

Paradise Canto 12

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-06-22 — 1 clipping

Christianity Index Divine Comedy Index Previous: Paradise Canto 11 Next:
Paradise Canto 13

Canto XII

Argument

A second circle of glorified souls encompasses the first. Buonaventura, who is one of them, celebrates the praises of St. Dominic, and informs Dante who the other eleven are, that are in this second circle of garland.

Soon as its final word the blessed flame[1]
Had raised for utterance, straight the holy mill[2]
Began to wheel; nor yet had once revolved,
Or e'er another, circling, compass'd it,
Motion to motion, song to song, conjoining;
Song, that as much our muses doth excel,
Our Syrens with their tuneful pipes, as ray
Of primal splendour doth its faint reflex.

[1: Thomas Aquinas.]

[2: The circle of spirits.]

As when, if Juno bid her handmaid forth,
Two arches parallel, and trick'd alike,
Span the thin cloud, the outer taking birth
From that within (in manner of that voice[3]
Whom love did melt away, as sun the mist),
And they who gaze, presageful call to mind
The compact, made with Noah, of the world
No more to be o'erflow'd; about us thus,
Of sempiternal roses, bending, wreathed
Those garlands twain; and to the innermost
E'en thus the external answer'd. When the footing,
And other great festivity, of song,
And radiance, light with light accordant, each
Jocund and blythe, had at their pleasure still'd,
(E'en as the eyes, by quick volition moved,
Are shut and raised together), from the heart
Of one[4] amongst the new lights[5] moved a voice,

[3: One rainbow giving back the image of the other, as sound is reflected by Echo, that nymph, who was melted away by her fondness for Narcissus, as vapor is melted by the sun. The reader will observe in the text not only a second and third simile within the first, but two mythological and one sacred allusion bound up together with the whole. Even after his

accumulation of imagery, the two circles of spirits, by whom Beatrice and Dante were encompassed, are by a bold figure termed two garlands of neverfading roses.]

[4: "One." St. Buonaventura, general of the Franciscan order, in which he effected some reformation; and one of the most profound divines of his age. "He refused the archbishopric of York, which was offered him by Clement IV, but afterward was prevailed on to accept the bishopric of Albano and a cardinal's hat. He was born at Bagnoregio or Bagnorea, in Tuscany, A. D. 1221, and died in 1274." Dict. Histor, par Chaudon et Delandine, Ed. Lyon. 1804.]

[5: In the circle that had newly surrounded the first.]

That made me seem[6] like needle to the star,
In turning to its whereabouts; and thus
Began: "The love,[7] that makes me beautiful,
Prompts me to tell of the other guide, for whom
Such good of mine is spoken. Where one is,
The other worthily should also be;
That as their warfare was alike, alike
Should be their glory. Slow, and full of doubt,
And with thin ranks, after its banner moved
The army of Christ, (which it so dearly cost
To reappoint), when its imperial Head
Who reigneth ever, for the drooping host
Did make provision, through grace alone,
And not through its deserving. As thou heard'st,[8]
Two champions to the succour of His spouse
He sent, who by their deeds and words might join
Again His scatter'd people. In that clime,[9]
Where springs the pleasant west - wind to unfold
The fresh leaves, with which Europe sees herself
New - garmented; nor from those billows[10] far,
Beyond whose chiding, after weary course,
The sun doth sometimes[11] hide him; safe abides
The happy Callaroga,[12] under guard
Of the great shield, wherein the lion lies
Subjected and supreme. And there was born
The loving minion of the Christian faith,[13]
The hallow'd wrestler, gentle to his own,

[6: "That made me turn to it, as the needle does to the pole."]

[7: "The love." By an act of mutual courtesy, Bounaventura, a Franciscan, is made to proclaim the praises of St. Dominic, as Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican, has celebrated those of St. Francis; and in like manner each blames the irregularities, not of the other's order, but of that to which himself belonged. Even Macchiavelli, no great friend to the Church, attributes

the revival of Christianity to the influence of these two saints.]

[8: See the last Canto, v. 33.]

[9: "In that clime." Spain.]

[10: "Those billows." The Atlantic.]

[11: During the summer solstice.]

[12: "Callaroga." Between Osma and Aranda, in Old Castile designated by the royal coat - of - arms.]

[13: Dominic was born April 5, 1170, and died August 6, 1221. His birthplace Callaroga; his father and mother's names. Felix, and Joanna; his mother's dream; his name of Dominic, given him in consequence of a vision by his godmother, are all told in an anonymous life of the saint, said to have been written in the thirteenth century.]

And to his enemies terrible. So replete
His soul with lively virtue, that when first
Created, even in the mother's womb,[14]
It prophesied. When, at the sacred font,
The spousals were complete 'twixt faith and him,
Where pledge of mutual safety was exchanged,
The dame,[15] who was his surety, in her sleep
Beheld the wondrous fruit, that was from him
And from his heirs to issue. And that such
He might be construed, as indeed he was,
She was inspired to name him of his owner,
Whose he was wholly; and so call'd him Dominic.
And I speak of him, as the labourer,
Whom Christ in His own garden chose to be
His help - mate. Messenger he seem'd, and friend
Fast - knit to Christ; and the first love he show'd,
Was after the first counsel[16] that Christ gave.
Many a time[17] his nurse, at entering, found
That he had risen in silence, and was prostrate,
As who should say, 'My errand was for this,'
O happy father! Felix[18] rightly named.
O favour'd mother! rightly named Joanna;
If that do mean, as men interpret it.[19]
Not for the world's sake, for which now they toil
Upon Ostiense[20] and Taddeo's[21] lore;
But for the real manna, soon he grew
Mighty in learning; and did set himself

[14: His mother, when pregnant with him, is said to have dreamt that she should bring forth a white and black dog with a lighted torch in his mouth, which were signs of the habit to be worn by his order, and of his fervent zeal.]

[15: His godmother's dream was, that he had one star in his forehead and another in the nape of his neck, from which he communicated light to the east and the west.]

[16: "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." - Matt. xix. 21. Dominic is said to have followed this advice.]

[17: His nurse, when she returned to him, often found that he had left his bed, and was prostrate, and in prayer.]

[18: "Felix." Felix Gusman.]

[19: Grace or gift of the Lord.]

[20: Arrigo (about 1250 A. D.), a native of Susa, and cardinal of Ostia and Velletri, hence his name of Ostiense, was celebrated for his lectures on the Decretals.]

[21: "Taddeo. Either the physician or the lawyer of that name. The former, T. d' Alderotto, a Florentine, called the Hippocratean, translated the Ethics of Aristotle into Latin; and died toward the end of the thirteenth century. The other, of Bologna, left no writings behind him.]

To go about the vineyard, that soon turns
To wan and wither'd, if not tended well:
And from the see[22] (whose bounty to the just
And needy is gone by, not through its fault,
But his who fills it basely), he besought,
No dispensation[23] for commuted wrong,
Nor the first vacant fortune,[24] nor the tenths
That to God's paupers rightly appertain,
But, 'gainst an erring and degenerate world,
License to fight, in favour of that seed[25]
From which the twice twelve cions gird thee round.
Then, with sage doctrine and good will to help,
Forth on his great apostleship he fared,
Like torrent bursting from a lofty vein;
And, dashing 'gainst the stocks of heresy,
Smote fiercest, where resistance was most stout.
Thence many rivulets have since been turn'd,
Over the garden catholic to lead
Their living waters, and have fed its plants.

[22: "The apostolic see, which no longer continues its wonted liberality toward the indigent and deserving; not indeed through its own fault, as its doctrines are still the same, but through the fault of the pontiff, who is seated in it."]

[23: Dominic did not ask for license to compound for the use of

unjust acquisitions by dedicating a part of them to pious purposes.]

[24: The first benefice that fell vacant.]

[25: "For that seed of the divine Word, from which have sprung up these four - and - twenty plants, these holy spirits that now environ thee."]

"If such, one wheel[26] of that two - yoked car,
Wherein the holy Church defended her,
And rode triumphant through the civil broil;
Thou canst not doubt its fellow's excellence,
Which Thomas,[27] ere my coming, hath declared
So courteously unto thee. But the track,[28]
Which its smooth fellies made, is now deserted:
That, mouldy mother is, where late were less.
His family, that wont to trace his path,
Turn backward, and invert their steps; erelong
To rue the gathering in of their ill crop,
When the rejected tares[29] in vain shall ask

[26: Dominic; as the other wheel is Francis.]

[27: "Thomas." Thomas Aquinas.]

[28: "But the track." "But the rule of St. Francis is already deserted; and the lees of the wine are turned into mouldiness."]

[29: "Tares." He adverts to the parable of the tares and the wheat.]

Admittance to the barn. I question not[30]
But he, who search'd our volume, leaf by leaf,
Might still find page with this inscription on't,
"I am as I was wont." Yet such were not
From Acquasparta nor Casale, whence,
Of those who come to meddle with the text,
One stretches and another cramps its rule.
Bonaventura's life in me behold,
From Bagnoregio; one, who, in discharge
Of my great offices, still laid aside
All sinister aim. Illuminato here,
And Agostino[31] join me: two they were,
Among the first of those barefooted meek ones,
Who sought God's friendship in the cord: with them
Hugues of Saint Victor,[32] Pietro Mangiadore,[33]
And he of Spain[34] in his twelve volumes shining;
Nathan the prophet; Metropolitan
Chrysostom[35] and Anselmo[36] and, who deign'd
To put his hand to the first art, Donatus.

[30: "I question not." "Some indeed might be found, who still observe the rule of the order; but such would come neither from Casale nor

Acquasparta." At Casale, in Monferrat, the discipline had been enforced by Uberto with unnecessary rigor; and at Acquasparta, in the territory of Todi, it had been equally relaxed by the Cardinal Matteo, general of the order.]

[31: Two among the earliest followers of St. Francis.]

[32: "Hugues of Saint Victor." He was of the monastery of St. Victor at Paris, and died in 1142, at the age of forty - four. His ten books, illustrative of the celestial hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite, according to the translation of Joannes Scotus, are inscribed to King Louis, son of Louis le Gros, by whom the monastery had been founded.]

[33: "Pietro Mangiadore." Petrus Comestor, or the Eater, born at Troyes, was canon and dean of that church, and afterward chancellor of the church of Paris. He relinquished these benefices to become a regular canon of St. Victor at Paris, where he died in 1198.]

[34: To Pope Adrian V succeeded John XXI, a native of Lisbon; a man of great genius and extraordinary acquirements, especially in logic and in medicine, as his books, written in the name of Peter of Spain, (by which he was known before he became Pope), may testify. He was killed at Viterbo, by the falling in of the roof of his chamber, after he had been pontiff only eight months and as many days, A. D. 1277.]

[35: "Chrysostom." The eloquent Patriarch of Constantinople.]

[36: Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, was born at Aosta, about 1034, and studied under Lanfranc, at the monastery of Bec in Normandy, where he afterward devoted himself to a religious life, in his twenty - seventh year. In three years he was made prior, and then abbot of that monastery; from whence he was taken, in 1093, to succeed to the archbishopric, vacant by the death of Lanfranc. He enjoyed this dignity till his death in 1109, though it was disturbed by many dissensions with William II and Henry I respecting immunities and investitures.]

Raban[37] is here; and at my side there shines
Calabria's abbot, Joachim,[38] endow'd
With soul prophetic. The bright courtesy
Of friar Thomas and his goodly lore,
Have moved me to the blazon of a peer[39]
So worthy; and with me have moved this throng."

[37: Rabanus Maurus, Archbishop of Mentz, 847, is placed at the head of the Latin writers of this age.]

[38: Abbot of Flora in Calabria; whom the multitude revered as divinely inspired, and equal to the most illustrious prophets of ancient times.]

[39: "A Peer." St. Dominic.]