

# Paradise Canto 10

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[Christianity Index](#) [Divine Comedy Index](#) [Previous: Paradise Canto 9](#) [Next: Paradise Canto 11](#)

Canto X

Argument

Their next ascent carries them into the sun, which is the fourth heaven. Here they are encompassed with a wreath of blessed spirits, twelve in number. Thomas Aquinas, who is one of these, declares the names and endowments of the rest.

Looking into His First - Born with the Love,  
Which breathes from both eternal, the first Might  
Ineffable, wherever eye or mind  
Can roam, hath in such order all disposed,  
As none may see and fail to enjoy. Raise, then,  
O reader! to the lofty wheels, with me,  
Thy ken directed to the point,[1] whereat  
One motion strikes on the other. There begin  
Thy wonder of the mighty Architect,

[1: To that part of heaven where the equinoctial circle and the Zodiac intersect each other, where the common motion of the heavens from east to west may be said to strike with greatest force against the motion proper to the planets, and this repercussion, as it were, is here the strongest, because the velocity of each is increased to the utmost by their respective distances from the poles.]

Who loves His work so inwardly, His eye  
Doth ever watch it. See, how thence oblique[2]  
Brancheth the circle, where the planets roll  
To pour their wished influence on the world;  
Whose path not bending thus, in Heaven above[3]  
Much virtue would be lost, and here on earth  
All power well - nigh extinct; or, from direct  
Were its departure distant more or less,  
I' the universal order, great defect  
Must, both in Heaven and here beneath, ensue.

[2: "Oblique." The Zodiac.]

[3: If the planets did not preserve that order in which they move, they would not receive nor transmit their due influences; and if the Zodiac were not thus oblique; if toward the north it either passed or went short of the tropic of Cancer, or else toward the south it passed, or went short of the tropic of Capricorn, it would not divide the seasons as it now does.]

Now rest thee, reader! on thy bench, and muse  
Anticipative of the feast to come  
So shall delight make thee not feel thy toil.  
Lo! I have set before thee; for thyself  
Feed now: the matter I indite, henceforth  
Demands entire my thought. Join'd with the part,[4]  
Which late we told of, the great minister[5]  
Of nature that upon the world imprints  
The virtue of the Heaven, and doles out  
Time for us with his beam, went circling on  
Along the spires,[6] where[7] each hour sooner comes;  
And I was with him, weetless of ascent,  
But as a man,[8] that weets his thought, ere thinking.

[4: The intersection of the equinoctial circle and the Zodiac.]

[5: "Minister." The sun.]

[6: According to Dante, as the earth is motionless, the sun passes by a spiral motion, from one tropic to another.]

[7: "Where." In which the sun rises earlier every day after the vernal equinox.]

[8: "But as a man." That is, he was quite insensible of it.]

For Beatrice, she who passeth on  
So suddenly from good to better, time  
Counts not the act, oh then how great must needs  
Have been her brightness! What there was i' th' sun,  
(Where I had enter'd,) not through change of hue,  
But light transparent - did I summon up  
Genius, art, practice - I might not so speak,  
It should be e'er imagined: yet believed

It may be, and the sight be justly craved.  
And if our fantasy fail of such height,  
What marvel, since no eye above the sun  
Hath ever travel'd? Such are they dwell here,  
Fourth family[9] of the Omnipotent Sire,  
Who of His Spirit and of His Offspring[10] shows;  
And holds them still enraptured with the view.  
And thus to me Beatrice: "Thank, oh thank  
The Sun of Angels, Him, who by His grace  
To this perceptible hath lifted thee."

[9: "Fourth family." The inhabitants of the sun, the fourth planet.]

[10: The procession of the third and the generation of the second person in the Trinity.]

Never was heart in such devotion bound,

And with complacency so absolute  
Disposed to render up itself to God,  
As mine was at those words: and so entire  
The love for Him, that held me, it eclipsed  
Beatrice in oblivion. Nought displeased  
Was she, but smiled thereat so joyously,  
That of her laughing eyes the radiance brake  
And scatter'd my collected mind abroad.

Then saw I a bright band, in liveliness  
Surpassing, who themselves did make the crown,  
And us their centre: yet more sweet in voice,  
Than, in their visage, beaming. Cinctured thus,  
Sometime Latona's daughter we behold,  
When the impregnate air retains the thread  
That weaves her zone. In the celestial court,  
Whence I return, are many jewels found,  
So dear and beautiful, they cannot brook  
Transporting from that realm: and of these lights  
Such was the song.[11] Who doth not prune his wing  
To soar up thither, let him[12] look from thence  
For tidings from the dumb. When, singing thus,  
Those burning suns had circled round us thrice,  
As nearest stars around the fixed pole;  
Then seem'd they like to ladies, from the dance  
Not ceasing, but suspense, in silent pause,

[11: The song of these spirits was like a jewel so highly prized that the exportation of it is prohibited by law.]

[12: Let him not expect intelligence of that place, for it surpasses direction.]

Listening, till they have caught the strain anew:  
Suspended so they stood: and, from within,  
Thus heard I one, who spake: "Since with its beam  
The Grace, whence true love lighteth first his flame,  
That after doth increase by loving, shines  
So multiplied in thee, it leads thee up  
Along this ladder, down whose hallow'd steps  
None e'er descend, and mount them not again;  
Who from his phial should refuse thee wine  
To slake thy thirst, no less constrained[13] were,  
Than water flowing not unto the sea.  
Thou fain wouldst hear, what plants are these, that bloom  
In the bright garland, which, admiring, girds  
This fair dame round, who strengthens thee for Heaven.  
I, then,[14] was of the lambs, that Dominic  
Leads, for his saintly flock, along the way

Where well they thrive, not swoln with vanity.  
He, nearest on my right hand, brother was,  
And master to me: Albert of Cologne[15]  
Is this; and, of Aquinum, Thomas[16] I.  
If thou of all the rest wouldst be assured,  
Let thine eye, waiting on the words I speak,  
In circuit journey round the blessed wreath.  
That next resplendence issues from the smile  
Of Gratian,[17] who to either forum[18] lent

[13: "The rivers might as easily cease to flow toward the sea, as we could deny thee thy request."]

[14: "I was of the Dominican order."]

[15: Albertus Magnus was born at Laugingen, in Thuringia, in 1193, and studied at Paris and at Padua; at the latter place he entered into the Dominican order. He then taught theology in various parts of Germany, and particularly at Cologne. Thomas Aquinas was his favorite pupil In 1260 he reluctantly accepted the bishopric of Ratisbon, and in two years after resigned it, and returned to his cell in Cologne, where the remainder of his life was passed in superintending the school, and in composing his voluminous works on divinity and natural science. He died in 1280.]

[16: Thomas Aquinas, of whom Bucer is reported to have said, "Take but Thomas away, and I will overturn the Church of Rome; and whom Hooker terms "the greatest among the school divines" - ("Eccl. Pol." b. iii. section 9), was born of noble parents, who anxiously but vainly endeavored to divert him from a life of celibacy and study. He died in 1274, at the age of forty - seven.]

[17: "Gratian." Gratian, a Benedictine monk belonging to the convent of St. Felix and Nabor, at Bologna, and by birth a Tuscan, composed, about the year 1130, for the use of the schools, an abridgement or epitome of canon law, drawn from the letters of the pontiffs, the decrees of councils and the writings of the ancient doctors.]

[18: "To either forum." By reconciling the civil with the canon law.]

Such help, as favour wins in Paradise.  
The other, nearest, who adorns our quire,  
Was Peter,[19] he that with the widow gave  
To holy Church his treasure. The fifth light,[20]  
Goodliest of all, is by such love inspired,  
That all your world craves tidings of his doom.[21]  
Within, there is a lofty light, endow'd  
With sapience so profound, if truth be truth,  
That with a ken of such wide amplitude  
No second hath arisen. Next behold  
That taper's radiance,[22] to whose view was shown,

Clearliest, the nature and the ministry  
Angelical, while yet in flesh it dwelt.  
In the other little light serenely smiles  
That pleader[23] for the Christian temples, he,  
Who did provide Augustin of his lore.  
Now, if thy mind's eye pass from light to light,  
Upon my praises following, of the eighth[24]  
Thy thirst is next. The saintly soul, that shows  
The world's deceitfulness, to all who hear him,  
Is, with the sight of all the good that is,  
Blest there. The limbs, whence it was driven, lie

[19: "Peter." Pietro Lombardo was of obscure origin, nor is the place of his birth in Lombardy ascertained. With a recommendation from the Bishop of Lucca to St. Bernard, he went into France to continue his studies; and for that purpose remained some time at Rheims, whence he proceeded to Paris. Here his reputation was so great that Philip, brother of Louis VII, being chosen Bishop of Paris, resigned that dignity to Pietro, whose pupil he had been. He held his bishopric only one year, and died 1160. His "Liber Sententiarum" is highly esteemed. It contains a system of scholastic theology, much more complete than any which had been yet seen.]

[20: "The fifth light." Solomon.]

[21: "His doom." It was a common question, it seems, whether Solomon were saved or no.]

[22: St. Dionysius, the Areopagite. "The famous Grecian fanatic, who gave himself out for Dionysius the Areopagite, disciple of St. Paul, and who, under the protection of this venerable name, gave laws and instructions to those that were desirous of raising their souls above all human things, in order to unite them to their great source by sublime contemplation, lived most probably in the fourth century." Maclaine's Mosheim.]

[23: "That pleader." In the fifth century, Paulus Orosius "acquired a considerable degree of reputation by the history he wrote to refute the cavils of the Pagans against Christianity, and by his books against the Pelagians and Priscillianists." Ibid.]

[24: Boetius, whose book "de Consolatione Philosophiae," excited so much attention during the Middle Ages, was born about 470. "In 524 he was cruelly put to death by Theodoric, either on real or pretended suspicion of his being engaged in a conspiracy." Della Lett. Ital.]

Down in Cieldauro;[25] and from martyrdom  
And exile came it here. Lo! further on,  
Where flames the arduous spirit of Isidore;[26]  
Of Bede;[27] and Richard,[28] more than man, erewhile,  
In deep discernment. Lastly this, from whom  
Thy look on me reverteth, was the beam

Of one, whose spirit, on high musings bent,  
Rebuked the lingering tardiness of death.  
It is the eternal light of Sigebert[29]  
Who 'scaped not envy, when of truth he argued,  
Reading in the straw - litter'd street." [30] Forthwith,  
As clock, that calleth up the spouse of God[31]  
To win her Bridegroom's love at matin's hour,  
Each part of other fitly drawn and urged,  
Sends out a tinkling sound, of note so sweet,  
Affection springs in well - disposed breast;  
Thus saw I move the glorious wheel; thus heard  
Voice answering voice, so musical and soft,  
It can be known but where day endless shines.

[25: "Cieldauro." Boetius was buried at Pavia, in the monastery of St. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro.]

[26: He was Archbishop of Seville during forty years, and died in 635.]

[27: "Bede." Bede, whose virtues obtained him the appellation of the Venerable, was born in 672, at Wearmouth and Jarrow in the bishopric of Durham, and died at Jarrow in 735. Invited to Rome by Pope Sergius I, he preferred passing almost the whole of his life in the seclusion of a monastery.]

[28: Richard of St. Victor, a native either of Scotland or Ireland, was canon and prior of the monastery of that name at Paris; and died in 1173. "He was at the head of the Mystics in this century; and his treatise, entitled the "Mystical Ark," which contains as it were the marrow of this kind of theology, was received with the greatest avidity." Maclaine's Mosheim.]

[29: A monk of the Abbey of Gemblours, in high repute at the end of the eleventh, and beginning of the twelfth century.]

[30: The name of a street in Paris; the "Rue de Fouarre."]

[31: The Church.]