

- in *The Divine Comedy: Inferno* XIX.82 f., *Purgatorio* XXXII.148 f., *Paradiso* XVII.82, XXVII.58-9.
 145-8 Clement V died in 1314, a year after Henry's death. Dante predicts his fate to be damnation in Hell, in the third valley of Malebolge, amongst the simoniacal popes (see *Inferno* XIX.82 f. and note).
 147 Simon Magus: see note to *Inferno* XIX.1.
 148 "the Anagni man": Boniface VIII, pope 1294-1303. See *Inferno* XIX.52-7 and note, *Purgatorio* XX.85-90 and note.

PARADISO XXXI

- Dante contemplates the angels and the elect in the Empyrean, the sempiternal rose of Paradise. Beatrice returns to her place amongst the elect, leaving Dante (who addresses to her a final encomium) in the care of St Bernard of Clairvaux. The saint and mystic points out to Dante the throne in Paradise of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*
- 2 "The holy army": the glorified souls of those elected and justified by God through faith in Jesus Christ, his Church in Triumph and mystical spouse (see Ephesians 5.22 f.).
 4 "the other army": that of the angels.
 13 For the aspects of angels described here by Dante, see Ezekiel 1.13, Matthew 28.3.
 26 "dispensations": Testaments. The souls are those of believers of the Judaic and Christian faiths: those born before Christ under the old dispensation of the Law of God, and those born after Christ under the new dispensation of the Love of God.
 28 "threefold light": the glory of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 31-2 i.e. from the north, in which horizon the constellations of the Great and Little Bear belong. For the story of Helice and Arcas, see note to *Purgatorio* XXV.131-2.
 35 "the Lateran": the papal palace in Rome in Dante's time, formerly a residence of the Emperors of Rome until the time of Constantine the Great (see note to *Paradiso* VI.1-3).
 39 "From Florence": this is Dante's last remark about his native city, for whose past virtues and achievements he entertained a lasting love (see *Paradiso* XV), but for whose current materialism, political opportunism and arrogance he felt deep revulsion (see *Paradiso* XVI and notes; *Inferno* XXVI.1 f., and elsewhere).
 49 "charity": Christian love (*caritas*), the greatest of the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity. See 1 Corinthians 13.1-13.

- 59 "an old man": St Bernard of Clairvaux (l. 102), 1091-1153, of the Cistercian Order of monks. As reformer, preacher and moving spirit of the Second Crusade, his practical influence in Church affairs of the twelfth century was considerable, but he was also a writer of devotional works of a mystical character, and ardently devoted to the cult of the Virgin Mary. Dante refers to one of his important mystical works, the *De Consideratione*, in *Letters* X.80.
 72 Again Dante emphasises Beatrice's main allegorical role as she "who lights the intellect to truth" (*Purgatorio* VI.45), i.e. Wisdom, 'the flawless mirror of the active power of God' (Wisdom of Solomon 7.26).
 81 Beatrice descended from Paradise into the Limbo of Hell in order to solicit Virgil's help as Dante's guide through Hell and Purgatory (see *Inferno* II.52 f.).
 85-6 "from servitude/To liberty": i.e. from the slavery of sin to the freedom of God's service (see Romans 6.20-23), or from the slavery of the Law to the freedom of Love (Galatians 3.13, 23). Dante's claims for Beatrice's extraordinary "power and . . . goodness" (l. 84) may well seem to exceed the bounds of Christian orthodoxy (see also l. 89). But Dante's emphasis is carefully placed, in the body of *The Divine Comedy*, on her intermediary role, in both the literal and allegorical senses. She is the one who led Dante to God by virtue of her beauty and goodness (*Purgatorio* XXXI.22-4), a reflection (l. 72) of those attributes of God (and therefore, she is a channel not a source of grace; cf. l. 83). For the reflexive or intermediary quality of her allegorical sense, see note to l. 72 above and note to *Purgatorio* XXVIII.40.
 93 "the eternal fountain": God (see Psalms 36.8-9, esp. v. 9: 'for with thee is the fountain of life').
 95 "the path": i.e. the path towards beatitude, which is the direct vision of God (the 'beatific vision'), the path upon which, unconsciously, Dante set his feet in 1274 when he saw Beatrice (the 'bringer of blessing') for the first time (see *Vita Nuova* II).
 100 "the queen of Heaven": the Virgin Mary.
 104 "our Veronica": the alleged image of Christ left on the towel which had been used by St Veronica to wipe his face on the way to his crucifixion. It was displayed in St Peter's, Rome, on 8 March.
 118 "I raised my eyes": Dante with this brief phrasing clearly had

- in mind here Psalms 121.1: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.' The process of Dante's rescue had begun with the concern of the Virgin Mary ('a gentle lady in heaven', *Inferno* II.94).
- 124-5 "the chariot/Which Phaeton drove": the sun (see note to *Inferno* XVII.107-8).
- 127 "oriflamme": the red and gold standard of the kings of France, carried in battle from 1152, and last used at Agincourt (1415).
- 132 Each angel was accredited with a different species.

PARADISO XXXII

St Bernard identifies for Dante the elect from those born before and after Christ who, redeemed, are seated in glory in the rose-shaped court of the Empyrean, true Paradise, and explains to him the presence there of unbaptised children.

- 1 For St Bernard, see note to *Paradiso* XXXI.59.
- 4 "The wound": that of Original Sin, caused by Adam's disobedience to the law of God, an act initiated by Eve although completed, ratified and transmitted by Adam (see Genesis 3.1-6, and note to *Purgatorio* XXIX.24). Cf. 'It was through one man [Adam] that sin entered the world, and through sin, death . . . through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners' (Romans 5.12, 19). The wound, Aquinas specifies, is in man's nature, in which the powers of the soul have since Adam's fault been 'deprived of their proper order whereby they are naturally directed to virtue' (see *Summa Theologiae* II, q. 85, art. 3, resp.). The Virgin Mary's obedience to God's will in bearing Christ, whose obedience to his Father's will led to the atonement and redemption of man, "closed up and anointed" that wound.
- 8-12 Rachel: see note to *Purgatorio* XXVII.97; Beatrice: see *Paradiso* XXXI.58-93; Sarah: Abraham's wife, the mother of Isaac; Rebecca: Isaac's wife, mother of Esau and Jacob; Judith: Jewish heroine of the time of Nebuchadnezzar, in the Apocryphal book of Judith; "the woman": Ruth, grandmother of King David, "that singer". David's "fault" was sending his general Uriah to his death, in order to possess his wife Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12).
- 29 "the lady of heaven": the Virgin Mary.
- 31 "the great John": St John the Baptist, cousin and herald of

Jesus Christ, the prophet of the Judean desert (Matthew 3.1 f.), who was summarily executed by Herod on the whim of his niece Salome (Matthew 14.3-12) some two years before Christ's crucifixion. St John thus remained two years "in hell" (Limbo; the first circle in Dante's *Inferno*) before Christ's death, his Harrowing of Hell, and his raising of the prophets and patriarchs to Paradise.

- 34 Francis: St Francis of Assisi (see *Paradiso* XI.28 f. and notes). Benedict: see *Paradiso* XXII.31 f. and note. Augustine: St Augustine (354-430), mystic and scholar, whose works on the Holy Trinity, free will, and the soul form the foundation of Christian theology. In spite of St Augustine's intellectual and spiritual stature, Dante accords him only brief recognition in *The Divine Comedy* (see *Paradiso* X.120).
- 49 f. Dante's perplexity arises from the fact that some children in the tiers of Paradise occupy higher seats than others. He will learn by what follows that their differing elevation or beatitude is the result not of merit but of their differing capacity for grace, to which they are predestined (II.65-6).
- 53-4 Chance is embraced by the Providence of God and therefore has no real significance; "sadness or thirst or hunger": see Revelation 7.13-17.
- 68 "those twins": Jacob and Esau, twin sons of Rebecca and Isaac (see Genesis 25.21 f.). Of the two, God chose and favoured Jacob in his providential purpose, rejecting Esau.
- 72 The metaphor might be construed: 'Shall depend on the capacity for grace with which each has been providentially endowed'.
- 76 "In the earliest centuries": i.e. from the time of Adam to Abraham.
- 80 i.e. from the time of Abraham, with whom circumcision was instituted as a profession of faith. Circumcision was not considered by Aquinas, however, as 'the perfection of salvation'.
- 84 "down below": in Limbo (the first circle of Dante's Hell; see note to *Inferno* IV.24).
- 85 "the face": that of the Virgin Mary.
- 89 "those holy intelligences": the angels, whose immaterial 'form' is pure mind; but Dante seems to allow them a transient body.
- 94-5 The angel Gabriel is "that love". See AV Luke 1.28: 'Hail [Mary] thou that art highly favoured.'
- 97 "answer": this would come in the form of the completion of

- Gabriel's salutation at the Annunciation, 'The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women.'
- 121 "He": Adam (see note to l. 4 above and *Paradiso* XXVI.82 f.).
- 124-6 "that ancient father": St Peter. See Matthew 16.18-19.
- 127-9 St John the Evangelist, to whom was attributed the authorship of Revelation, which prophesies the calamities which the early Church ("that lovely spouse") suffered.
- 131 "the leader": Moses, who led the tribes of Israel through the wilderness to within sight of the Promised Land (see Old Testament, Exodus to Deuteronomy).
- 133 Anna: the mother of the Virgin Mary.
- 137 Lucy: St Lucy sits opposite Adam ("paterfamilias"). For her role in Dante's journey of salvation, see *Inferno* II.97 f. and note, *Purgatorio* IX.52 f., and ib. note to l. 20 f.
- 139 "the time of your vision": Dante everywhere insists that his experience in the Afterlife was a journey, not merely a dream or mystical vision as such. St Paul (not Isaiah, Ezekiel or St John of Revelation) is his illustrious predecessor and model in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. His experience of Paradise is of a journey in which he is "heavy with mortality", as St Peter remarks to Dante (*Paradiso* XXVII.64); and even in the Empyrean, essential Paradise beyond space and time, Dante claims he was actually present: "I have been in the heaven which takes most of his [God's] light" (*Paradiso* I.4). St Bernard's words here to Dante refer therefore not to the journey but to sight, and to the limited time that mortal eyes can bear the retulgence of the courts of heaven, where the souls of the elect appear to him in their glorified bodies and where the light of God's glory is everywhere apparent.
- 142 "the primal love": God.
- 148 "Grace from her": from the Virgin Mary.

PARADISO XXXIII

St Bernard's invocation to the Virgin Mary. Dante's vision of God.

1-39 St Bernard's prayer to the Virgin, on which Chaucer freely based the 'Invocacio ad Mariam' in the Prologue of the *Second Nun's Tale*, is itself an effortless synthesis of Marian *topoi* bearing traces and reflections of biblical, patristic, mystical and liturgical writing. Motivated nevertheless by something of the reverence and ardour of Dante's early love poetry in praise of Beatrice, the prayer carefully places her (it is the last mention

of Beatrice) in the proper perspective of orthodoxy, and hence in the proper order of Dante's affections (l. 38). See note to *Paradiso* XXXI.85-6.

48 Following Dante's choice of words (*finii*), the translator properly uses "finished" here in the old sense of 'perfected' (see AV Hebrews 12.2: 'Jesus the author and finisher of our faith').

54 The "profound light" of God is the 'true light' (AV John 1.9) of understanding, love and power, which is the source of the divine spark in mankind ('the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world', ib.) and by which all human activity and aspiration is to be judged ('in thy light shall we see light', AV Psalms 36.9).

61 "vision": see note to *Paradiso* XXXII.139.

65 The Sibyl of Cumae (Cumae, near Naples) was one of the prophetesses of the cult of Apollo, whose prophecies were written on the leaves of trees, to be scattered inexorably by the wind (Virgil, *Aeneid* III.441 f.).

76-8 Divine light is unlike intense natural light, from which the eye must turn in order to recover. For Aquinas, divine light must lend power to the inner eye of the contemplative to bear it (*Contra Gentiles* III.54). Cf. ll. 112-13.

85 f. Dante's vision of God is a remarkable *tour de force* of poetry, perhaps unequalled in any literature. The subject is properly speaking inexpressible, since the experience is ineffable ('unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter', St Paul in AV 2 Corinthians 12.4). Dante's antecedents in apocalyptic and mystical literature (Isaiah, Ezekiel, St Paul, St John, Richard of St Victor, St Bernard, St Bonaventure) resort perhaps more confidently to the requisite analogies than Dante himself, whose approach is conditioned in part by an awareness of the philosophical difficulties inherent in the unique experience. But out of the difficulties arises magnificent poetry, shot through with pathos, since even his powers must logically be unequal to the challenge. For pure understanding, such as Dante begins here to experience in the Beatific Vision, does not require for its acquisition the intermediary of the organic mind (*fantasia*) with its 'material phantasms' (cf. *Convivio* III.IV.9), hence recall must operate in a void, and fail. The point at which the canto ends is the point at which "high imagination" (*alta fantasia*, l. 142) is starved of material analogues. Dante's vision is perfected in three ascending stages, moving from a perception

- of the "light" of love which binds the "leaves" of material creation (phenomena represented in scholastic terms as "substances", "accidents" and their mutual relationships) into one unifying principle (a "single volume", l. 86), to a yet deeper vision of the triadic nature of the Godhead (l. 115 f., "three circles/Of three colours"), and finally (l. 127 f.) to a perception within the Trinity of the human contours of the Son of God. Yet even here the philosopher in Dante is not fully appeased, for there remains the deep intellectual problem of the principle that relates the Creator to humanity in the Incarnate Person of the Son: it is a mystery that lies deepest of all, and is revealed to Dante in a properly ineffable moment of illumination (l. 137 f.). See Dante, *Letters* X.28, to Can Grande.
- 88 Aristotelian terms employed in scholastic philosophy: *substances*, things in themselves possessing independent existence; *accidents*, the inherent, differentiating qualities of things.
- 91 "form": a scholastic term, signifying the essential character of a thing.
- 93 The soul is an intellectual entity, finding its fulfillment ("gladness") in perfect knowledge of the Truth, which is the Wisdom, the Love and Power of God.
- 94-6 Normally the memory fails through the passing of time, but Dante's memory here fails instantaneously because of the unmediated fusion of his understanding with infinite reality (see note to l. 85 f. above). Lines which delighted T. S. Eliot ('it is the real, right thing, the power of establishing relation between beauty of the most diverse sorts: it is the utmost power of the poet', *Dante*, 1929), they contain an intriguing parallelism of roles, since Dante and a god, Neptune, are linked by their marvelling at something beyond their comprehension; the former at the majesty and mystery of the Godhead, the latter at the ingenuity and presumption of man in the invention of a ship.
- 96 Neptune: the sea god. The *Argo* carried Jason and his companions, the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece at Colchis at a date precisely computed by medieval historians. See *Paradiso* II.16 f. and note, *Inferno* XVIII.83 f. and note.
- 103-5 cf. Aquinas: 'But the sight of the Divine Essence fills the entire human soul with Its good . . . Therefore it is clear that the soul so beatified cannot of its own will forgo its beatitude' (*Summa Theologica* I.II, q. 5, art. 4, resp.).
- 106-11 As Dante's perception sharpens so as to desecry the Trinity of the Godhead, he insists firstly on the inevitable puerility of his efforts to match words to his experience, and secondly stresses the notion of the Unity of the Godhead as of equal importance to that of His triadic being ('Three Persons in One God': Nicene Creed).
- 116-20 God the Son is represented as a reflection of God the Father ('Light from Light, Very God of Very God, begotten not made, being of one Substance with the Father', Nicene Creed), the Holy Spirit is the flame that is "breathed equally from both" (cf. the Pentecostal appearance of the Holy Spirit as 'tongues like flames of fire', Acts 2.3).
- 124-6 Marvellously synthesised into poetry, this tercet is based on several theological propositions: 'God is light' (1 John 1.5); 'As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father' (AV John 10.15); and the related propositions that God the Father has entire knowledge of Himself, God the Son who shares this knowledge is understood alone by Him, and God the Holy Spirit, as knowing and known, reflects love of, and joy in, this fullness of knowledge.
- 131 The human profile of the Godhead as God the Son Incarnate.
- 133-5 "To square the circle" is the mathematically impossible task of discovering the formula that exactly relates the side of a square to the diameter of a circle of equal area.
- 143-5 Dante's soul, replete with the knowledge and love afforded by a momentary revelation of the deepest mysteries of God, has achieved total freedom to be and enjoy what is its true nature and inheritance. In harmony with the spheres, which respond fully and freely to God's loving order, Dante's soul is one of balanced forces: desire and will are no longer at variance, as Dante wills what he most deeply desires, and desires what his soul most deeply desires.