



***Paradiso*: DIRECTIONS**

Because *Paradiso* is so much more complex than the either *Inferno* or *Purgatorio* and because we are short on time, Here is a detailed summary of *Paradiso* for you to use as a study guide as you skim through the Heavens. **For each section, 1) note the cantos**, just as we did for the first two cantiche. 2) Skim along with Dante as you read the summary and **note the exact location of one image, or idea, or question about what you read that you found interesting**. We'll discuss those in class when we return on March 18th.

THE ASCENT TO HEAVEN; THE SPHERE OF FIRE Canto(s)

Beatrice stares up at the noonday sun, and **Dante** does likewise for as long as he is able. When he drops his gaze it seems to him as if a second sun is illuminating everything. Dante finds that he and Beatrice have ascended to a sphere of celestial fire.

They continue to ascend, and Dante feels himself to be pure light, pure spirit, and draws himself towards God with this feeling. Beatrice tells him that he is now rising up faster than lightning strikes down. She states that everything seeks its own level and that the flame (of the Sun) seeks the Moon and is the heart of things that die. The natural urge of men's souls is to rise to Heaven, but they can kill this urge by sin and false joys - it is their *not* rising which is unnatural. 'The natural deathless thirst in Heaven to be - the aspiration all from birth may claim - impelled us upward with the speed of light wellnigh as fast to rise as eyes could see into the luminous vault's immensity, the while I on Beatrice gazed, and she gazed upward.'

It is not clear what happens to Statius from this point onwards; it is probably safe to assume that he ascends into Heaven separately from Dante and Beatrice.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE HEAVEN OF THE MOON Canto(s)

As one ascends, one arrives at the first of the levels of Heaven, that closest to the Earth - the Heaven of the Moon. 'It seemed a cloud enclosed us, shining, dense, with polished surface firm that, diamond-bright, was dazzling in the sun's reflected light. We passed within the eternal pearl, as sinks a ray of sunlight in the stream, which drinks the light, land is not opened: cleft and whole. If I were body or unsubstanced soul I know not.' This is not unlike being inside a dazzlingly bright cloud.

When there, Beatrice explains the dark marks seen upon the face of the Moon to Dante. Beatrice points out that they cannot be caused by variance in the density or transparency of the Moon, as otherwise eclipses would not be as they are. She tells Dante that they are a visible sign of the diverse states and essences distributed throughout the Heavens.

The Heaven of the Moon is the slowest moving of the Heavens, being the furthest from the Primum Mobile. At this point Dante is surrounded by the blessed of this Heaven. 'As translucent glass, or shallow water where the light will pass clear to the bottom, mirrors those who gaze. Faint as a white pearl on as white a brow, so there were many faces round me now eager for speech'. They appear as if made of, or glowing with, moonlight, and can fade in and out of sight at will, as a stone sinks into dark waters. They are relegated here, to the lowest Heaven, for the failure of their vows of chastity in life, even if not by their own fault, such as those who were victims of rape.

Dante wordlessly questions Beatrice as to why those blessed are placed in a lower Heaven because of things which, in life, they could not control. She explains that all of the blessed *are* equally high in Heaven, and close to God, but differ in what part of the Eternal Inspiration they are aware of. Those visible in each Sphere of Heaven are not *contained* in that Sphere, but appear to be there because they claim that particular celestial eminence.

As for their apparently being punished for things beyond their control, Beatrice points out that this is because they bent to that violence, by lack of will, rather than resisting unto death, and that this is important because Free Will is God's greatest gift to man. She tells Dante that the Old and New testaments are man's guide within the care of the Church, but that people should also beware of 'evil shepherds' and not be led astray by them - to be 'men, not sheep'.

Following this, with Beatrice, Dante almost instantly ascends to the second sphere of Heaven.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE HEAVEN OF MERCURY Canto(s)

As soon as one arrives at the Heaven of Mercury one is surrounded by hundreds of spirits of the Blessed, each one casting an affluent glow. The spirits in this Heaven glow with the light of the sun, and are clothed in the same light. They are pleased to see visitors, as they see them as people by whom their loves are magnified. They can come and go almost instantly, flying like swift sparks.

The spirit of the Emperor Justinian tells Dante that 'this small low star on which we meet contains good spirits passionate in pursuit of fame and honor of earthly life, and hence desires may swerve so far that strength which love requires is somewhat lessened for its mounting rays.

But yet no less we give to God the praise, no less perceive that our deserts and gains are justly measured in the perfect scale. For in us the live justice doth prevail, and malice may not warp affections here.' That is, those here are those who gave service in life, but whose service was somewhat marred by ambition.

Following the departure of the spirits of this Heaven, Beatrice lectures Dante on the fall of Man, and God's scheme for his redemption, and then, as quickly as before, Dante and Beatrice ascend to the third sphere of Heaven.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE HEAVEN OF VENUS Canto(s)

Dante does not know where he is going until he arrives at the Heaven of Venus. It is the most beautiful place he has ever been. The souls in this Heaven glow and dance like the flame of a torch, at varying speeds, some faster than the lightning. As they go, they sing hosannas in voices so beautiful that anyone hearing them will long to hear them for ever after.

Those in this Heaven are the spirits of lovers, but those whose love was marred by wantonness. From this Heaven, the glory of the Sun, in the next Heaven, is visible. Some of those in this Heaven are unhappy with the avarice and corruption of the Papal court.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE HEAVEN OF THE SUN Canto(s)

Again, one travels instantly up from the Heaven of Venus to the Heaven of the Sun. The Heaven of the Sun glows with a glorious light. 'Round us bent a glowing girdle, living, conquering, that more than all it showed could sweetly sing, making itself a circling crown, and we its centre.'

Each of the spirits here is an ardent sun in their own right, glowing with the light of love. They dance and whirl about, and will circle around visitors such as Dante to inform them of what lies in this Heaven. They can also see the thoughts of visitors. Different groups of spirits may speak to visitors as they pass through this Heaven. Thomas Aquinas is one of the spirits here, who consist of wise religious men, doctors of the Church and teachers.

From here one ascends rather more slowly to the Heaven of Mars.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE HEAVEN OF MARS Canto(s)

As one approaches Mars itself, one can see that on its face is a huge white Christian cross with the figure of Christ upon it, which gleams as if with moving specks of white light. Up from the specks of light comes a sublime hymn that can easily entrance the listener, whose theme is 'Arise and Vanquish'. 'From arm to arm, from crest to base, thereon there moved innumerable specks of light, as the cool darkness men in daylight make may be transthurst by one invading ray, wherein the motes unnumbered whirl and play. So in continual interchange did they motelike

their interlacing dances break and join and alter. Crossing swift or slow, from short to long, the specks unnumbered go. And as sweet music turned to harmony of many cords of viol or harp may chime sweetly to one who doth not understand the notes they render, so a strain sublime entranced me from those myriad notes, although I could not follow their triumphant hymn.' Each of the specks of light is a spirit, the souls of the soldiery of Christ, or, as a voice from the cross puts it 'In this fifth circle of the Eternal Tree of which no fruit shall fail, no leaf be shed, which from its summit with full life is fed, are spirits which before to Heaven they came were of such eminence of earthly fame as must the more exalt the loftiest song'. One or more of the spirits here will rise to greet the visitor, leaving the cross and yet remaining on it. 'As down the tranquil night's unclouded sky a light may dart and draw the following eye, as though some star its station changed (yet not leaving a vacant place among the stars, nor where it goes itself establishing), so from its place upon that cross there shot a star toward me, yet which did not leave the cross's foot, but, gem to, scarf, thereon like glowing fire in alabaster shone.' The color of the glow of the spirits of this Heaven can change from white to a topaz color, which glows more as the spirit is spoken to.

For Dante, Beatrice has him gaze at the cross, and a voice from it has him gaze on the Cross's horns. As the voice names some of the spirits there, they flash along it, like lightning flashing along a cloud. The spirits in this Heaven include Joshua, Maccabee, Orlando, Charlemagne, William, Rinaldo, Robert Guiscard, Duke Godfrey and many others. From this Heaven, one instantly arises to the Heaven of Jupiter, the light changing from the red of Mars to the white of Jupiter as one goes.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE HEAVEN OF JUPITER Canto(s)

In this Heaven the spirits again glow with light, and wheel in ordered flight through the wide white star of Jupiter, singing as they go the Song of the Just. Each flight moves so as to form a golden letter on the face of the Heaven, and chants the Latin words and phrases which these letters, collected together, shape, such as 'Diligite Justitiam' and 'Qui Judicatis Terram'. When a word is formed, the spirits pause for a while before moving on to form new words and phrases in the Heaven. The spirits here are the just, Princes who have loved righteousness, and people who were once Pagans who are now in bliss.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE EAGLE Canto(s)

As Dante watches the spirits of Jupiter gradually form a gigantic eagle, its wings outspread, on the face of Jupiter. It is a 'myriad entity woven of praises of the will divine'. The eagle then speaks to him in the voice of all the spirits which form it of the mysteries of Divine justice, comparing the depths of divine justice to the depths of the sea, which, although man cannot see them, they are still there. It then speaks of the necessity of Faith for salvation, and of the sins of certain kings across Europe and the Middle East. Having spoken the eagle closes its beak, and the spirits making it up each glow brighter than any star and sing the Song of the Just

again. As Dante puts it 'Music they were, but not as notes that blew, but rather thoughts of God, the flute-holes through'. The eagle then speaks again of faith, salvation and predestination. From here one again arises instantly to the next Heaven, the Heaven of Saturn. Presumably the spirits here unmake the eagle and go back to their shaping of words on Jupiter once Dante is gone...

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE HEAVEN OF SATURN Canto(s)

Upon arriving at the crystal sphere of the seventh Heaven, Dante is immediately faced with a great golden ladder. 'In that great crystal which doth bear the name of the earth's ruler through that golden age when every evil left the temperate land, I saw a ladder. To so great a height it rose that not my eager straining sight could follow, colored like reflected gold; and on its steps were splendors manifold, ascending and descending. Countless they, numerous as though upon those golden bars the emptied depth of Heaven had poured its stars. As jackdaws, when the day begins to break, lift their chilled wings, and rise in flocks that make straight outward, or a wheeling course prefer, so seemed that sparkling host, that made its flight in groups which on their chosen steps would light.'

The ladder is filled with the spirits of this Heaven, 'gloriously flashing their message of pure love'. They are lucent spheres of beautiful light, who each enhance the light of the others, and who can whirl as they speak and ascend and descend the ladder. Those here are those who had given themselves to devout contemplation in life, and who practiced temperance. This includes St Benedict.

A spirit on the lowest rung of the ladder named Damien's Peter speaks to Dante of this Heaven, and those here. He also condemns the luxury in which modern prelates of the Church live, and he and Dante speak of predestination. As they do so the other spirits on the ladder begin to change their motion. 'As thus he spoke those other flames, that shone upon the higher steps, began to whirl and brighten, and descend from rung to rung. And every motion that they made thereon enhanced their beauty.'

Grouping around Damien's Peter, they send a cry 'unto the heights of Heaven', which ascends as a deep articulate thunder, beyond Dante's comprehension, and which stupefies him. Beatrice comforts him, telling him that *everything* is holy here in Heaven. She tells him that 'in that cry you lacked the wit to hear, the vengeance you shall see before you die thundered aloft through Heaven its meaning clear. The sword of wrath, which smites and sundereth, will haste or hinder not to deal its death, though those whose wrong it vengeth think it slow, and those who fear its dreadful edge to know think it too instant in its fall.'

After conversing with the spirits here, as though a whirlwind blows the spirits all sweep upward, carrying Beatrice and Dante with them. 'Believe that flight of mine was over ere a hand which feels the flame could be snatched backward. In that space I came to reach the high sign of the Heavenly wheel which follows Taurus. O most glorious stars! Impregnated with virtues luminous! All that I am, or have of genius, or much or little, from your lights derives. With you was rising, and with you would set, that ardent heart which sires all mortal lives when first I breathed the air of Tuscany and then, when largesse was bestowed on me to enter the high sphere

in which you wheel, I found your region mine. Oh, give me now, devoutly I entreat thee, equal power to the hard passage that I take!

Beatrice speaks to him as they rise, telling him that as he is so near 'the ultimate blessedness, that you should seek approach with eyesight clear and most awareness of the glories here; and therefore, ere to more ascent we go, I charge thee to look backward. Look below; and see how wide a realm, and how complete, already have I placed beneath your feet. For then the exultance of your heart will be of equal mood to meet Christ's chivalry triumphant in its height celestial, when through the ether on your sight it breaks.'

So Dante looks back towards the Earth, seeing the sun and all the planets in their crystal spheres with the globe of the Earth laid out within them all. 'Then looked I downward through the seven spheres. How mean, how paltry our proud earth appears seen from that height! I needs must smile to see its meagre aspect. O sound choice that takes its value at the least! How truly they are upright called who raise their eyes away. I saw Latona's daughter,' (Artemis, the Moon) 'shining now without those shadows which to earth she turns, making me doubtful of her density; sustained the aspect of Hyperion's son;' (Helios, the sun) 'and saw the daughter fair of Dione,' (Aphrodite, Venus) 'and Maia's son,' (Hermes, Mercury) 'in his vicinity their courses take; I saw Jove's temperate fire between his hot son and his chillier sire; observed their various orbits; all I learned, their size, their swiftness, and the distant vast that parts them on their paths. And far below the map of Earth was spread: the hills I know: the winding rivers. All that threshing floor for which we strive so hard, to lose at last. So from the Eternal Twins my glance I cast on all we had passed to that far height attain, and turned it to her beauteous eyes again.' And with that, one arrives at the Heaven of the Fixed Stars.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

HEAVEN OF THE FIXED STARS AND THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST Canto(s)

As soon as he arrives in this Heaven, **Dante** is presented with a procession of the Triumph of Christ. When he arrives, the Heaven is dark, but quickly a faint light grows golden, brightening the sky. This marks the drawing nigh of the 'Squadrons of the Rule of Christ', and of Christ Himself. As the curtain of pure light draws nearer, it seems like the bright light of a full Moon, though everyone seeing it knows that it is the light of Christ. He has all the souls who were true to him on Earth around him, vast hosts of them, all formless and merged into a single clear translucent flame. 'For each soul was not, in its Master's sight, substantial seeming, but reflected light, and He the Substance.'

Through the curtain of light, one can see Christ Himself, but the light is so bright that one must turn away. Beatrice tells Dante that what he sees is 'the path God's suffering paved with fire, and Christ comes down it'. The mortal soul cannot look upon Christ as he approaches without having their mind refuse, and give way under the pressure. Dante gets around this by seeing 'the Banquet of the Lord of Heaven' reflected in Beatrice. He sees 'splendors in a space I might not share, and yet could know them'. This inspires Dante to prayer.

The light of Christ grows a garden around him, of lilies, for His life, and roses, for His blood. As Dante prays, lifting his heart to God, a response comes down to Beatrice. 'Down from midHeaven, through all its splendors, came separate intense, a tiny orb of flame, that when it

reached her, ringed her round complete, a crown of light, pulsating. Song most sweet were discords of the storm, to that great lyre that sounded, as their Queen was throned in fire. O, sapphire, that the brightest Heavens contain, central! O, song that hymns thy, deathless reign! Clear through the breathless, waiting hosts, it said: "I am the Angelic love. The light that led the waiting world to God. The Uncreate Fire. Who sheltered in her womb the World's Desire I compass ever, height on height to tread. O Lady, follow where thy Christ hath led! The highest, holiest, inmost sphere shall be Diviner, flowering all its hope in thee."

As the song ceases, the circling lights return Beatrice's praise in a sweet silence, before they lengthen upwards with a chant of 'Regina caelis rose'. These lights are some of the spirits of this Heaven. Beatrice speaks to them and they become each become a golden-red radiant sphere, spinning on its axis. Together they dance in perfect harmony. The spirits here are all vicars of Christ, who have done His will in life.

One of the spirits of this Heaven, a sphere of light of the greatest beauty, is St. Peter. He examines Dante concerning Faith, and approves his answer with a triumphant cry through the Heaven of 'Deus Laudmus'. Following this, he is examined on Hope by St. James, who also approves his answer with a cry of delight from Heaven, and a clarion cry of 'sperent in te' from the spirits there which is accompanied by a glorious flash of white light. Lastly, St. John appears, the light emanating from him so bright that it blinds Dante (though not permanently). He examines Dante concerning Love. Again, Dante passes the examination, and the most sweet strain Dante has yet heard sounds through Heaven. A strong light strikes him and by it, Beatrice restores his sight, making it, in fact, better than before. It can be assumed that a similar set of examinations would be applied to any other mortals who travel so far in Heaven...

With his sight restored, Dante sees that Adam has joined the three saints. He tells Dante that he lived from nine hundred and thirty years on Earth, and was four thousand, three hundred and two years in the same place as Virgil (presumably Limbo) before spending a short time in the Earthly Paradise and ascending into Heaven.

As he watches, Dante sees the four spirits change to a crimson hue as Saint Peter also denounces his degenerate successors upon the Papal throne. Then they rise up into the air. 'As we see the frozen vapors in white flakes to fall when the Sun feels the Goat's extended horn, so through the ether rose, like flakes of fire, those lights triumphant. Not could sight aspire so high to follow.' As he watches the four spirits rise, Beatrice points out to Dante how far they themselves have risen. He sees the Earth below him again as they rise to the Crystalline Heaven.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE CRYSTALLINE HEAVEN, OR PRIMUM MOBILE Canto(s)

This is the ninth and last of the material Heavens, called the Crystalline because it is transparent and invisible, or the Primum Mobile because from its infinite speed the other lower Heavens take their slower motions.

Beatrice talks to Dante about the nature of this Heaven. 'All reality Round its fixed centre moves; but in this height where God is all the love and all the light, where is no elsewhere, no where can be. Love graspeth all in one including zone of mystery only to its Maker known. What language can define infinity? Five is the half of ten, but that to see the limit of the ten must first

be seen. Here is no limit of space; and naught hath been, nor will be, ended or commenced. Behold the roots of Time's full-leaved but fading Tree!' She also rebukes the covetousness of mortals.

In this Heaven Dante sees a bright point of light directly overhead surrounded by nine concentric rings of fire, the innermost very small, and spinning very fast, the outermost huge and spinning slowly. At the point of light everything begins, and everything concludes, Beatrice tells Dante. As she speaks, each of the rings sends forth innumerable lights which dance within its circle, sounding hosannas as they go. She continues to explain that they each ring is one of the Angelic Orders, around God, in the centre:

'The inmost circles have revealed to thee the Seraphim and Cherubim. So fast they spin around that central source that they shall share its verity the most they may. And as their vision is sublime, so far they gain their purpose.

'Those their course beside, the loves that round the next swift circle ride, are named the Throne, because they brought to be completion of the primal ternary. And you should know that their delightings are according as their sights can penetrate the truth which quietens every intellect. From which we can perceive the blissful state is founded on the sight of God direct, from which love followeth in its course. The sight is merit in itself, which grace begets, and the desire for holiness; and so from grade to grade doth the sweet process go.

'The second ternary which flowereth thus in this eternal spring, where never night sees Aries trample, doth perpetually unite in its hosannas, which it sets in three accordant strains of melody, as the three orders of its gladness are. For here are three ranks of divinity; thus ordered - Dominations, Virtues, Powers.

'The third, last ternary consists of these: first Principalities, Archangels next, and, last and outmost, Angels flame and sing. All these gaze upward, being so drawn, and draw from downward with a might as victoring.'

Beatrice then talks of the creation and nature of the angels, before denouncing modern preachers on Earth. As she speaks, she and Dante ascend to the Empyrean, rising towards the centre of the rings of angels, into the bright point of light, the rings of light fading as they go into that blinding light.

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:

THE EMPYREAN Canto(s)

This is the highest Heaven, outside of time and space. It is the Heaven of God's immediate presence and the only real home of the angels and the redeemed, whose blessedness consists of their eternal vision of Him.

'Behold, from out the Heaven of greatest space passed have we to the sphere where light is all; light intellectual by pervading love impregnated: pure love of holiness impregnated with bliss, which bliss transcends all separate sweetness. Here your eyes shall see the twofold chivalry of Paradise; and those who from an earthly conflict rise in the same aspect as their forms shall be before the throne of judgement,' says Beatrice as she and Dante enter the Empyrean.

At this point a bright light swathes Dante so that he cannot see. From within himself he summons a power to conquer all that he had been, and is able to see again. 'There I saw Light like a river in

its molten glow That golden flowed between two banks aflower With spring's fresh miracle.
From out the stream Came leaping sparks that in the blossoms fed, Rubies in cups of sunlight.
Each would seem To sate itself with fragrance, and return As others outward leaped that joy to learn.'

Dante bends to taste from the stream, and as his eyes meet its flow, he sees the stream change to a golden rose, and sees through 'the previous beauty of the sparks and flowers, lo, the two courts of Heaven were manifest! But where are words their wonder to declare? A light transcending every light is there by which His creatures their Creator see, where only in that sight their peace may be.'

Up through the petals of the Rose of Paradise are the ranked thrones of the saints, with the Blessed Virgin at the peak. The boundary of the top petals of the open Rose contains a point even more radiant than the general golden glow of the Empyrean with 'over it a thousand angels making festival hovered and sang and sported; every one distinct in art and function, separately a thought of God created.' At that point sits the Blessed Virgin, the sight of whom fills **Dante** with deepest joy, the 'deliciousness for which the victor saints of Heaven are glad.'

Beatrice points out to Dante an empty throne set in the Rose, which is designated for Henry VII. 'As a hill images itself in some clear lake, as though upon its own rich verdancy to gaze, so in that light, around that eminence, round and around in thousand ranks I saw the conquering saints of God. And if so low, so large the light, the concourse, nearly viewed, judge what must be the outmost amplitude of the wide petals of that golden Rose. But not the great breadth nor the ample height could give denial to mine eager sight of the full sweep of that ranged ecstasy. For, where God is, nor near nor far can be, nor Nature's laws have any meaning there. Within the yellow of the eternal Rose Beatrice drew me, while its petals spread wide open to that sun which round it shed an everlasting spring, the while its praise continual perfume gave.' Those in the Empyrean, within the Rose of Paradise, are 'the ranks of Christ's great chivalry, which with His blood, a sacred spouse, He won'. The many saints there do not obstruct the light from above. They constantly sing hosannas.

Over them fly Angels who, 'while they fly, do sing His glory whom continually they serve, and by that service magnify'. They descend into the Rose of Paradise and drink the love of God there before ascending back into the sky. 'Their faces were of lively flame: alight their wings with lustrous gold: the rest so white that dull in contrast were the whitest snow. And as within the flower they ministered with fanning wings the ranks of saints along, passion they gave and peace alike to know; for in the bliss of that most holy state passion is peace, and peace is passionate.'

At this point, Beatrice goes from Dante while he is gazing around, and ascends to her throne, which is in the third circle below the Blessed Virgin. Saint Bernard, who has been assigned to Dante to ensure that he 'mightst complete a perfect progress' points her out to Dante. 'Seated high, the living everlasting light divine crowning her brows with its reflected rays, I saw her, far from any reach of mine. Far as from darkness of the deepest sea the thunders of the utmost Heaven may be, I saw her inaccessible'. Dante prays to her, thanking her for what she has done, and she smiles down on him in response.

St Bernard describes the ranks and orders of the Rose to Dante. At Mary's feet, the only inhabitant of the second rank, sits Eve. In addition to Beatrice, the third rank contains Rachel.

'After these, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, and beyond the Moabite maid who was the ancestress of him who sinned and sang, and in the stress of penitence misereri mei cried.'

'Petal by petal, rank by rank,' St Bernard tells Dante of the 'illustrious names of old, half-circling down the Rose's rounded cup,' until he reaches the seventh rank which contains the 'unnumbered names, but ancient all, a tale of Hebrew dames and others who, before Christ's victory, looked forward, and believed the light to be.' On the other side of the Rose, separated from them by a cleft between petals, 'are those who loved the Christ their eyes had seen, or looked with faith upon a backward day.' Because of this every petal is filled on the first side, but there are many vacant seats on the other 'waiting those who yet shall rise triumphant.'

On a throne at an equal level to that of Mary sits St John. Beneath him sit Saints Francis, Benedict and Augustus, with, below them, the 'conquering Christian saints'.

Close to Mary sit the patricians of the Court of Heaven. On Mary's left hand sits Adam, on her right sits St Peter. Beside him sits St John, and beside Adam sits Moses. Next to Peter sits Anna, Mary's mother, so entranced by her daughter that she does not sing hosannas. Beyond Anna sits Lucia. Note that some of the saints here are also present in, or perhaps visit, the lower Heavens too...

In a third division of the Rose are enthroned those 'who come to God unmerited either by deeds or faith, their lives too soon expiring', that is, the children, who remain children in Heaven forever. He tells Dante that 'in the first ages innocence alone secured salvation to the child of those who were themselves devout. A later day allowed male children such release if they were circumcised and sinless. After that the period of full grace full rite required of Christian baptism, that the innocent wings should gather power to soar.' So that, now, only baptized Christian children will find their way to the Empyrean.

When Dante has seen all this, St Bernard begins a prayer to the Virgin, asking her to complete Dante's journey, so that what he has seen does not lose its power on him. She looks down at him, then up, and the Light of God shines down on Dante, giving him the Beatific Vision and the Ultimate Salvation. 'But what I saw therein no words could tell, no human memory from God's citadel retire with plunder of its wondrous store. As he who dreamed, and can recall no more, nor that from his encumbered mind dismiss, so toiled am I. I know no more than this: I dreamed. I waked. I know the sweetness yet, though the deep source my yearning thoughts forget.' 'This I know: Had mine eyes wavered from that sacred glow I had been irretrievably lost. Therefore, aware of peril, did I strive the more the weight of infinite value to sustain.' 'As I gazed, it seemed that form was on that painted light pictured in human semblance. There I raised Eyes tranced and raptured by that wondrous sight.' And so, with his journey complete, Dante returns to Earth...

An image, idea, or question that caught your imagination and its citation:
