

Paradiso Canto XXXII:1-36 The Two Halves of the Rose

He, the contemplative, with his Love fixed on his Delight, freely assumed the office of a teacher, and began these sacred words: ‘The wound, that *Mary* [p. 516] sealed and anointed, is that which *Eve* [p. 472], who is so lovely, at her feet, opened and pierced. In the order, made by the third level, *Rachel* [p. 544] with *Beatrice* [p. 426], sits below her, as you see. Even as I go down the rose, petal by petal, naming their proper names, you can see, descending from level to level, *Sarah* [p. 551], *Rebecca* [p. 545], *Judith* [p. 500], and *Ruth* [p. 549], her from whom came *David* [p. 460] the singer, third in descent, who cried out, from grief at his sin: ‘Miserere mei: Pity me.’ And down from the seventh, and beyond, again the Hebrew women, separating the flower’s tresses, since they are the wall, that parts the sacred stairway, according to how faith in Christ was realised.

On this side, where the flower is full-blown, in all its petals, those, who believed in Christ to come, are sitting. On the other side, where there are empty seats among them, are the semi-circles of those whose eyes were turned towards the Christ who had come. And as the glorious throne of Heaven’s Lady, and the seats below her, make such a partition, so, next to her, does that of the great Baptist, *John* [p. 497], who, ever holy, suffered the desert and a martyr’s death, and then Limbo, for two years space, until Christ came there: and, below him, the separating line, assigned to *Francis* [p. 475], *Benedict* [p. 429], *Augustine* [p. 423], and the others from circle to circle, down to here.’

Paradiso Canto XXXII:37-84 The Children

‘Now marvel at the depth of Divine provision, since both aspects of the faith will fill this Garden equally. And know that, down from the level that cuts across the two divisions, the spirits have their places not because of their own merit, but another’s, given certain conditions, since these are all souls freed before they had exercised true choice.

You can see it by their faces, and their voices, those of children, if you look carefully and listen. Now you doubt, and are silent in your doubting: but I will untie the difficult knot for you, in which your subtle thoughts are

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entangling you. No chance point has place in all this kingdom, no more than sadness, thirst, or hunger do, because what you see is established by Eternal Law, so that the ring corresponds exactly to the finger.

The ordering of these children, swiftly come to the true life, according to greater or lesser excellence, is not *sina causa*: without reason. The King, by whom this kingdom rests in such great love, such great delight that he will dares nothing more, when he creates minds, in his joyous sight, of his grace and at his pleasure, grants them diversity: and let the effect suffice as proof. And this is marked, clearly and expressly, in Holy Writ, concerning those twins who struggled in anger in *Rebecca's* [p. 545] womb.

So the Supreme Light must wreath them worthily, according to the colour of the tresses of such grace. Therefore they are placed at different levels, without regard for the externals, differentiated only by their primal keenness in seeing Him.

So, in ancient times, the parents' faith alone, combined with innocence, was enough to reach salvation. When those first ages were complete, males needed to gain power in their innocent wings, through the rite of circumcision. But when the time of grace came, then, lacking Christ's perfect baptism, such innocence was held, *there, below* [p. 429].'

Paradiso Canto XXXII: 85-114 Gabriel

'Now see the face that is most like Christ's, since its brightness, and no other, has the power to equip you to see Christ.'

I saw such gladness, borne in the sacred Angelic minds created to fly through that altitude, rain down on that face that nothing, I had seen before, seized me with such dumb admiration, or so revealed the semblance of God. And that Love which first came down to Her, singing: 'Ave, Maria, gratia plena: Hail, *Mary* [p. 516], full of grace,' now spread his wings in front of her. The Divine Canticle was responded to on every side by the court of the blest, so that every face found peace in it.

'O holy Father, you who accept being here below for my sake, leaving that sweet place, where you sit by eternal sanction, who is that Angel who looks our Queen in the eyes with such joy, so enamoured he seems all on

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fire?’ So I turned again to his teaching, he who gathered beauty from Mary, as the morning star does from the sun. And he to me: ‘The greatest exultation and chivalry that exists in Angel or in spirit, is all in him: and we would wish it so, since it is *Gabriel* [p. 477] who brought the palm down to Mary, when the Son of God willed that He should take on our burden.’

Paradiso Canto XXXII:115-151 The Noble Souls

‘But now let your eyes come travel, even as I speak, and note the great noble souls, of this most just and pious empire. Those two who sit up there, most blest by being nearest to the Empress, are like two roots of this Rose. Her neighbour on the left is *Adam* [p. 405], that father, through whose audacity in tasting the fruit, the human race tastes such bitterness. On the right is *Peter* [p. 534], that ancient father of Holy Church to whom Christ entrusted the keys of this beloved flower. And *John* [p. 498], sits by his side, who, before he died, saw all the dark prophetic seasons of that fair Bride, who was won with lance and nails: and by Adam’s side, *Moses* [p. 523], that leader, rests, under whom the ungrateful, fickle, and mutinous people were fed with manna.

See *Saint Anne* [p. 415], sitting opposite Peter, so content to look at her daughter, that she does not remove her gaze to sing Hosanna. And opposite Adam, the greatest father of our family, sits *Lucy* [p. 508], who stirred your Lady, when you were bending your brow downwards to ruin.

But since the time of your vision flees, here let us stop, like the careful tailor who cuts the garment according to the cloth, and let us turn our eyes towards the Primal Love, so that gazing at Him, you might penetrate as far as possible into his brightness. Truly grace needs to be acquired by prayer (so that you do not by chance fall back as you beat your wings), grace from Her who has power to help you: and follow me with such affection that your heart is not separated from my words.’ And he began this sacred prayer.