
FROM THE DARK WOOD TO THE BEATIFIC VISION: JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT WITH DANTE

Part 5: “.. in His will is our peace”



St Columba's, Culloden
Wednesday 21 March 2018

Paradiso

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; (*Para.* 1: 4-6)

“Transhumanize”—it cannot be explained
per verba, so let this example serve
until God’s grace grants the experience. (*Para.* 1: 70-72)

- Dante uses light, motion, music, and literary techniques such as similes and metaphors, to describe the indescribable.

The Structure of Paradise

| HEAVENS | CATEGORIES AND EVENTS | FIGURES |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Moon | Breakers of Vows | Piccarda Donati |
| 2. Mercury | Those given to Fame and Glory | Justinian |
| 3. Venus | Lovers | Charles Martel |
| 4. Sun | Theologians (Lovers of Wisdom) | Thomas Aquinas; Bonaventure; Solomon |
| 5. Mars | Crusaders | Cacciaguida |
| 6. Jupiter | The Eagle; Lovers of Justice | Trajan; Ripheus; Constantine |
| 7. Saturn | Contemplatives | Peter Damian |
| 8. Fixed Stars | Triumph of Christ; Dante’s examination on Faith, Hope, and Love | Saints Peter, James, and John, Mary, Adam |
| 9. Primum Mobile or Crystalline Heaven | God and the Angels as lights around a dazzling point | |
| 10. Empyrean | The Blessed in the Heavenly Rose; the Beatific Vision | St Bernard |

- **First Heaven (The Moon) – Breakers of Vows: Piccarda Donati**

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. ”

Then it was clear to me that every where
of Heaven is Paradise, though there the light
of Grace Supreme does not shine equally. (*Para.* 3: 85-90)

- **Second Heaven (Mercury) – Lovers of Fame and Glory: Justinian**
- Why God chose to redeem humanity by becoming man: satisfaction theory of atonement – St Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo?* (1094-98)

- **Fourth Heaven (Sun) – The Theologians**
- St Thomas Aquinas praises the life of St Francis:

One of the two shone with seraphic love,
the other through his wisdom was on earth
a splendour of cherubic radiance. (*Para.* 11: 28-39)

- .. but criticises the contemporary corruption of his own Dominicans:

But his own flock is growing greedy now
for richer food, and in their hungry search
they stray to alien pastures carelessly; (*Para.* 11: 124-126)

- St Bonaventure praises the life of St Dominic:

Dominic he was named. I see in him
the husbandman, the one chosen by Christ
to help Him in the garden of His Church. (*Para.* 12: 70-72)

- .. but criticises the contemporary corruption of his own Franciscans:

But now the track made by the topmost part
of that great wheel's circumference is gone,
and there is only mould where once was crust.
(*Para.* 12: 112-114)

- This is an example of harmony, balance, and order in Paradise.

- **Fifth Heaven (Mars) - Crusaders: Cacciaguida (Dante's ancestor).**
- Cacciaguida compares the past glories of Florence with the present state of moral decay:

"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 woman 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 yet come
to show to what use bedrooms can be put." (*Para. 15: 97-108*)

- He then predicts Dante's exile and future sufferings:

"You shall be forced to leave behind those things
you love most dearly, and this is the first
arrow the bow of your exile will shoot.

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.

But what will weigh you down the most will be
the despicable, senseless company
whom you shall have to bear in that sad vale;

and all ungrateful, all completely mad
and vicious, they shall turn on you, but soon
their cheeks, not yours, will have to blush from shame."
(*Para. 17: 55-66*)