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

Part 6: “.. the Love that moves the sun and the other stars”



St Columba's, Culloden
Wednesday 28 March 2018

Paradiso: Dante's Condemnation of the Church

Seventh Heaven: Saturn (contemplatives)

- St. Peter Damian (1007-1072) – reforming Benedictine monk and cardinal.

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!
Heaven's Patience, what you must endure!" (*Para.* 21: 130-135)

- St. Benedict (480-547) – monastic orders have relaxed their original spiritual discipline.

The walls that used to be our abbey cells
are dens for beasts now, and the cowls monks wear are just so
many sacks of rotting meal.

The greed of usury, however gross,
offends God less than does that holy fruit
which drives the hungry hearts of monks insane;

for what the Church has in its keeping should
be for the poor who ask it in God's name,
not for the families of monks—or worse. (*Para.* 22: 76-84)

Sphere of Fixed Stars: St. Peter's Invective

and I heard: "Do not marvel at my change
of colour, for you are about to see
all of these souls change colour as I speak.

He who on earth usurps that place of mine,
that place of mine, that place of mine which now
stands vacant in the eyes of Christ, God's Son,

has turned my sepulchre into a sewer of blood and filth, at which the Evil One who fell from here takes great delight down there. ” (*Para. 27: 19-27*)

- Compare this with the Ninth Station of the 2005 Via Crucis, written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.
- Dante’s criticism of the Church is not borne out of hate, but out of love.

Spiritual Preparation: Examination in the Three Theological Virtues

- St. Peter examines him on FAITH; St. James on HOPE; St. John on LOVE.
- Heaven IS love.

Tenth Heaven: The Empyrean – The Celestial Rose

- Dante sees a river of light flowing between two banks laden with flowers and an exchange of countless sparks between the river and the flowers.
- What had appeared to be flowers are the souls of the Blessed, seated in tiers of petals that grow in circumference the higher they rise, opening up like an immense rose.

And as a hillside rich in grass and flowers
looks down into a lake as if it were
admiring the reflection of its wealth,

so, mirrored, tier on tier, within that light,
more than a thousand were reflected there,
I saw all those of us who won return.

And if the lowest tier alone can hold
so great a brilliance, then how vast the space
of this Rose to its outer petals’ reach! (*Para. 30: 109-117*)

- Inspiration: the North Rose Window of Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris
- Beatrice takes her place in the Celestial Rose, and is replaced as guide by St. Bernard.

- Structure and order in the Celestial Rose:

Within the vastness of this great domain
no particle of chance can find a place —
no more than sorrow, thirst, or hunger can —

for all that you see here has been ordained
by the eternal law with such precision
that ring and finger are a perfect fit.
(*Para. 32: 55-60*)

- The Beatific Vision of the Blessed Trinity:

Within Its depthless clarity of substance
I saw the Great Light shine into three circles
in three clear colours 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.

How my weak words fall short of my conception,
which is itself so far from what I saw
that “weak” is much too weak a word to use! (*Para. 33: 115-123*)

O Light Eternal fixed in Self alone,
known only to Yourself, and knowing Self,
You love and glow, knowing and being known!

That circling which, as I conceived it, shone
in You as Your own first reflected light
when I had looked deep into It a while,

seemed in Itself and in Its own Self-colour
to be depicted with man’s very image.
My eyes were totally absorbed in It. (*Para. 33: 124-132*)