

# Paradise Canto 29

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-06-20 — 1 clipping

[Christianity Index](#) [Divine Comedy Index](#) [Previous: Paradise Canto 28](#) [Next: Paradise Canto 30](#)

## Canto XXIX

### Argument

Beatrice beholds, in the mirror of divine truth, some doubts which had entered the mind of Dante. These she resolves; and then digresses into a vehement reprehension of certain theologians and preachers in those days, whose ignorance or avarice induced them to substitute their own inventions for the pure word of the Gospel.

No longer, than what time Latona's twins  
Cover'd of Libra and the fleecy star,  
Together both, girding the horizon hang;  
In even balance, from the zenith poised;  
Till from that verge, each, changing hemisphere,  
Part the nice level; e'en so brief a space  
Did Beatrice's silence hold. A smile  
Sat painted on her cheek; and her fix'd gaze  
Bent on the point, at which my vision fail'd:  
When thus, her words resuming, she began:  
"I speak, nor what thou wouldst inquire demand;  
For I have mark'd it, where all time and place  
Are present. Not for increase to Himself  
Of good, which may not be increased, but forth  
To manifest His glory by its beams;  
Inhabiting His own eternity,  
Beyond time's limit or what bound soe'er  
To circumscribe His being; as He will'd,  
Into new natures, like unto Himself,  
Eternal Love unfolded. Nor before,  
As if in dull inaction, torpid, lay.  
For, not in process of before or aft,  
Upon these waters moved the Spirit of God.  
Simple and mix'd, both form and substance, forth  
To perfect being started, like three darts  
Shot from a bow three - corded. And as ray  
In crystal, glass, and amber, shines entire,  
E'en at the moment of its issuing; thus  
Did, from the eternal Sovran, beam entire  
His threefold operation, at one act  
Produced coeval. Yet, in order, each  
Created his due station knew: those highest,

Who pure intelligence were made; mere power,  
The lowest; in the midst, bound with strict league,  
Intelligence and power, unsever'd bond.  
Long tract of ages by the Angels past,  
Ere the creating of another world,  
Described on Jerome's pages,[1] thou hast seen.  
But that what I disclose to thee is true,  
Those penmen,[2] whom the Holy Spirit moved  
In many a passage of their sacred book,  
Attest; as thou by diligent search shalt find:  
And reason,[3] in some sort, discerns the same,  
Who scarce would grant the heavenly ministers,  
Of their perfection void, so long a space.  
Thus when and where these spirits of love were made,  
Thou know'st, and how: and, knowing, hast allay'd  
Thy thirst, which from the triple question[4] rose.  
Ere one had reckon'd twenty, e'en so soon,  
Part of the Angels fell: and in their fall,  
Confusion to your elements ensued.  
The others kept their station: and this task,  
Whereon thou look'st, began, with such delight,  
That they surcease not ever, day nor night,  
Their circling. Of that fatal lapse the cause  
Was the curst pride of him, whom thou hast seen  
Pent with the world's incumbrance. Those, whom here  
Thou seest, were lowly to confess themselves  
Of His free bounty, who had made them apt  
For ministeries so high: therefore their views  
Were, by enlightening grace and their own merit,  
Exalted; so that in their will confirm'd  
They stand, nor fear to fall. For do not doubt,  
But to receive the grace, which Heaven vouchsafes,

[1: Jerome had described the Angels as created long before the rest of the universe; an opinion which Thomas Aquinas controverted.]

[2: As in Gen. i. I, and Eccles. xviii. I.]

[3: "Reason." The heavenly ministers ("motori") would have existed to no purpose if they had been created before the corporeal world, which they were to govern.]

[4: He had wished to know where, when, and how the Angels had been created, and these three questions had been resolved.]

Is meritorious, even as the soul  
With prompt affection welcometh the guest.  
Now, without further help, if with good heed  
My words thy mind have treasured, thou henceforth

This consistory round about mayst scan,  
And gaze thy fill. But, since thou hast on earth  
Heard vain disputers, reasoners in the schools,  
Canvass the angelic nature, and dispute  
Its powers of apprehension, memory, choice;  
Therefore, 'tis well thou take from me the truth,  
Pure and without disguise; which they below,  
Equivocating, darken and perplex.

"Know thou, that, from the first, these substances,  
Rejoicing in the countenance of God,  
Have held unceasingly their view, intent  
Upon the glorious vision, from the which  
Nought absent is nor hid: where then no change  
Of newness, with succession, interrupts,  
Remembrance, there, needs none to gather up  
Divided thought and images remote.

"So that men, thus at variance with the truth,  
Dream, though their eyes be open; reckless some  
Of error; others well aware they err,  
To whom more guilt and shame are justly due.  
Each the known track of sage philosophy  
Deserts, and has a bye - way of his own:  
So much the restless eagerness to shine,  
And love of singularity prevail.  
Yet this, offensive as it is, provokes  
Heaven's anger less, than when the Book of God  
Is forced to yield to man's authority,  
Or from its straightness warp'd: no reckoning made  
What blood the sowing of it in the world  
Has cost; what favour for himself he wins,  
Who meekly clings to it. The aim of all  
Is how to shine: e'en they, whose office is  
To preach the Gospel, let the Gospel sleep,  
And pass their own inventions off instead.  
One tells, how at Christ's suffering the wan moon  
Bent back her steps, and shadow'd o'er the sun  
With intervenient disk, as she withdrew:  
Another, how the light shrouded itself  
Within its tabernacle, and left dark  
The Spaniard, and the Indian, with the Jew.  
Such fables Florence in her pulpit hears,  
Bandied about more frequent, than the names  
Of Bindi and of Lapi[5] in her streets.  
The sheep, meanwhile, poor witless ones, return  
From pasture, fed with wind: and what avails  
For their excuse, they do not see their harm?"

Christ said not to His first conventicle,  
'Go forth and preach impostures to the world,'  
But gave them truth to build on; and the sound  
Was mighty on their lips: nor needed they,  
Beside the Gospel, other spear or shield,  
To aid them in their warfare for the faith.  
The preacher now provides himself with store  
Of jests and gibes; and, so there be no lack  
Of laughter, while he vents them, his big cowl  
Distends, and he has won the meed he sought:  
Could but the vulgar catch a glimpse the while  
Of that dark bird which nestles in his hood,  
They scarce would wait to hear the blessing said,  
Which now the dotards hold in such esteem,  
That every counterfeit, who spreads abroad  
The hands of holy promise, finds a throng  
Of credulous fools beneath. Saint Anthony  
Fattens with this his swine,[6] and others worse  
Than swine, who diet at his lazy board,  
Paying with unstampt metal[7] for their fare,

[5: Common names at Florence.]

[6: On the sale of these blessings, the brothers of St. Anthony supported themselves and their paramours. From behind the swine of St. Anthony, our Poet levels a blow at Boniface VIII, from whom, in 1297, they obtained the privileges of an independent congregation.]

[7: With false indulgences.]

"But (for we far have wander'd) let us seek  
The forward path again; so as the way  
Be shorten'd with the time. No mortal tongue,  
Nor thought of man, hath ever reach'd so far,  
That of these natures he might count the tribes.  
What Daniel[8] of their thousands hath reveal'd,

[8: "Daniel." "Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him" - Dan. vii. 10.]

With finite number, infinite conceals.  
The fountain, at whose source these drink their beams,  
With light supplies them in as many modes,  
As there are splendours that it shines on: each  
According to the virtue it conceives,  
Differing in love and sweet affection.  
Look then how lofty and how huge in breadth  
The eternal Might, which, broken and dispersed  
Over such countless mirrors, yet remains  
Whole in itself and one, as at the first."

