Octavian Caesar (the grand-nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar) and Mark Antony, who allied himself with Cleopatra. Octavian defeated their forces at the Battle of Actium, a naval battle, in 31 B.C.E. Mark Antony and Cleopatra fled back to Egypt. Both of them committed suicide, Cleopatra by allowing a poisonous snake to bite her. Octavian became Caesar Augustus. He is the first Roman Emperor. With him, the Roman Republic ended.

• **What was the “world-wide peace / that kept the gates of Janus temple locked” (Musa 6.80-81)?**

From roughly 27 BC to 180 AD, the Roman Empire was at peace. Of course, fighting occurred on the edges of the Roman Empire, but Italy itself was at peace. This is known as the *Pax Romana*: the Roman Peace.

Peace is a great blessing. Life during wartime is rough. Food is scarce to get. Women sell their bodies to get enough to eat. Children starve. People kill and are killed.

During World War II, the Nazis frequently bombed London. A man saw a woman's arm in the rubble, and he pulled at it, thinking to unearth a corpse. The arm came out of the rubble. The rest of the woman's corpse was elsewhere.

The United States is lucky because wars have not recently been fought on our territory.

At Rome was a temple to Janus. During times of peace, the doors of the temple were kept locked. During times of war, the doors to the temple were kept open.

• Justinian refers to two important events that are connected with the Romans Tiberius and Tiber. Who are these Romans, and what were these events?

These two important events will be discussed in the next canto:

1) During the reign of the third Caesar (that is, the second Roman Emperor; the first Caesar was Julius), Jesus Christ was crucified.

2) In 70 C.E., Titus conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. At the time, Titus' father, Vespasian, was the Roman Emperor. Later, Titus became Roman Emperor, serving from 79-81 C.E.

Here are the dates of the first few Roman Emperors:

Augustus 31 B.C.E.-14 C.E.

Tiberius 14-37

Gaius (Caligula) 37-41

Claudius 41-54

Nero 54-68

Iulius Vindex 68

L. Clodius Macer 68

Galba 68-69

C. Nymphidius Sabinus 68-69

Otho 69

Vitellius 69

Vespasian 69-79

Titus 79-81

• How can I learn to understand all these names and events?

One point here. Unless you already know about Roman history, you may be lost by the references to historically important Romans in this canto. Of course, that is one reason that editions of *The Divine Comedy* contain notes. (It is also good to have a teacher be your guide through *The Divine Comedy* the first time you read it, if that is possible.) However, you should be aware that all of us construct a web of knowledge. We learn one fact, then another, and then another. Eventually, these facts construct a web of understanding, and we are able to make the web bigger by adding more facts. In other words, keep learning. It will get easier.

Justinian assumes that Dante the Pilgrim knows his Roman history, and Dante the Poet assumes that his audience knows their Roman history. This is a major compliment to his audience. Of course, Dante's audience when he wrote is not the same as his audience now. The United States of America did not exist in Dante's day. USAmericans nowadays

seldom study Latin, and they know much less about Roman history than Dante's contemporary audience did.

• **Justinian takes the story all the way up to the 1st century, and then he jumps to Charlemagne (Musa 6.742-814). That is a major leap.**

Certainly a leap of some 700 years is a major leap, but Justinian (485-565 C.E.) started his story in the middle, with his own era, so we do have some of the story in between.

Justinian says,

“And when the tooth of Lombardy had bitten
The Holy Church, then underneath its wings
Did Charlemagne victorious succor her.”

(Longfellow 6.94-96)

Charlemagne (742-814 C.E.) defended the Church against a man he dethroned: King Desiderius, the Lombard.

Charlemagne was the Holy Roman Emperor, but he called himself simply the Roman Emperor. For Dante, Charlemagne's story is the continuing story of the Roman Empire.

• **What is so bad about the Guelf/Ghibelline conflict?**

Another big jump of time in Justinian's narration takes us to Dante's own time and the conflict between Guelfs and Ghibellines. It turns out that both political parties are working against the Empire.

The Guelfs, of course, supported the Pope against the Holy Roman Emperor. They were against the Empire. (When the Guelfs split into factions, the white Guelfs opposed Pope Boniface VIII, while the black Guelfs supported him. Dante was a white Guelf.)

However, the Ghibellines are also against the Empire. Supposedly, the Ghibellines support the Holy Roman Emperor, but they are actually more concerned with getting power for themselves.

Justinian tells us,

“To the public standard one the yellow lilies
Opposes, the other claims it for a party,
So that ’tis hard to see which sins the most.”

(Longfellow 6.100-102)

The “public standard” (Musa 6.100) is the Roman eagle, the sign of Empire. The Guelfs are allied with the French — symbolized by the “yellow lilies” of line 101 — while the Ghibellines want power for themselves. Note that Dante is criticizing both political parties: the Guelfs and the Ghibellines.

By the way, the Holy Roman Emperor of this time did not impress Dante because he was in Germany and was not interested in Italy.

Dante fully supported world government in his book *On World Government*. He is against whatever would prevent a competent world government from forming.

• **Which kind of souls can be found on Mercury?**

Justinian lets us know which kind of souls can be found on Mercury:

“This little star is made more beautiful
by valiant souls whose zealous deeds on earth
were prompted by desire for lasting fame:”

(Musa 6.112-114)

The “little star” (Musa 6.112) is the small planet Mercury. These souls were too concerned about “lasting fame” (Musa 6.114) and so they are not to be found higher in Paradise. It is fitting for these souls to be found on Mercury because it is a planet that is often obscured by the Sun. It is much easier to see Venus in the sky — it is the Morning Star and the Evening Star. These souls wanted fame, but now the Sun and Venus often overshadow the planet they are associated with. Of course, these souls are in the Mystic Emporium, but they appear here as a courtesy to Dante.

All of these souls performed great deeds on Earth, but these souls were tainted by being overly concerned with their Earthly honor and fame.

• Write a short character analysis of Romeo of Villeneuve.

Frequently, we go from the big picture to the little picture in *The Divine Comedy*. Both the local story and the empire story are related. The same is true of our actions. We are a part of a bigger story.

Justinian, an Emperor, now tells us about a person who did great deeds, but whose great deeds went unrewarded. He tells us about Romeo (whose name means “a pilgrim to Rome”):

“And in the compass of this present pearl

Shineth the sheen of Romeo, of whom

The grand and beauteous work was ill
rewarded.”

(Longfellow 6.127-129)

Romeo was not nobly born, but he was able to get noble husbands for the four daughters of a count named Raymond Berenger; in fact, each daughter became a queen. However,

because of his success other people envied him, and he lost his position.

These are the daughters and the nobles they married:

Margaret married King Louis IX (St. Louis).

Eleanor married King Henry III of England.

Sancha married Richard of Cornwall (the brother of King Henry III of England).

Beatrice married Charles of Anjou.

• **How is Romeo of Villeneuve similar to and different from Pier delle Vigne (*Inferno* 13)?**

Both Romeo of Villeneuve and Pier delle Vigne lost their positions due to the envy of other people.

However, Romeo's response to losing his position was much different from the response of Pier delle Vigne. Pier, of course, committed suicide, but Romeo went begging his bread. Justinian tells us:

“And then malicious words incited him

To summon to a reckoning this just man,

Who rendered to him seven and five for ten.

Then he departed poor and stricken in years,

And if the world could know the heart he had,

In begging bit by bit his livelihood,

Though much it laud him, it would laud him more.”

(Longfellow 6.136-142)

Pier delle Vigne is the negative example — how not to act to political misfortune. Romeo is the positive example — how to properly respond to political misfortune.

Note also a reversal. Pier was a spin doctor for Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II — he praised Frederick II. Here we have a Byzantine Emperor praising Romeo of Villeneuve.

• How is Romeo of Villeneuve similar to and different from Dante?

Dante did not get women married to kings, but he did suffer political misfortune that led him to exile. The situations of Dante and Romeo of Villeneuve are similar.

• Conclusion: Politics is important in *The Divine Comedy*.

Politics is important in *The Divine Comedy*, as we see in *Inferno* 6 (Florentine politics) and *Purgatory* 6 (Italian politics) and *Paradise* 6 (the politics of the empire). (Of course, as pointed out above, a linkage also exists with *Aeneid* 6.)

CHAPTER 7: “Canto 7: Mercury — The Mystery of Redemption”

• How are Canto 7 in the *Inferno*, Canto 7 in *Purgatory*, and Canto 7 in *Paradise* similar and different?

The 7th cantos in the three canticles all focus on the greater workings of history:

Inferno: Fortune

Fortune is a minister of God. She sees that money goes from person to person, family to family, country to country. She controls the Wheel of Fortune. At times, a person may be at the top of the Wheel of Fortune and very prosperous, but as the Wheel turns, that person’s prosperity decreases. The thing to do is to be prepared for the turning of the Wheel of Fortune.

Purgatory: Negligent Princes

The Negligent Princes did not focus on what they should have been focusing on. A Ruler needs to do two things: 1) Be right with God, and 2) Rule the country well. Most of these Rulers were not right with God, but at least one ruler focused too much on serving God and not enough on ruling his country.

Paradise: Divine Providence

In Canto 8, we discover that Divine Providence gives each of us gifts. We need to think about the best way to use our gifts. A person with the gift to be an excellent priest ought not to be a king, and vice versa. However, in Canto 7, Beatrice talks about Divine Providence in the form of Jesus becoming human so that he could die for our sins.

In addition, the 7th cantos in the three canticles all follow cantos that focus on politics.

• Which kinds of art do Justinian and the other souls engage in?

Justinian and the other saved souls sing and dance. They sing a Mass hymn that mixes both Latin and Hebrew. Hebrew is the language of Jerusalem, and Latin is the language of Rome. These are extremely important cities in religious and secular history.

We read:

*“Osanna sanctus Deus Sabaoth,
Superillustrans claritate tua
Felices ignes horum malahoth!”*

In this wise, to his melody returning,

This substance, upon which a double light

Doubles itself, was seen by me to sing,

And to their dance this and the others moved,

(Longfellow 7.1-7)

Note that these souls were active in life, and they are also active in Paradise. Dance is one of the arts found in Paradise.

The foreign words that Justinian and the other souls sing is a combination of Latin and Hebrew, and they mean, “Hosanna, holy God of hosts, who illumine with your brightness the blessed fires of these realms.”

• Note that Dante follows a certain pattern in the *Paradise*.

Dante follows a certain pattern in Paradise:

- When Dante arrives at a new planet or star, he describes the scene.
 - Dante then talks to one of the souls on the planet or star.
 - Dante then talks with Beatrice about any questions that he has, and Beatrice answers his questions.
- **Often, Beatrice is a lecturer in Paradise, but she is still someone whom Dante loves.**

Dante is puzzled by something that Justinian said, but he is too intimidated to ask Beatrice about it. However, the souls in Paradise have special knowledge, and Beatrice knows what Dante is thinking. In addition, souls in Paradise are helpful, and so Beatrice answers Dante's question.

When Dante is too intimidated by Beatrice to ask her questions, we read:

Not long did Beatrice let me suffer
 before announcing with a glowing smile
 that would rejoice a man condemned to burn:
 (Musa 7.16-18)

Beatrice tells Dante that she will answer his question.

- **According to Beatrice, why did Christ's crucifixion need to be avenged by Titus Vespasian?**

Dante has heard about two Roman emperors:

- 1) Tiberius. This Roman was emperor when Christ was put to death. In other words, Tiberius conspired with the Jews in Jerusalem to crucify Christ.

2) Titus Vespasian. Before he became Roman emperor, Titus conquered Jerusalem, thus punishing it for crucifying Christ.

Both of these are acts of vengeance. Adam originally sinned, and Christ's crucifixion paid for that sin. However, then Vespasian punished Jerusalem for Christ's crucifixion. If Christ's crucifixion was just vengeance for Adam's sin, why did Christ's crucifixion need to be avenged? Can a just revenge be given for a just vengeance?

Beatrice answers that question. Adam sinned because he refused to be limited in his choices. Instead of eating all fruits except that of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he refused to limit his choices and so he ate from that tree.

To pay for that original sin, Jesus — the son of God — became fully human as well as fully divine. He took on Adam's fallen nature.

When Jesus was crucified, part of the crucifixion was just. The part that punished Christ's human nature was just because it paid for Adam's original and very human sin. Jesus paid the punishment for all human beings. Remember: Jesus died for our sins.

However, the part of the crucifixion that was endured by the fully divine Jesus was unjust. The fully divine Jesus had committed no sin, and so Jesus' death on the cross was unjust. That is what needed to be avenged, and Vespasian avenged it by sacking Jerusalem and destroying the temple.

• According to Beatrice, why did God choose to redeem the sins of Humankind with Christ's death on the Cross?

This leads to a second question: why did God choose to redeem the sins of Humankind with Christ's death on the Cross?

Beatrice's answer is that Adam's original sin could be atoned for in two ways:

- 1) Humankind could make a full apology.
- 2) God could show mercy to Humankind by sacrificing His own son.

Humankind could never apologize enough to make up for Adam's original sin, so Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for atone for the sins of Humankind.

• According to Beatrice, why are human beings immortal?

According to Beatrice:

- Everything that God makes, such as angels, is incorruptible.
- Our soul is given to us directly by God. It is therefore immortal.
- In addition, God directly made the bodies of our first parents: Adam and Eve.
- Therefore, we — souls and bodies — will be resurrected.

CHAPTER 8: “Canto 8: Venus — Charles Martel”

• What does Dante see when he arrives on Venus?

Dante has not been aware that he has been rising to the planet Venus.

Venus, of course, is associated with the ancient goddess of passionate love: Venus/Aphrodite. Here Dante will see souls who loved excessively.

Dante learns that he has arrived on Venus by the beauty of Beatrice. The closer to God they get, the more beautiful Beatrice is.

On Venus, Dante sees lights dancing. This is significant for these reasons:

- 1) Paradise has joy. We see that in the dancing — and in the music.
- 2) Paradise has art. We see that in the dancing — and in the music.

• Write a short character analysis of Charles Martel.

Charles Martel was a French Angevin Prince. He died young at age 24 in a cholera epidemic. He visited Florence in 1294, one year before he died, and he and Dante knew and liked each other.

Charles is concerned about good government. He speaks of Robert, his brother, who will be a bad ruler in Naples unless he stops being so greedy.

• Dante and Charles Martel discuss an important topic in this section of the *Paradise*: Why do good parents produce bad children?

The question “Why do good parents produce bad children?” is important.

We would like to know how to produce good children all the time, yet we do not know how to do that. After all:

- Good parents can produce bad children.
- Bad parents can produce good children.
- The children can be very different from each other even if they share the same parents.

• What is an example of good parents who had a bad child?

Probably, many examples exist. Where do mass murderers come from? I don't believe in necessarily blaming the parents.

• What is an example of bad parents who had a good child?

One example of a good child who came from bad parents (or at least low-born parents) is Romulus, the founder of Rome. Charles Martel says that "Romulus sprang from so base a sire, / that men imagined him the son of Mars" (8.131-132). Here the trait is nobility. Romulus seemed so noble that people could not believe that his father really was his father; instead, they said that he had to be the son of a god: Mars.

• What is an example of two children who were very different although they shared the same parents?

Jacob and Esau were twin brothers, but they were very different, as is told in Genesis 25:20-28 (King James Version):

20: And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

21: And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22: And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD.

23: And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

24: And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

25: And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

26: And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

27: And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

28: And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

• According to Charles Martel, why do good parents sometimes produce bad offspring?

According to Charles Martel, temperament does not come from parents. Rather, Providence modifies temperament to make people different. (And yes, we do have free will.) Charles Martel talks about the influence of Heavenly Bodies, but we would talk about the influence of DNA.

• **Why are different types of temperament needed?**

Different occupations require different temperaments. The necessary roles of society include these:

- Law-makers
- Warriors
- Priests
- Artisans/Manufacturers

God gives us a certain temperament when we are born. We are born with certain qualities that qualify us for a certain occupation. We may have the qualities of a judge, a warrior, a priest, or an artisan/manufacturer, or many more.

Even though we may be given a certain temperament, we still have free will. We know the difference between right and wrong, and we have the power to make choices.

• **What career advice does Charles Martel give in Canto 8?**

Charles Martel advises people to choose a job that is suited to your temperament. Not everyone is cut out to be a landlord, or a sales person, or a teacher. If you try to be what you are not, you will be unhappy. (If I were to try to be the center for the Boston Celtics, despite being well under six feet tall, I would most likely become unhappy because I am trying to get a job I am unqualified for.)

According to Charles Martel, if someone has the temperament of a priest, it would be better if he did not become a King.

One of my students was majoring in engineering at Ohio University because his parents wanted him to, not because

he wanted to. His dream career was to open up his exercise fitness gym. He may end up unhappy in his life.

Charles Martel would agree probably with Joseph Campbell's advice to "Follow your bliss."

By the way, the Dalai Lama believes that the purpose of human life is to be happy, although this means, I believe, self-actualization.

CHAPTER 9: “Canto 9: Venus — Cunizza, Folquet, Rahab”

• Which kind of souls can be found on Venus?

Excessive lovers are found on Venus.

Dante does not tell us of his friend Charles Martel’s specific sins, but we do meet three other excessive lovers in this canto.

• Write a short character analysis of Cunizza da Romano.

Cunizza (1198-1279) is the sister of the tyrant Ezzelino (1194-1259), who is in the Inferno because of the blood he spilled when he was a tyrant.

Cunizza was the lover of Sordello, one of the late repentant of the Purgatory. He abducted her from her husband (or perhaps she left her husband for him). She had lots of husbands and lovers: four husbands and two lovers. In other words, she had lots of sex.

According to Cunizza, the planet Venus formed her character; thus, she fell in love easily. Today, we would say that her DNA made her fall in love easily. Of course, Cunizza still has free will and the ability to tell right from wrong.

In later life, she was a good soul and did many good deeds. Sinners can repent and end up in Paradise.

Being in Paradise, she has special knowledge, and she prophesies that some loveless sinners will be punished in northern Italy.

• **What is the importance of Cunizza da Romano's statement that "gladly I forgive in me / what caused my fate" (Musa *Paradise* 9.34-35)?**

This is a joyous utterance. People in Paradise do not beat themselves up because of their sin. They know that God forgives them, and they forgive themselves.

• **Write a short character analysis of Folquet of Marseilles.**

Folquet (c. 1160-1231) was a famous troubadour. Folquet, of course, loved women, and his love made him suffer. In fact, he says that his torments equaled those of three classic lovers.

By the way, "c." means "circa, or around, or approximately."

Late in life, Folquet became a monk and then a bishop.

Folquet, like Cunizza, does not feel the sting of sin. Instead, he and the other souls in Paradise are happy that their sins have been forgiven. He says,

"Yet here is no repenting, but we smile,

Not at the fault, which comes not back to
mind,

But at the power which ordered and foresaw."

(Longfellow 9.103-105)

• **Folquet says that his love torments equaled those of three classic lovers. Explain those stories.**

1) *Dido*.

Pygmalion, Dido's brother, killed her husband, and she fled to North Africa, where she founded Carthage. Aeneas, blown off course by a storm sent by Juno, landed in

Carthage, and Dido fell in love with him although she had pledged to remain faithful to her husband. Dido and Aeneas had a love affair until Jupiter, through Mercury, reminded Aeneas that he had a destiny to fulfill in Italy: to become the founder of the Roman people. Out of grief, Dido committed suicide.

Jupiter is the king of the gods, and mercury is a messenger-god.

2) *Phyllis*.

Phyllis, a Thracian princess, loved Demophoon, the son of Theseus. According to Mark Musa, they were supposed to be married, but when he did not show up at the altar, she hanged herself (115). According to another version of the myth, Phyllis and Demophoon married, but he left her behind when he returned home, promising to return quickly. When he did not return, she hanged herself.

3) *Deianira*.

Deianira was the wife of Hercules. However, he fell out of love with her and pursued Iole instead. She believed that a shirt soaked in the blood of Nessus, a Centaur (which had tried to rape her, but which Hercules killed) would restore Hercules' love for her. Her source of information was Nessus, but he tricked her. The blood was poison and burned like acid, and Hercules killed himself to escape the agony caused by the Centaur's blood. Of course, we met Nessus in the Inferno. He gave Dante a ride across the river of boiling blood.

• **Who is Rahab?**

We find souls in Paradise praising other souls. Cunizza praised Folquet, and Folquet praises Rahab.

Rahab is the whore of Jericho; she helped the Old Testament general Joshua conquer the city. Rahab hid two of Joshua's scouts, and she is an ancestor of Christ.

During the Harrowing of Hell, Rahab was released from Limbo.

Folquet says,

“To this sphere where the shadow of your earth
comes to an end, she was the first to rise
among the souls redeemed in Christ's great
triumph.”

(Musa 9.118-120)

We read about Rahab in Joshua 2 (King James Version):

1: And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

2: And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

3: And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

4: And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

5: And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went

out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

6: But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

7: And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

8: And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9: And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10: For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11: And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

12: Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

13: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

14: And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

15: Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

16: And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

17: And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

18: Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

19: And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.

20: And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.

21: And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

22: And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were

returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not.

23: So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them:

24: And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

Even though Rahab was a whore, she made it into Paradise.

CHAPTER 10: “Canto 10: Sun — Saint Thomas Aquinas”

• Which kind of souls can be found on the Sun?

At the end of Canto 9 of *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil leave behind the circles devoted to punishing the incontinent and move to the circle that punishes the heretics.

At the end of Canto 9 of *Purgatory*, Dante and Virgil pass through the gate, leaving Pre-purgatory behind and passing through the gate to Purgatory Proper.

At the end of Canto 9 of *Paradise*, Dante and Beatrice leave behind the planets that are touched by the shadow of the Earth and move to the planets that are not touched by the shadow of the Earth.

On the previous planets, Dante saw souls who were associated with a planet for negative reasons:

Moon: Faith (Souls Who Did Not Keep Their Religious Vows)

Mercury: Hope (Souls Who Were Excessively Concerned with Earthly Fame)

Venus: Love (Souls Who Loved Excessively)

The Sun is a symbol of wisdom. Wisdom = Light. Here on the Sun Dante and Beatrice see the souls of some wise people.

On the Sun and the other planets, the souls will be associated with these planets for a positive reason — for something they had and have rather than for something they lacked.

• Does wisdom equal scholarship?

Scholarship and wisdom are two different things.

We see a very learned soul here: that of Saint Thomas Aquinas. However, two other souls we will see here are not known for scholarship. Neither Saint Francis nor Saint Dominic is known for scholarship. Nevertheless, both of them were and are wise.

This means that wisdom is a broader concept than we may usually assume.

Two facts about wisdom are that it is communal and it is cumulative.

Think about the way that we accumulate knowledge throughout history. One of the great inventions has been writing because we can now write down what we learn. A person can study *The Divine Comedy* for years and have wonderful insights into the epic poem, but when that person dies, those insights can be lost unless that person has written down his or her thoughts.

When a person writes a book that appears in a library, that person is making his or her insights available communally — someone else can read that book and learn those insights.

In addition, the other people who read that book can build on its insights. They can publish their own books that contain their own insights. These insights can build up over the years. For one thing, we don't need to keep reinventing the wheel generation after generation. The wheel has already been invented. New generations can figure out better ways of using the wheel.

Books have a major advantage over the transmission of information orally. In Africa, storytellers, who were called *griots*, passed along information orally. It was said that when a *griot* died, a library died. It would be much better if the *griots* wrote down what they know. That way, a library will not die when a *griot* dies.

So much knowledge dies when a person dies. Do you know much about your great-grandparents? How much better would it be if all of our grandparents had written books about their lives. Someday, you will probably be a great-grandparent. Why not start writing down autobiographical essays that you can assemble into chapters of your autobiography?

When a person can write a good book and does not write that book, it is as if a child has died.

Still, wisdom does not mean book-learning, although book-learning is important. A person such as Saint Francis is known for his love, and love can be a kind of wisdom. Love can be a way of knowing what is important.

We will see a visual display of the communal and cumulative nature of wisdom. A wheel of saved souls will appear. Later, another wheel of saved souls will appear. The two wheels will interact with each other.

One of the things that this will mean is that wisdom is understanding parts and wholes. It is understanding the way that things fit together and the way that things interact with each other.

The Sun is bright, and it is an appropriate symbol of the brightness of wisdom.

• **What does Dante admire about the Sun?**

Dante admires the Sun because of the seasons: we have summer, and we have winter. Why do we have seasons? We have seasons because the Sun and the Earth have a proper relationship with each other. The parts — the Sun and the Earth — are related in such a way that we have seasons.

We know that the Earth is tilted. So does Dante, but he expresses it in a funny way.

Dante the Poet invites the reader to look at the heavens:

Look up now, Reader, with me to the spheres;
 look straight to the point of the lofty wheels
 where the one motion and the other cross.
 and there begin to revel in the work
 of that great Artist who so loves His art,
 His gaze is fixed on it perpetually.

(Musa 10.7-12)

We say that the Earth is tilted at a 23.5-degree angle. Dante talks about wheels. One wheel is the equator (understood as extended into space); the other wheel is the path of the Sun. Dante would say that the two wheels meet at a 23.5-degree angle.

This relationship is absolutely correct. If the Earth's tilt were too big, the Earth's seasons would be extreme. If the Earth's tilt were too small, the Earth's seasons would be very similar. The relationship of parts and the whole is absolutely correct for seasons that will support life on Earth.

The universe is a great work of art, and we should contemplate it. God contemplates His own creation, and we should likewise contemplate it in order to become God-like.

• Here Dante sees a wheel of souls. Dante will see two wheels of souls in Canto 12 (and a third wheel of souls in Canto 14). All of these wheels interact. What does this suggest about wisdom?

Dante sees three circles of souls eventually. Here he sees the first circle of souls. Then he sees a second circle in Canto 12, and he sees a third circle of souls in Canto 14.

Here we see that wisdom is cumulative. We learn one thing, then we learn another, and then another. Each new piece of knowledge fits into our growing web of knowledge.

We also see parts forming a whole. The parts relate to each other well. Wisdom is an interrelationship of parts forming a whole.

The first circle of 12 souls surrounds Beatrice. These souls are very bright, and they dance.

• Write a short character analysis of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Who is he, historically?

In our time, we regard Saint Thomas Aquinas as being the greatest medieval philosopher, but in Dante's time Saint Thomas was respected, but not as respected as he later became in the 16th century. In our times, we regard Saint Thomas as the dominant Catholic theologian. Dante's opinion of Saint Thomas agrees with our opinion of him.

Saint Thomas was born in 1224, and he died at age 50 in 1274. Dante was born in 1265, so he was nine years old when Saint Thomas died. The Catholic Church canonized Saint Thomas in 1323. Dante died in 1321, so he had been dead for two years when Saint Thomas was canonized. To canonize someone is to declare someone a saint. The Catholic Church placed Saint Thomas' name in the canon, or list, of recognized saints.

Thomas Aquinas was a huge man, both physically and mentally. Once a brother monk decided to play a joke on him. The monk looked out a window and said, "Come quick — look at the cow flying." Aquinas jumped up and looked out the window — and saw nothing, of course. The monk began to laugh, but Aquinas told him, "I thought it more likely that a cow should fly than that a monk would lie."

An important fact about Saint Thomas is that he was a Dominican monk.

Some people attacked Saint Thomas' writings because they thought that pagan philosophers such as Aristotle had influenced him too much. Later, Martin Luther, who started the Reformation, also attacked him.

Aquinas believed in both revealed truth, such as the revelations that we have in Scripture, and in discovered truth, such as we find by using our reason. He argued that the two kinds of truth were compatible. Moses Maimonides, a great Jewish thinker, believed the same thing.

• **Who are the other souls with Thomas Aquinas?**

In this first circle are 12 souls, and they surround Beatrice like the numbers on a clock. All of the 12 souls are male. Later, a second circle of 12 souls will join the first circle. The number 24 is important in the Bible — for example, in the Book of Revelation there are 24 elders.

Thomas Aquinas tells Dante who are the other 11 wise people in the circle with him. Among them is the Old Testament King Solomon, whose wisdom Saint Thomas will discuss later.

The other 11 wise people come from many nations and 21 centuries:

1. *Albert the Great (Albertus Magnus — “Magnus” is Latin for “Great”)*

He was a teacher of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Albert the Great died in 1280, and he was canonized in 1931. Albert the Great was known as the Universal Doctor, a name that reflected his great knowledge. He commented widely on the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Like Saint Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great was a Dominican.

2. Gratian

He is Italian. He was a Benedictine monk, and he is known as the father of canon law. Gratian sought to harmonize Church and civil laws, thereby allowing canon law to be correctly interpreted. His *magnum opus* is *A Concordance of Discordant Regulations*, or *Gratian's Decretals*, which appeared between 1140 and 1150. It is interesting that we see Gratian here. One of Dante's criticisms of the Catholic church was that it did not spend enough time studying Scripture; instead, it spent too much time studying Church law. Yet we see here Gratian, the great compiler of Church law. What can we learn from this? We can learn that Church law is important, but we have to be careful to use it well, neither overvaluing nor undervaluing it.

3. Peter Lombard

His years are circa 1100-1164, and he was the bishop of Paris. He wrote *Libri Sententiarum (The Books of Opinions)*, which brought together the opinions of the Church fathers on four key subjects:

- the Godhead
- the incarnation
- creation
- the sacraments

Peter Lombard called his writings his "widow's mite," a reference to the New Testament story (Luke 21:1-4), who brought her small offering to the temple. This is the story in the King James Version:

1: And he [Jesus] looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.

2: And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.

3: And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all:

4: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.

4. *King Solomon*

Solomon, David's son by Bathsheba, is in this group of wise souls. Though Saint Augustine believed that King Solomon was damned, Solomon is the most beautiful in this group.

Solomon had a dream in which God asked him what he wanted, and Solomon wanted wisdom to be able to distinguish "an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad" (I King 3:9; King James Version). God granted him that, as well as things which Solomon did not ask for. This is the story from I Kings 3:1-15 (King James Version):

1: And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.

2: Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days.

3: And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

4: And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

5: In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

6: And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7: And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

8: And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

9: Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

10: And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

11: And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

12: Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart;

so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

13: And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

14: And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.

15: And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

Immediately following these verses appears the story in which two women claim to be the mother of a living baby. Solomon uses his wisdom to resolve that dispute. He orders the child to be cut in half, and each mother to be given half of the child. One of the women speaks up and asks Solomon to give the child to the other woman. Solomon knows that the woman who spoke up is the real mother of the child because the real mother would not want the child killed.

5. Dionysius the Areopagite

In the 1st century, Saint Paul converted an Athenian named Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34):

34: Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

People incorrectly believed that Dionysius the Areopagite had written a highly influential book about angels: *On the Heavenly Hierarchy*, aka *The Celestial Hierarchy*.

Here are two definitions of “Areopagite”:

a member of the council of the Areopagus

Source: wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

The Areopagus or Areios Pagos is the ‘Hill of Ares,’ north-west of the Acropolis, which in classical times functioned as the chief homicide court of Athens.

Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Areopagite

6. *Orosius*

This soul is not named, but commentators tend to identify the soul with an Orosius who was a Spanish cleric and historian. He was a 5th-century contemporary of Saint Augustine. Some pagans believed that the arrival of Christianity had made the world worse than it had been, and Orosius wrote seven books opposing that belief. These books were called *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*.

7. *Boethius*

Boethius (circa 480-524), a Roman, wrote *On the Consolation of Philosophy* while he was in prison. He was executed for treason — although he was innocent — after he completed the book. After the death of Beatrice, Dante read *On the Consolation of Philosophy* and was consoled by it. Boethius is also known as Saint Severinus; his full name was Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius. People of the Middle Ages regarded him as a martyr.

8. *Isidore of Seville*

Isidore of Seville (circa 570-636) was a Spaniard. He wrote a highly influential encyclopedia of the scientific knowledge of his time.

9. *The Venerable Bede*

The Venerable Bede (circa 673-735), an Anglo-Saxon monk, is known as the father of English history. He wrote the five-volume *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*.

Here are some definitions of “venerable”:

1) impressive by reason of age; “a venerable sage with white hair and beard”

2) august: profoundly honored; “revered holy men”

Source:^[1]_[SEP]wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

Venerable is an official epithet in several Christian churches.^[1]_[SEP]

Source:^[1]_[SEP]en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venerable

commanding respect because of age, dignity, character or position; worthy of reverence; ancient, antiquated or archaic

Source:^[1]_[SEP]en.wiktionary.org/wiki/venerable

10. *Richard of Saint Victor*

Richard of Saint Victor died in 1173. He may have been a Scotsman, and he was called the great Contemplator after he wrote a book titled *De Contemplatione*. He was an important 12th-century mystic, and he was prior of the illustrious Augustinian monastery at Saint Victor near Paris.

11. *Siger of Brabant*

Siger of Brabant died circa 1284. He was a Belgian whose beliefs opposed those of Saint Thomas. For example, Siger thought that the world has always existed and therefore is eternal. He also doubted that the soul is immortal — since he is in Paradise, he has happily discovered that he was wrong about that. He and Saint Aquinas may have had philosophical disagreements while they were alive, but they get along well in Paradise.

• **Why isn't Saint Augustine here?**

Many of Dante's readers would expect to see Saint Augustine somewhere on the Sun, but he does not appear, although we find out in *Paradise* 32.34-36 that he is in fact in Paradise. That Saint Augustine does not appear may reflect what Dante considers most important. Saint Augustine is a theologian, but although theology is important, Dante believes that contemplation, as represented by Saint Benedict, and the perfect imitation of Christ, as represented by Saint Francis, are more important. See Mark Musa's note for *Paradise* 32.34-36 for more information.

• **Many disagreements between scholars are not between good people and bad people. People of good will can disagree. Sometimes, people are mistaken, but they are still true seekers of wisdom.**

Siger of Brabant and Saint Thomas Aquinas disagreed about important things while they were alive on Earth, but they are next to each other in Paradise. Siger of Brabant was even accused of heresy, and yet we see him in Paradise.

What can we learn from this? We can learn that many disagreements between scholars are not between good people and bad people. We can learn that people of good will can disagree. Sometimes, people are mistaken, but they are still true seekers of wisdom.

• **How does Thomas Aquinas introduce himself?**

Thomas Aquinas introduces himself in a very interesting way:

“Of the lambs was I of the holy flock
 Which Dominic conducteth by a road
 Where well one fattens if he strayeth not.
 He who is nearest to me on the right
 My brother and master was; and he Albertus
 Is of Cologne, I Thomas of Aquinum.”

(Longfellow 10.94-99)

We learn, if we did not already know, that Saint Thomas Aquinas was a Dominican monk. By the way, Aquinas simply means “of Aquino.” The name identifies the town where Thomas is from.

The people whom Saint Thomas Aquinas is next to in the circle are very interesting. One person is Albert of Cologne, better known today as Albertus Magnus or Albert the Great. Albert the Great was Saint Thomas’ teacher. The other person is Siger of Brabant, with whom Saint Thomas had philosophical difficulties.

After Saint Thomas has introduced himself and the other wise souls, the souls revolve like a clock wheel.

In Canto 11, Dante wants more information about something that Saint Thomas said when he introduced himself. Dante wants to know what the line “along the road / where all may fatten if they do not stray” (Musa 10.95-96) means.

**CHAPTER 11: “Canto 11: Sun — Saint Thomas
Aquinas Praises Saint Francis of Assisi”**

• **In Heaven, souls are helpful.**

All the souls in Paradise, not just Beatrice, can read Dante’s mind. Saint Thomas Aquinas knows that Dante would like him to explain the phrase “where all may fatten” (Musa 10.96 and Musa 11.25), and he, like the other souls in Paradise, is very willing to help Dante.

• **In Heaven, the various religious fraternities are not jealous of each other.**

Thomas Aquinas is a Dominican monk, and yet he talks about the Franciscans in this canto. Here Saint Thomas praises Saint Francis, the founder of the Franciscans. Saint Thomas will also criticize his own order, the Dominicans, on Earth.

Later, Saint Bonaventure, a Franciscan, will praise Saint Dominic.

Both the Franciscans and the Dominicans were founded as reform orders. Both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic want the Church to be strong.

In Heaven the various religious fraternities are not jealous of each other. They realize that they are on the same side.

In this canto, Saint Thomas explains the line “along the road / where all may fatten if they do not stray” (Musa 10.95-96). He talks about reform in the Church. By the way, this canto almost entirely consists of the words of Saint Thomas.

• **What did Saint Dominic and Saint Francis both try to do?**

Thomas says,

“The Providence that governs all the world
 with wisdom so profound none of His
 creatures
 can ever hope to see into Its depths,
 in order that the Bride of that sweet Groom
 who crying loud espoused her with His
 blood,
 might go to her Beloved made more secure
 within herself, more faithful to her Spouse,
 ordained two noble princes to assist her
 on either side, each serving as a guide.”

(Musa 11.28-36)

When Saint Thomas refers to “the Bride of that sweet Groom” (Musa 11.31), he is referring to the Church.

The “two noble princes” (Musa 11.35) are Saint Dominic and Saint Francis, each of whom sought to reform the Church. The Church needed to be reformed, and these two saints in different but complementary ways, sought to reform it.

St. Thomas says,

“One will I speak of, for of both is spoken
 In praising one, whichever may be taken,
 Because unto one end their labours were.”

(Longfellow 11.40-42)

St. Thomas, a Dominican, is aware that both Saint Dominic and Saint Francis sought to reform the Church. Saint Thomas

shows respect for Saint Francis by narrating his life. Later, Saint Bonaventure, a Franciscan, will show respect for Saint Dominic by narrating his life.

• **How were Saint Dominic and Saint Francis different?**

Both Saint Dominic and Saint Francis were reformers, but there were differences among them.

Saint Dominic is from Spain, and Saint Francis is from France.

Saint Dominic's focus is on the gifts of the mind, and Saint Francis' focus is on the gifts of the heart.

Saint Thomas says,

“The one was all seraphical in ardour;
The other by his wisdom upon earth
A splendour was of light cherubical.”

(Longfellow 11.37-39)

The two saints are associated with different orders of angels. Saint Francis is associated with the Seraphim, whom Mark Musa identifies as “symbolic of the greatest love of God” (Musa 139). Saint Dominic is associated with the Cherubim, whom Mark Musa identifies as “these acknowledged as the wisest” (Musa 139).

A proper Church needs both wisdom and love.

• **Whose story does the Dominican Thomas Aquinas relate? The story of Saint Dominic, or the story of Saint Francis?**

St. Thomas, who is a Dominican, chooses to tell the story of Saint Francis. This shows that in Paradise there is no jealousy between the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Both

Dominicans and Franciscans know that they are on the same side.

Here are a few things to know about Saint Francis:

St. Francis of Assisi was generous to the poor. Once, he and a friend named Giles were out walking when they came across a beggar woman. Saint Francis had nothing to give her, as he was wearing a simple, much-worn habit with a bit of rope for a belt. Giles, however, was wearing a coat. Saint Francis told him, "Give it to her." Giles handed the beggar woman the coat, and he became one of the first Franciscans.

Q: A crèche is a representation of the Christmas story. It shows Joseph, Mary, the baby Jesus in a manger, some animals, and sometimes shepherds and the three wise men bearing gifts. Who created the first Christmas crèche?

A: In the year 1223, Saint Francis of Assisi created the first crèche in the grotto of Greccio in Italy.

That Saint Thomas tells us about Saint Francis shows something about wisdom. Don't be afraid to learn from other sources and from traditions other than your own. Although Saint Thomas is a Dominican, he knows that there is wisdom to be learned from the story of Saint Francis. One of the things that we may do today is to learn from religions other than our own. We may want to investigate Zen Buddhism to see what we can learn from it. (Dante, if he were alive, may or may not agree.)

Wisdom can involve interrelationships. Saint Thomas tells the story of Saint Francis. Later, Saint Bonaventure, who is the head of another circle of souls, will tell the story of Saint Dominic. We see communication between circles here.

St. Thomas' biography of Saint Francis is a long biography. Obviously, Church reform is important to Dante. Wisdom is about seeing things in the right relationship. The Sun and the

Earth are in the right relationship to have seasons and to support life. The Franciscans and the Dominicans need to have the right relationship, which is to be on the same side and to work for the good of the Church. The Church needs to recognize the importance of both love and wisdom.

• In what way does Francis of Assisi serve as a model for Dante?

When Dante spends a lot of time on a particular figure in *The Divine Comedy*, he has something to learn from that figure. We have seen that in the *Inferno* and in *Purgatory*, and it is still true in *Paradise*. We need to ask what Dante is able to learn from Saint Francis. In what way is Saint Francis a model for Dante?

What we know about Saint Francis is that he was a wandering saint. He had taken vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. He was a missionary who visited parts of the world devoted to Islam.

What can Dante learn from this? Saint Francis preached poverty and humility. Those are lessons that Dante needs to learn. Soon, Dante will be exiled from Florence, and he will have to make his way in the world. In addition, we know that Dante thinks that he will have to spend a lot of time on the ledge of the Mountain of Purgatory that is devoted to purging pride.

St. Francis turns out to be a very good model for Dante.

• Why does Thomas Aquinas tell us so much about where Saint Francis comes from: Assisi?

St. Thomas starts by telling us where Saint Francis came from. He locates Assisi geographically.

Why is this important? It is important because where someone comes from is important in their biography. One of

the most important facts about Dante is that he is from Florence. That remains important even after he is exiled from Florence. That is true for all of us. Where we grow up is important, whether it is in the American south, in New York City, in a Welsh mining town or in Assisi. Or for that matter, in Jesus' case, in Bethlehem and around the Sea of Galilee.

All of us are born in a particular place at a particular time, and that is important. We may be concerned with universal truths, but where and when we are born are important.

• **Why does Thomas Aquinas tell Dante the story of Saint Francis being married to Lady Poverty?**

When Saint Francis was still young, he decided to forego the pursuit of wealth and instead be poor. In figurative terms, he married Lady Poverty. Of course, Lady Poverty is not someone people normally chose to consort with:

“For he in youth his father’s wrath incurred
 For certain Dame, to whom, as unto death,
 The gate of pleasure no one doth unlock;
 And was before his spiritual court
 Et coram patre unto her united;
 Then day by day more fervently he loved
 her.”

(Longfellow 11.58-63)

By the way, *et coram patre* is Latin for “in the presence of the father.”

When Saint Francis “took this lady as his lawful wife” (Musa 11.62), he does not take a physical woman as his wife. Instead, he takes Lady Poverty as his wife. The subject of

Saint Francis marrying Lady Poverty appears in art. For examples, search “Saint Francis marrying poverty” in Google Images.

Lady Poverty is not very popular, even or perhaps especially in our age. Some people may believe that “Greed is good,” as the character Gordon Gekko does in the movie *Wall Street*, but this is something that Saint Francis totally rejects.

Nevertheless, Lady Poverty had another suitor, much earlier:

“She, reft of her first husband, scorned, obscure,
 One thousand and one hundred years and
 more,
 Waited without a suitor till he came.
 Naught it availed to hear, that with Amyclas
 Found her unmoved at sounding of his voice
 He who struck terror into all the world;
 Naught it availed being constant and undaunted,
 So that, when Mary still remained below,
 She mounted up with Christ upon the cross.”

(Longfellow 11.64-72)

Few people have wanted to be with Lady Poverty since her “first spouse” (Musa 11.64) — that is, Jesus.

One person who did not avoid Lady Poverty was Amyclas, a poor fisherman who was not afraid of Julius Caesar when he appeared before him, wanting to be ferried across the Adriatic Sea. Apparently, when you have no possessions, you do not worry about losing them.

St. Francis and Dante are not alike in some ways:

1. Dante is not a saint.
2. Saint Francis chooses poverty willingly; Dante does not. Dante is exiled from Florence, and then his poverty begins.
3. Dante does not literally beg for his food, although it is fair to say that he has to learn humility.

One thing that Dante has to do is to choose his reaction to what happens to him. One possible reaction is commit suicide. That kind of reaction, of course, gets a person membership forever in the Inferno; we remember Pier delle Vigne. Another kind of reaction is to embrace your fate. Saint Francis embraced poverty. Dante can chose to do his best in the face of poverty and exile. His best, of course, is *The Divine Comedy*, which has lasted 700 years and is likely to last at least another 700 years.

• What kind of marriage do Saint Francis and Lady Poverty have?

The marriage of Saint Francis and Lady Poverty turns out to be fruitful. Soon Saint Francis has followers: Bernard, Giles, and Sylvester:

“So much so that the venerable Bernard

First bared his feet, and after so great peace

Ran, and, in running, thought himself too slow.

O wealth unknown! O veritable good!

Giles bares his feet, and bares his feet
Sylvester

Behind the bridegroom, so doth please the bride!

Then goes his way that father and that master,
 He and his Lady and that family
 Which now was girding on the humble cord;”

(Longfellow 11.79-87)

In the *Inferno*, Brunetto Latini was unfruitful. He did speak of Dante as his son, but Brunetto Latini's doing so was a way for him to be remembered. If Dante becomes famous, then Brunetto Latini will be famous because he was a teacher and a mentor for Dante. A more fruitful family is one in which all do good work. Brunetto Latini wrote for fame, and his writings have perished except for scholars researching Dante. Saint Francis' family is still doing good work. The Franciscans do many good deeds throughout the world.

• Why does Thomas Aquinas mention to Dante the story of Saint Francis preaching to the Sultan?

Also important, of course, are the highlights of our lives. We must be alert to the highlights of Saint Francis' life that Saint Thomas brings up. These are highlights that Dante will be able to learn from.

St. Thomas tells us that Saint Francis went East during a time of crusade, and he preached to the Sultan. Actually, Saint Francis was hoping to be martyred, but he was a good guy, and the Sultan whom Saint Francis preached to did not want to martyr him.

St. Thomas says,

“And when he had, through thirst of martyrdom,
 In the proud presence of the Sultan preached
 Christ and the others who came after him,”

(Longfellow 11.100-102)

St. Francis once said, “Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” (Source: Geneva M. Butz, *Christmas in All Seasons*, p. ix.)

St. Francis is a kind of crusader. He does not fight with a sword, however, but instead he educates with words.

One of Dante’s ancestors was a warrior in the Crusades. Dante will meet this ancestor later, and the ancestor will tell Dante what his mission in life will be: to write *The Dante Comedy*. Of course, this epic poem will also use words to educate people in a kind of Crusade. Neither Saint Francis nor Dante use swords in their Crusade.

• **What is the stigmata that Saint Francis received?**

St. Thomas also tells the story of how Saint Francis receives the stigmata. The stigmata are the wounds of Christ. These unexplained markings are on the hands and feet and on the side of the person receiving them. In Saint Francis’ case, they are regarded as a miracle.

St. Thomas mentions the stigmata after he says that Saint Francis returned from preaching to the Sultan:

“And when he had, through thirst of martyrdom,
 In the proud presence of the Sultan preached
 Christ and the others who came after him,
 And, finding for conversion too unripe
 The folk, and not to tarry there in vain,
 Returned to fruit of the Italic grass,
 On the rude rock ’twixt Tiber and the Arno
 From Christ did he receive the final seal,

Which during two whole years his members bore.”

(Longfellow 11.100-108)

Most people who bear the stigmata are women; very few males ever receive the stigmata.

The phrase “this final seal” (Musa 11.108) is interesting. It refers to the stigmata. A seal, of course, is used to seal envelopes. Hot wax is dropped across the folded part of the envelope and then a seal of some kind is pressed into the wax. Here are a few important points that Dante scholars William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman make:

1. The seal indicates that this is the genuine article. The letter has not been forged. Also, Saint Francis’ Christianity has not been faked.
2. The letter is in a finished state. No more writing needs to be done in the letter. Similarly, Saint Francis has achieved Paradise. In addition, we can say that he has come as close to perfection as a human being who is not also divine can.
3. The letter has been approved. If it were not approved, the seal would not be applied to it. Similarly, Saint Francis’ life has been approved — by God.
4. The letter is officially sealed. We can say that Saint Francis is officially sealed. We may also want to consider him a fully completed work of art. In Cantos 10 and 11 of *Purgatory*, the souls of the proud were bent over like the works of art known as corbels. They were being formed into works of art. Now, near the end of his life, Saint Francis is a fully completed work of art.

St. Francis' stigmatization occurs "on bare rock between Arno and Tiber" (Musa 11.106). The Tiber flows to Rome and the Pope. The Arno flows to Dante's hometown, Florence.

When Saint Francis died, he commended Lady Poverty to the care of his followers.

"Stinking Alley," a slum, was the location of the first Franciscan foundation in London.

Only two years after he died, St. Francis was canonized.

By the way, Saint Thomas' main source for the life of Saint Francis is a biography written by Saint Bonaventura, who will be speaking soon in the *Paradise*.

• How does Saint Thomas Aquinas criticize the Dominicans (his own religious order)?

St. Thomas has been praising Saint Francis, the founder of the Franciscans. Now he criticizes his own order: the Dominicans. Saint Dominic himself was a good man, but many of his followers are now going astray:

"But his own flock is growing greedy now
 for richer food, and in their hungry search
 they stray to alien pastures carelessly;
 the farther off his sheep go wandering
 from him in all directions, the less milk
 they bring back when they come back to the
 fold.

True, there are some who, fearing loss, will keep
 close to their shepherd, but so few are these

it would not take much cloth to make their
cowls.”

(Musa 11.124-132)

• Saint Thomas Aquinas’ style of writing was difficult to read. Note that Dante parodies that style at the end of this canto.

Dante parodies Saint Thomas Aquinas’ complex style of writing at the end of this canto:

“Now if my utterance be not indistinct,
 If thine own hearing hath attentive been,
 If thou recall to mind what I have said,
 In part contented shall thy wishes be;
 For thou shalt see the plant that’s chipped
 away,
 And the rebuke that lieth in the words,
 ‘Where well one fattens, if he strayeth not.’”

(Longfellow 11.133-139)

CHAPTER 12: “Canto 12: Sun — Saint Bonaventure Praises Saint Dominic”

Who was Saint Bonaventure? Who is he, historically?

As Saint Thomas finishes speaking, his circle of wise souls is joined by another circle of wise souls. The second circle goes around the first circle. Again, we have a relationship of parts forming a whole.

The soul who will speak in this circle is Saint Bonaventure, a Franciscan. He enjoyed learning from books.

St. Bonaventure was born in Tuscony in 1221, but he was named John. He received his name when he became ill, then recovered. Saint Francis heard of John’s remarkable recovery, and he exclaimed, “O *buona ventura*,” which means, “O good fortune.”

St. Bonaventure became the superior of the Franciscan friars, and he died in 1274. This is the same year that Saint Thomas Aquinas died.

• Whose story does the Franciscan Saint Bonaventure relate? The story of Saint Dominic, or the story of Saint Francis?

St. Bonaventura tells the story of Saint Dominic (circa 1170-1221). Again, we see that the Franciscans and the Dominicans in Paradise are not jealous of or competitive in a bad way with each other. They know that they are on the same side.

Just as Saint Thomas, a Dominican, tells the story of Saint Francis, so Saint Bonaventure, a Franciscan, tells the story of Saint Dominic. This is a way of showing respect for a great founder who did not found his own order.

• What does Saint Bonaventure relate about Saint Dominic?

One important point to notice is that the lives of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis are complementary.

However, one difference is that Saint Bonaventure's story of the life of Saint Dominic focuses more on such miraculous things as prophetic utterances and prophetic dreams than did Saint Thomas' story of the life of Saint Francis.

One of the prophetic events in Saint Dominic's life occurred even before he was born. His mother had a dream about the son she would give birth to:

“His mind, the instant God created it,
possessed extraordinary power: within
his mother's womb he made her prophesy.”

(Musa 12.58-60)

St. Dominic's mother dreamed that she would give birth to a dog — a black-and-white dog that held a flaming torch in its mouth. Here are some important points about the dream:

- The Dominicans are called *Domini canes*, or the “dogs of the Lord” (Musa 151). Some people call Dominicans the hounds of the Lord.
- Black and white are the colors of the Dominican habit (the clothing worn by the Dominicans).
- The flaming torch is a symbol of the zeal of the Dominican order.

Names are important in Saint Dominic's family:

- Saint Dominic belongs to the Lord (Dominus).

- His father, Felix, was felicitous (marked by good fortune). *Felix* is Latin for “happy.”
- His mother, Giovanna, gave birth to Saint Dominic, a gift to the world, “Giovanna” means “God gives.”

St. Dominic was concerned about the poor.

St. Dominic died in 1221, and he was canonized in 1234.

• How does Saint Bonaventure criticize the Franciscans (his own religious order)?

St. Thomas criticized his own order, the Dominicans, and now Saint Bonaventure criticizes his own order, the Franciscans. He says that very few of them are what they should be:

“Yet say I, he who searcheth leaf by leaf

Our volume through, would still some page
discover

Where he could read, ‘I am as I am wont.’

’Twill not be from Casal nor Acquasparta,

From whence come such unto the written
word

That one avoids it, and the other narrows.”

(Longfellow 12.121-126)

“Acquasparta” refers to a man who relaxed the rules of the Franciscan order: Matthew of Acquasparta, who became the general of the order in 1287.

“Casal” refers a man who opposed the relaxation of the rules of the Franciscan order: Ubertino of Casal.

Here Dante is saying that we need to have a Golden Mean. Having not enough rules is wrong. Matthew of Acquasparta made this mistake. But having too rigid an enforcement of the rules is also wrong. Ubertino of Casal made this mistake.

When Mother Teresa founded her order of nuns, the Missionaries of Charity, she at first wanted them to eat only what the poor ate: bread and salt. However, she soon realized that that was too strict. To do good work among the poor, her nuns needed to eat more than bread and salt. However, Mother Teresa was careful not to relax the rules too much. In one city, she thought that her nuns were living too luxuriously, so she got rid of some of the luxuries.

Both Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure criticize something that they love; they criticize their own religious orders. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante is also criticizing something that he loves: the Catholic Church. (Of course, this is before the Reformation, so no Protestant churches exist.)

One thing that Dante learns from Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure is to criticize something you love. By criticizing it when it is wrong, you hope to get it on the right path again.

• Saint Francis and Saint Dominic emphasize different things. What are they? Do we need both of them?

Both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic wanted the Church to be right, but they emphasized different things.

St. Francis emphasized repentance and coming back to God. Christianity, according to Saint Francis, involves more than simply attending church on Sunday morning. Saint Francis emphasized making Christianity a part of your life. Saint Francis emphasized experiencing Christ rather than simply reading the Bible.

St. Dominic emphasized thinking correctly about God. You must believe the correct doctrine, not an incorrect doctrine that will lead you astray. Saint Dominic wanted preachers to preach the right things.

Of course, we would say that both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic are correct. We need repentance. We also need correct doctrine. Without both of those, we can be led astray. Without both of those, we can go wrong.

A strong Church must emphasize each of these things: repentance and correct doctrine. The Church needed to be reformed, and Saint Francis and Saint Dominic emphasized two things that would make the Church strong.

• Who are the sages who form the rest of Saint Bonaventure's wheel?

After Saint Bonaventure tells briefly the biography of Saint Dominic, he identifies the wise souls who make up his wheel.

The sages who make up Saint Bonaventure's wheel are all males and span several centuries:

1. *Illuminato*.

Illuminato is an early Italian Franciscan who joined Saint Francis in 1210.

2. *Augustine*.

Augustine is another early Italian Franciscan who joined Saint Francis in 1210. Augustine was from Assisi, like Saint Francis.

3. *Hugh of the Abbey of Saint Victor near Paris.*

Hugh lived circa 1097-1141. He was an influential mystic and theologian whose students Richard of Saint Victor and Peter Lombard are also known as sages.

4. *Peter the Eater.*

This nickname may make us think of Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater, but he got his nickname because he devoured books, not pumpkins. He was born in French Troyes, and he died in 1179.

By the way, when Gary Paulsen, the popular children's author of *Hatchet*, speaks before groups of young readers, he often wears a cap that bears the message, "Read Like a Wolf Eats." (Source: Edith Hope Fine, *Gary Paulsen: Author and Wilderness Adventurer*, p. 109.)

5. *Peter the Spaniard.*

He lived from circa 1225-1277, and he was actually from Portugal. He was the only Portuguese Pope: Pope John XXI. He was concerned about the dangers of Aristotelianism. He died after only eight or nine months in the papacy. The falling ceiling of a cell killed him; the cell had been hastily built so that he could continue his scholarly pursuits there. He wrote a book on logic that was widely used.

6. *Nathan.*

This Hebrew prophet spoke truth to power and criticized King David for arranging the death of Bathsheba's husband. This story is told in 2 Samuel 12:1-15 (King James Version):

1: And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

2: The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

3: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

4: And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him

5: And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

6: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

7: And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

8: And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

9: Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

10: Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

11: Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

12: For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

13: And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

14: Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

15: And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

7. Saint John Chrysostom.

Saint John Chrysostom lived circa 345-407 C.E. He was a famed preacher who was called the “golden-mouthed” patriarch of Constantinople; he was noted for his honesty, self-denial, and tactlessness. He spent time in exile.

8. Saint Anselm.

Saint Anselm lived from 1033-1109. He was an Italian archbishop of Canterbury, and if you study the Philosophy of Religion, you will probably study his famous “Ontological Argument” for God’s existence. Both Saint Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant criticized the

Ontological Argument; both Descartes and Hegel defended the Ontological Argument.

9. *Donatus*.

Donatus was the 4th-century Roman author of a famous Latin grammar.

10. *Rabanus/Hrabanus*.

Rabanus/Hrabanus lived circa 776-856, and he was abbot and archbishop of his native Mainz. Like many of the other sages in this circle, he was a great scholar.

11. *The Abbot Joachim of Flora*.

St. Thomas Aquinas has his adversary Siger of Brabant on his left, and Saint Bonaventure has his adversary the Abbot Joachim of Flora (died circa 1220) on his left. The Abbot Joachim of Flora was a Cistercian monk who predicted an approaching final age of history, which he believed would be the age of the everlasting gospel. Saint Bonaventure strove to combat this belief.

• Why is it surprising that Saint Bonaventure and the Calabrian Abbot Joachim are part of the same wheel?

St. Bonaventure introduces the last sage of the wheel, a sage who is next to him:

“Here is Rabanus, and beside me here
 Shines the Calabrian Abbot Joachim,
 He with the spirit of prophecy endowed.
 To celebrate so great a paladin
 Have moved me the impassioned courtesy
 And the discreet discourses of Friar Thomas,

And with me they have moved this company.”

(Longfellow 12.139-145)

Once again, we see that two scholars who were rivals on Earth are now side by side in Paradise.

Once again, we learn that two people of good will can disagree over what is to be regarded as truth.

Once again, we see two people of good will who strove to know the truth on Earth.

Once again, we see that two people of good will can both be sincere seekers after truth even if they arrive at different conclusions.

**CHAPTER 13: “Canto 13: Sun — Saint Thomas
Aquinas Discusses Solomon”**

• What does Saint Thomas mean when he says that Solomon has no equal in wisdom?

St. Thomas is aware that Dante believes that God’s light shone brightest in Adam, the first man, and in Jesus Christ.

And so Saint Thomas is also aware that Dante is wondering what Saint Thomas meant when he said that Solomon had no equal in wisdom.

St. Thomas says that both he and Dante believe correctly. What Saint Thomas believes and what Dante believes are not contradictory.

St. Thomas says that when God acts directly, as when he created Adam and as when Christ was conceived, the result is perfect:

“If then the fervent Love, the Vision clear,
Of primal Virtue do dispose and seal,
Perfection absolute is there acquired.”

(Longfellow 13.79-81)

Solomon was without equal in the gift of wisdom that he received from God. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule well as a King, and he received it.

St. Thomas says,

“So, when I talked of unmatched wisdom then,
royal prudence was the wisdom upon which
I had my arrow of intention drawn.”

(Musa 13.103-105)

So Solomon was the wisest of all kings, of whom there are many, but of whom few are good.

• **Why must we be careful not to second-guess God?**

St. Thomas warns against making hasty judgments:

“Nor should one be too quick to trust his judgment;
 be not like him who walks his field and
 counts
 the ears of corn before the time is ripe,
 for I have seen brier all winter long
 showing its tough and prickly stem, and then
 eventually produce a lovely rose,
 and I have seen a ship sail straight and swift
 over the sea through all its course, and then,
 about to enter the harbor, sink.”

(Musa 13.130-138)

We can correct mistakes. Briers can produce roses.

We can make mistakes. A ship can make a long voyage and then sink near its home harbor.

Partly, this means that when we judge a life, we need to judge an entire life. An evil man can repent at the last minute, just as a brier eventually produces a rose. A good person can become evil at the end of his life, just as a ship that has made a long voyage ends up sinking near its home harbor.

Aristotle said that in order to determine whether a man was happy, we need to look at the whole of that man’s life. After he has died, we will be able to tell if he was happy.

St. Thomas says,

“No Mr. or Miss Know-It-All should think,
when they see one man steal and one give
alms
that they are seeing them through God’s own
eyes,
for one may yet rise up, the other fall.”

(Musa 13.139-142)

God sees the whole picture — we don’t. God knows the end of a person’s life and whether or not they repented.

Chances are, we will be surprised by some of those who make it to Paradise, and by some of those who end up in the Inferno.

**CHAPTER 14: “Canto 14: Sun — Solomon; Mars —
Symbolic Cross”**

• What are the two questions that Beatrice asks at the end of Dante’s time on the Sun?

Midway through Canto 14, Dante will leave the Sun. In this first section of the canto, we notice two things:

1. Beatrice is a good guide and educator. She asks questions the answers to which Dante wants to know.
2. As we have seen elsewhere on the Mountain of Purgatory and in Paradise, the souls are very helpful, as well as very happy. They readily answer Beatrice’s two questions.

Beatrice says,

“This man has need (and does not tell you so,
Nor with the voice, nor even in his thought)
Of going to the root of one truth more.
Declare unto him if the light wherewith
Blossoms your substance shall remain with
you
Eternally the same that it is now;
And if it do remain, say in what manner,
After ye are again made visible,
It can be that it injure not your sight.”

(Longfellow 14.10-18)

In different words, the two questions are these:

1. Will the souls retain their radiance eternally?

2. If the souls do retain their radiance, how will they be able to withstand each other once their bodies and sight (sight through use of eyes) are restored to them on the Day of Judgment?

The souls of the wise are happy to answer these questions. They first respond with music and dance, causing Dante to say that those who fear death do not know the delight that awaits them in Paradise:

Those who regret that we die here on earth
to live above, have never known the
freshening
downpour of God's eternal grace up here.

(Musa 14.25-27)

In other words, if we knew what delights await us in Paradise, we would not fear dying.

By the way, Woody Allen jokes that he isn't afraid of dying — he just doesn't want to be there when it happens.

• How does Solomon respond to Beatrice's two questions?

Solomon responds to Beatrice's two questions:

1. Solomon says that the souls will retain their radiance forever. The radiance comes from their love of God.
2. When the souls are reunited with their bodies, they will retain their radiance. In fact, their radiance will grow even brighter. God will strengthen their eyes so that they are able to withstand the radiance of the other souls.

At this point, a third circle joins the first two circles.

In addition, Beatrice grows brighter.

• **What does Dante see on the planet Mars?**

As Dante looks at the radiant Beatrice, he becomes aware that he has risen to a new sphere: the planet Mars.

Dante expresses gratitude for what he is experiencing, and he sees a cross of white light. He also hears music, and a hymn that contains the words “‘Arise’ and ‘Conquer’” (14.125).

Nothing to Dante seems sweeter than that hymn, but Dante points out that he has not yet looked at Beatrice’s eyes since ascending to the planet Mars.

• **What is the Symbolic Cross that Dante sees on Mars?**

The Symbolic Cross is the cross of the Crusaders. It is a Greek cross, which means that the two parts that make up the cross are of equal length. The Symbolic Cross is made up of the saved souls who are associated with the planet Mars.

CHAPTER 15: “Canto 15: Mars — Cacciaguida”

• Why are Cantos 15, 16, and 17 important?

• In Cantos 15-17, Dante meets his great-great grandfather, who tells him his great mission to accomplish on Earth: to write *The Divine Comedy*.

Cantos 15-17 are the center of the *Paradise*, and the center is a position of importance for Dante. Certainly, his mission is important.

• Which virtue is associated with planet Mars? Which kind of souls can be found on the planet Mars?

We see in *The Divine Comedy* an alternation between the public and the private.

On the Sun Dante saw public figures. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Bonaventure, and many others of the souls he saw are famous Christian theologians and are very well known even today. On the Sun, Dante saw and learned about 24 wise souls.

Here on Mars we go back to the private. Dante will meet one of his own ancestors: a Crusader named Cacciaguida. Cacciaguida is the main soul Dante will interact with on Mars.

Cacciaguida is a good example of the type of souls who are found on Mars. The virtue associated with Mars is courage.

Mars is the Roman name for Ares, the Greek god of war. Similarly, Mars is the Roman god of war. War is certainly a place and time where a person can exhibit courage.

Dante’s interaction with his ancestor Cacciaguida will be personally important to him. Cacciaguida will give Dante a mission to perform once he returns to Earth.

It is interesting to note that Cacciaguida speaks many lines in *The Divine Comedy*, even more lines than Saint Thomas Aquinas did. Cacciaguida speaks more lines in *The Divine Comedy* than anyone except Dante the Pilgrim, Virgil, and Beatrice.

• How is Dante’s meeting with Cacciaguida, his ancestor, similar to the meeting of Aeneas with his father in the Land of the Dead in the *Aeneid*?

Dante the pilgrim has a long encounter with Cacciaguida. Dante the poet writes,

Thus piteous did Anchises’ shade reach forward,
If any faith our greatest Muse deserve,
When in Elysium he his son perceived.

(Longfellow 15.25-27)

Anchises is the father of Aeneas, the hero of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas visits his father in the Underworld. Of course, this is very similar to what is happening here. Dante is visiting one of his ancestors in Paradise. Both Aeneas and Dante meet an ancestor in the afterlife. By the way, Elysium is where good souls go in the Land of the Dead, which is the Hades of ancient Greece and Rome.

We continue with the comparison to the *Aeneid* in how Cacciaguida greets Dante the pilgrim. He greets him with Latin, some of which comes from Book 6 of the *Aeneid* when Anchises greets Aeneas: “*sanguis meus*” (15.28) means in Latin, “my blood” or “blood of mine.”

Dante does not yet know that this soul is his ancestor, but he will soon find that out.

The ancient Romans had the concept of *pietas*, or duty. Duty includes duty to one's family, one's gods, and one's country. Aeneas is known for showing *pietas* to his father, his gods, and his country. It takes a great effort on Aeneas' part, including leaving behind a woman he apparently loves, making a visit to the Underworld, and winning a war, but Aeneas succeeds in fulfilling his destiny, taking the surviving courageous Trojan men to Italy and becoming an important ancestor of the Romans.

Dante also has a destiny if he is able to fulfill it: His destiny is to write *The Divine Comedy*.

Both Aeneas and Dante the Poet make the trip to the Afterlife in order to answer an important question: Why go on? Aeneas is discouraged when he visits the Land of the Dead, but he is rejuvenated when he returns from the Land of the Dead. Dante is in danger of losing his soul when he visits the Afterlife, but he has a mission in life (and knows how to avoid spending eternity in the Inferno) when he returns to Earth.

In this section of *The Divine Comedy*, we deal with Dante's vocation as a poet and we deal with his exile.

In Canto 15, Dante picks up his inquiry as to what is the name of the speaker in this way,

“Whence I, who mortal am, feel in myself

This inequality; so give not thanks,

Save in my heart, for this paternal welcome.

Truly do I entreat thee, living topaz!

Set in this precious jewel as a gem,

That thou wilt satisfy me with thy name.”

(Longfellow 15.82-87)

By the way, we see a linkage here with *Inferno* 15, where Brunetto Latini also gave Dante a paternal welcome. Of course, Brunetto was a Sodomite who had no biological children and who was not Dante's biological father. Here, Cacciaguida really is Dante's biological ancestor.

• **How does Cacciaguida introduce himself to Dante?**

Cacciaguida tells Dante who he is in this way:

“O leaf of mine, in whom I pleasure took
 E'en while awaiting, I was thine own root!”
 Such a beginning he in answer made me.
 Then said to me: “That one from whom is named
 Thy race, and who a hundred years and more
 Has circled round the mount on the first
 cornice,
 A son of mine and thy great-grandsire was;
 Well it behoves thee that the long fatigue
 Thou shouldst for him make shorter with thy
 works.”

(Longfellow 15.88-96)

Cacciaguida is the father of the father of Dante's grandfather. That makes him Dante's great-great grandfather.

Cacciaguida, like other souls in Paradise, is kind. He wishes that Dante would pray for the soul of his great-grandfather, so that he can climb the Mountain of Purgatory quicker.

• **How does Cacciaguida describe the Florence of his time?**

Cacciaguida tells the early history of Florence to Dante. Whenever something like this happens, Dante is supposed to learn something from it.

Cacciaguida was proud of Florence, and he talks about the moral virtues that people had in the early days of Florence.

Cacciaguida says,

“Florence, enclosed within her ancient walls
 from which she still hears terce and nones
 ring out,
 once lived in peace, a pure and temperate
 town:

no necklace or tiara did she wear,
 no lavish gowns or fancy belts that were
 more striking than the women they adorned.

In those days fathers had no cause to fear
 a daughter’s birth: the marriageable age
 was not too low, the dowry not too high.

Houses too large to live in were not built,
 and Sardanapalus had not come
 to show to what use bedrooms can be put.”

(Musa 15.97-108)

The terms “terce” and “nones” refer to different times. According to Mark Musa (186), “Terce” means 9 a.m. (the third hour), and “Nones” means 3 p.m. (the ninth hour).

Many things were good back then:

- The times were peaceful.
- Women did not wear fancy clothing.
- Daughters did not marry too young, and dowries were reasonable — not excessively high.
- Houses were not overly large. (No McMansions.)
- Effeminate men who indulge in sexual excesses were not present. (King Sardanapalus of Assyria was known for being effeminate and for indulging in sexual excesses.)

Back in the good old days, the citizens of Florence did not indulge in luxuries.

In addition, the women of Florence did not wear makeup. Plus, they did not have to worry about going into exile and they did not have to worry about their husbands travelling to France on business because the husbands stayed in Florence:

“O fortunate women! and each one was certain
Of her own burial-place, and none as yet
For sake of France was in her bed deserted.”

(Longfellow 15.118-120)

Parents in the early days brought up their children with patriotic “tales / about the Trojans, Rome, and Fiesole” (*Paradise* 15.125-126). The Trojans came to Italy, and their descendants founded Rome. The Romans then founded Fiesole.

Cacciaguida adds,

“As great a marvel then would have been held

A Lapo Salterello, a Cianghella,
As Cincinnatus or Cornelia now.”

(Longfellow 15.127-129)

Cacciaguida is saying here that the early citizens of Florence would have been amazed by a Lapo Salterello or a Cianghella. Lapo Salterello and Cianghella are examples of bad people:

Lapo Salterello

He, a Florentine, was a corrupt judge and a corrupt lawyer.

Cianghella

She, a Florentine, was a woman whose virtue was questionable and whose lifestyle was extravagant.

He is also saying that the citizens of the Florence of Dante’s day would have been amazed by a Cincinnatus or a Cornelia. Cincinnatus and Cornelia are examples of good people:

Cincinnatus

Cincinnatus was a farmer and a politician. The Romans recognized his qualities and during a crisis they asked him to rule them. While he ruled the Romans, he defeated the army of the Aequi. He then returned to being a farmer, after serving as Roman leader (dictator) for 16 days.

Cornelia

Cornelia was the daughter of the elder Scipio Africanus and the mother of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchi. Her sons wanted to preserve the Roman republic, and they died in that attempt.

The Florence of Cacciaguida's day was orderly, both physically and morally. The streets were nicely laid out, and the people were virtuous.

According to Cacciaguida, Florence has changed radically since he died around 1150 C.E. It used to be virtuous, but by Dante's day, it is not virtuous.

We can see the changes in the physical city of Florence. The center of Florence is laid out the way the Romans designed it, with the streets at right angles to each other. But after Cacciaguida died, Florence began to grow, and no longer were all the streets laid out nicely. Instead, the streets are crooked.

Here Dante is hoping to find out what made Florence so united in Cacciaguida's day. Then there was no bad factionalism. Dante would love to have no bad factionalism in Florence in his own day.

Once again, where someone comes from is important. Cacciaguida talks about Florence, his city, before he begins to talk about himself.

• Write a short character analysis of Cacciaguida, Dante's great-great-grandfather.

But in any case Cacciaguida talks about himself and says

“To such a quiet, such a beautiful
 Life of the citizen, to such a safe
 Community, and to so sweet an inn,
 Did Mary give me, with loud cries invoked,
 And in your ancient Baptistery at once
 Christian and Cacciaguida I became.”

(Longfellow 15.130-135)

Cacciaguida is an important name. *Guida* means guide, and *caccia* means chase or hunt.

Cacciaguida is going to be Dante's guide. Cacciaguida will tell Dante directly of his upcoming exile, and he will tell Dante about what should be his life's work and how to accomplish it. We can say that Dante is hunting for his life's purpose or mission; Cacciaguida will tell him what that ought to be.

Cacciaguida was a Crusader in the Second Crusade, and he is a martyr. He went to Paradise immediately following his death because of his martyrdom in the Crusades:

“There the vile Saracen delivered me
from the entanglements of your vain world,
the love of which corrupts so many souls —
from martyrdom I came to this, my peace.”

(Musa 15.145-148)

When Cacciaguida became a Crusader, he followed the Emperor Conrad III to the Holy Land.

By the way, the man who called for the Second Crusade was a Cistercian monk named Bernard of Clairvaux. We will see him later in *Paradise*.

Once again, we see how smaller things and larger things are related. Dante starts out by talking about Florence and then he talks about empire.

In addition, I think that we have to say that Dante is in favor of the Crusades. Emperor Conrad III of Germany did the right thing when he called for the Second Crusade.

Cacciaguida was martyred, as he says at the end of the canto, and so he appears here on Mars.

By the way, people in the Middle Ages believed that martyrs went directly to Paradise, bypassing the Mountain of Purgatory.

time with its shears will trim off more and more.

(Musa 16.7-9)

Here we have a metaphor. Nobility is compared to a coat. We need to keep doing noble deeds or our nobility will be lost. The word “noble” is used here in the sense of a high and good character. Noble deeds are brave deeds; noble deeds are good deeds.

In other words, we can take pride in an ancestor’s nobility of character only if doing so inspires us to make our own character noble. Taking pride in being related to Mother Teresa is good only if it inspires you to do good deeds.

• How does Cacciaguida compare and contrast the Florence of his time with the Florence of Dante’s time?

Canto 15 ended with the martyrdom of Cacciaguida. In Canto 16, Cacciaguida talks about the changes in Florence from the time of his own death (circa 1150 C.E.) up until Dante’s time (1300 C.E.).

Of course, he already did a little of that in Canto 15:

“O happy wives! Each one of them was sure
of her last resting place — none of them yet
lay lonely in her bed because of France.”

(Musa 15.118-120)

In Cacciaguida’s day, families were together. France had not yet messed up the lives of families in Florence.

Times changed after the death of Cacciaguida. Husbands traveled to France on business, leaving their wives at home. Husbands traveled to France, bought merchandise at one of the great fairs there, and then returned to Italy and sold the

merchandise at a profit. Making a big profit was more important to these husbands than staying in Florence with their wives.

Another thing that changed after Cacciaguida died is that the Pope used French troops to drive the White Guelfs out of Florence.

The main point is that Florence is very different from the way it was in Cacciaguida's day. Now factionalism has divided the city, resulting in Dante's exile.

• Why does Cacciaguida wish that the Buondelmonti family had never come to Florence?

Cacciaguida wishes that the Buondelmonti family had never come to Florence because they are the family whose coming started the factionalism in Florence.

This is what happened: Buondelmonte was engaged to be married, but he had a chance to make a better marriage, so he jilted his bride-to-be. This was, of course, a major insult to her and her family, and members of her family murdered Buondelmonte. This led to factionalism in Florence, and the split of its citizens into the Guelf and the Ghibelline groups.

Cacciaguida says,

“The house that was the source of all your tears,
 whose just resentment was the death of you
 and put an end to all your joy of life,
 was highly honored as were all its clan.

 O Buondelmonte, wrong you were to flee
 the nuptials at the promptings of another!
 Many who are now sad would have been pleased

if God had let the Ema drown you when
you started for our city the first time.”

(Musa 16.136-144)

If only Buondelmonte had died (by drowning) before he came to Florence, Florence and its citizens (and Dante) would be much better off.

The first Guelf is Buondelmonte, and the first Ghibelline is his murderer.

Notice who Dante is criticizing here: Buondelmonte, who is the founder of his own political party. Clearly, Buondelmonte did the wrong thing by jilting the woman he was engaged to. (Of course, the man who murdered him also did the wrong thing.)

Dante is not saying, My political party is right, and your political party is wrong. When a member of his political party is wrong, he says so. Political factionalism can be a bad thing, and Dante is very well aware of that.

CHAPTER 17: “Canto 17: Mars — Cacciaguida’s Prophecy”

• Which prophecy does Cacciaguida make, and how does Dante react to it?

Now that Cacciaguida has talked about the past and the present, he begins to talk about the future. (Beatrice encourages Dante to ask Cacciaguida questions.)

Dante has had many hints of his upcoming exile throughout the previous cantos of *The Divine Comedy*, but Cacciaguida tells Dante clearly that he will be exiled. (Souls in Paradise know the future.) As you would expect, this is something that worries Dante.

• Which prophecies has Dante heard about his future life throughout the *Divine Comedy*?

On his journey throughout the Inferno and the Mountain of Purgatory, Dante has heard hints of his future exile:

Inferno

1) Ciaccio

In the Inferno, Ciaccio prophesied to Dante that after much more fighting, one party will drive out the other party. Then within three years the positions will be reversed, and the party that was victorious will be defeated, and the party that was defeated will be victorious.

2) Farinata

Farinata revealed that Dante will soon be sent into exile — within 50 months. Farinata says,

“But the face of the queen who reigns down here will glow

not more than fifty times before you learn

how hard it is to master such an art; [...]"

(Musa *Inferno* 10.79-81)

3) Brunetto Latini

Brunetto Latini prophesied hard times for Dante. He says:

“But that ungrateful and malignant race

which descended from the Fiesole of old,

and still have rock and mountain in their
blood,

will become, for your good deeds, your enemy — ”

(Musa *Inferno* 15.61-64)

This prophecy states that both political parties will regard Dante as an enemy. Fiesole is the town where Julius Caesar besieged Catiline. The survivors of the siege founded Florence.

4) Vanni Fucci

As elsewhere in the *Inferno*, Vanni Fucci predicted coming trouble for Dante and for Florence. Vanni tells Dante of these coming troubles, including the expulsion of the White Guelfs from Florence by the Black Guelfs, and then he added, “And I have told you this so you will suffer!” (Musa *Inferno* 24.151).

Purgatory

1) Conrad Malaspina.

Dante talked with a Guelf, Judge Nino Visconti (died 1296), who wanted his widow, who has remarried, to pray for him. Dante also talked with a Ghibelline, Conrad Malaspina (died c. 1294), who wanted news of the coast of Tuscany, where he had been well known. Dante praised the generosity of the

Malaspina family, and Conrad made a prediction: within seven years Dante will have need of that generosity.

2) Oderisi of Gubbio

Oderisi of Gubbio prophesied that Dante will learn the humiliation of begging (*Purgatory* 11.13-141).

3) Bonagiunta Da Lucca

In Canto 24.43-45, the poet Bonagiunta Da Lucca prophesied that a still unmarried woman from his city (the city of Lucca), which is reviled, will make Dante praise it.

• **Note that Cacciaguida speaks of Dante’s exile “in plain words, with clarity of thought” (Musa 17.34) rather than “with dark oracles” (Musa 17.31).**

Dark oracles can be misleading, and they can lead people astray. Some oracles (or prophecies) were deliberately ambiguous, so that whatever happened the oracle would be true. For example, Croesus, the King of Lydia, was thinking about attacking Persia. He sent an emissary to the Delphic Oracle to ask whether he should do that. The Delphic Oracle responded that if he attacked Persia, “a mighty empire will fall.” Croesus did attack Persia, whose King was Cyrus the Great, and a mighty empire did fall. Unfortunately, the mighty empire that fell was his own empire. This story appears in Herodotus’ *Histories* 1.92:

It is said that when the Lydian messengers reached Delphi and asked the questions they had been told to ask, the Priestess replied that not God himself could escape destiny. As for Croesus, he had expiated in the fifth generation the crime of his ancestor, who was a soldier in the bodyguard of the Heraclids, and, tempted by a woman’s treachery, had murdered his master and stolen his office, to which he had no claim. The God of Prophecy was eager that the fall

of Sardis might occur in the time of Croesus' sons rather than in his own, but he had been unable to divert the course of destiny. Nevertheless what little the Fates allowed, he had obtained for Croesus' advantage: he had postponed the capture of Sardis for three years, so Croesus must realize that he had enjoyed three years of freedom more than was appointed for him. Secondly, the god had saved him when he was on the pyre. As to the oracle, Croesus had no right to find fault with it: the gods had declared that if he attacked the Persians he would bring down a mighty empire. After an answer like that, the wise thing would have been to send again to inquire which empire was meant, Cyrus' or his own. But as he misinterpreted what was said and made no second inquiry, he must admit the fault to have been his own.

Source: <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/clubmed/examsourceanal.html>

• **How will Dante's exile occur?**

The theme of Canto 17 of *Paradise* is Dante's exile. Cacciaguida both describes Dante's upcoming exile and advises him about it.

Beatrice tells Dante to ask Cacciaguida questions, and Dante asks him about the veiled warnings that he has been hearing in the *Inferno* and on the Mountain of Purgatory.

Cacciaguida describes Dante's exile well. He describes not just facts, but also how Dante's exile will affect him.

Cacciaguida says,

“Already this is willed, and this is sought for;

And soon it shall be done by him who thinks
it,

Where every day the Christ is bought and
sold.”

(Longfellow 17.49-51)

Why will Dante go into exile? Because of Pope Boniface VIII. The Pope’s armies will force Dante to go into exile.

The problem with all of that, of course, is that when they do it, they will also try to make sure that they look like the good guys. Cacciaguida continues,

“The blame shall follow the offended party

In outcry as is usual; but the vengeance

Shall witness to the truth that doth dispense
it.”

(Longfellow 17.52-54)

One thing that will happen is that the Pope will have good PR for a while. The public will be on the Pope’s side for a while. However, Cacciaguida says that eventually the truth will out, and the public will know Dante’s side of the story. Of course, Dante will tell his side of the story in *The Divine Comedy*. One of Dante’s purposes in writing *The Divine Comedy* is to do exactly that.

• **What will be the effects of Dante’s exile on Dante?**

Cacciaguida says,

“Thou shalt abandon everything beloved

Most tenderly, and this the arrow is

Which first the bow of banishment shoots
forth.”

(Longfellow 17.55-57)

One major effect, of course, is that Dante will leave behind his beloved city, Florence, and he will be separated from his family, at least part of the time.

Cacciaguida also says,

“And you will know how salty is the taste
of others’ bread, how hard the road that takes
you down and up the stairs of others’ homes.”

(Musa 17.58-60)

This passage is important. One thing it says is that Dante will have to eat different kinds of food than the food he is used to getting in Florence. Dante will be in unfamiliar places. He will eat the food of other people, and he will stay at the homes of other people. Of course, when you do that, you are not home. You are not in control. To an extent, you have to do what other people want you to do.

In addition, Cacciaguida makes a reference to something that most modern Americans would not know. People in Florence do not put salt in their bread, and so when they travel outside of Florence and eat bread, they notice how salty the bread is.

Bread, of course, is important. According to the Bible, bread is the staff of life. Bread is also an important part of the Eucharist (a Christian sacrament in which bread represents the body of Christ and wine represents the blood of Christ).

Much will change for Dante, of course. He traveled to Rome, thinking that he would return to Florence in a few weeks, but he will be exiled from Florence and even the taste of the bread he eats will change.

Worse is to come:

“And that which most shall weigh upon thy shoulders
 Will be the bad and foolish company
 With which into this valley thou shalt fall;
 For all ingrate, all mad and impious
 Will they become against thee; but soon after
 They, and not thou, shall have the forehead
 scarlet.”

(Longfellow 17.61-66)

For a while after he was exiled, Dante plotted with other Guelfs about how they could return to Florence. One way, of course, would be to raise an army and fight a battle.

However, Dante soon decided to move on with his life. Some of the people he was dealing with were not nice people. Cacciaguida says,

“Of their bestiality their own proceedings
 Shall furnish proof; so ’twill be well for thee
 A party to have made thee by thyself.”

(Longfellow 17.67-69)

One thing that Dante has been learning during his journey through the afterlife is to avoid extreme factionalism. The people he had been meeting with turned out to be extreme factionalists of the type that Farinata was in the Inferno.

Eventually, Dante becomes a party of one. He is able to criticize both the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs, and he is able to criticize both the Guelfs and the Ghibellines.

Dante must have been tempted to do a lot to get back into Florence. One way to do that is to raise an army and go to war. Of course, if you do that, lots of people will die, and lots of people will be hurt. Soldiers will die, and their families will be without breadwinners.

You have to ask, Is it worth it? It can be tempting to say, Yes. It can be tempting to think, If I get back into office, then I will do lots of good for lots of people.

However, we need to be careful. Maybe the war is for your own personal benefit, not for the benefit of the people of Florence. It can be easy to fool yourself.

Dante stopped plotting with other people about how to get back into Florence. He stopped engaging in bad factionalism. He learned that other things are important. We should not say, My political party, right or wrong.

Farinata is a person who put himself and his political party first, and look where he ended up.

• What life mission does Cacciaguida reveal to Dante? (What should Dante do after his supernatural visit to the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise?)

Dante will be able to bring good out of exile. He has been exiled from Florence, but he will be able to learn from the experience, and he will be able to pass on what he learns to other people in his *Divine Comedy*.

Dante will be able to be like an Old Testament prophet who speaks truth to power. His exile will become a kind of pilgrimage.

In doing this, Dante will make many, many people very, very angry at him. Many, many powerful people will appear in the *Inferno* part of his *Divine Comedy*. Their families will still be alive.

Dante will be in exile, which means that he won't have much to lose. Because he won't have much to lose, he will have a certain amount of freedom. Not having much to lose means that he can tell the truth. What will someone do if they become angry at him: exile him? He's already in exile.

• What advice does Cacciaguida give to Dante about writing what he has seen in the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise?

Dante is a little worried. If he is going to tell his story, he has to tell it the right way if his message is going to endure.

Brunetto Latini wrote for the wrong reasons. He wanted to become famous, and so he wrote to become famous. It worked, but not for long. He was well known when he was alive, but now he would be forgotten if not for his being a character in the *Inferno*.

What Dante needs to do is to tell the truth. Telling the truth is why the Old Testament prophets are remembered. Dante knows that it will take courage to tell the truth:

“yet, if I am a timid friend to truth,
I fear my name may not live with those
who will look back at these as the old days.”

(Musa 17.118-120)

If Dante tells the truth, he will make other people angry: “I learned things that, were they to be retold, / would leave a bitter taste in many mouths” (Musa 17.116-117).

Still, in order to be remembered, Dante must tell the truth, even though it will make other people angry.

Cacciaguida encourages Dante to tell the truth. This is something that will help people, although at first people may be angry. We read that Cacciaguida

[...] then replied : “The conscience that is dark
 with shame for his own deeds or for
 another’s,
 may well, indeed, feel harshness in your
 words;
 nevertheless, do not resort to lies,
 let what you write reveal all you have seen,
 and let those men who itch scratch where it
 hurts.

Though when your words are taken in at first
 they may taste bitter, but once well-digested
 they will become a vital nutriment.”

(Musa 17.124-132)

Of course, the words that Dante will write are those of *The Divine Comedy*. Cacciaguida tells Dante to tell the truth in those words. Although some people will sting from the words, nevertheless the words will be beneficial to them.

Here we see the difference between Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the Poet. In *Paradise 17*, Dante the Pilgrim learns what Dante the Poet puts into practice throughout *The Divine Comedy*.

We have been hearing about bread that nourishes the body in this canto. Now we have heard about Dante’s words, which will nourish the soul and mind.

So did Dante follow Cacciaguida's advice? Of course, he did. We know that he did because we are still reading *The Divine Comedy* today. If Dante had lied, he would be as or a little better well known than Brunetto Latini is remembered today. That is, both men would be known probably only by specialists in Italian literature. Unlike Brunetto Latini, Dante did not write for fame. (Dante did write good poetry before *The Divine Comedy*, but he would not be the giant of world-class literature he is today if he had not written *The Divine Comedy*.)

Dante engages in an awful lot of criticism in *The Divine Comedy*, but his purpose is ultimately creative rather than destructive. If a building is a wreck, tear it down and then build another one in its place. If you have bad habits, get rid of the bad habits so that you can substitute good habits in their place. If the Church needs to be reformed, criticize it so that it can be reformed and become both better and stronger.

Dante's words will be hard to hear, but they can provide much-needed nourishment.

Cacciaguida was a Crusader with a sword, but he lets Dante know that he must be a Crusader with a pen.

CHAPTER 18: “Canto 18: Jupiter — Lovers of Justice”

• Who are some of the famous soldier-souls whom Cacciaguida identifies to Dante?

The cross in the sky has eight holy warriors whom Cacciaguida identifies:

Joshua

Joshua was the successor of Moses and the conqueror of the Holy Land. Moses himself never made it to the Holy Land.

Judas Maccabaeus

Judas Maccabaeus was a Jewish general. He fought the Syrians in the 2nd century B.C.E. He restored and purified the temple at Jerusalem, but later the Syrians defeated and killed him.

Charlemagne

Charlemagne was the restorer of the Western Empire; he was what we call the Holy Roman Emperor, but he called himself the Roman Emperor. The Holy Roman Empire is the successor to the Roman Empire. It consisted of territory in Western and Central Europe and lasted from the early Middle Ages until 1906.

Roland

Roland, Charlemagne’s nephew, fought the Saracens in Spain. (The Saracens are the Muslims; Saracens was a popular term for Muslims during the Crusades.)

William of Orange

William of Orange fought the Saracens (Arabs and Muslims) in southern France.

Renouard

Renouard was a Saracen who converted to Christianity and fought with William of Orange. He was also William's brother-in-law.

Duke Godfrey

Duke Godfrey was the leader of the First Crusade. He fought the Saracens in the Holy Land, and became the first Christian King of Jerusalem.

Robert Guiscard

The 11th-century Robert Guiscard fought the Saracens in Sicily and in southern Italy, and he founded the Norman dynasty there.

• Which kind of souls are found on Jupiter?

The virtue that is associated with Jupiter is justice, and the souls found here are the souls of the just.

Dante is interested in many things, including justice.

No one should be surprised to discover that justice is discussed here. The justice discussed will be justice that is found on Earth and justice that is found in Paradise. The two are not contradictory, although we cannot fully understand the justice that is found in Paradise. We are looking at two parts of one reality.

• Which message do the souls on Jupiter spell out?

The souls spells out this message: DILIGITE IUSTITIAM QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM (Musa 18.92-93).

Translated, the message means "LOVE JUSTICE, YOU WHO RULE THE EARTH" (Musa 220).

This is the beginning of chapter one of the book called “Wisdom of Solomon”; in the King James Version, verse one of chapter one is this:

1: Love righteousness, ye that be judges of the earth: think of the Lord with a good (heart,) and in simplicity of heart seek him.

The “Wisdom of Solomon” is an apocryphal book. It is part of the Apocrypha. The Free Online Dictionary defines Apocrypha is this way:

The biblical books included in the Vulgate and accepted in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox canon but considered noncanonical by Protestants because they are not part of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Source: <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Apocrypha>>; accessed 13 September 2012.

The Apocrypha consists of books that are not accepted as revelations by all Christian denominations.

• **Into what does the letter M transmorph?**

The letter M transmorphs (transforms) into an eagle.

The Eagle is a symbol of empire. It is interesting that the Eagle is the symbol of justice here. Why is that? It is because of the great respect that Dante had for Roman law.

We can think of the eagle are being like a mosaic. The souls are like lights, which are like tesserae. Tesserae are the pieces that make up a mosaic.

Dante lived at Ravenna. In fact, he died there on 14 September 1321. Ravenna is famous for its mosaics, which existed when Dante lived there.

• **How does Dante criticize the Popes of his time?**

As you may expect, we will meet many rulers and emperors on Jupiter; these, of course, will be wise rulers and emperors.

First, however, Dante criticizes some rulers who are not wise:

“O Heaven’s army to whom my mind returns,
 pray for those souls on earth who are misled
 by bad example and have gone astray.”

(Musa 18.124-126)

Who are the bad rulers whom Dante condemns? They are bad Popes:

“Once ’twas the custom to make war with swords;
 But now ’tis made by taking here and there
 The bread the pitying Father shuts from
 none.”

(Longfellow 18.127-129)

Here Dante is referring to — and condemning — the use of excommunication for political ends. If a King would not do what a Pope told him to do, the Pope could excommunicate him until the King bent his will to the Pope’s will.

Pope Gregory VIII (died 1085) excommunicated Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV twice.

Centuries after the death of Dante, Popes were still excommunicating Kings. Pope Clement VII excommunicated King Henry VIII of England.

Excommunication can be used ethically, but to use it for political purposes is to misuse it.

Canto 18 ends in this way:

But you will answer: “I, who have my heart
 so set on him who chose to live alone
 and for a martyr’s crown was danced away,
 know nothing of your Fisherman or Paul.”
 (Musa 18.133-136)

The “you” (Musa 18.133) refers to the bad Popes of Dante’s day. “[Y]our Fisherman” (Musa 18.136) refers to Peter.

In this image, Dante is saying that the current Pope has set his heart on John the Baptist. This sounds good at first, but it is really an insult. The image of John the Baptist was stamped on gold coins. Pope John XXII (1316-1334) is more concerned with collecting gold coins than on doing the will of God. Pope John XXII knows a lot more about John the Baptist (or rather, John the Baptist’s image on gold coins) than he does about Peter or Paul.

We are in Paradise, but we are talking about injustice. Why? For one thing, it is in Paradise that you really understand injustice because in Paradise you really understand justice.

In addition, we should be aware that Pope Boniface VIII also misused excommunication in addition to his other bad deeds.

CHAPTER 19: “Canto 19: Jupiter — Symbolic Eagle”

• What about the salvation of pagans, and how does that relate to the idea of a just God?

In this sphere, no soul speaks individually. Instead, the eagle, which is composed of many souls, speaks.

Dante wishes to know about justice. For example, Christians believe that having faith in Christ is necessary if one wishes to be saved. However, what about the pagans who never have heard of Christ? Should they be damned? Is that just? Does a person have to be explicitly Christian in order to be saved?

Some of us may think that it is unjust to damn a good person who has never heard of Christ. This canto addresses this problem.

The problem is laid out here:

“For saidst thou: ‘Born a man is on the shore
 Of Indus, and is none who there can speak
 Of Christ, nor who can read, nor who can
 write;
 And all his inclinations and his actions
 Are good, so far as human reason sees,
 Without a sin in life or in discourse:
 He dieth unbaptised and without faith;
 Where is this justice that condemneth him?
 Where is his fault, if he do not believe?’”

(Longfellow 19.70-78)

Is it just to condemn people who did not become Christians because they never a chance — knowledge of Christ had never come to their part of the world?

Of course, we are aware of *Inferno*, Canto 4, which gave us information about Limbo. In Limbo resided the souls of the virtuous pagans and unbaptized infants. Here we have additional information. It is not always the case that a virtuous pagan goes to Limbo. In fact, we will see two pagans (or two people who *were* pagans) on this planet.

By the way, a pagan does not hold the religious beliefs of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. A pagan does not believe in what the followers of these religions would call the one true God.

This part of Dante's *Paradise* shows that readers need to read more than the *Inferno* to get the full story. Anyone who reads the *Inferno* only would think that all pagans would go to the Inferno; the best place they can end up is in Limbo. Here, however, we find out that pagans can end up in Paradise.

By reading the *Inferno*, we can get a proper foundation for understanding *Purgatory* and *Paradise*, but to get the full story — or as much of it as we can know — we have to also read *Purgatory* and *Paradise*.

• Can mortals understand the mystery of Eternal Judgment? What does it mean that the Eternal Judgment is a mystery?

The Eagle points out a few things to Dante, one of them being that Humankind cannot be a good judge of God because Humankind has limited knowledge:

“Now who are you to sit in judgment’s seat

and pass on things a thousand miles away,

when you can hardly see beyond your nose?"

(Musa 19.79-81)

The Eagle explicitly says that Humankind is unable to understand Eternal Judgment:

Circling, it sang, then spoke: "Even as my notes
are too high for your mind to comprehend,
so is Eternal Judgment for mankind."

(Musa 19.97-99)

Our finite human minds are simply unable to understand God's infinite mind. We underestimate God's mind if we assume that we can understand the things that God knows.

In *Paradise*, we will learn that we can't understand everything. Dante is going to have some experiences that he simply will not be able to put into words.

Dante is going to have to say that some things are a mystery. A mystery is something that human reason cannot understand and cannot explain. Some of what Dante experiences at the end of *Paradise* will be a mystery. All we can do is to accept mystery because we cannot explain it.

God created Limbo, and he created the rest of the Inferno. We have to assume that He had a good reason for doing this.

Here is an example of someone who may very well be in Paradise even though some pious people may be surprised to see him there:

- Comedian Jackie Gleason was raised Catholic, but as an adult he seldom attended Mass or made a confession. His friend Jack Haley was also Catholic, and he wanted to return Mr. Gleason to the Church. One day Mr. Haley told Mr. Gleason, "I know a

priest who will forgive anything in confession — and no lectures, sermons, or questions.” Another friend, Max Kaminsky, heard this and commented, “I’d pay ten thousand bucks to hear that first confession.” Mr. Gleason simply replied, “One of these days, pal.” Mr. Haley then asked Mr. Gleason to pay \$100 each for two tickets to a fundraising dinner for Father Patrick Peyton and his Family Rosary Crusade, whose slogan was, “The Family That Prays Together Stays Together.” Mr. Gleason wrote a check for \$10,000, handed it to Mr. Haley, and said, “Use it to buy tickets for priests and nuns who can’t afford a C-note for dinner.” (Mr. Gleason once went to Mass with Mr. Haley, but he said, “Haley and I are walking in the church and Loretta Young and Irene Dunne, both Catholics, saw me, turned around and walked out. They thought the roof would cave in.”) (Source: James Bacon, *How Sweet It Is: The Jackie Gleason Story*, pp. 144-145, 160.)

- Both Jackie Gleason and Tommy Dorsey led lives that in some ways were not conventionally moral. Mr. Dorsey died in 1956, and Mr. Gleason took care of the funeral arrangements for his friend. Both men were Catholic, but since Mr. Dorsey had been married three times, Mr. Gleason was unable to arrange for Mr. Dorsey to be buried by the Catholic Church, despite Mr. Gleason’s best efforts. He even complained to a priest, “How can you call yourself a man of God if you can let a baptized Catholic go to his Maker without even a prayer from his own faith?” Hearing that, the priest promised Mr. Gleason that he would himself go to the funeral home during the services and recite the rosary while standing outside on the sidewalk. (Source: James Bacon, *How Sweet It Is: The Jackie Gleason Story*, pp. 142-143.)

• Was it possible to have faith in Jesus Christ before He was born?

The Eagle continues to speak:

It recommenced: “Unto this kingdom never
 Ascended one who had not faith in Christ,
 Before or since he to the tree was nailed.”

(Longfellow 19.103-105)

Some people, of course, had faith in Christ before He was crucified — in fact, they even had faith in Him before He was born.

Of course, these are the people who were released from Limbo by Christ in the Harrowing of Hell.

We will learn in Canto 20 that at least two pagans had implicit faith in Christ and made it to Paradise.

• Is just saying that you are Christian enough to get you in Paradise?

It seems that being Christian is enough to get you into Paradise, but is just saying that you are Christian enough to get you into Paradise?

The Eagle says,

“But look thou, many crying are, ‘Christ, Christ!’
 Who at the judgment shall be far less near
 To him than some shall be who knew not
 Christ.”

(Longfellow 19.106-108)

We should know already that just saying that you are Christian is NOT enough to get you into Paradise. All you

have to do is look in the Inferno and see all the Popes there. Many of the unrepentant sinners in the Inferno said that they were Christian. Guido da Montefeltro attempted to scam God into thinking that he was a Christian, but Guido's scam did not work.

We also read that some pagans are much better qualified for Paradise than some so-called "Christians." Perhaps it is possible for them to be saved:

“Such Christians shall the Ethiop condemn,
When the two companies shall be divided,
The one for ever rich, the other poor.”

(Longfellow 19.109-111)

The day when the two companies shall be divided is the Day of Judgment. It certainly sounds as if some pagans, represented here by the Ethiop, will be “rich [...] forevermore” (*Paradise* 19.111). The only kind of “rich” that will be meaningful after the Day of Judgment will be a residence in Paradise.

In Matthew 25:31-46 (King James Version), we read about the Day of Judgment. It is a separation like the one we read in this canto:

31: When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats

33: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34: Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37: Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38: When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39: Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40: And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41: Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44: Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a

stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45: Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46: And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

The pagans who do the right thing may be going to be among the rich forevermore. What is the right thing to do? The right thing to do is to feed the hungry, give something to drink to the thirsty, give clothing to the naked, and help those who are ill or in prison.

• Who are some of the Christians named in Canto 19 who have done terrible things?

Many so-called Christians have behaved badly, and Dante lists a few of them here.

A “Christian” can divide the world into the good guys and the bad guys, and then say that because you are a good guy you can do whatever you want to the bad guys. That kind of “Christian” is a bad Christian.

In this section, Dante uses another acrostic. In *Purgatory*, Canto 12, he used the acrostic OMO for Humankind. Here he uses the acrostic LVE. The ‘V’ means ‘U,’ and in Italian LUE means “pestilence.” Pestilence is what Dante writes about here.

Here are some of the Christians whom Dante mentions who behave badly:

The Emperor Albert.

Albert of Austria devastated Prague.

Philip the Fair.

Philip the Fair of France debased his country's currency in order to pay for his wars. He died when he fell from his horse after a wild boar had run between its legs. To debase currency or money means to lessen the value of the money.

Robert the Bruce and William Wallace, and Kings Edward I and Edward II of England

The English and the Scots warred often, venturing into each other's territory. Dante prefers that the Scottish leaders stay in Scotland, and the English leaders stay in England.

CHAPTER 20: “Canto 20: Jupiter — Two Pagans in Paradise (Ripheus and Trajan)”

• Briefly describe the six famous souls who championed justice on Earth.

As seen in profile, the Eagle’s eye is composed of six famous souls (two Christians, two Jews, and two pagans) who championed justice on Earth. These are the six righteous souls, each of whom now knows something in Paradise:

King David

King David is the pupil of the eye of the Eagle. King David composed the Psalms, according to tradition. He also danced before the ark of the covenant. This ark — a sacred chest — contained two tablets: On the two tablets were written the Ten Commandments. Dante writes that King David now knows “the value of his psalms” (Musa 20.40).

By the way, one meaning of the word “ark” is “the sacred chest representing to the Hebrews the presence of God among them,” according to the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

<<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ark>>.

This is a definition of “Ark of the Covenant”:

“The wooden chest which contained the tablets of the laws of the ancient Israelites. Carried by the Israelites on their wanderings in the wilderness, it was later placed by Solomon in the Temple at Jerusalem.”

Source:

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ark_of_the_covenant>.

By the way, the Latin word *arca* means “chest.”

The Roman Emperor Trajan

The next five spirits form the eyebrow. We heard about the Emperor Trajan on the first level of the Mountain of Purgatory. He was not proud, and he was just. Instead of going to war right away, he first helped a widow whose son had been killed. This scene is depicted on Trajan's Column in Rome. For a while, the Emperor Trajan lived in Limbo, and he now knows "how dear / it costs a man to fail to follow Christ" (Musa 20.47-48).

King Hezekiah

King Hezekiah of Judah learned that he was going to die, but he prayed to God, and God allowed him to live for 15 more years. This story is told in 2 Kings 20:1-6 (King James Version):

1: In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

2: Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying,

3: I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

4: And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

5: Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy

tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

6: And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

The Eagle says about Hezekiah:

“And now he knows that God's eternal laws
 are not changed when a worthy prayer from
 earth
 delays today's events until tomorrow.”

(Musa 20.52-54)

Constantine

The Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire east to Constantinople in 330 CE. This left the Popes in charge of Rome. Dante believed that the Donation of Constantine was disastrous because it made the Popes greedy, although Constantine himself had good motives when he made his donation. The Donation of Constantine turned out to be a forgery, although Dante was not alive when the forgery was discovered. The Donation of Constantine is a document giving the Popes authority in the West, including Rome, Italy, Greece, Judea, and Africa, while Constantine would hold power in the West, in Byzantium.

The Eagle says about Constantine:

“and now he knows that all the evil sprung
 from his good action does not harm his soul,

though, thereby, all the world has been destroyed.”

(Musa 20.58-60)

Constantine’s Donation may have had very bad consequences, but his motive was good when he made the Donation, and so he is in Paradise. From this we learn that our good motives will get us into Paradise, and that the bad consequences of actions that we do with a good motive will not keep us out of Paradise.

King William II, the Good, of Naples and Sicily

Here we have a son who is better than his father, King William I, the Bad. King William II was good to religious institutions and to his people, who mourned his death in 1189. In Paradise “now he knows how much is loved in Heaven / a righteous king” (Musa 20.64-65).

Ripheus

Ripheus is pre-Christian. He is mentioned very briefly in Book 2 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which recounts the fall of Troy. Ripheus fought with Aeneas against the conquering Achaeans, and he died defending Troy. The most important lines concerning Ripheus for our purposes in the *Aeneid* are the final two below:

In a moment we’re overwhelmed by weight of numbers:

first Coroebus falls, by the armed goddess’s altar, at the hands

of Peneleus: and Ripheus, who was the most just of all the Trojans,

and keenest for what was right (the gods’ vision was otherwise):

Translator: A. S. "Tony" Kline

Source: <http://tkline.pgcc.net/PITBR/Latin/VirgilAeneidII.htm>

Of course, we are surprised that a pre-Christian such as Ripheus would be here in Paradise. Dante's original audience would also be surprised. The Eagle says,

"Who would believe, down in the errant world,
That e'er the Trojan Ripheus in this round
Could be the fifth one of the holy lights?"

(Longfellow 20.67-69)

Ripheus also knows more in Paradise than he knew on Earth:

"And now he knows much more about God's grace
than anyone on earth and sees more deeply,
even though his eye cannot pierce God's
depths."

(Musa 20.70-72)

• Are these six people the six people you would expect to find in this sphere of justice?

King David

Chances are, the only soul out of these six whom you would expect to see here is King David. I doubt that anyone would expect to see Ripheus here. For one thing, very few people have ever heard of him.

Interestingly, King David is presented here as a poet. In the Middle Ages, when Dante was writing, people believed that King David had written all of the psalms in the Book of Psalms. Nowadays, we don't believe that:

“He who is shining in the midst as pupil
 Was once the singer of the Holy Spirit,
 Who bore the ark from city unto city;”

(Longfellow 20.37-39)

Of course, we remember that David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant was one of the exempla of humility on the first ledge of the Mountain of Purgatory.

The Emperor Trajan

In addition to Kind David, the Emperor Trajan, who is one of the just here, also was one of the exempla of humility that we saw on the first ledge of the Mountain of Purgatory. See *Purgatory*, Canto 10.

The Roman Emperor Trajan lived after the time of Christ. He died in the year 117 CE, but as far as we know, he was not a Christian. However, he did not prosecute Christians. Apparently, in real life he did not care for Christians, but he was a good enough man that he did not want to prosecute them.

Constantine

Constantine is an interesting choice here because Dante believed that the Donation of Constantine caused a lot of trouble because it made the Popes greedy.

The Eagle says,

“The next light went to Greece bearing the laws
 and me to let the Shepherd take his place —
 his good intentions bore the worst of fruits;
 and now he knows that all the evil sprung

from his good action does not harm his soul,
 though, thereby, all the world has been
 destroyed.”

(Musa 20.55-60)

The word “me” in *Paradise* 20.56 refers to the Eagle, the symbol of Roman Empire. It is interesting that the Eagle is the symbol of justice here. Why is that? It is because of the great respect that Dante had for Roman law.

Constantine moved the center of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople. Dante also believed that Constantine made the Donation of Constantine, which Dante believed had bad consequences.

Of course, on Earth we can't know for sure the consequences of our decisions. I may decide to work out, so I go to the gymnasium. Taking care of your health is certainly a good thing, so this seems like a wise decision to make. However, on the way back home from the gym, I am hit by a car and badly injured. This is a bad thing.

How are we to be judged? We are judged by our motives. If we have good motives when we make a decision, then we are good people even if our decision has bad consequences. If I had lived long ago, I might have given food and clothing to a starving artist in Austria; my motive in doing that is good, so I am a good person even if that starving artist in Austria whom I keep alive turns out to Adolf Hitler, who caused the Holocaust.

Ripheus

Ripheus is such a minor character in the *Aeneid* that it is unlikely that many people would know who he is, much less expect to see him in Paradise. For one thing, he lived centuries before the time of Christ, and he was not a Jew.

• **Who was Ripheus of Troy?**

Ripheus of Troy is here among the just, and his presence is the most mysterious of all the souls here. The Eagle says,

“Who would believe, down in the errant world,
That e’er the Trojan Ripheus in this round
Could be the fifth one of the holy lights?”

(Longfellow 20.67-69)

Dante, of course, knew the *Aeneid* very well indeed, and he knew who Ripheus of Troy was.

Ripheus is “a man uniquely just among the Trojans, / the soul of equity” in a few brief lines in the *Aeneid* (translation by Robert Fitzgerald):

[...] and Ripheus fell,
A man uniquely just among the Trojans,
The soul of equity; but the gods would have it
Differently.

(Fitzgerald *Aeneid* 2.560-563)

We see the mystery of salvation here. Ripheus, a very minor character in the *Aeneid*, is in Paradise, but Virgil, who wrote the *Aeneid*, is in Limbo.

• **Can a pagan go to Paradise? Yes. How do the pagans Trajan and Ripheus end up in Paradise?**

Dante is astonished that two pagans — Trajan and Ripheus — are in Paradise.

Like we may want to do, Dante asks, “How can this be?” (Musa 20.82).

The Eagle is very willing to explain — the souls in Paradise are happy to help:

“*Regnum celerum* suffers violence
 gladly from fervent love, from vibrant hope
 — only these powers can defeat God’s will:
 not in the way one man conquers another,
 for That will wills its own defeat, and so
 defeated it defeats through its own mercy.”

(Musa 20.94-99)

The Kingdom of Heaven (*Regnum celerum*) wishes to be conquered by human love, and that has happened in these cases. If we were to go by the so-called “rules,” Trajan and Ripheus would not be in Paradise, but their human love has conquered the Kingdom of Heaven, just as the Kingdom of Heaven has wished, and so they have a place in Paradise.

The Eagle explains that the Roman Emperor Trajan and Ripheus were actually Christians, not pagans:

“They did not leave their bodies, as you think,
 as pagans, but as Christians with firm faith
 in feet that suffered and in feet that would.”

(Musa 20.103-105)

Trajan believed in the “feet that suffered” (Musa 20.105). By his time, Christ had already had his feet pierced on the cross.

Ripheus believed in the “feet that would” (Musa 20.105) suffer. In his time, Christ had not yet had his feet pierced on the cross.

Roman Emperor Trajan

According to a medieval legend, Pope Gregory the Great (died 604 CE) was so impressed by the story of Trajan and the woman whose son had been killed that he prayed so fervently for Trajan that the emperor was taken from Limbo and brought back to life. While alive for the second time, Trajan accepted Christ, and he then died as a Christian.

The Eagle says,

“For one from Hell, where no one e’er turns back
 Unto good will, returned unto his bones,
 And that of living hope was the reward, —
 Of living hope, that placed its efficacy
 In prayers to God made to resuscitate him,
 So that ’twere possible to move his will.

The glorious soul concerning which I speak,
 Returning to the flesh, where brief its stay,
 Believed in Him who had the power to aid it;
 And, in believing, kindled to such fire
 Of genuine love, that at the second death
 Worthy it was to come unto this joy.”

(Longfellow 20.106-117)

Ripheus

Ripheus, over a thousand years before Christ, so believed in and loved justice that he received God’s grace.

The Eagle says,

“The other soul, by means of grace that wells

up from a spring so deep that no man's eye
 has ever plumbed the bottom of its source,
 devoted all his love to righteousness,
 and God, with grace on grace, opened his
 eyes
 to our redemption and he saw the light,
 and he believed in this; from that time on
 he could not bear the stench of pagan creed,
 and warned all its perverse practitioners.
 He was baptized more than a thousand years
 before baptism was — and those three ladies
 you saw at the right wheel were his baptism.”

(Musa 20.118-129)

The “three ladies” (Musa 20.129) were Faith, Hope, and Charity/Love: the theological virtues. Ripheus believed in Faith, Hope, and Charity/Love so much that his belief was his baptism. Of course, Ripheus' culture did not know about baptism.

Why should we “be slow to judge” (Musa 20.133)?

One thing that we can learn from the presence of Ripheus and Trajan in Paradise is that we ought to be “slow to judge” (Musa 20.133) on Earth.

The Eagle says,

“You men who live on earth, be slow to judge,
 for even we who see God face to face

still do not know the list of His elect,”

(Musa 20.133-135)

Things such as predestination are mysteries. We human beings are unable to understand such things.

The Eagle says,

“O thou predestination, how remote
 Thy root is from the aspect of all those
 Who the First Cause do not behold entire!”

(Longfellow 20.130-132)

Definitions

Grace: A gift from God.

Predestination: Determined in advance. Whether we are saved or not is determined in advance, and God knows whether we are saved or not. One explanation for this that does not take away free will is that God exists outside of time and space, and so God knows our every action: past, present, and future. God sees us using our free will to either do the right thing or do the wrong thing.

We see a number of souls in *Paradise*, but of course we do not see all of the souls in Paradise. As in the *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, the souls who appear to Dante are the souls who have something important to teach him.

• Does Dante ignore the hard questions in his *Divine Comedy*?

No. Very definitely, Dante does not ignore the hard questions. If he did ignore the hard questions, he would not be writing about predestination.

The concept of predestination arises from Romans 8:29. Romans is actually Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. Here are two different translations:

For God knew his own before ever they were, and also ordained that they should be shaped to the likeness of his Son. (Romans 8:29 — New English Bible)

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29 — King James Version)

Of course, this is a hard question because it raises the problem of determinism and justice. If God already knows — even before we are born — who is predestined to be among the Elect and go to Paradise, then does that mean that what we do in life does not matter? Do we lack free will? Is it determined that we act in such a way that we will go to Paradise or we will go to the Inferno? And if so, is this fair?

Why does Dante bring up predestination? What can we learn from what Dante says here?

One thing we can learn is that we have limitations. We are unable to explain the mystery of predestination. We are unable to tell who will wind up in the Inferno and who will wind up in Paradise.

Of course, that means that we can't tell exactly what is needed for people to get into Paradise. None of us can make up a list of 10 things we have to do in order to get a Get Out of Hell Free card. This doesn't mean that we don't know lots of things we ought to do and lots of things we ought not to do if we want to make it to Paradise. But we would be arrogant if we were to tell God that we did such-and-such, and therefore God has to let us into Paradise.

One person who did make a to-do list of things to do in order to get into Paradise is Guido da Montefeltro. His list included Repent and Give Up Sin, but of course he failed miserably at doing these things. Even though Guido made his list and checked off all the items, God knew that Guido was trying to scam Him, and therefore Guido ended up in the Inferno.

Of course, Paradise does have good surprises:

Who knew that a pagan from the Trojan War would end up in Paradise?

Who knew that someone's earnest prayer would help save a pagan who was already dead?

And since we can't figure out such things as Salvation and Predestination, perhaps other excellent surprises are in store for us.

These days, we believe in a merciful and omnibenevolent, all-loving God. We have a hard time understanding eternal punishment. Interestingly, some Christian mystics, including Julian of Norwich, and some Christian theologians, including Origen, believe in *apocatastasis*. They believe that all will be well for everybody in the end. In other words, everybody will make it to Paradise in the end. The word *apocatastasis* means an upset verdict — someone may have been sentenced to eternal damnation, but if that verdict is upset, then that person will make it to Paradise.

If Hitler eventually makes it to Paradise, it would be a triumph for Unconditional Love, although many of us want Hitler to go through Purgation for millennia. Hitler's mother probably loved him and wants him in Paradise. God's Unconditional Love is greater than that of a mother who loves her child.

Of course, we want many people to make it to Heaven, including Virgil and Cato and the other good pagans.

In the *Inferno*, Dante sees a sign at the entrance to Hell that says, “ABANDON ALL HOPE / ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE.” Of course, Dante did not abandon hope although he entered the Inferno, and we will find out that when he dies he will go to Paradise (after climbing the Mountain of Purgatory a second time).

CHAPTER 21: “Canto 21: Saturn — Symbolic Ladder; Saint Peter Damian”

• Who is Semele?

One should not be temperate in some things. One is Love. Unconditional Love is not temperate.

However, even though Beatrice’s beauty is not temperate — she becomes more and more beautiful the closer she rises to Paradise — she demonstrates temperance in how she handles her beauty. For example, she does not smile at Dante because she knows that if she were to smile, her beauty would blast Dante to ashes, the way that Semele was blasted to ashes when she asked Zeus to reveal himself to her in all his glory. Mortals cannot look at gods in all their glory and survive. This may be why the gods and goddesses so often disguise themselves as mortals when they come among Humankind.

In addition, we do have not music on this planet (Saturn) because Dante could not withstand its beauty.

Here is some information about Semele:

Semele was the daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia, and the mother, by Zeus, of the god Dionysus. Because Zeus slept with Semele secretly, Hera only found out about the affair after the girl was pregnant. Bent on revenge, Hera disguised herself and persuaded Semele to demand that Zeus come to her in all the splendor with which he visited Hera. As a result, Semele asked Zeus to grant an unspecified favor, and got him to swear by the river Styx that he would grant it. Unable to break his oath, Zeus came to her armed in his thunder and lightning, and Semele was destroyed. However, Zeus

rescued the unborn child from the mother's ashes and sewed it in his thigh until it was ready to be born. Thus Dionysus is sometimes called "the twice-born." Dionysus was raised at first by Semele's sister and brother-in-law, Ino and Athamus, and later by the nymphs of Nysa. As an adult, he retrieved his mother from Hades and made her a goddess; she was called Thyone.

Source: James Hunter, "Semele."

Encyclopedia Mythica.

<<http://tinyurl.com/kmx8swq>>. Accessed 8 August 2013.

• The souls on Saturn are temperate. What is temperance?

Beatrice and Dante have risen to the next sphere: Saturn, which is the planet of temperance.

Temperance means moderation, not going to extremes. Temperance is one of the cardinal virtues. The four cardinal virtues are wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance.

The word "cardinal" means "fundamental," "chief," "principal," and "of the utmost importance."

Saint Thomas Aquinas regarded temperance as the disciplining of our instincts toward pleasure. Eating is pleasurable, but a temperate person will not be obese. Sex is pleasurable, but a temperate person will not be a rapist or engage in immoral sex. Drinking wine in moderation is pleasurable, but a temperate person will not be an alcoholic.

• Why does Dante regard temperance as so important?

Dante regards temperance as being very important, as shown by the fact that the planet devoted to temperance is the

closest to Paradise of the planets devoted to the four cardinal virtues. Other people of the Middle Ages probably would have regarded wisdom as being more important than temperance, but Dante believes differently.

On Saturn, the planet of temperance, we find the contemplatives. The contemplatives contemplate God, and possibly they occasionally enjoy a direct experience of God.

Contemplatives are temperate. They do not overindulge in food, sex, or wine.

Why does Dante regard temperance as so important? Temperance is important if we are to develop and use our other virtues. Temperance is a foundation for the other cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, justice).

Let's say that you are addicted to food, sex, and wine. Will you be wise, brave, and just?

- If you are drunk all the time, you won't read books or study or think much.
- If you eat way too much, you won't be able to rescue a child from a burning house because you are too fat to climb in the window so you can rescue the child.
- If you are addicted to sex, you won't be a just judge because all a pretty (or handsome) defendant has to do to get a verdict of "innocent" is to sleep with you.

I personally don't drink much alcohol because it interferes with reading. As a young man, I tried reading a novel while drinking. I enjoyed reading about 30 pages of the novel, but the next day I couldn't remember much of what I had read. Therefore, I decided that I really didn't (and don't) want to drink much.

• Dante sees a ladder. What is the ladder a symbol of? And what are the cross and the eagle symbols of?

The Ladder is a symbol of communication between God and Humans; it is also a symbol of spiritual vision. We read the story of Jacob's Ladder in Genesis 28:12-16 (King James Version):

12: And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

13: And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

14: And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15: And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

16: And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.

We see four symbols in this section of the *Paradise*:

Four planets are devoted to the cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance. Each planet has a symbol.

The Sun is devoted to wisdom. Its symbol is the Circle, which is a symbol of Divine Infinity: Infinite Power, Infinite Knowledge, and Infinite Benevolence.

Mars is devoted to courage. Its symbol is the Cross, which is a symbol of Human Salvation.

Jupiter is devoted to justice. Its symbol is the Eagle, which is a symbol of Earthly Order.

Saturn is devoted to temperance. Its symbol is the Ladder, which is a symbol of Communication between God and Humans. It is also a symbol of Spiritual Vision. Each rung of the Ladder represents knowledge of the Divine that the contemplative has achieved.

People of the Middle Ages were very concerned about these things: Divine Infinity, Human Salvation, Earthly Order, and Spiritual Vision.

• **Write a brief character analysis of Peter Damian.**

Peter Damian greets Dante on Saturn.

Peter Damian was a great contemplative who was called away from the contemplative life. He lived 250 years before the time *The Divine Comedy* is set. His dates are circa 1007 to 1072.

He introduces himself by saying,

“I in that place was Peter Damiano;

And Peter the Sinner was I in the house

Of Our Lady on the Adriatic shore.

Little of mortal life remained to me,

When I was called and dragged forth to the
hat

Which shifteth evermore from bad to worse.

Came Cephas, and the mighty Vessel came

Of the Holy Spirit, meagre and barefooted,
Taking the food of any hostelry.”

(Longfellow 21.121-129)

Peter Damian was a contemplative who was “forced to wear the Hat” (Musa 21.125). That means that he was forced to wear a Cardinal’s hat although he did not want to; in other words, he became a Cardinal.

“Cephas” is another name for Peter, and so “Cephas” here means “Pope.” (The Pope is the vicar of Peter; Peter is regarded as being the first Pope.) Pope Stephen IX made Peter Damian a Cardinal, although Peter Damian preferred not to be a Cardinal. “Cephas” means “rock” in Syrian. It is a surname that Jesus gave to Peter:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and
upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates
of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16:18 (King James Version)

The Pope wanted a contemplative such as Peter Damian to be a Cardinal. Contemplatives have the ability to reform the Church.

The Gregorian Reform era was one that was supported by both Peter Damian and by Pope Stephen IX.

• How does Peter Damian criticize the leaders of the Church in Dante’s day?

By the way, Saint Peter, the first Pope, was also temperate. He is “Lean” (Musa 21.127), in contrast to the intemperate clergy who need to be reformed:

“Your modern pastors need all kinds of help:

one here, one there, to lead, to prop and hold

up their behinds — they are so full of food;
 their flowing cloaks cover the horse they ride:
 two beasts beneath one hide appear to move!
 O Heaven's Patience, what you must
 endure!"

(Musa 21.130-135)

The modern clergy are not temperate when it comes to food.
 They are fat.

We can think of other criticisms.

What did Pope Boniface VIII do? He ended up in the circle of the Inferno that was dedicated to punishing Simony. He worked differently from Pope Stephen IX.

Pope Stephen IX wanted to reform the Church; therefore, he found the best man for the job, and he made him a Cardinal. (Of course, there were also other reformers.) A Simonist Pope would have made a Cardinal whoever offered him the greatest amount of money.

Compare also the people who are made Cardinals in the two systems. A Simonist wants to be made a Cardinal but is not qualified to be a Cardinal. Peter Damian is qualified to be a Cardinal, but he resists being made a Cardinal until he is convinced that he can do a lot of good as a Cardinal.

CHAPTER 22: “Canto 22: Saturn — Saint Benedict”

• **The way that poets work in the *Purgatory*, contemplatives work in *Paradise*. We met poets at the beginning and at the end of the *Purgatory*. Similarly, we meet contemplatives at the beginning and at the end of the *Paradise*.**

In *Purgatory*, Dante first meets and talks with Casella, a poet, and he continues to meet and talk with many poets throughout the *Purgatory*. At the end, Dante meets Statius, who accompanies him to the top of the Mountain of Purgatory.

In *Paradise*, Dante meets Piccarda Donati, a contemplative, and talks to her. At the end of *Paradise*, Dante meets and talks with Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who is also a contemplative. He also sees Saint Benedict and other contemplatives on the planet Saturn. We see many contemplatives in *Paradise*, just as we saw many poets in *Purgatory*. Many of these contemplatives are founders of religious orders.

Of course, Dante learns from the people he meets in the afterlife. Peter Damian is a model for Dante to follow. Peter Damian was a contemplative who was able to experience God, but he left the contemplative life because the Pope needed him to help reform the Church. Similarly, at the end of the *Paradise*, Dante is going to be able to experience God. This is his own kind of contemplative experience. However, like Peter Damian, Dante is going to have to leave. He is not ready to stay in Paradise. Instead, Dante has work to accomplish on Earth: He has to write *The Divine Comedy*. Later, after his death, is the time for Dante to stay in Paradise permanently. Like Peter Damian, Dante will be a reformer.

• **Why did the saints shout at the end of Canto 21?**

We certainly learn something good about Paradise here. Beatrice

Said to me: “Knowest thou not thou art in heaven,
 And knowest thou not that heaven is holy all
 And what is done here cometh from good
 zeal?”

(Longfellow 22.7-9)

At the end of Canto 21, the saints shouted, but Dante was not able to understand what they said. Beatrice explains that the saints were shouting that vengeance for evil will soon come:

“In which [the shout of the saints] if thou hadst
 understood its prayers
 Already would be known to thee the
 vengeance
 Which thou shalt look upon before thou
 diest.”

(Longfellow 22.13-15)

• **Write a brief character analysis of Saint Benedict. Who is he, historically?**

At this point, Dante sees many souls. Saint Benedict approaches and speaks with Dante.

Saint Benedict is a contemplative; in fact, he is known as the founder of Western monasticism.

Other souls here are Saint Macarius (died 404), who was influential in Eastern monasticism, and Saint Romuald (died 1027), who helped reform Benedictinism in the 11th century.

He is known as the founder of the order of Reformed Benedictines.

Saint Benedict was a 6th-century Italian monk. In the Rule of Saint Benedict, which most Western Catholic monks follow, the monks are contemplatives, they live in a cloister, and they pray in a group many times a day.

In Canto 22, Saint Benedict shares his biography, starting with the founding of his monastery at Monte Cassino:

“That mountain on whose slope Cassino stands
 Was frequented of old upon its summit
 By a deluded folk and ill-disposed;
 And I am he who first up thither bore
 The name of Him who brought upon the earth
 The truth that so much sublimateth us.
 And such abundant grace upon me shone
 That all the neighbouring towns I drew away
 From the impious worship that seduced the
 world.”

(Longfellow 22.37-45)

Lots of pagans were around Monte Cassino when Saint Benedict founded his monastery there, and so Saint Benedict acted as a missionary, converting pagans to Christianity.

Saint Benedict criticizes the corruption of his day:

“It was the patriarch Jacob who saw
 our ladder stretch to touch the final height,

the time he dreamed of it so thronged with
angels.

But now no man will lift a foot from earth
and try to climb it, and my Rule is worth
the wasted parchment it is written on.”

(Musa 22.70-75)

Saint Benedict, however, is aware that much-needed reforms will come.

• **What made Saint Benedict a great missionary?**

Saint Benedict was a great missionary. Why? He was a contemplative. Contemplatives pray, and they have discipline. They have roots in spiritual discipline.

Dante suggests that it is a good idea for us to be also rooted in spiritual discipline. If you want to make positive changes in the world, you need to have good roots.

Another thing that we can learn here is that we build on the work of others. Certainly scientists learn from the work of other scientists, and then they push on and hope to make new discoveries. (The past really does affect the future, either positively or negatively. If you are obese now, you have probably been overeating for a long time. If you are middle-aged and fit now, you have probably been taking care of your body for a long time.)

Fortunately, some things from the past are very positive. Saint Benedict says,

“Peter began with neither gold nor silver,
And I with orison and abstinence,
And Francis with humility his convent.”

(Longfellow 22.88-90)

People in different historical eras need different things, but we can build on the good work that has been done before us. Saint Peter did not want silver and gold. Saint Benedict stressed praying and fasting. Saint Francis was humble.

In Saint Francis' day, what was needed was humility, and so he was humble. However, he also prayed and fasted, as Saint Benedict recommended. He also did not need silver and gold, just as Saint Peter recommended.

Did Saint Francis build a new church? No, he reformed the old church. He built on the foundations that had been made by others.

At the beginning of the *Paradise* we read these words:

The glory of the One Who moves all things
penetrates all the universe, reflecting
in one part more and in another less.

(Musa 1.1-3)

Throughout the universe are things that can lead us back to God. The founders of religious orders whom we see on Saturn are people who have found things that lead us back to God.

Dante is using the wisdom of other people. These contemplatives have found things that can lead us back to God, so why shouldn't we be aware of and make use of them?

In my opinion, one of the good things that we can do in our lives is to investigate other religious orders and even other religions and see what truth we can find in them.

**CHAPTER 23: “Canto 23: Gemini — Christ, Mary,
and the Saints”**

• **What does Dante see in the sphere of the fixed stars?**

Christ in Triumph

Beatrice is very attentive at the beginning of this canto; she is eagerly waiting for something to arrive. She is like a mother bird awaiting dawn so that she can find food for her nestlings.

Soon, she sees what she was waiting to see:

And Beatrice exclaimed: “Behold the hosts
Of Christ’s triumphal march, and all the fruit
Harvested by the rolling of these spheres!”

(Longfellow 23.19-21)

Dante sees that Beatrice is very happy. He also sees “a myriad of lights” (Musa 23.28), and above those lights is “one Sun that lit them all” (Musa 23.29).

The light from that Sun is so bright that Dante is not able to endure looking at it.

Beatrice explains what Dante would see if his eyes could endure that sight. He would be looking at the Church Triumphant. He would be looking at Christ. He would be looking at the Triumph of Christ.

Dante’s mind is transformed, and he is now able to look at Beatrice, even when she smiles.

Ineffability

Occasionally in Paradise Dante will witness things that he is unable to describe in words. One of them is Beatrice’s beauty:

If at this moment sounded all the tongues
 That Polyhymnia and her sisters made
 Most lubrical with their delicious milk,
 To aid me, to a thousandth of the truth
 It would not reach, singing the holy smile
 And how the holy aspect it illumed.
 And therefore, representing Paradise,
 The sacred poem must perforce leap over,
 Even as a man who finds his way cut off;
 (Longfellow 23.55-63)

“Polyhymnia and her sisters” (Musa 23.56) refers to the Muse of Song and the other Muses.

Of course, what Dante is doing in Paradise is something very difficult, so he says that we ought not to blame him if occasionally he cannot describe something in words:

Now bear in mind the weight of my poem’s theme,
 think of the mortal shoulders it rests on,
 and do not blame me if I stagger here:
 this stretch of sea my vessel’s prow now dares
 to cut is no place for a little boat
 nor for a captain who would spare himself.
 (Musa 23.64-69)

Mother Mary

Christ has ascended, but many other splendid lights remain. Because his mind has been transformed, Dante can now look at the many splendors that are still before him. The brightest of all these splendors is Mary, the mother of Christ. (By the way, “Christ” means “Messiah.”)

We find that Dante is and has been devoted to Mary:

The name of that fair flower I e'er invoke
 Morning and evening utterly enthralled
 My soul to gaze upon the greater fire.

(Longfellow 23.88-90)

The angel Gabriel descends, circles Mary, and sings words of praise to her.

Mary then leaves, following in the path of Jesus. The remaining saints sing the hymn “*Regina Coeli*” (“O Queen of Heaven”).

Here are the lyrics of the *Regina Coeli*:

Literal translation:

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

For He whom thou didst merit to bear in your womb, alleluia.

Has risen, as He promised, alleluia.

Pray for us to God, alleluia.

V. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia.

R. For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia.

Let us pray. O God, who through the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ gave rejoicing to the world, grant, we pray, that through his Mother, the Virgin Mary, we may obtain the joy of everlasting life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regina_Coeli

Date Accessed: 8 August 2013

Coming up next is an examination of Dante. What does he know about the virtues faith, hope, and love?

**CHAPTER 24: “Canto 24: Gemini — Saint Peter
Examines Dante’s Faith”**

• **Dante will be examined in the virtues faith, hope, and love.**

My students at Ohio University have to take final exams to show what they have learned; the same is true of Dante.

Dante will be examined on his knowledge of the virtues faith, hope, and love.

Of course, the first three spheres that Dante visited were concerned with those virtues:

Moon: Faith

Mercury: Hope

Venus: Love

The souls in these first three spheres incorrectly practiced or lacked in some way the virtue associated with the sphere they were in.

Afterward, the Sun and the spheres beyond the Sun were beyond the shadow cast by the Earth. The souls on these spheres (including the Sun) did not lack the virtue associated with the sphere they were in; instead, they were outstanding examples of that virtue.

One purpose of the examination is to see what changes his journey has wrought in Dante. What has he learned by taking this journey?

• **Who are the three apostles who will examine Dante in the virtues faith, hope, and love?**

Three apostles examine Dante in the virtues faith, hope, and love:

Saint Peter: Faith

Saint James: Hope

Saint John: Love

• **Dante's examination is described as similar to a medieval university exam for a bachelor's degree.**

Dante's examination is described as being similar to a medieval university exam:

As baccalaureate arms himself, and speaks not
 Until the master doth propose the question,
 To argue it, and not to terminate it,
 So did I arm myself with every reason,
 While she was speaking, that I might be ready
 For such a questioner and such profession.

(Longfellow 24.46-51)

Undergraduate students at Ohio University are attempting to get their bachelor's degree, and "bachelor" (Musa 24.46) refers to the student taking an examination to get a medieval bachelor's degree.

The examination involves discussion, not final answers. The bachelors taking these examinations in the Middle Ages would discuss whatever topic the master examining him would propose. This is a case of the bachelor demonstrating what he knows, but also learning from the master. This examination is a case of engaging oneself in a dialogue from which one can learn.

This examination can be scary for some people reading *The Divine Comedy* because it can remind them of their examination to get a Ph.D. However, taking an examination

such as this can be a good thing. Normally, the people examining you are going to be on your side, and they will be hoping that you do well. In addition, we want the people who get a degree to actually deserve the degree.

• **Why is Saint Peter a good choice to examine Dante in faith?**

Peter examines Dante in the virtue of faith. This is the same Peter who denied three times that he knew Jesus after the Romans took Jesus prisoner. Peter sinned, but he repented, and he became an effective spreader of Christianity, with the results that he knows a lot about faith and he is now in Paradise. The story is told in Matthew, chapter 26 (King James Version):

31: Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

32: But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee

33: Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

34: Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35: Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

[...]

69: Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

70: But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

71: And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

72: And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

73: And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

74: Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

75: And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

• **How does Dante answer this question: What is Faith?**

One good thing to do can be to define important words to show that you know their meaning. Saint Peter in fact asks Dante, “Speak up, good Christian, and declare yourself! / Faith, what is Faith?” (Musa 24.52-53).

Dante replies,

“Faith is the substance of the things we hope for,
 And evidence of those that are not seen;
 And this appears to me its quiddity.”

(Longfellow 24.64-66)

The word “quiddity” here means essence.

Dante has read Saint Paul. His definition comes from Paul’s letter to the Hebrews (11:1): “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (King James Version).

Dante has done his reading for the examination. Saint Peter is the author of 1 Peter and 2 Peter in the New Testament; these books are letters. Dante has read these books, as well as the writings of Paul, including Hebrews.

• How does Dante answer this question: What is the evidence for the truth of what we read in the Bible — including miracles?

The discussion continues, and they talk about the evidence for the truth of what we read in the Bible — including miracles. Now that Dante has defined — correctly — faith, they move on to the substance of faith.

Dante’s argument here is interesting. He says,

“If the world turned to Christ without the help
of miracles,” I said, “then that would be
a miracle far greater than them all.”

(Musa 24.106-108)

Miracles occurred, and people became Christians.

Suppose that the miracles did not occur. If people became Christians without witnessing the miracles that spurred them to become Christians, then that would be even more of a miracle than the miracles we read about in the Bible!

• **How does Dante answer this question: What does Dante personally believe?**

Once they have talked about how we can know that what we read in the Bible is true, Peter asks Dante what is it that he personally believes. We read,

I answered him, “you want me to reveal
 the form of my unhesitating faith,
 and you have asked the reason for its being.
 I tell you: I believe in one, sole God
 eternal Who, unmoved, moves all the
 heavens
 that spin in His love and in His desire;”

(Musa 24.127-132)

Dante adds,

“and I believe in three eternal Beings,
 an Essence that is One as well as Three
 where *is* and *are* describe it equally.”

(Musa 24.139-141)

Dante also talks about how he knows that these things are true:

“And of such faith not only have I proofs
 Physical and metaphysical, but gives them
 Likewise the truth that from this place rains
 down

Through Moses, through the Prophets and the
Psalms,

Through the Evangel, and through you, who
wrote

After the fiery Spirit sanctified you;”

(Longfellow 24.133-138)

Dante has learned much not only from Holy Scripture (Moses, which refers to the first five books of the Bible; the Prophets; the Psalms; the gospels, and from Peter and Paul), but also from philosophers such as Aristotle. When Dante refers to God as the “eternal Who, unmoved, moves all the heavens” (Musa 24.131), he is using Aristotelian language. In this definition, we have a combination of creed and cosmology. Of course, as Dante moves upward in the Heavens toward Paradise, he is engaging in cosmology.

We have two sources of knowledge here: revelation (as in Scripture) and reason (as in the study of nature, including the heavenly bodies). In other words, we can learn some things through reason, and we can learn other things through revelation. The two kinds of knowledge, if in fact they are knowledge, do not conflict. Importantly, by using our reason, we can learn some things about God.

• **How does Dante do in this examination?**

Saint Peter is very pleased with Dante’s answers:

Even as a lord who hears what pleaseth him

His servant straight embraces, gratulating

For the good news as soon as he is silent;

So, giving me its benediction, singing,

Three times encircled me, when I was silent,

The apostolic light, at whose command
I spoken had, in speaking I so pleased him.

(Longfellow 24.148-154)

Saint Peter is delighted by Dante's answers to his questions.

baptismal font assume the laurel wreath,
 for it was there I entered in the faith
 that counts God's souls for Him, the faith for
 which
 Peter just turned himself into my crown.

(Musa 25.1-12)

Dante acknowledges that writing *The Divine Comedy* has been hard work. Even though his poem is “sacred” (Musa 25.1), it has made him “lean from laboring so long” (Musa 25.3).

This may seem like a digression, but it is not. Dante will be examined on hope in this canto, and he is expressing a personal hope that is of great concern to him. He hopes that his poem will allow him to return to Florence and be crowned as a poet there.

Here we see the public and the personal again, as well as the great and the small. Dante's poem *The Divine Comedy* is public, and it is of great importance. His desire to return to Florence is personal, and in the nature of things, it is much smaller than his composition of *The Divine Comedy*.

Of course, Dante never made it back to Florence. At the Church of Santa Croce in Florence is a tomb for Dante, but the tomb is empty.

Interestingly, when Dante finished *The Divine Comedy*, he was living in Ravenna, and he must have known that his exile from Florence would most likely not end in his lifetime. However, his hope was still strong that he would return to Florence — or at least his desire to return to Florence was still strong.

• How does Dante the Pilgrim do in the test that Saint James gives him about hope?

Saint James asks Dante three questions:

“Say what it [Hope] is, and how is flowering with it

Thy mind, and say from whence it came to thee.”

Thus did the second light again continue.”

(Longfellow 25.46-48)

In other words, the three questions are these:

- 1) What is the definition of Hope?
- 2) To what degree do you possess Hope?
- 3) What is the source of your Hope?

• How does Beatrice answer this question: To what degree do you possess Hope? Why does Beatrice — not Dante — answer this question?

Beatrice answers the second question for Dante — very positively:

“There is no son of the Church Militant

with greater hope than his, as you can read

in Him whose radiance lights all our host;

and this is why he is allowed to come

from Egypt to behold Jerusalem

before his fighting days on earth are done.”

(Musa 25.52-57)

Beatrice does not want Dante to answer the question because it may seem as if he is proud.

By the way, the word “host” (Musa 25.54) means a multitude or a vast number.

• How does Dante answer this question: What is the definition of Hope?

Dante then defines Hope:

“Hope,” said I, “is the certain expectation
Of future glory, which is the effect
Of grace divine and merit precedent.”

(Longfellow 25.67-69)

Mark Musa writes this (302):

The Pilgrim now defines Hope. His definition comes from that found in Peter Lombard (see *Par.* X, 106-108), *Liber sententiarum*, III, XXVI, 1: “hope is a certain expectation of future beatitude proceeding from God’s grace and antecedent merits.” The motivation of hope springs from God’s grace alone; “precedent worth,” or merit, is necessary for the assurance of salvation.

• How does Dante answer this question: What is the source of your Hope?

The third question is from which source has Dante received his hope. He answers that he received his hope from many sources, but he received his hope first from David, the singer of the Psalms:

“From many stars this light comes unto me;
But he instilled it first into my heart

Who was chief singer unto the chief captain.”

(Longfellow 25.70-72)

Hope is important in Christianity because all of us have sinned. The Old Testament has 613 laws, and all of us have broken many of those laws. And even if we believe that many of the laws do not apply to Christians, we have broken many of the laws that remain and that we think still are applicable to our lives.

If we focus too much on our sins, we can lose hope. We can think that we have sinned so much that we will never make it to Paradise. Faith is important to hope. If we have faith in a merciful God, then we can retain our hope.

• How does Dante the Pilgrim do in the test that Saint James gives him about hope?

Dante the Pilgrim also passes this examination.

• Does Saint John have a body?

A third light — Saint John — arrives. Dante has heard a tradition — which was disputed — that Saint John’s body went to Paradise along with his soul.

To see whether this is true, Dante stares at the light that is Saint John, but the light blinds him. Saint John, however, tells Dante that his body is not in Paradise:

“Even as a man who gazes, and endeavours

To see the eclipsing of the sun a little,

And who, by seeing, sightless doth become,

So I became before that latest fire,

While it was said, ‘Why dost thou daze
thyself

To see a thing which here hath no existence?
 Earth in the earth my body is, and shall be
 With all the others there, until our number
 With the eternal proposition tallies.”

(Longfellow 25.118-126)

In addition, Saint John tells Dante that only two people have bodies in Paradise. They are Jesus and Mary:

“Two Lights and no more, were allowed to rise
 straight to our cloister clad in double robes —
 explain this to your world when you go
 back.”

(Musa 25.127-129)

The rest of the souls in Paradise will be given their bodies on the Day of Judgment. Of course this is also true of the souls in the Inferno. The souls on the Mountain of Purgatory will receive their bodies, and they will go to Paradise.

**CHAPTER 26: “Canto 26: Gemini — Saint John
Examines Dante’s Love; Adam”**

• Why is Dante temporarily blind during the test about the virtue of love?

In Canto 25, Dante blinded himself trying to see if Saint John had a body.

Love is blind, and so is Dante — temporarily.

Dante’s sight will be restored just as Saul’s sight was restored in Acts 9:17 by Ananias (King James Version) — of course, Saul became Saint Paul:

1: And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2: And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3: And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5: And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6: And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7: And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8: And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9: And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10: And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11: And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12: And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13: Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15: But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17: And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in

the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Saint John tells Dante that Beatrice will be able to restore his sight just as Ananias restored the sight of Saul/Paul:

“Because the Lady, who through this divine
Region conducteth thee, has in her look
The power the hand of Ananias had.”

(Longfellow 26.10-12)

• **How does Dante answer this question: “tell what it is that your soul / is set upon” (Musa 26.7-8)?**

Dante is being examined in three things: faith, hope, and love. Love — appropriately — is presented as an experience.

Saint John asks Dante, “tell what it is that your soul / is set upon” (Musa 26.7-8).

Dante’s answer is that his soul is set on God:

“The Good, that gives contentment to this Court,
The Alpha and Omega is of all
The writing that love reads me low or loud.”

(Longfellow 26.16-18)

Saint John then asks Dante what made him set his soul on God:

And I: “By philosophic arguments,
And by authority that hence descends,
Such love must needs imprint itself in me;”

(Longfellow 26.25-27)

What made Dante set his soul on God? Dante answers that both reason and revelation did that. Reason refers to philosophical arguments, and revelation refers to sacred Scripture.

Many people believe that both reason and revelation lead to the same conclusions. C.S. Lewis, the great defender of Christianity, believed this. So did Saint Thomas Aquinas, another great defender of Christianity.

We have read about seals before in *The Divine Comedy*. When Saint Francis received the stigmata, this was referred to as a seal:

“then on bare rock between Arno and Tiber
 he took upon himself Christ’s holy wounds,
 and for two years he wore this final seal.”

(Musa 11.106-108)

The phrase “this final seal” (Musa 11.108) is interesting. It refers to the stigmata. A seal, of course, is used to seal envelopes. Hot wax is dropped across the folded part of the envelope and then a seal of some kind is pressed into the wax. Here are a few important points made by Dante scholars William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman:

1. The seal indicates that this is the genuine article. The letter has not been forged. Also, Saint Francis’ Christianity has not been faked.
2. The letter is in a finished state. No more writing needs to be done in the letter. Similarly, Saint Francis has achieved Paradise. In addition, we can say that he has come as close to perfection as a human being who is not also divine can.

3. The letter has been approved. If it were not approved, the seal would not be applied to it. Similarly, Saint Francis' life has been approved — by God.

4. The letter is officially sealed. We can say that Saint Francis is officially sealed. We may also want to consider him a fully completed work of art. In Cantos 10 and 11 of *Purgatory*, the souls of the proud were bent over like the works of art known as corbels. They were being formed into works of art. Now, near the end of his life, Saint Francis is a fully completed work of art.

Dante is stamped with a seal much like Saint Francis of Assisi.

Joseph Gallagher points out that Dante believes these things about love (184):

Acknowledging the authority of reason and revelation, Dante first states his thesis: goodness when recognized begets love; the greater the good, the greater the love. Therefore, the Supreme Good, whom all other goods mirror, must be supremely loved. These ideas he attributes to the philosopher Aristotle, to the book of Exodus (33:17), and to Saint John's own Gospel. (The sublimity of this work caused John to be symbolized by a high-flying eagle.)

• How does the Pilgrim do in the test that Saint John gives him about love?

Dante passes all of his exams, including this one. He hears music: "*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*" or "Holy! Holy! Holy!" (Musa 26.69). This song comes from Isaiah 6:3 (King James Version):

1: In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2: Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

3: And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

• How does Adam answer the four questions that Dante asks him?

Three lights (the apostles Peter, James, and John) are before Dante, but now he notices a fourth light, who is Adam, the first man.

Dante asks Adam four questions. Actually, he doesn't even have to ask out loud the questions because Adam knows what he is thinking:

Q1: Why was Adam banished from the Garden of Eden?

A: Adam answers that he was banished for disobedience, not for the tasting of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

“Now, son of mine, the tasting of the tree
 Not in itself was cause of so great exile,
 But solely the o’erstepping of the bounds.”

(Longfellow 26.115-117)

Q2: How long did Adam spend on Earth?

A: Adam lived 930 years on Earth and 4,302 years in Limbo.

Q3: Which language did Adam speak?

A: Adam spoke a language that became extinct before the attempt to build the Tower of Babel:

“The language that I spake was quite extinct

Before that in the work interminable

The people under Nimrod were employed;”

(Longfellow 26.124-126)

Q4: How long was Adam without sin in the Earthly Paradise?

A: Adam was created at about 6 a.m. (sunrise) and he sinned and was banished from the Earthly Paradise at just after noon. Therefore, Adam lived without sin for just over six hours.

Mark Musa gives this chronology (316):

Creation of Adam: 5198 B.C.

Adam’s death and descent to Limbo: 4268 B.C.

Christ’s descent into Hell: A.D. 34

**CHAPTER 27: “Canto 27: Gemini — Heaven’s Wrath
at the Sinful Church; The Primum Mobile”**

• What happens after Adam has answered Dante’s questions?

Dante’s exam took place in the eighth sphere — the sphere of the fixed stars. Previously he had visited the seven spheres of the planets (including the Sun, which Dante called a planet).

In the Ptolemaic universe, the fixed stars move as a group. They do not move in relation to each other. In contrast, the planets such as the Moon are not fixed. They move around in the night sky.

After Adam has answered Dante’s questions, song again is heard:

“Glory be to the Father, to the Son,
And Holy Ghost!” all Paradise began,
So that the melody inebriate made me.”

(Longfellow 27.1-3)

Dante then says something interesting that Joseph Gallagher believes is “a compact definition of Heaven” (186):

“O joy! O gladness inexpressible!
O perfect life of love and peacefulness!
O riches without hankering secure!”

(Longfellow 27.7-9)

• **How does Saint Peter criticize his successors?**

Red is the color of anger, while white is the color of holiness, and Saint Paul turns from white to red as he criticizes the bad Popes who have succeeded him.

Saint Peter especially criticized Pope Boniface VIII:

“He who usurps upon the earth my place,
My place, my place, which vacant has
become

Before the presence of the Son of God,
Has of my cemetery made a sewer
Of blood and stench, whereby the Perverse
One,

Who fell from here, below there is appeased!”

(Longfellow 27.22-27)

Saint Peter’s criticisms of Pope Boniface VIII are harsh:

- Although Boniface VIII is the Pope, Christ regards the papacy as being vacant because of Boniface VIII’s corruption.
- Boniface VIII has turned the papacy “into a sewer” (Musa 27.25).

Saint Peter also points out two things:

- Saint Peter and his good successors did not covet gold.
- Saint Peter and his good successors did not engage in hurtful politics.

Saint Peter does, however, say that reform is coming.

• **What is the ninth sphere?**

All the saints leave, rising upward, and Dante looks down toward the Earth. What he sees is not impressive; he calls the Earth “this puny threshing-ground of ours” (Musa 27.85).

The next sphere that Dante will visit is the ninth. This sphere is the Primum Mobile, or the Prime Mover. We can regard it as the created universe’s outermost sphere.

Aristotle spoke about the Prime Mover. It is that which gives motion to the other spheres. He also called it the Unmoved Mover — the first uncaused cause.

What is beyond the ninth sphere is not located in space or time.

• **How does Beatrice criticize greed?**

We see lots of criticism in this canto.

Saint Peter criticizes bad Popes — bad shepherds of the sheep.

Beatrice criticizes bad people — greedy sheep:

“O Greed, so quick to plunge the human race
 into your depths that no man has the strength
 to keep his head above your raging waters!

The blossom of man’s will is always good,
 but then the drenchings of incessant rain
 turn sound plums into weak and rotten ones.

Only in little children can we find
 true innocence and faith, and both are gone

before their cheeks show the first signs of
hair.”

(Musa 27.121-126)

Why do the sheep go astray? Because they lack good
shepherds. Beatrice says,

“My words should not surprise you when you think
there is no one on earth to govern you
and so the human family goes astray.”

(Musa 27.139-141)

People on Earth need good rulers.

This should not surprise us.

CHAPTER 28: “Canto 28: Primum Mobile — The Hierarchy of Angels”

• What is the Mystic Empyrean?

The Mystic Empyrean lies beyond the Primum Mobile. Actually, “lies beyond” is misleading, as the Mystic Empyrean does not exist in space and time. However, because we are human beings who exist in space and time we have to use language metaphorically when we speak of the Mystic Empyrean.

The Mystic Empyrean is the goal of Dante’s journey. It is the place where God dwells. Of course, here again “place” is a word that is used metaphorically.

Here again, Dante looks at the places he has been, and now he looks ahead to where he is going.

He sees a point of brilliant light. Nine rings of fire surround it. The closer a ring of fire is to the point of brilliant light, the faster it moves. Beatrice helps explain what Dante is now seeing:

My Lady, who in my anxiety

Beheld me much perplexed, said: “From that point

Dependent is the heaven and nature all.”

(Longfellow 28.40-42)

The nine whirling rings of fire are the nine orders of angels, and this leads to a discussion of the nine orders of angels.

The point of brilliant light turns out to be God, Whom Dante is seeing from a distance.

What Dante sees seems to him to be the reverse of what we see in nature. We see the Earth as the center, and the spheres

around the Earth become more and more divine the farther they are from Earth. Here, however, the point of brilliant light is divine, and the rings of fire whirling around are holier the closer they are to the point of brilliant light.

Of course, what Dante is seeing now is ultimate reality, and not the inside-out version of reality that we get on Earth.

• **What is ultimate reality?**

Of course, ultimate reality has God at the center — not the Earth. Circling around God are the orders of angels. All of the angels sing “Hosanna” to God. (“Hosanna” is a cry of praise that is directed toward God.)

• **Briefly describe the orders of angels.**

Each order of angel is associated with a heavenly sphere:

9. Primum Mobile

The order of Angels is Seraphim.

8. Fixed Stars

The order of Angels is Cherubim.

7. Saturn

The order of Angels is Thrones.

The trait associated with this sphere is Contemplation.

6. Jupiter

The order of Angels is Dominions.

The trait associated with this sphere is Justice.

5. Mars

The order of Angels is Virtues.

The trait associated with this sphere is Courage.

4. *Sun*

The order of Angels is Powers.

The trait associated with this sphere is Wisdom.

3. *Venus*

The order of Angels is Principalities.

The trait associated with this sphere is Love.

2. *Mercury*

The order of Angels is Archangels.

The trait associated with this sphere is Hope.

1. *Moon*

The order of Angels is Angels.

The trait associated with this sphere is Faith.

When Beatrice names the orders of the angels, she does so in threes:

The Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones

The Dominations, Virtues, and Powers

The Principalities, Archangels, and Angels

Threes play an important part in *The Divine Comedy* because of the Trinity. H

Of course, we can put all the angels in three groups:

- 1) The good angels in Paradise.
- 2) The bad angels who rebelled with Lucifer.

3) The neutral angels who did not take a stand and who are now in the Vestibule of Hell, rejected by both Paradise and the Inferno.

• Why did Pope Gregory the Great laugh when he reached the Empyrean?

Pope Saint Gregory the Great (590-604) had a different way of listing the orders of angels, but he was mistaken. When he reached Paradise, he realized that he had been mistaken — and he laughed! The person who listed the angels correctly was Dionysius the Areopagite, who converted to Christianity because of the preaching of Saint Paul. We read,

And Dionysius with so great desire
 To contemplate these Orders set himself,
 He named them and distinguished them as I
 do.

But Gregory afterwards dissented from him;
 Wherefore, as soon as he unclosed his eyes
 Within this heaven, he at himself did smile.

(Longfellow 28.130-135)

Joseph Gallagher writes, “Dante too must have been smiling as he wrote this, because in *The Banquet* he followed Gregory’s arrangement” (189).

CHAPTER 29: “Canto 29: Primum Mobile — The Creation and Fall of Angels”

- **In Paradise, souls are very helpful.**

In Paradise, souls are very helpful. Beatrice knows that Dante has some unanswered questions about angels:

Then she began: “I say, and I ask not

What thou dost wish to hear, for I have seen
it

Where centres every When and every ‘Ubi.’”

(Longfellow 29.10-12)

The place of “every *where* and every *when*” (Musa 29.12), of course, is God. The point of brilliant light that Dante can see from the Primum Mobile is God.

In Canto 28, Beatrice talked about the nine orders of the angels. In Canto 29, she talks about other topics concerning the angels.

- **Were the Angels created before the Heavenly Spheres and the Earth?**

By creating the angels, God created reflections of Himself. When God created the angels, He also created the Heavenly Spheres and the Earth. Each order of angels is associated with a Heavenly Sphere. Beatrice says,

“Matter and Form unmingled and conjoined

Came into being that had no defect,

E’en as three arrows from a three-stringed
bow.”

(Longfellow 29.22-24)

The angels are “[p]ure form,” Earth is “pure matter,” and the Heavenly Spheres are “form and matter mixed” (Musa 29.22).

Saint Jerome (circa 340-420) had thought that angels were created long before the Heavenly Spheres; however, he was mistaken. The angels were created at the same time as the Heavenly Spheres and the Earth.

From what we read here, we know that the angels were created in the Mystic Empyrean.

• **How quickly did some of the angels fall from heaven?**

Some of the angels rebelled against God very quickly — quicker than you could count to 20 after the creation of the universe. Beatrice says,

“Nor could one reach, in counting, unto twenty
So swiftly, as a portion of these angels
Disturbed the subject of your elements.”

(Longfellow 29.49-51)

• **Why did some of the angels fall from heaven?**

The presumption of Lucifer, whom Dante saw at the bottom of the Inferno, was responsible for the Fall of the Angels, according to Beatrice:

“The occasion of the fall was the accursed
Presumption of that One, whom thou hast
seen
By all the burden of the world constrained.”

(Longfellow 29.55-57)

Interestingly, Adam took longer to sin than the fallen angels.

The angels who did not rebel against God received a gift from Him:

“Those whom thou here beholdest modest were
 To recognise themselves as of that goodness
 Which made them apt for so much
 understanding;
 On which account their vision was exalted
 By the enlightening grace and their own
 merit,
 So that they have a full and steadfast will.”

(Longfellow 29.58-63)

Mark Musa identifies this gift from God as “God’s ‘enlightening grace’ ([line] 62), or the light of glory, the light by which God sees Himself and by which the creature may have direct vision of God” (348).

• **Do unfallen angels have memories?**

According to Beatrice, unfallen angels do not have memories because they have no need of memories. They get their knowledge directly from God, and so they have no need to memorize things.

• **What are the numbers of the unfallen angels?**

According to Beatrice, mortals cannot count the numbers of the unfallen angels:

“This nature doth so multiply itself
 In numbers, that there never yet was speech
 Nor mortal fancy that can go so far.”

(Longfellow 29.130-132)

What does Daniel 7:10 say about the numbers of the unfallen angels? This is the King James Version:

10: A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

Beatrice says,

“And if thou notest that which is revealed

By Daniel, thou wilt see that in his thousands

Number determinate is kept concealed.”

(Longfellow 29.133-135)

• Why does Beatrice criticize some preachers and thinkers in Canto 29?

Beatrice criticizes some preachers and thinkers because of two things:

1) Bad preachers and thinkers are more concerned about putting on “a show of wits” (Musa 29.87) than they are with teaching well. These preachers and thinkers talk above the heads of their students.

Beatrice says,

“You mortals do not keep to one true path

philosophizing; so carried away

you are by putting on a show of wits!”

(Musa 29.85-87)

Philosophy can be used correctly, and it can be misused. It is misused when it is used simply to score points against

someone else. It is used correctly when it is used to find out the truth.

Arguments can be made sincerely, but bad arguments can be used deviously to mislead others.

Philosophy is very useful. It can be used to understand whatever can be understood by human reason.

Being an intellectual can be dangerous unless you use your intelligence and knowledge to seek the truth that can be understood by human reason. If you use your intelligence and knowledge to score points against others or to put on a show of how smart you are, then you are misusing your intelligence and knowledge.

2) Bad preachers and thinkers teach incorrect things about God.

Beatrice says,

“And even this above here is endured
 With less disdain, than when is set aside
 The Holy Writ, or when it is distorted.”

(Longfellow 29.88-90)

Why does Beatrice condemn bad philosophy and bad theology? Because bad philosophy and bad theology lead to bad preaching.

Beatrice, of course, is strongly against bad preaching:

“In such wise that the lambs, who do not know,
 Come back from pasture fed upon the wind,
 And not to see the harm doth not excuse
 them.

Christ did not to his first disciples say,

‘Go forth, and to the world preach idle tales,’

But unto them a true foundation gave;”

(Longfellow 29.106-111)

This calls to mind what Jesus said to his company (Mark 16:15; King James Version):

15: And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world,
and preach the gospel to every creature.

**CHAPTER 30: “Canto 30: Mystic Empyrean — The
River of Light; The Mystic Rose”**

• Much of what Dante sees in the Mystic Empyrean is ineffable. What does that mean?

If something is ineffable, it cannot be described adequately in words. This is an important theme in Dante’s *Paradise*. Dante the poet writes,

“Vanquished do I confess me by this passage
More than by problem of his theme was ever
O’ercome the comic or the tragic poet;
For as the sun the sight that trembles most,
Even so the memory of that sweet smile
My mind depriveth of its very self.
From the first day that I beheld her face
In this life, to the moment of this look,
The sequence of my song has ne’er been
severed;
But now perforce this sequence must desist
From following her beauty with my verse,
As every artist at his uttermost.”

(Longfellow 30.22-33)

Dante is no longer able to describe Beatrice’s great beauty.

• Dante and Beatrice leave the material realm completely and enter the Mystic Empyrean. (The Mystic Empyrean

is the dwelling place of God. It can be described as the mind of God.)

Beatrice tells Dante that they have now entered the Empyrean:

With voice and gesture of a perfect leader

She recommenced: “We from the greatest
body

Have issued to the heaven that is pure light;

Light intellectual replete with love,

Love of true good replete with ecstasy,

Ecstasy that transcendeth every sweetness.”

(Longfellow 30.37-42)

Dante has to be prepared for this final vision. He is blinded — briefly — but when his vision returns, it is very strong. He can now see more clearly than ever before. Beatrice tells him,

“The Love that calms this heaven forever greets

all those who enter with such salutation,

so is the candle for Its flame prepared.”

No sooner had these brief, assuring words

entered my ears than I was full aware

my senses now were raised above their
powers;

the power of new sight lit up my eyes

so that no light, however bright it were,

would be too brilliant for my eyes to bear.

(Musa 30.52-60)

• What does Dante see in the Mystic Empyrean? Describe the River.

Dante sees a number of things in the Mystic Empyrean. He sees a river of light. The banks of the river have flowers. He sees sparks of light going back and forth between the river and the riverbanks.

However, more is to be seen here. Beatrice tells him that he has to drink the water of the river — with his eyes. That will allow him to see even more.

Dante does this, and he sees that the sparks of light are actually angels and the flowers are actually the souls of the Blessed in Paradise. The angels go back and forth from the souls and God. They bring graces from God to the souls, and they bring praises from the souls to God.

• What does Dante see in the Mystic Empyrean? Describe the Rose.

Dante describes the souls of the Blest as forming a Rose. This Rose has more than a thousand tiers; it is gigantic.

What Dante is seeing now is ultimate reality.

The Rose is almost completely filled with souls, although a few empty spaces remain for future saved souls. Beatrice says,

“Behold how vast the circuit of our city!

Behold our seats so filled to overflowing,

That here henceforward are few people wanting!”

(Longfellow 30.130-132)

• Write a brief character analysis of Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII. Who is he, historically?

One of the empty places in the Rose is reserved for Emperor Henry VII. Of course, in 1300, he is still alive; therefore, he is not in the Rose right now.

Henry VII became Holy Roman Emperor, but he went to Italy, something that the Pope did not like. As we know, there was often a power struggle going on over who would control Italy.

Dante fully supported the Holy Roman Emperor. In Dante's perfect government, the Holy Roman Emperor would control secular matters in Italy, while the Pope would control religious matters in Italy.

Beatrice's final words — which are full of righteous indignation — in *The Divine Comedy* are to say that Pope Clement V, who opposed Henry VII, the Holy Roman Emperor, will end up in the Inferno, in the circle devoted to punishing the Simoniacs:

“But long of God he will not be endured
 In holy office; he shall be thrust down
 Where Simon Magus is for his deserts,
 And make him of Alagna lower go!”

(Longfellow 30.145-148)

The “Alagnese” or “him of Alagna” is Pope Boniface VIII, who was born in the town of Alagna. Of course, we have already learned that Pope Boniface VIII ends up in the Inferno, punished forevermore in the circle of the Simoniacs.

Unfortunately, Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII died in 1313, as he was approaching Rome. Dante believed that Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII would have done good things for Italy had he lived.

• **Will Dante be among the saved?**

In Canto 30, Dante learns that he will be among the saved. This occurs in two places in this canto:

1) *Canto 30, lines 43-45*

Beatrice tells Dante about the Empyrean,

“Here shalt thou see the one host and the other
Of Paradise, and one in the same aspects
Which at the final judgment thou shalt see.”

(Longfellow 30.43-45)

The “twofold soldiery” (Musa 30.43) refers to the angels and to the Blest souls.

2) *Canto 30, lines 133-138*

Beatrice also refers to a future time when Dante shall be summoned “to this nuptial feast” (Musa 30.135):

“On that great throne whereon thine eyes are fixed
For the crown’s sake already placed upon it,
Before thou suppest at this wedding feast
Shall sit the soul (that is to be Augustus
On earth) of noble Henry, who shall come
To redress Italy ere she be ready.”

(Longfellow 30.133-138)

CHAPTER 31: “Canto 31: Mystic Empyrean — Saint Bernard”

• **Again, we have a change of guides. Write a brief character analysis of Saint Bernard. Who is he, historically?**

Again, we have a change of guides.

Dante looks at the Rose and at the Mystic Empyrean. He turns to Beatrice to talk to her, but she is no longer beside him:

One thing I meant, another answered me;

I thought I should see Beatrice, and saw

An Old Man habited like the glorious people.

(Longfellow 31.58-60)

The new guide is Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. He lived in the 12th century (1090 or 1091-1153), and he was a member of the Cistercian religious order.

Saint Bernard was a number of things that are important to Dante:

- 1) He was a contemplative.
- 2) He was a reformer. As a reformer, he wrote to the Pope. He advised the Pope to focus on spiritual things and to cease his focus on political things.
- 3) He was a preacher.
- 4) He was a poet.

Saint Bernard is Dante’s final guide.

One of the things that Saint Bernard did was to call for the Second Crusade. This is the Crusade in which Cacciaguida,

Dante's ancestor, died as a martyr. This Crusade was a failure.

Twenty-one years after his death, Bernard was canonized.

Saint Bernard helps Dante to see the beatific vision — the vision of the Trinity.

This is a definition of “beatific”:

“experiencing or bestowing celestial joy,”

Source: <wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn - Definition in context>.

• **Where has Beatrice gone?**

Beatrice is still present, although she is not beside Dante. Beatrice is seated among the saved souls in the Mystic Rose. Dante wonders where Beatrice is, and he asks Saint Bernard that. Saint Bernard tells him where she is.

Interestingly, the natural laws that we have to obey in the physical universe do not apply in the Empyrean. Despite Beatrice's great distance from him, Dante is able to see her clearly: “distance made no difference, for her image / came down to me unblurred by anything” (Musa 31.77-78).

Dante gives Beatrice the praise that is due to her:

“From bondage into freedom you led me
by all those paths, by using all those means
which were within the limits of your power.”

(Musa 31.85-87)

Beatrice responds by smiling at Dante, and then she looks again at God.

• **How important a guide is Saint Bernard?**

Saint Bernard really does not spend much time with Dante, acting as his guide, but he is a very important guide, nevertheless.

Each of the guides helps prepare Dante:

- Virgil gets Dante ready to be guided by Beatrice.
- Beatrice gets Dante ready to be guided by Saint Bernard.
- Saint Bernard gets Dante ready to see God.

• **What do Dante's various guides (Virgil, Beatrice, Saint Bernard) symbolize?**

We can look at each of Dante's three major guides — Virgil, Beatrice, and Saint Bernard — as symbols:

Virgil: The Symbol of the Light of Human Reason

Beatrice: The Symbol of the Light of Revelation

Saint Bernard: The Symbol of the Light of Mystical Contemplation. It is Saint Bernard who prepares Dante to see God more clearly. Only Mystical Contemplation can do that. Saint Bernard himself is said to have had a vision of God during his lifetime.

Saint Bernard begins acting as Dante's guide immediately, telling him to look up at Mary:

“Thou son of grace, this jocund life,” began he,
 “Will not be known to thee by keeping ever
 Thine eyes below here on the lowest place;
 But mark the circles to the most remote,
 Until thou shalt behold enthroned the Queen

To whom this realm is subject and devoted.”
(Longfellow 31.112-117)

CHAPTER 32: “Canto 32: Mystic Empyrean — Saint Bernard and the Saints in the Rose”

• Of which souls is the Rose composed?

Saint Bernard will get Dante ready to see God. He does that by having Dante study the Mystic Empyrean with all of its saved souls and good angels.

Saint Bernard points out a number of souls in the Rose to Dante. Mary, of course, is here, and Dante looked at her in Canto 31.

Ruth, an ancestor of David, is here. King David, of course, is also in the Rose. Saint Bernard refers to David as “the singer / who cried for his sin: *Miserere mei*” (Musa 32.10-12).

“*Miserere mei*” means “Have mercy on me.” These words appear in Psalm 50:1 (King James Version):

1: Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Of course, Dante thought that King David had written all of the Psalms.

“*Miserere*” is a word that appears in all three canticles of *The Divine Comedy*:

Inferno

In the *Inferno*, Canto 1, the first words that Dante speaks are “*Miserere mei*.” He says those words to Virgil:

And when I saw him standing in this wasteland,
 “Have pity on my soul,” I cried to him,
 “whichever you are, shade or living man!”

Testament souls such as Adam. These souls believed in the Christ Who was to come. Many, many Jews are in Paradise.

- The half of the Rose that is not yet completed is devoted to those who believed in the Christ Who had come. These souls are from New Testament times onward. This half of the Rose is nearly complete, indicating that the Day of Judgment is near.
- We have contrasts in the Rose: young and old, male and female, Old Testament figures and New Testament figures. We remember that the wisdom we talked about in the cantos set on the Sun involved complementarity. We have complementarity here in the Mystic Rose.
- Most of the souls look at God. The one exception is Saint Anne, who looks at Mary, her daughter, with love.

• What is it time for Dante to do?

Now it is time for Dante to see his final vision. He will see God the Trinity. He will see God, Who is Love.

Saint Bernard will pray to Mary that Dante be allowed to look at the Trinity. In Paradise, souls are very helpful. Saint Bernard's prayer will be answered positively. Dante will see God:

“But since the moments of thy vision fly,
 Here will we make full stop, as a good tailor
 Who makes the gown according to his cloth,
 And unto the first Love will turn our eyes,
 That looking upon Him thou penetrate

As far as possible through his effulgence.”
(Longfellow 32.139-144)

Actually, we have a trinity of paradoxes in these first two lines of Saint Bernard's prayer:

1. "Virgin Mother" (Musa 33.1)
2. "daughter of your son" (Musa 33.1)
3. "most humble, most exalted of all creatures" (Musa 33.2)

This is a definition of paradox:

In literature, the paradox is an anomalous juxtaposition of incongruous ideas for the sake of striking exposition or unexpected insight.

Source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox_\(literature\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox_(literature))

The language of paradox is not the language that we use in everyday life. Dante must use a new kind of language because of the things that he is trying to describe at the end of *The Divine Comedy*.

Dante is trying to describe the "ineffable" — something that cannot be described adequately in words. In other words, he is trying to eff the ineffable, and to do that, he has to use language that is not ordinary language.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux also tells Mary who Dante is, and in a brief six lines, we get the story of *The Divine Comedy* so far:

"Now doth this man, who from the lowest depth
 Of the universe as far as here has seen
 One after one the spiritual lives,
 Supplicate thee through grace for so much power
 That with his eyes he may uplift himself

Higher towards the uttermost salvation.”

(Longfellow 33.22-27)

• **For what does Saint Bernard ask in his prayer to Mary?**

Saint Bernard is asking Mary for a favor, but a favor for Dante, not for himself.

Saint Bernard prays that Dante be allowed to see God face to face.

In his prayer to Mary, Saint Bernard says that he burns to help Dante:

“And I, who never burned for my own seeing
 More than I do for his, all of my prayers
 Proffer to thee, and pray they come not short,
 That thou wouldst scatter from him every cloud
 Of his mortality so with thy prayers,
 That the Chief Pleasure be to him displayed.”

(Longfellow 33.28-33)

Saint Bernard also prays that Dante be protected when he returns to Earth as a living man:

“Still farther do I pray thee, Queen, who canst
 Whate’er thou wilt, that sound thou mayst
 preserve
 After so great a vision his affections.
 Let thy protection conquer human movements;
 See Beatrice and all the blessed ones

My prayers to second clasp their hands to thee!"

(Longfellow 33.34-39)

Here we see again just how helpful the souls in Paradise are.

The last time that Beatrice is referred to in *The Divine Comedy*, she is adding her prayer to that of Saint Bernard. Beatrice — and the other souls in Paradise — are praying to Mary that she allow him to see God face to face.

• Why is Dante the Poet unable to explain everything he sees in Canto 33?

Dante is now back on Earth writing *The Divine Comedy* and trying to remember what he saw in his final moments in Paradise, something that is difficult for him to do.

Two themes in this section of the last canto of *The Divine Comedy* are these:

1. The inadequacy of language.
2. The inadequacy of memory.

Both language and his memory fail Dante as he tries to describe the sight of God.

Dante the Poet writes:

One instant brings me more forgetfulness
 than five and twenty centuries brought the
 quest
 that stunned Neptune when he saw Argo's
 keel.

(Musa 33.94-96)

In one instant, Dante forgot very much of his vision. He forgot in that one instant more than the sea-god Neptune has forgotten in the 2,500 years since he saw the *Argo*, the first ship, which was captained by Jason.

The sight of the *Argo* was remarkable to Neptune, and the sight of God was remarkable to Dante.

• **How is Dante similar to Jason?**

Jason in the *Argo* was in quest of something remarkable — the Golden Fleece. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante has been in quest of something remarkable — the sight of God.

The ram with the Golden Fleece rescued a child: Phrixus, the son of Athamas and Nephele in southeastern Greece. Athamas had married Nephele, and she bore him two children: a son named Phrixus and a daughter named Helle. But Athamas ceased to love Nephele, and he married Ino. Nephele left. Ino was a cruel stepmother to Phrixus and Helle, and she plotted against them and wanted them to die. Nephele returned to rescue her children. She sent them a winged ram whose fleece was made of gold. Phrixus and Helle climbed on top of the ram, which flew them over the sea. Unfortunately, Helle fell off the ram into the sea, which thereafter was called the Hellespont in honor of her. The ram carried Phrixus from Greece to Colchis on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. Phrixus lived there in the palace of King Aetes, and he sacrificed the ram to the sea-god Poseidon. He skinned the ram and hung its Golden Fleece on a tree where a huge snake guarded it. This is the Golden Fleece that Jason and the heroes who sailed with him sought.

One of the things that Jason did was not just go in search of the Golden Fleece — he brought it back with him. Dante has also brought back something from his journey. Dante has brought back the knowledge that resulted in the creation of *The Divine Comedy*.

To create *The Divine Comedy*, of course, Dante needs the right language. This is something that he prays for:

O Light Supreme, that dost so far uplift thee
 From the conceits of mortals, to my mind
 Of what thou didst appear re-lend a little,
 And make my tongue of so great puissance,
 That but a single sparkle of thy glory
 It may bequeath unto the future people;
 For by returning to my memory somewhat,
 And by a little sounding in these verses,
 More of thy victory shall be conceived!

(Longfellow 33.67-75)

Like Saint Bernard, Dante prays for something that will benefit someone other than himself. *The Divine Comedy* will benefit the many people who will read it seriously.

• **What is Dante’s job when he returns to his Earthly existence?**

What does Dante see when he experiences God’s presence?
 He writes,

I saw how it contains within its depths
 all things bound in a single book by love
 of which creation is the scattered leaves:

(Musa 33.85-87)

“All things” refers to the universe.

Dante's job back on Earth is to write *The Divine Comedy*. In doing so, he will be describing all of the afterlife.

• **Can Dante adequately describe what he saw?**

Again, Dante talks about the inadequacy of his words to describe ultimate reality:

Shorter henceforward will my language fall
 Of what I yet remember, than an infant's
 Who still his tongue doth moisten at the
 breast.

(Longfellow 33.106-108)

What is Dante's opinion of the words he uses to describe ultimate reality? They are like baby-talk.

The Divine Comedy is one of the greatest poems ever written. It is over 14,000 lines long. Yet Dante says that the part of it that describes his vision of God is baby-talk!

• **When we are in Paradise, we will experience God. That experience will never grow boring because God is infinite.**

Paradise will not be boring. When saved souls are in Paradise, they will experience God. That experience will never grow boring:

Not that within the Living Light there was
 more than the sole aspect of the Divine
 which always is what It has always been.
 yet as I learned to see more, and the power
 of vision grew in me, that single aspect
 as I changed, seemed to me to change Itself.

(Musa 33.109-114)

Not only is God infinite, but also we continue to grow in Paradise. We grow more and more able to experience God.

Of course, God is perfect, and God never changes, but our experience of God can change.

Similarly, our experience of great works of literature such as *The Divine Comedy* can change, even though the words of *The Divine Comedy* remain the same. Students often prefer the *Inferno*, perhaps because they are sinning. Middle-aged adults such as myself often prefer the *Purgatory*, perhaps because we are regretting our sins. Religious people such as nuns and priests often prefer the *Paradise*, perhaps because they are readying themselves to see God.

Of course, *The Divine Comedy* is not scripture, although I am sure that God would approve of *The Divine Comedy*.

Here Dante attempts to describe his vision, even though he says that his words are like baby-talk:

Within Its depthless clarity of substance

I saw the Great Light shine into three circles
in three clear colors bound in one same space;

the first seemed to reflect the next like rainbow

on rainbow, and the third was like a flame
equally breathed forth by the other two.

(Musa 33.115-120)

Here Dante attempts to describe his vision of the Trinity. God is Three, and yet God is One. God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and together they are One God.

In addition, Dante attempts to describe his vision of the incarnation of Christ. In the Incarnation, Christ assumed bodily form.

Of course, Dante is well aware that his words are inadequate to describe what he saw:

O how all speech is feeble and falls short
 Of my conceit, and this to what I saw
 Is such, 'tis not enough to call it little!

O Light Eterne, sole in thyself that dwellest,
 Sole knowest thyself, and, known unto
 thyself
 And knowing, lovest and smilest on thyself!

That circulation, which being thus conceived
 Appeared in thee as a reflected light,
 When somewhat contemplated by mine eyes,
 Within itself, of its own very colour
 Seemed to me painted with our effigy,
 Wherefore my sight was all absorbed therein.

(Longfellow 33.121-132)

Christ in His incarnation was fully human and fully divine. This is what Dante sees when he sees “man’s very image” (Musa 33.131) when he looks at the Trinity.

Of course, the Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ are Mysteries: These are things that human reason cannot comprehend. Dante writes,

As the geometrician, who endeavours

To square the circle, and discovers not,
 By taking thought, the principle he wants,
 Even such was I at that new apparition;
 I wished to see how the image to the circle
 Conformed itself, and how it there finds
 place;

(Longfellow 33.133-138)

Squaring the circle is a traditional Greek mathematical problem. This information comes from Wikipedia:

Squaring the circle is a problem proposed by ancient geometers. It is the challenge to construct a square with the same area as a given circle by using only a finite number of steps with compass and straightedge. More abstractly and more precisely, it may be taken to ask whether specified axioms of Euclidean geometry concerning the existence of lines and circles entail the existence of such a square.

In 1882, the task was proven to be impossible, as a consequence of the Lindemann–Weierstrass theorem which proves that π [...] is a transcendental, rather than algebraic irrational number; that is, it is not the root of any polynomial with rational coefficients. It had been known for some decades before then that if π were transcendental then the construction would be impossible, but that π is transcendental was not proven until 1882. Approximate squaring to any given non-perfect accuracy, on the other hand, is possible in a finite number of steps, as a consequence of the fact that there are rational numbers arbitrarily close to π .

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squaring_the_circle

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Both the square and the circle are symbols. The circle is a symbol for the infinite, and the square is a circle for the human.

Dante is unable to understand what he sees on his own, but he receives divine help:

But my own wings were not enough for this,
 Had it not been that then my mind there
 smote
 A flash of lightning, wherein came its wish.

(Longfellow 33.139-141)

Dante ends his poem with these words:

Here vigour failed the lofty fantasy:
 But now was turning my desire and will,
 Even as a wheel that equally is moved,
 The Love which moves the sun and the other stars.

(Longfellow 33.142-145)

Dante has had a mystical, ineffable experience, but he is able to say about his experience that God is Love and God is “the Love that moves the sun and the other stars” (Musa 33.144).

All three canticles end with the word “stars.” The *Paradise* ends with Dante’s vision of God. This is the best place to end *The Divine Comedy*.

This vision of God gives Dante the authority to write *The Divine Comedy*. Without this vision of God, Dante would probably not be able to write *The Divine Comedy*.

• **When you finish reading *The Divine Comedy*, you are now ready to read *The Divine Comedy*.**

Dante scholars William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman say this about Dante's *Divine Comedy*, "[w]hen you finish reading *The Divine Comedy*, you are now ready to read *The Divine Comedy*" (*Dante's Divine Comedy, Part 2*, p. 194).

What they mean by that is something that is true of all great books. Each time you read a great book, you can learn more from it. This is very true of *The Divine Comedy*. For example, you have to read all of *The Divine Comedy* to understand it. Anyone who reads only Dante's *Inferno* will have an incomplete picture of the entire *Divine Comedy*. For example, if you read only Dante's *Inferno*, you have only an incomplete picture of Dante's treatment of lust, which he addresses in the *Inferno*, but also in the *Purgatory* and the *Paradise*.

Having been through *The Divine Comedy*, you are now ready to read it again. This time when you read the *Inferno*, you will know that you are getting only part of the story. You will be able to read the *Inferno* with knowledge of what the *Purgatory* and the *Paradise* say. You will be able to re-read *The Divine Comedy* and continue to make connections among the three canticles.

You have used this discussion guide as a guide to the epic poem, and approaching a major work of literature such as *The Divine Comedy* with a guide can be a good idea, but now you can approach the epic poem on your own.

William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman have had interesting experiences through the years of seeing how that

has, in fact, taken place with some of Dante's readers (their students). Cook and Herzman taught the *Divine Comedy* inside a maximum-security prison, at Attica Correctional Facility. This poem had a great impact on the prisoners who had read it, and it had the greatest impact on prisoners who were not Christian, but who instead were Muslims. These are people who were able to make *The Divine Comedy* an important part of their experience.

• Your favorite part of *The Divine Comedy* depends on who you are. Your favorite part can change over time.

Re-reading *The Divine Comedy* at various points in your life can be rewarding because you can bring your own experiences to *The Divine Comedy*. As I have mentioned before, young people tend to respond especially to the *Inferno*, and middle-aged people (and inmates) tend to respond especially to the *Purgatory*. And religious people tend to respond especially to the *Paradise*.

• If you read *The Divine Comedy* once, have you really read it?

The Divine Comedy is one of those books that repay re-readings.

Poet T.S. Eliot once met novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald. Their hostess showed Mr. Eliot a copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and said that she had read it. Mr. Eliot corrected her: "You have begun to read it."

Appendix A: Bibliography

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Appendix B: About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine’s brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka “The Joker,” decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn’t been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don’t often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for “sounds like” and “two words,” then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn’t let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor’s degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a Master of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy. Yes, I have my MAMA degree.

Currently, and for a long time to come (I eat fruits and veggies), I am spending my retirement writing books such as *Nadia Comaneci: Perfect 10*, *The Funniest People in Dance*, *Homer’s Iliad: A Retelling in Prose*, and *William Shakespeare’s Othello: A Retelling in Prose*.

By the way, my sister Brenda Kennedy writes romances such as *A New Beginning* and *Shattered Dreams*.

Appendix C: Some Books by David Bruce

Retellings of a Classic Work of Literature

Ben Jonson's The Alchemist: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Case is Altered: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Catiline's Conspiracy: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Devil is an Ass: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Epicene: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humor: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humor: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Fountain of Self-Love, or Cynthia's Revels: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The New Inn: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Staple of News: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Volpone, or the Fox: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Complete Plays: Retellings

Christopher Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Retellings of the 1604 A-Text and of the 1616 B-Text

Christopher Marlowe's Edward II: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's The Rich Jew of Malta: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Parts 1 and 2: Retellings

Dante's Divine Comedy: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Inferno: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Purgatory: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Paradise: A Retelling in Prose

The Famous Victories of Henry V: A Retelling

From the Iliad to the Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose of Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica

George Peele: Five Plays Retold in Modern English

George Peele's The Arraignment of Paris: A Retelling

George Peele's The Battle of Alcazar: A Retelling

George Peele's David and Bathsheba, and the Tragedy of Absalom: A Retelling

George Peele's Edward I: A Retelling

George Peele's The Old Wives' Tale: A Retelling

George-A-Greene, The Pinner of Wakefield: A Retelling

The History of King Leir: A Retelling

Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose

Homer's Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose

Jason and the Argonauts: A Retelling in Prose of Apollonius of Rhodes' Argonautica

The Jests of George Peele: A Retelling

John Ford: Eight Plays Translated into Modern English

John Ford's The Broken Heart: A Retelling

John Ford's The Fancies, Chaste and Noble: A Retelling

John Ford's The Lady's Trial: A Retelling

John Ford's The Lover's Melancholy: A Retelling

John Ford's Love's Sacrifice: A Retelling

John Ford's Perkin Warbeck: A Retelling

John Ford's The Queen: A Retelling

John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Retelling

- John Webster's The White Devil: A Retelling*
- King Edward III: A Retelling*
- The Merry Devil of Edmonton: A Retelling*
- Robert Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay: A Retelling*
- The Taming of a Shrew: A Retelling*
- Tarlton's Jests: A Retelling*
- The Trojan War and Its Aftermath: Four Ancient Epic Poems*
- Virgil's Aeneid: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 5 Late Romances: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 10 Histories: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 11 Tragedies: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 12 Comedies: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 38 Plays: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV, aka Henry IV, Part 1: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 2 Henry IV, aka Henry IV, Part 2: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 1 Henry VI, aka Henry VI, Part 1: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 2 Henry VI, aka Henry VI, Part 2: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 3 Henry VI, aka Henry VI, Part 3: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's All's Well that Ends Well: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's As You Like It: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Coriolanus: A Retelling in Prose*

- William Shakespeare's Cymbeline: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Hamlet: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Henry V: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Henry VIII: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's King John: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's King Lear: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Love's Labor's Lost: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Macbeth: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Othello: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Pericles, Prince of Tyre: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Richard II: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Richard III: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Tempest: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Timon of Athens: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida: A Retelling in Prose*

William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Two Noble Kinsmen: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale: A Retelling in Prose

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Nadia Comaneci: Perfect Ten

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How to Manage Your Money: A Guide for the Non-Rich

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Seize the Day: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

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Dante's Paradise: A Discussion Guide

Dante's Purgatory: A Discussion Guide

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William Sleator's Oddballs: A Discussion Guide

