

The Humanistic Tradition

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him “Francesco.” The son of a wealthy Italian cloth merchant, Francis renounced a life of luxury and dedicated himself to preaching and serving the poor. In imitation of the apostles, he practiced absolute poverty and begged for his food and lodging as he traveled from town to town. Unlike Saint Benedict (see chapter 9) and other cloistered followers of Christ, Francis chose to evangelize among the citizens of the rapidly rising Italian city-states. His mendicant (begging) lifestyle made him an icon of humility; and his attention to the poor and the sickly revived the compassionate ideals of Early Christianity and of Jesus himself. Some of the legends written after the death of Francis reported that the body of the saint bore stigmata, the marks of crucifixion. Others described Francis as a missionary to all of God’s creation, hence the popular depiction of the saint sermonizing to the beasts and the birds (Figure 12.2). In the song of praise written by Francis two years before his death, his reverence for nature is displayed with a forthright simplicity that resembles both the hymns of Ambrose (see Reading 9.2) and the ritual prayers chanted by Native Americans in praise of nature (see Reading 18.5).

READING 12.1 Saint Francis’ *The Canticle of Brother Sun* (1224)

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, 10
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, 20
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, 30
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

Q What is the relationship between God and nature
in this song of praise?

The Franciscans were not the sole exemplars of the wave of humanitarianism that swept through the Christian West during the thirteenth century; in 1216 the followers of the well-educated Spanish priest Saint Dominic (ca. 1170–1221) founded a second mendicant order devoted to teaching and preaching. Deeply committed to the study of theology, the Dominicans educated many renowned scholars, including Thomas Aquinas, discussed later in this chapter. The Franciscan and Dominican friars (“brothers”) earned longlasting respect and acclaim for educating the young, fighting heresy, and ministering to the sick and needy.

Saint Francis and Saint Dominic drew many into their folds, but their female followers had a difficult time establishing orders in their name. The Fourth Lateran Council had confirmed Church restrictions prohibiting nuns from hearing confession, preaching, and singing the Gospel—measures that limited the freedom and privileges of Benedictine nuns and other holy women. The new orders denied female participation, since neither Francis nor Dominic considered the apostolic life suitable for women. Nevertheless, one of the followers of Saint Francis, Clare Affreduccio (1193–1253), a young noblewoman from Assisi, renounced a life of aristocratic privilege to establish a community of women modeled on the practice of poverty and humility. Initially denied papal approval for a monastic order, Clare had her rule endorsed only days before she died. She was the first woman to write a rule for a religious order; the Order of Poor Ladies came to be called the Order of Saint Clare, or the “Poor Clares.”

Medieval Literature

The Literature of Mysticism

Most of the religious literature of the Middle Ages was didactic—that is, it served to teach and instruct. Visionary literature, however, functioned in two other ways. It reflected an individual’s intuitive and direct knowledge of God (thus constituting a form of autobiography); and it conjured vivid images of the supernatural (thus providing a vocabulary by which the unknowable might actually be known). The leading mystic of the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), was an extraordinary individual. Entering a Benedictine convent at the age of eight, she went on to become its abbess. A scholar of both Latin and her native German, she wrote three visionary tracts, treatises on natural science, medicine, and the treatment of disease, an allegorical dialogue between the vices and the virtues, and a cycle of seventy-seven songs for devotional performance (see chapter 13). While some regard Hildegard as the *first* of the female visionaries,

she actually follows a long line of mystics and seers whose history begins in antiquity (most famously represented by the Delphic priestesses and the Roman sibyls). One of the first great Christian mystics, however, Hildegard produced original works on such topics as the nature of the universe, the meaning of Scripture, and the destiny of the Christian soul. The Church confirmed the divine source of her visions and, along with most of her contemporaries, acknowledged her prophetic powers. In the following selection from *Scivias*, short for *Scito vias domini* (*Know the Ways of the Lord*), her encounter with the “voice

from Heaven” is followed by two of her most compelling visions. The miniature accompanying one of these visions (Figure 12.3)—like all those that illustrate her manuscripts—was supervised by Hildegard herself.

READING 12.2 From Hildegard of Bingen's *Know the Ways of the Lord* (ca. 1146)

1. A Solemn Declaration Concerning the True Vision Flowing from God: *Scivias*. Protestificatio

Lo! In the forty-third year of my temporal course, when I clung to a celestial vision with great fear and tremulous effort, I saw a great splendor. In it came a voice from heaven, saying:

“O frail mortal, both ash of ashes, and rottenness of rottenness, speak and write down what you see and hear. But because you are fearful of speaking, simple at expounding, and unlearned in writing—speak and write, not according to the speech of man or according to the intelligence of human invention, or following the aim of human composition, but according to what you see and hear from the heavens above in the wonders of God! Offer explanations of them, just as one who hears and understands the words of an instructor willingly makes them public, revealing and teaching them according to the sense of the instructor's discourse. You, therefore, O mortal, speak also the things you see and hear. Write them, not according to yourself or to some other person, but according to the will of the Knower, Seer, and Ordainer of all things in the secrets of their mysteries.”

And again I heard the voice from heaven saying to me: “Speak these wonders and write the things taught in this manner—and speak!”

It happened in the year 1141 of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, when I was forty-two years and seven months old, that a fiery light of the greatest radiance coming from the open heavens flooded through my entire brain. It kindled my whole breast like a flame that does not scorch but warms in the same way the sun warms anything on which it sheds its rays.

Suddenly I understood the meaning of books, that is, the Psalms and the Gospels; and I knew other catholic books of the Old as well as the New Testaments—not the significance of the words of the text, or the division of the syllables, nor did I consider an examination of the cases and tenses.

Indeed, from the age of girlhood, from the time that I was fifteen until the present, I had perceived in myself, just as until this moment, a power of mysterious, secret, and marvelous visions of a miraculous sort. However, I revealed these things to no one, except to a few religious persons who were living under the same vows as I was. But meanwhile, until this time when God in his grace has willed these things to be revealed, I have repressed them in quiet silence.

But I have not perceived these visions in dreams, or asleep, or in a delirium, or with my bodily eyes, or with my external mortal ears, or in secreted places, but I received them awake and looking attentively about me with an unclouded mind, in open places, according to God's will. However this may be, it is difficult for carnal man to fathom. . . .

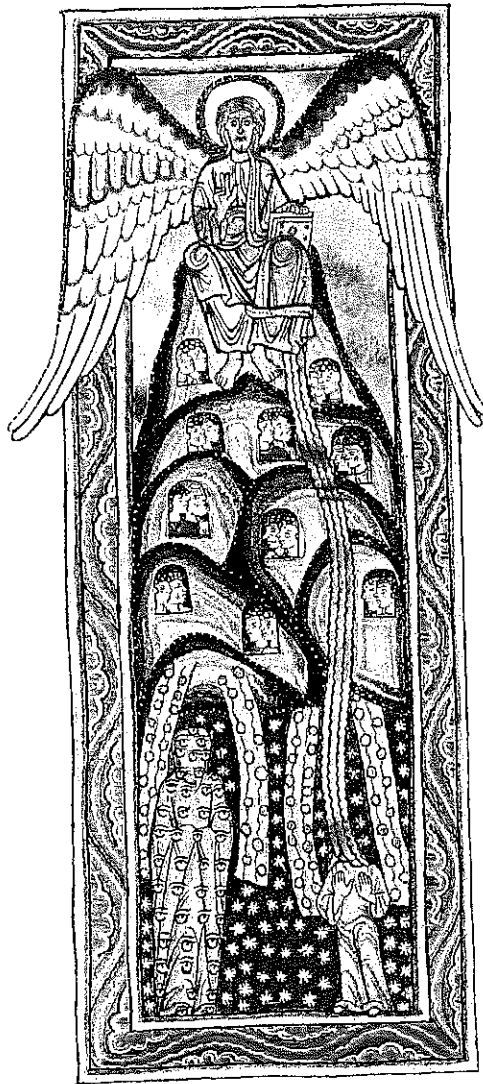


Figure 12.3 HILDEGARD OF BINGEN, *Scivias*, ca. 1146. Height 12½ in. The revelation is pictured as a burst of “fiery light” that flows from the angelic figure of Jesus at the top of the illustration to the small image of Hildegard (bottom right). The voice from Heaven orders Hildegard: “Speak,” in a manner similar to the command (“Recite”) of the archangel Gabriel to Muhammad (see chapter 10).

2. The Iron-Colored Mountain and the Radiant One: *Scivias*, Book I, Vision 1

I saw what seemed to be a huge mountain having the color of iron. On its height was sitting One of such great radiance that it stunned my vision. On both sides of him extended a gentle shadow like a wing of marvelous width and length. And in front of him at the foot of the same mountain stood a figure full of eyes everywhere. Because of those eyes, I was not able to distinguish any human form.

In front of this figure there was another figure, whose age was that of a boy, and he was clothed in a pale tunic and white shoes. I was not able to look at his face, because above his head so much radiance descended from the One sitting on the mountain. From the One sitting on the mountain a great many living sparks cascaded, which flew around these figures with great sweetness. In this same mountain, moreover, there seemed to be a number of little windows, in which men's heads appeared, some pale and some white.

And see! The One sitting on the mountain shouted in an extremely loud, strong voice, saying: "O frail mortal, you who are of the dust of the earth's dust, and ash of ash, cry out and speak of the way into incorruptible salvation! Do this in order that those people may be taught who see the innermost meaning of Scripture, but who do not wish to tell it or preach it because they are lukewarm and dull in preserving God's justice. Unlock for them the mystical barriers. For they, being timid, are hiding themselves in a remote and barren field. You, therefore, pour yourself forth in a fountain of abundance! Flow with mystical learning, so that those who want you to be scorned because of the guilt of Eve may be inundated by the flood of your refreshment!

"For you do not receive this keenness of insight from man, but from that supernal and awesome judge on high. There amidst brilliant light, this radiance will brightly shine forth among the luminous ones. Arise, therefore, and shout and speak! These things are revealed to you through the strongest power of divine aid. For he who potently and benignly rules his creatures imbues with the radiance of heavenly enlightenment all those who fear him and serve him with sweet love in a spirit of humility. And he leads those who persevere in the path of justice to the joys of everlasting vision!"

3. The Fall of Lucifer, the Formation of Hell, and the Fall of Adam and Eve: *Scivias*, Book I, Vision 2

Then I saw what seemed to be a great number of living torches, full of brilliance. Catching a fiery gleam, they received a most radiant splendor from it. And see! A lake appeared here, of great length and depth, with a mouth like a well, breathing forth a stinking fiery smoke. From the mouth of the lake a loathsome fog also arose until it touched a thing like a blood vessel that had a deceptive appearance.

And in a certain region of brightness, the fog blew through the blood vessel to a pure white cloud, which had emerged from the beautiful form of a man, and the cloud contained within itself many, many stars. Then the loathsome fog blew and drove the cloud and the man's form out of the region of brightness.

Once this had happened, the most luminous splendor encircled that region. The elements of the world, which previously had held firmly together in great tranquility, now, turning into great turmoil, displayed fearful terrors. . . .

Now "that lake of great length and depth" which appeared to you is Hell. In its length are contained vices, and in its deep abyss is damnation, as you see. Also, "It has a mouth like a well, breathing forth a stinking, fiery smoke" means that drowning souls are swallowed in its voracious greed. For although the lake shows them sweetness and delights, it leads them, through perverse deceit, to a perdition of torments. There the heat of the fire breathes forth with an outpouring of the most loathsome smoke, and with a boiling, death-dealing stench. For these abominable torments were prepared for the Devil and his followers, who turned away from the highest good, which they wanted neither to know nor to understand. For this reason they were cast down from every good thing, not because they did not know them but because they were contemptuous of them in their lofty pride. . . .

Q What role does revelation play in Hildegard's visions?

Q Which of her visionary images do you find most vivid?

Sermon Literature

While the writings of Hildegard of Bingen addressed individual, literate Christians, medieval sermons, delivered orally from the pulpit of the church, were directed to the largely illiterate Christian community. Both visionary tracts and sermon literature, however, described grace and salvation in vivid terms. The classic medieval sermon *On the Misery of the Human Condition* (ca. 1200) was written by Innocent III. This sermon is a compelling description of the natural sinfulness of humankind and a scathing condemnation of the "vile and filthy [human] condition." Such motifs, like those found in Hildegard's visions, proceeded from prevailing views of the human condition: weighed down by the burden of the flesh, the body is subject to corruption, disease, and carnal desire. As the temple of the soul, the body will be resurrected on Judgment Day, but not before it suffers the trials of mortality. Warning of the "nearness of death," Innocent's sermon functioned as a *memento mori*, a device by which listeners in a predominantly oral culture might "remember death" and thus prepare themselves for its inevitable arrival. Innocent's portrayal of the decay of the human body reflects the medieval disdain for the world of matter, a major theme in most medieval didactic literature. During the Late Middle Ages, especially after the onslaught of the bubonic plague (see chapter 15), the motif of the body as "food for worms"—one of Innocent's most vivid images—became particularly popular in gruesomely forthright tomb sculptures (Figure 12.4).

Innocent's vivid account of the Christian Hell transforms the concept of corruption into an image of eternal punishment for unabsolved sinners—a favorite subject for medieval artists (see Figures 12.1 and 12.8). The contrast



Figure 12.4 Detail of *transi* (effigy of the dead) of François de la Sarra, ca. 1390. La Sarraz, Switzerland. Length 5 ft. (approx.). Worms crawl into the flesh of the deceased, while toads gnaw at his eyes and mouth.

that Innocent draws between physical death and spiritual life has its visual counterpart in the representations of the Last Judgment depicted in medieval manuscripts and on Romanesque and Gothic church portals (see Figure 13.8):

READING 12.3 From Pope Innocent III's
On the Misery of the Human Condition (ca. 1200)

Of the Miserable Entrance upon the Human Condition

... Man was formed of dust, slime, and ashes: what is even more vile, of the filthiest seed. He was conceived from the itch of the flesh, in the heat of passion and the stench of lust, and worse yet, with the stain of sin. He was born to toil, dread, and trouble; and more wretched still, was born only to die. He commits depraved acts by which he offends God, his neighbor, and himself; shameful acts by which he defiles his name, his person, and his conscience; and vain acts by which he ignores all things important, useful, and necessary. He will become fuel for those fires which are forever hot and burn forever bright; food for the worm which forever nibbles and digests; a mass of rottenness which will forever stink and reek. ...

On the Nearness of Death

A man's last day is always the first in importance, but his first day is never considered his last. Yet it is fitting to live always

¹ Ecclesiastes 14:12.

on this principle, that one should act as if in the moment of death. For it is written: "Remember that death is not slow."¹ Time passes, death draws near. In the eyes of the dying man a thousand years are as yesterday, which is past. The future is forever being born, the present forever dying, and what is past is utterly dead. We are forever dying while we are alive; we only cease to die when we cease to live. Therefore it is better to die to life than to live waiting for death, for mortal life is but a living death. ...

On the Putrefaction of the Dead Body

... Man is conceived of blood made rotten by the heat of lust; and in the end worms, like mourners, stand about his corpse. In life he produced lice and tapeworms; in death he will produce worms and flies. In life he produced dung and vomit; in death he produces rottenness and stench. In life he fattened one man; in death he fattens a multitude of worms. What then is more foul than a human corpse? What is more horrible than a dead man? He whose embrace was pure delight in life will be a gruesome sight in death.

Of what advantage, then, are riches, food, and honors? For riches will not free us from death, neither food protect us from the worm, nor honors from the stench. That man who but now sat in glory upon a throne is now looked down on in the grave; the dandy who once glittered in his palace lies now naked and vile in his tomb; and he who supped once on delicacies in his hall is now in his sepulcher food for worms. ...

That Nothing Can Help the Damned

... O strict judgment!—not only of actions, but "of every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account";² payment with the usurer's interest will be exacted to the last penny. "Who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come?"³

"The Son of Man shall send his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity, and they will bind them as bundles to be burnt, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,"⁴ there shall be groaning and wailing, shrieking and flailing of arms and screaming, screeching, and shouting; there shall be fear and trembling, toil and trouble, holocaust and dreadful stench, and everywhere darkness and anguish; there shall be asperity, cruelty, calamity, poverty, distress, and utter wretchedness; they will feel an oblivion of loneliness and namelessness; there shall be twistings and piercings, bitterness, terror, hunger and thirst, cold and hot, brimstone and fire burning, forever and ever world without end. ...

Q How does Innocent describe the nature and the destiny of humankind?

Q How does this sermon compare with the Sermon on the Mount (Reading 8.2)?

² Matthew 12:36.

³ Luke 3:7.

⁴ Matthew 13:41–42.

READING 12.5 From Dante's *Divine Comedy*

(ca. 1308–1321)

The Dark Wood of Error ("Inferno," Canto 1)

Midway in our life's journey, I went astray
from the straight road and woke to find myself
alone in a dark wood. How shall I say

what wood that was! I never saw so drear,
so rank, so arduous a wilderness!
Its very memory gives a shape to fear.

Death could scarce be more bitter than that place!
But since it came to good, I will recount
all that I found revealed there by God's grace:

How I came to it I cannot rightly say,
so drugged and loose with sleep had I become
when I first wandered there from the True Way.

But at the far end of the valley of evil
whose maze had sapped my very heart with fear!
I found myself before a little hill

and lifted up my eyes. Its shoulders glowed
already with the sweet rays of that planet
whose virtue leads men straight on every road,

and the shining strengthened me against the fright
whose agony had wracked the lake of my heart
through all the terrors of that piteous night.

Just as a swimmer, who with his last breath
flounders ashore from perilous seas, might turn
to memorize the wide water of his death—

so did I turn, my soul still fugitive
from death's surviving image, to stare down
that pass that none had ever left alive.

And there I lay to rest from my heart's race
till calm and breath returned to me. Then rose
and pushed up that dead slope at such a pace

each footfall rose above the last. And lo!
almost at the beginning of the rise
I faced a spotted Leopard, all tremor and flow

and gaudy pelt. And it would not pass, but stood
so blocking my every turn that time and again
I was on the verge of turning back to the wood.

This fell at the first widening of the dawn
as the sun was climbing Aries with those stars
that rode with him to light the new creation.

Thus the holy hour and the sweet season
of commemoration did much to arm my fear

of that bright murderous beast with their good omen.

Yet not so much but what I shook with dread
at sight of a great Lion that broke upon me
raging with hunger, its enormous head

held high as if to strike a mortal terror
into the very air. And down his track,
—a She-Wolf drove upon me, a starved horror

ravening and wasted beyond all belief.
She seemed a rack for avarice, gaunt and craving.
Oh many the souls she has brought to endless grief!

She brought such heaviness upon my spirit
at sight of her savagery and desperation,
I died from every hope of that high summit.

And like a miser—eager in acquisition
but desperate in self-reproach when Fortune's wheel
turns to the hour of his loss—all tears and attrition

I wavered back; and still the beast pursued,
forcing herself against me bit by bit
till I slid back into the sunless wood.

And as I fell to my soul's ruin, a presence
gathered before me on the discolored air,
the figure of one who seemed hoarse from long silence.

At sight of him in that friendless waste I cried:
"Have pity on me, whatever thing you are,
whether shade or living man." And it replied:

"Not man, though man I once was, and my blood
was Lombard, both my parents Mantuan.
I was born, though late, sub Julio, and bred

in Rome under Augustus in the noon
of the false and lying gods. I was a poet
and sang of old Anchises' noble son

who came to Rome after the burning of Troy.
But you—why do you return to these distresses
instead of climbing that shining Mount of Joy

which is the seat and first cause of man's bliss?"
"And are you then that Virgil and that fountain
of purest speech?" My voice grew tremulous:

"Glory and light of poets! now may that zeal
and love's apprenticeship that I poured out
on your heroic verses serve me well!

For you are my true master and first author,
the sole maker from whom I drew the breath
of that sweet style whose measures have brought me honor.

See there, immortal sage, the beast I flee.

For my soul's salvation, I beg you, guard me from her,
for she has struck a mortal tremor through me."

And he replied, seeing my soul in tears:
"He must go by another way who would escape
this wilderness, for that mad beast that fleers"
before you there, suffers no man to pass.
She tracks down all, kills all, and knows no glut,
but, feeding, she grows hungrier than she was.

She mates with any beast, and will mate with more
before the Greyhound comes to hunt her down.
He will not feed on lands nor loot, but honor
and love and wisdom will make straight his way.
He will rise between Feltro and Feltro, and in him
shall be the resurrection and new day

of that sad Italy for which Nisus died,
and Turnus, and Euryalus, and the maid Camilla.
He shall hunt her through every nation of sick pride
till she is driven back forever to Hell
whence Envy first released her on the world.
Therefore, for your own good, I think it well

you follow me and I will be your guide
and lead you forth through an eternal place.
There you shall see the ancient spirits tried

in endless pain, and hear their lamentation
as each bemoans the second death of souls.
Next you shall see upon a burning mountain

souls in fire and yet content in fire,
knowing that whensoe'er it may be
they yet will mount into the blessed choir.

To which, if it is still your wish to climb,
a worthier spirit shall be sent to guide you.
With her shall I leave you, for the King of Time,

who reigns on high, forbids me to come there
since, living, I rebelled against his law.
He rules the waters and the land and air
and there holds court, his city and his throne.
Oh blessed are they he chooses!" And I to him:
"Poet, by that God to you unknown,

lead me this way. Beyond this present ill
and worse to dread, lead me to Peter's gate
and be my guide through the sad halls of Hell."

And he then: "Follow." And he moved ahead
in silence, and I followed where he led.

* sneers.

Notes to "Inferno" (Canto 1)

line 1 *midway in our life's journey*: The biblical life span is three-score years and ten. The action opens in Dante's thirty-fifth year, i.e., 1300.

line 17 *that planet*: The sun. Ptolemaic astronomers considered it a planet. It is also symbolic of God as He who lights man's way.

line 31 *each footfall rose above the last*: The literal rendering would be: "So that the fixed foot was ever the lower." "Fixed" has often been translated as "right," and an ingenious reasoning can support that reading, but a simpler explanation offers itself and seems more competent: Dante is saying that he climbed with such zeal and haste that every footfall carried him above the last despite the steepness of the climb. At a slow pace, on the other hand, the rear foot might be brought up only as far as the forward foot. This device of selecting a minute but exactly centered detail to convey the whole of a larger action is one of the central characteristics of Dante's style.

lines 33, 44, 48 *Leopard, Lion, She-Wolf*: These three beasts are undoubtedly taken from Jeremiah 5:6. Many additional and incidental interpretations have been advanced for them, but the central interpretation must remain as noted. They foreshadow the three divisions of Hell (incontinence, violence, and fraud) that Virgil explains at length in Canto 11, 16–111. I am not at all sure but what the She-Wolf is better interpreted as Fraud and the Leopard as Incontinence. Good arguments can be offered either way.

lines 38–39 *Aries . . . that rode with him to light the new creation*: The medieval tradition had it that the sun was in Aries at the time of the Creation. The significance of the astronomical and religious conjunction is an important part of Dante's intended allegory. It is just before dawn of Good Friday 1300 when he awakens in the Dark Wood. Thus his new life begins under Aries, the sign of creation, at dawn (rebirth), and in the Easter season (resurrection). Moreover the moon is full and the sun is in the equinox, conditions that did not fall together on any Friday of 1300. Dante is obviously constructing poetically the perfect Easter as a symbol of his new awakening.

line 69 *sub Julio*: In the reign of Julius Caesar.

lines 95–98 *the Greyhound . . . Feltro and Feltro*: This almost certainly refers to Can Grande della Scala (1290–1329), a great Italian leader born in Verona, which lies between the towns of Feltre and Montefeltro.

lines 100–101 *Nisus, Turnus, Euryalus, Camilla*: All were killed in the war between the Trojans and the Latians when, according to legend, Aeneas led the survivors of Troy into Italy. Nisus and Euryalus (*Aeneid IX*) were Trojan comrades-in-arms who died together. Camilla (*Aeneid XI*) was the daughter of the Latian king and one of the warrior women. She was killed in a horse charge against the Trojans after displaying great gallantry. Turnus (*Aeneid XII*) was killed by Aeneas in a duel.

line 110 *the second death*: Damnation. "This is the second death, even the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:14)

lines 118–119 *forbids me to come there since, living, etc.*: Salvation is only through Christ in Dante's theology. Virgil lived and died before the establishment of Christ's teachings in Rome, and therefore cannot enter Heaven.

line 125 *Peter's gate*: The gate of Purgatory. (See "Purgatorio" 9, 76 ff.) The gate is guarded by an angel with a gleaming sword. The angel is Peter's vicar (Peter, the first pope, symbolized all popes;

i.e., Christ's vicar on earth), and is entrusted with the two great keys.

Some commentators argue that this is the gate of Paradise, but Dante mentions no gate beyond this one in his ascent to Heaven. It should be remembered, too, that those who pass the gate of Purgatory have effectively entered Heaven.

The three great gates that figure in the entire journey are: the gate of Hell (Canto 3, 1-11), the gate of Dis (Canto 8, 79-113, and Canto 9, 86-87), and the gate of Purgatory, as above.

The Ninth Circle of Hell ("Inferno," Canto 34)

"On march the banners of the King of Hell,"—
my Master said. "Toward us. Look straight ahead:
can you make him out at the core of the frozen shell?"

Like a whirling windmill seen afar at twilight,
or when a mist has risen from the ground—
just such an engine rose upon my sight

stirring up such a wild and bitter wind
I cowered for shelter at my Master's back
there being no other windbreak I could find.

I stood now where the souls of the last class
(with fear my verses tell it) were covered wholly:
they shone below the ice like straws in glass.

Some lie stretched out; others are fixed in place
upright, some on their heads, some on their
soles; another, like a bow, bends foot to face.

When we had gone so far across the ice
that it pleased my Guide to show me the foul creature
which once had worn the grace of Paradise,

he made me stop, and, stepping aside, he said:
"Now see the face of Dis! This is the place
where you must arm your soul against all dread."

Do not ask, Reader, how my blood ran cold
and my voice choked up with fear. I cannot write it:
this is a terror that cannot be told.

I did not die, and yet I lost life's breath:
imagine for yourself what I became,
deprived at once of both my life and death.

The Emperor of the Universe of Pain
jutting his upper chest above the ice;
and I am closer in size to the great mountain

the Titans make around the central pit,
than they to his arms. Now starting from this part,
imagine the whole that corresponds to it.

If he was once as beautiful as now
he is hideous, and still turned on his Maker,
well may he be the source of every woe!

With what a sense of awe I saw his head
towering above me! for it had three faces:
one was in front, and it was fiery red,

the other two, as weirdly wonderful,
merged with it from the middle of each shoulder
to the point where all converged at the top of the skull;

the right was something between white and bile;
the left was about the color that one finds
on those who live along the banks of the Nile.

Under each head two wings rose terribly,
their span proportioned to so gross a bird:
I never saw such sails upon the sea.

They were not feathers—their texture and their form
were like a bat's wings—and he beat them so
that three winds blew from him in one great storm:

it is these winds that freeze all Cocytus [the final pit of Hell].
He wept from his six eyes, and down three chins
the tears ran mixed with bloody froth and pus.

In every mouth he worked a broken sinner
between his rakelike teeth. Thus he kept three
in eternal pain at his eternal dinner.

For the one in front the biting seemed to play
no part at all compared to the ripping: at times
the whole skin of his back was flayed away.

"That soul that suffers most," explained the Guide,
"is Judas Iscariot, he who kicks his legs
on the fiery chin and has his head inside.

Of the other two, who have their heads thrust forward,
the one who dangles down from the black face
is Brutus: note how he writhes without a word.

And there, with the huge and sinewy arms, is the soul
of Cassius. But the night is coming on
and we must go, for we have seen the whole."

Then, as he bade, I clasped his neck, and he,
watching for a moment when the wings
were opened wide, reached over dexterously

and seized the shaggy coat of the king demon;
then grappling matted hair and frozen crusts
from one tuft to another, clambered down.

When we had reached the joint where the great thigh
merges into the swelling of the haunch,
my Guide and Master, straining terribly,

turned his head to where his feet had been
and began to grip the hair as if he were climbing;
so that I thought we moved toward Hell again.

"Hold fast!" my Guide said, and his breath came shrill with labor and exhaustion. "There is no way but by such stairs to rise above such evil."		the shaggy flank of the Great Worm of Evil	108
At last he climbed out through an opening in the central rock, and he seated me on the rim; then joined me with a nimble backward spring.	84	which bores through the world—you were while I climbed down, but when I turned myself about, you passed the point to which all gravities are drawn.	111
I looked up, thinking to see Lucifer as I had left him, and I saw instead his legs projecting high into the air.	87	You are under the other hemisphere where you stand; the sky above us is the half opposed to that which canopies the great dry land.	114
Now let all those whose dull minds are still vexed by failure to understand what point it was I had passed through, judge if I was perplexed.	90	Under the mid-point of that other sky the Man who was born sinless and who lived beyond all blemish, came to suffer and die.	117
"Get up. Up on your feet," my Master said. "The sun already mounts to middle tierce, and a long road and hard climbing lie ahead."	93	You have your feet upon a little sphere which forms the other face of the Judecca [named for Judas Iscariot]. There it is evening when it is morning here.	120
It was no hall of state we had found there, but a natural animal pit hollowed from rock with a broken floor and a close and sunless air.	96	And this gross Fiend and image of all Evil who made a stairway for us with his hide is pinched and prisoned in the ice-pack still.	123
"Before I tear myself from the Abyss," I said when I had risen, "O my Master, explain to me my error in all this:	99	On this side he plunged down from heaven's height, and the land that spread here once hid in the sea and fled North to our hemisphere for fright;	126
where is the ice? and Lucifer—how has he been turned from top to bottom: and how can the sun have gone from night to day so suddenly?"	102	and it may be that moved by that same fear, the one peak that still rises on this side fled upward leaving this great cavern here."	129
And he to me: "You imagine you are still on the other side of the center where I grasped	105	Down there, beginning at the further bound of Beelzebub's dim tomb, there is a space not known by sight, but only by the sound	132



Figure 12.9 Attributed to **SCHOOL OF COPPO DI MARCOVALDO**, *Last Judgment* (detail), thirteenth century. Florence Baptistery. Mosaic, 12 × 40 ft. (approx.)

of a little stream descending through the hollow
it has eroded from the massive stone
in its endlessly entwining lazy flow.

135

My Guide and I crossed over and began
to mount that little known and lightless road
to ascend into the shining world again.

138

He first, I second, without thought of rest
we climbed the dark until we reached the point
where a round opening brought in sight the blest

141

and beauteous shining of the Heavenly cars.
And we walked out once more beneath the Stars.

Notes to "Inferno" (Canto 34)

line 1 *On march the banners of the King*: The hymn ("Vexilla regis prodeunt") was written in the sixth century by Venantius Fortunatus, bishop of Poitiers. The original celebrates the Holy Cross, and is part of the service for Good Friday, to be sung at the moment of uncovering the Cross.

line 17 *the foul creature*: Satan.

line 38 *three faces*: Numerous interpretations of these three faces exist. What is essential to all explanations is that they be seen as perversions of the qualities of the Trinity.

line 54 *bloody froth and pus*: The gore of the sinners he chews, which is mixed with his slaver.

line 62 *Judas*: His punishment is patterned closely on that of the Simoniacs whom Dante describes in Canto 19.

line 67 *huge and sinewy arms*: The Cassius who betrayed Caesar was more generally described in terms of Shakespeare's "lean and hungry look." Another Cassius is described by Cicero (*Catiline III*) as huge and sinewy. Dante probably confused the two.

line 68 *the night is coming on*: It is now Saturday evening.

line 82 *his breath came shrill*: Cf. Canto 23, 85, where the fact that Dante breathes indicates to the Hypocrites that he is alive. Virgil's breathing is certainly a contradiction.

line 95 *middle tierce*: In the canonical day tierce is the period from about 6 to 9 a.m. Middle tierce, therefore, is 7:30. In going through the center point, they have gone from night to day. They have moved ahead twelve hours.

line 128 *the one peak*: The Mount of Purgatory.

line 129 *this great cavern*: The natural animal pit of line 98. It is also "Beelzebub's dim tomb," line 131.

line 133 *a little stream*: Lethe. In Classical mythology, the river of forgetfulness, from which souls drank before being born. In Dante's symbolism it flows down from Purgatory, where it has washed away the memory of sin from the souls who are undergoing purification. That memory it delivers to Hell, which draws all sin to itself.

line 143 *Stars*: As part of his total symbolism, Dante ends each of the three divisions of the *Commedia* with this word. Every conclusion of the upward soul is toward the stars, God's shining symbols of hope

and virtue. It is just before dawn of Easter Sunday that the Poets emerge—a further symbolism.

Q Why is Dante's *Commedia* considered a medieval epic?

Q Whom does Dante find in the ninth circle of Hell? Why are they there?

The Medieval University

Of the many medieval contributions to modern Western society, one of the most significant is the university. Education in medieval Europe was almost exclusively a religious enterprise, and monastic schools had monopolized learning for many centuries. By the twelfth century, however, spurred by the resurgence of economic activity, the rise of towns, and the influx of heretofore unavailable Classical texts, education shifted from monastic and parish settings to cathedral schools located in the new urban centers of Western Europe. Growing out of these schools, groups of students and teachers formed guilds for higher learning; the Latin word *universitas* describes a guild of learners and teachers.

In medieval Europe, as in our own day, universities were arenas for intellectual inquiry and debate. At Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge, to name but four among some eighty universities founded during the Middle Ages, the best minds of Europe grappled with the compelling ideas of their day, often testing those ideas against the teachings of the Church. The universities offered a basic Liberal Arts curriculum divided into two parts: the *trivium*, consisting of grammar, logic, and rhetoric; and the *quadrivium*, which comprised arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Programs in professional disciplines, such as medicine, theology, and law, were also available. Textbooks—that is, handwritten manuscripts—were expensive and difficult to obtain, so teaching took the form of oral instruction, and students took copious notes based on class lectures (Figure 12.10). Exams for the bachelor of arts (B.A.) degree, usually taken upon completion of a three-to-five-year course of study, were oral. Beyond the B.A. degree, one might pursue additional study leading to mastery of a specialized field. The master of arts (M.A.) degree qualified the student to teach theology or practice

Chronology

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| 1054 | split between Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches |
| 1159 | University of Bologna founded |
| 1215 | Fourth Lateran Council |
| 1215 | Franciscan order established |
| 1302 | <i>Unam sanctam</i> |

