

Dante' s Paradise

A Pictorial Journey



If you are a believer, join us
in prayer

If you are a nonbeliever,
enjoy the beautiful
artworks.

If you are an imbecile,
write on the walls.
(*Wall plaque at LaVerna*)

Andrea della Robbia, Altarpiece of the Ascension, La
Verna, Italy, 1475-1486



Ways of Reading the Commedia

- If you are a Christian believer, join Dante on his journey with prayer: Miserere in the first canto, the Lord's Prayer paraphrase in Canto 11 of Purgatorio, and the Hymn to the Virgin that opens the last canto of Paradiso
- If you are a nonbeliever, savor the beauty of Dante's language, his imagery, the power of his ideas, the fascination of his stories and characters, and take his journey to self-knowledge.
- The third choice (dispensing with the insults) is to read a novel called Dante's Inferno or play the video game of the same name. But as Dorothy Sayers remarked, thinking you understand Dante through the Inferno alone is like thinking you know Paris after visiting the sewers.

Dante's Inventions

- Epic poem in a modern vernacular language vying with the classical epics such as Homer's Iliad and Vergil's Aeneid
- *Cantica*: coined the word to mean a “book”--one of the three major parts of the epic
- *Canto*: coined the word to refer to each chapter, consisting of 125-160 rhyming verses
- *Terza Rima*: invented the interlocking rhyme scheme of three-line stanzas (think of Shelley's Ode to the West Wind, a rare English example)

The Journey Begins

Domenico di Michelino
1465, Florence Cathedral



Inferno “Incipit”

Dante Codex

1340s

Illumination on parchment
University Library, Budapest

Stopped mid-motion in the middle
of what we call our life, I looked up and saw no sky—
Only a dense cage of leaf, tree, and twig. I was lost.

It's difficult to describe a forest:
Savage, arduous, extreme in its extremity. I think
And the facts come back, then fear comes back.

Death, I believe, can only be slightly more bitter.
I can't address the good I found there
Until I describe in detail what I saw.

I don't know for certain how I entered it--
I was so sleepy-faced
At the place where I took a wrong path.

modern translation by Mary Jo Bang



Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra **vita**
mi ritrovai per una selva **oscura**
che la diritta via era **smarrita**.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era e cosa **dura**
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e **forte**
che nel pensier rinova la **paura**!

Tant'è amara che poco e più **morte**;
ma per trattar del ben ch'ì vi **trovai**,
diro de l'altre cose ch'ì v'ho **scorte**.

Io non so ben ridir com'ì **v'intrai**,
tant'era pien di sonno a quel **punto**
che la verace via **abbandonai**.

Ma poi ch'ì fui al pie d'un colle **giunto**,
la dove terminava quella **valle**
che m'avea di paura il cor **compunto**,

guardai in alto, e vidi le sue **spalle**
vestite già de' raggi del pianeta
che mena dritto altrui per ogni **calle**.



Terza rima is like a colorful chain of sounds that knits the whole poem together



Three Laws of the Afterlife

Inferno – The soul lives only for itself
and its immediate appetites (infantile ego)

Purgatory – The soul understands that there are laws,
but they seem outside the self (good citizen, but
limited to immediate circle—adult who holds on to
childish vision of Earthly Paradise)

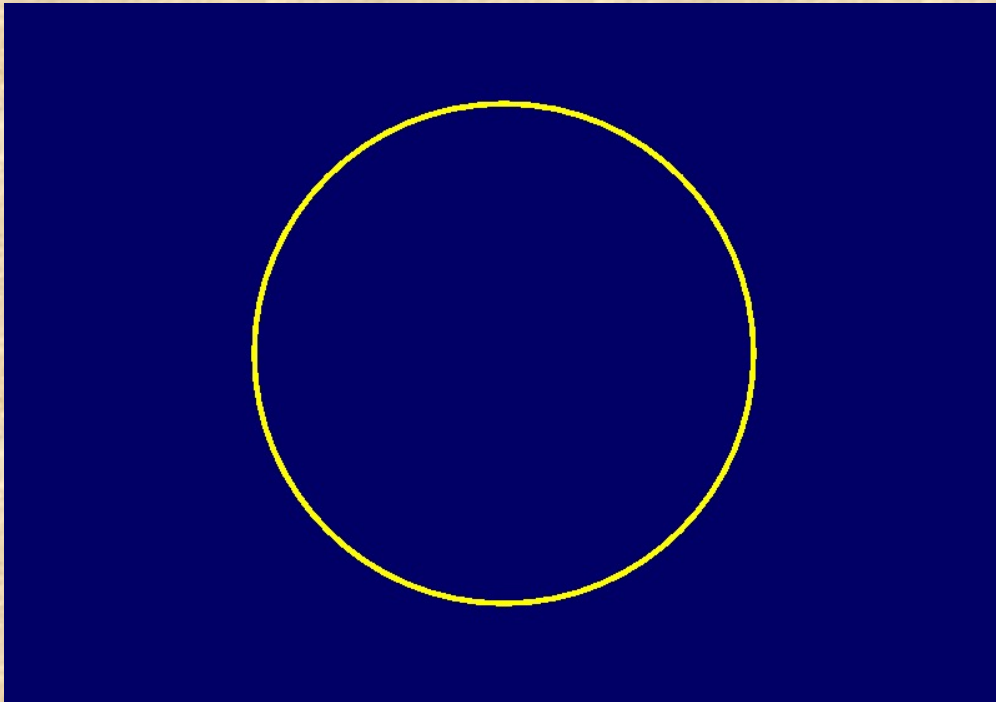
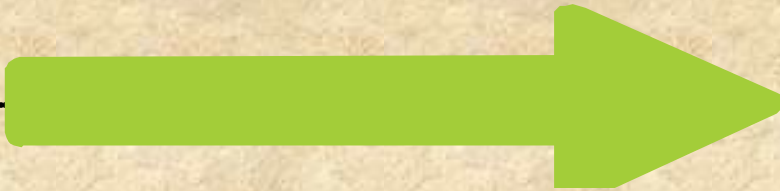
Paradise – The soul moves in harmony with Love, the
law that guides the universe (saint, or world citizen)
– true destiny of the mature human being

Guide 1: Virgil

- Born in Mantua
- Lived 70 BC-19 BC
- Son of a farmer, he became known as one of the greatest Latin poets
- Wrote Aeneid, the national epic of Rome, as answer to Homer
- Wrote the Eclogues and the Georgics: the fourth Eclogue was believed to predict the Birth of Christ



`A different journey'



2. The Mandate of Beatrice

My friend, but not
fortune's friend ...



5. Minos



34. Lucifer



34. Seeing Stars



Purgatory “Incipit”



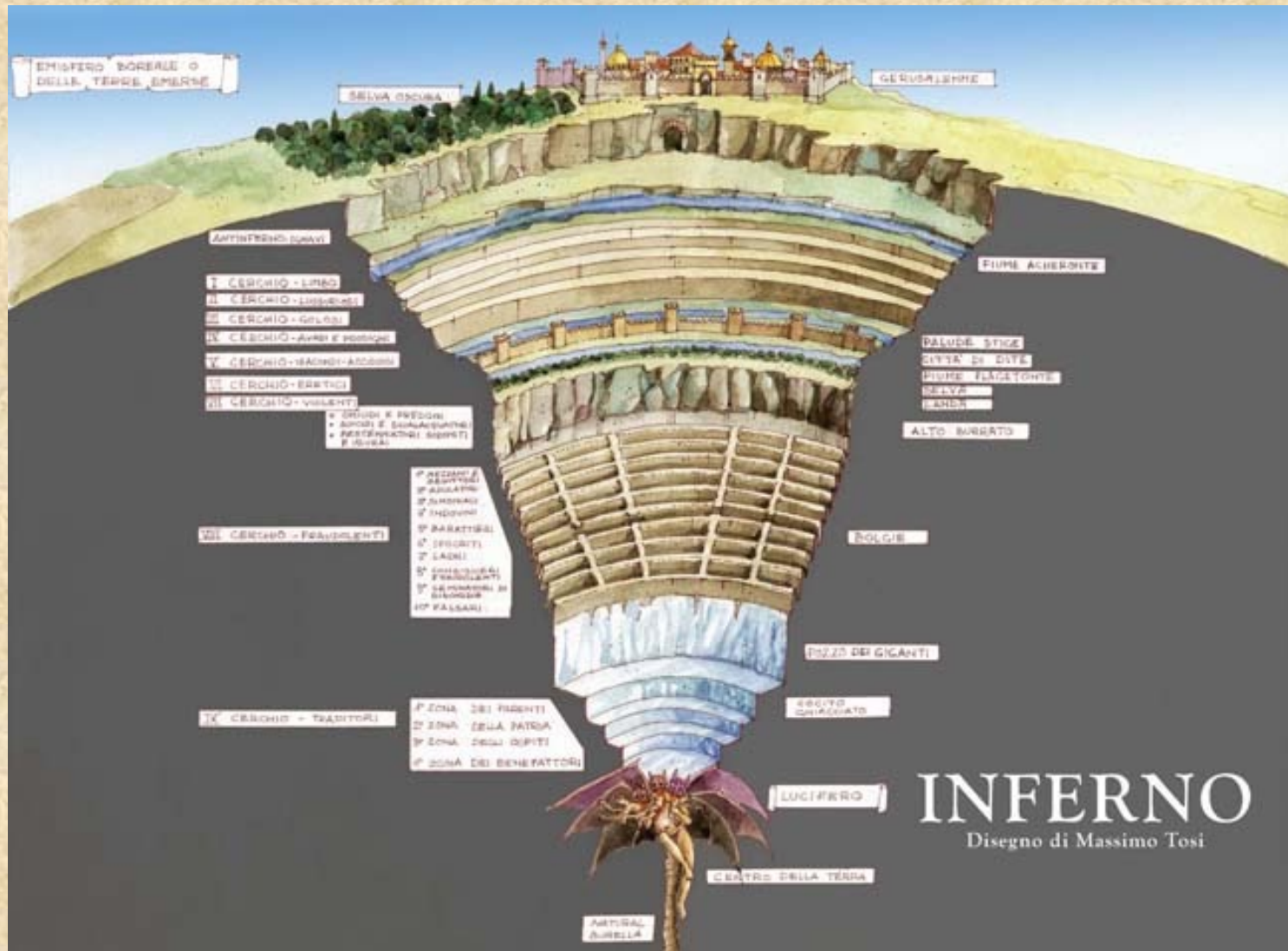
Per correr miglior acque alza le **vele**
omai la navicella del mio **ingegno**,
che lascia dietro a sé mar sì **crudele**;
e canterò di quel secondo **regno**
dove l'umano spirito si **purga**
e di salire al ciel diventa **degno**.

To course across more kindly waters now my
talent's little vessel lifts her sails, leaving
behind herself a sea so cruel;

and what I sing will be that second kingdom, in
which the human soul is cleansed of sin,
becoming worthy of ascent to Heaven.

Yates-Thompson Dante,
Sienese 15th century,
British Library

Hell Gets Narrower and Narrower



Purgatory: More Air as You Rise



Circles 1, 2, 3:
love of evil
things

Circle 4: love
that is too
slow

Circle 5, 6, 7:
love of
ephemeral
goods that do
not satisfy the
soul

conostereſti all'altoz moral mente.
 Ma p chio uegio te/ nell'ontellecto
 facto di pietra e inpietrato tanto
 ſiede tabaglia lume del tuo dexto.
 Vaglio e/ ſe nō ſcritto al men di pinto
 chello ne porti dentro a te p quello
 cheſſi regal lordon di palma anto
 E io ſicome aia di ſugello
 chella figura inpreſa nō traſmuta
 ſegnato e/ or dauoi al mio ceruello.

ſe tuua nouita allie ueſtigi.
 Le ſecte donne al fin da nonbra ſinorta
 qual ſotto ſaglie uerdi e rami nigr
 ſopra ſuoi ſtrecchi nun l'alte porta.
 Sinanci a deſſe euſtates e/ tigr
 ueder mi parue uſcite duna fontana
 e quaſi amici di partirſi pigri.
 O luce/ o gloua della gente humana
 che acqua/ e/ queſta che qui ſi diſpregia
 da un principio eſce da ſe lontana.

Santo. Chetola. Dante. Teamae. Temp. ſer. Juſt. Iane. Pmo. Spioz. fides.



Guide 2: Beatrice



Based on Beatrice Portinari, whom Dante first saw at age 9, and who died in childbirth at age of 27

Some scholars think she is more symbolic than a real woman

Inspired his “Vita Nuova” book of poetry in early 1290s that made him the leading poet of Florence

Became his guide in Paradiso

Eager to rise, now ready for the stars.

...e/ coronarmi delle firtlie
...la mac...
...de uolte padre sine collie
...triumphar o/ cesar o/ petra
...pa/ e/ uergogna del humane uollie
...partur letitia in su lalieta

...esser acunto come auea che puote
...adorno.

Beatrice tutta nel eterne rote
fissa con li occhi staua e io in lei
le luce fixe di la su rimote.
Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei



Venetian ms. End of Purgatory and
start of Paradise, Venetian ms. C.
1385

Reader, if I had space to
write more words,
I'd sing, at least in part, of
that sweet draught
Which never could have
satisfied my thirst....
Gracious Apollo! In this
crowning test
Make me the conduit that
thy power runs through!
Fit me to wear those bays
thou lovest best!



Three Kinds of Love

Φιλία: philia, dispassionate virtuous love to friends, family and community requires virtue, equality and familiarity

Έρως: eros, desire and longing

Γραπτή: agape, the covenant love of God for humans, as well as the reciprocal human love for God



In gloria de chulm che tuetu moue

The glory of Him who moves all things
penetrates the universe and shines
in one part more and in another less.

I was in that heaven which receives
more of His light. He who comes down from
there
can neither know nor tell what he has seen.

M. Anselmi, *Apollo and Marsyas*, c. 1540, National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Enter into my breast, breathe into me as high/
A strain as that which
vanquished Marsyas/
The time you drew him from his body's
sheath./Oh Power divine! But lend me of yourself/
So much as will
make clear at least the shadow/
Of that high realm imprinted on my
mind.

Ary Scheffer Dante and Beatrice in
Paradise, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

"And, of a sudden,
meseemed that day was
added / unto day, as though
he who hath the power, /
had adorned heaven with a
second sun. Beatrice was
standing with her eyes all
fixed / upon the eternal
wheels, and I fixed my sight
/ removed from there
above, on her." (words
written on the frame)



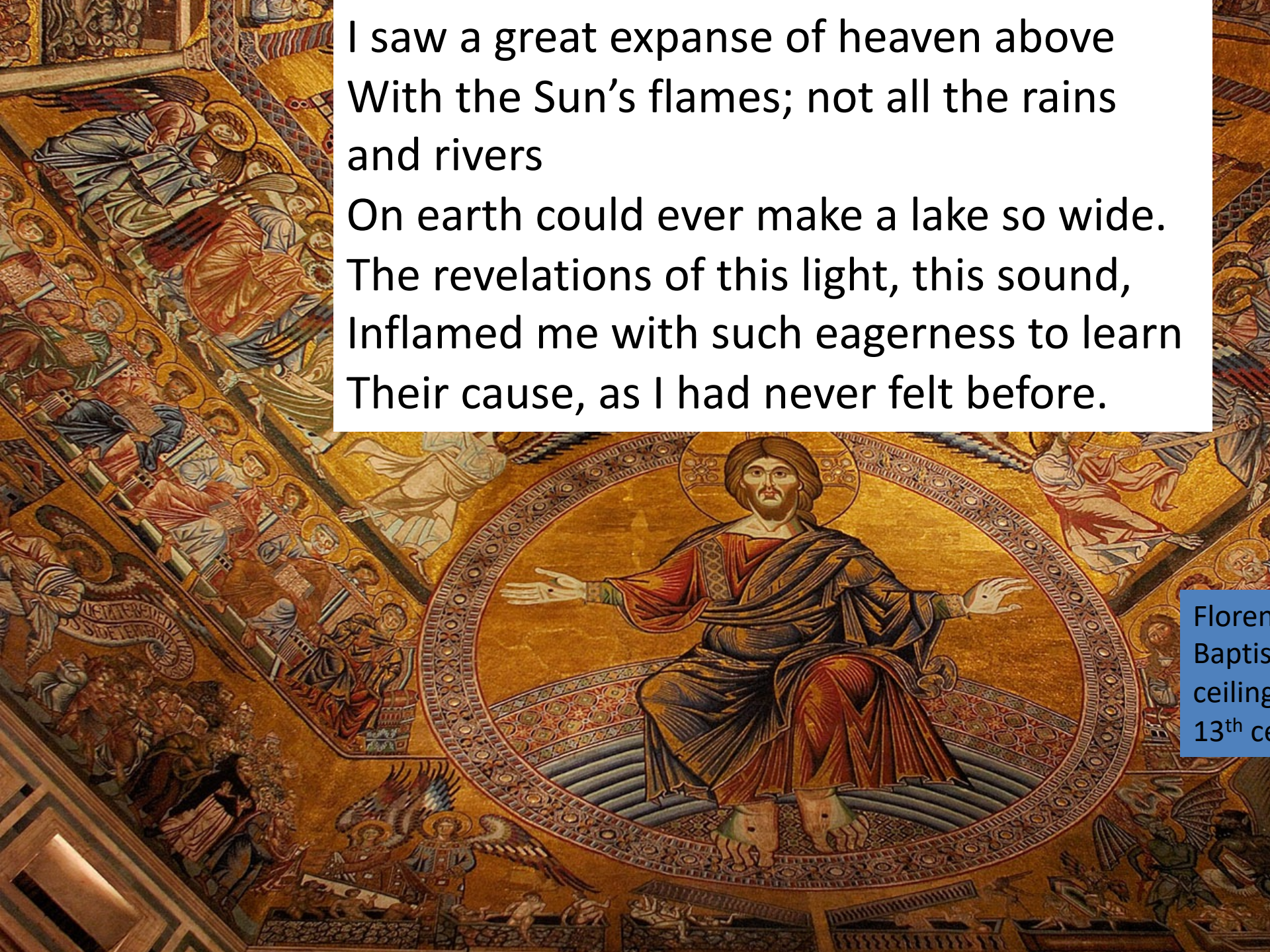
B. Spranger, Glaucus and Scylla,
16th century painting

Gazing at her, I felt
myself becoming/what
Glaucus had become
tasting the herb/that
made him like the other
sea-gods
there./"Transhumanize"
—it cannot be explained
per verbo, so let this
example serve/Until
God's grace grants the
experience.





You may think that you
are still on earth,
But lightning never
sped downward from
its home as you are
now ascending to your
own. (Beatrice)



I saw a great expanse of heaven above
With the Sun's flames; not all the rains
and rivers
On earth could ever make a lake so wide.
The revelations of this light, this sound,
Inflamed me with such eagerness to learn
Their cause, as I had never felt before.

Florence
Baptistery
ceiling
13th century

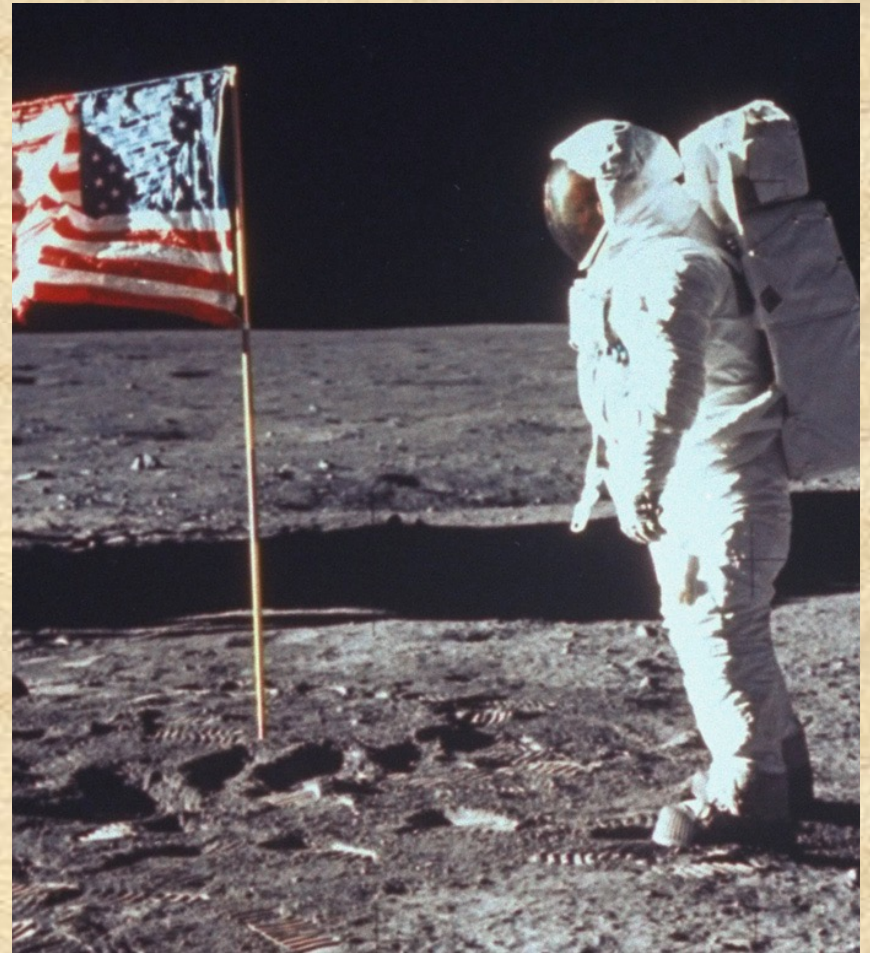
Canto 1



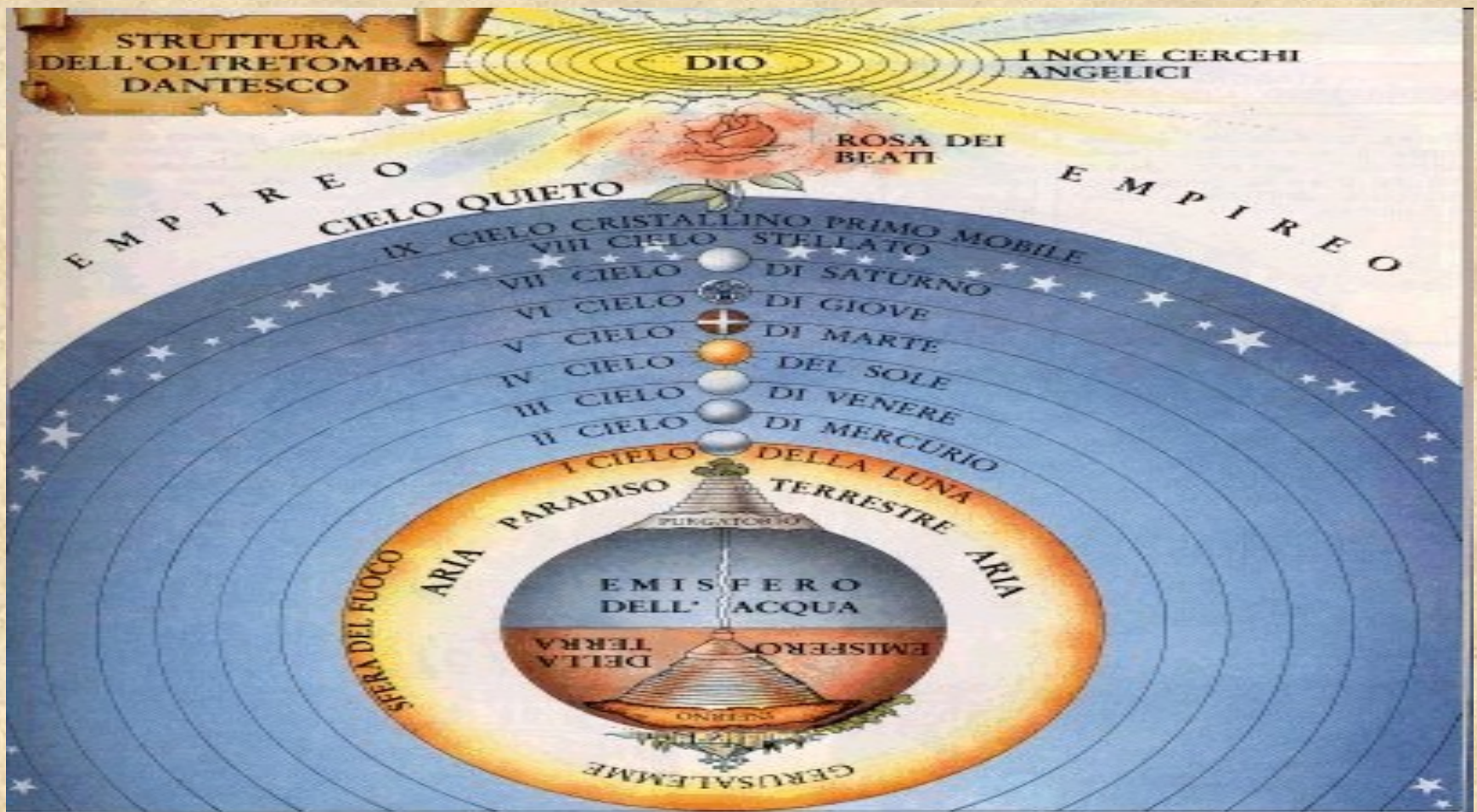
All created things, according to their bent, ... move, all to a different port/across the vast ocean of being, and each endowed with its instinct as its guide.

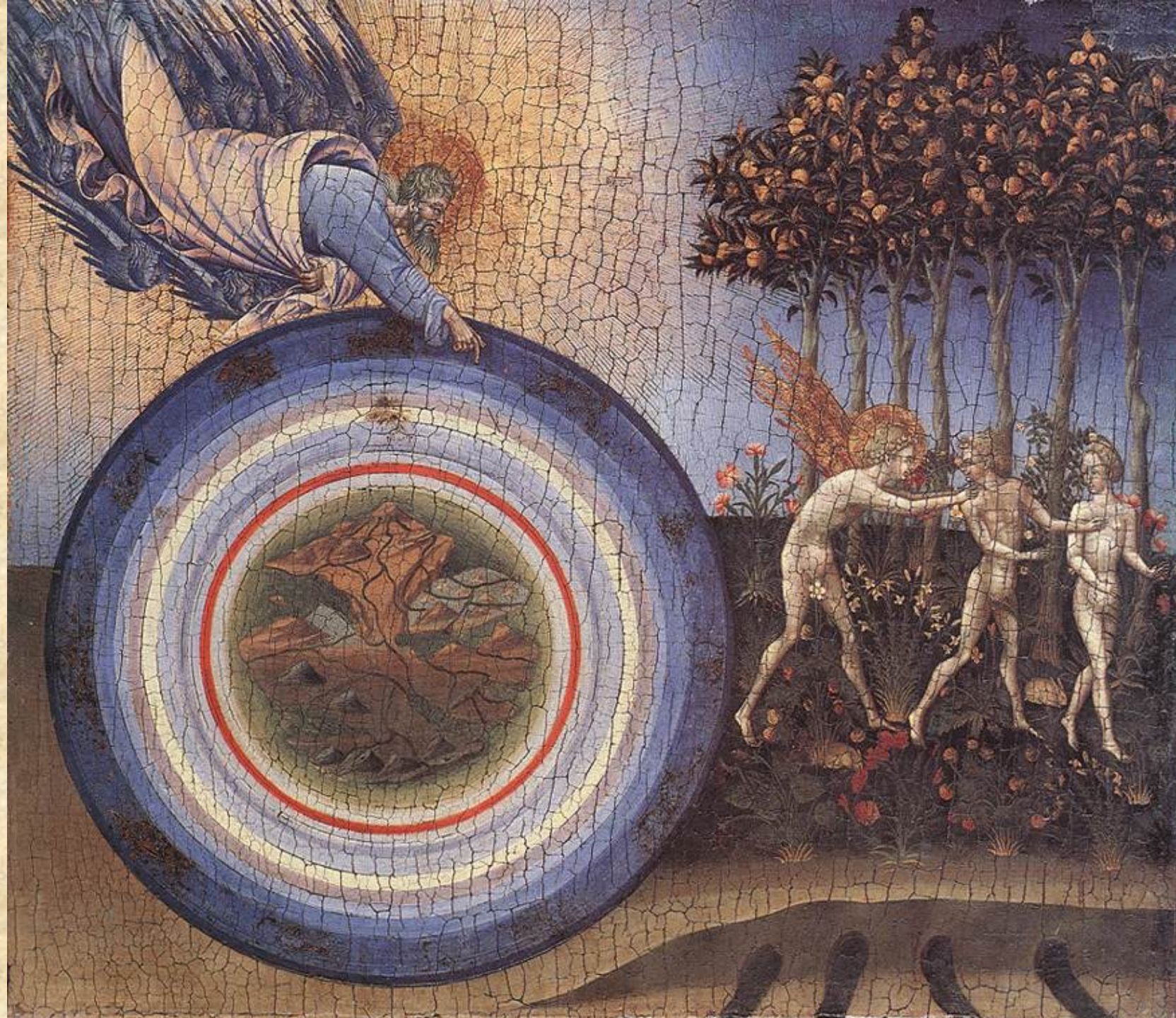
“You should, in all truth,
be no more amazed/at
your flight up than at the
sight of water/that rushes
down a mountain to its
base.

If you, free as you are of
every weight/had stayed
below, then that would be
as strange/as living flame
on earth remaining still.”



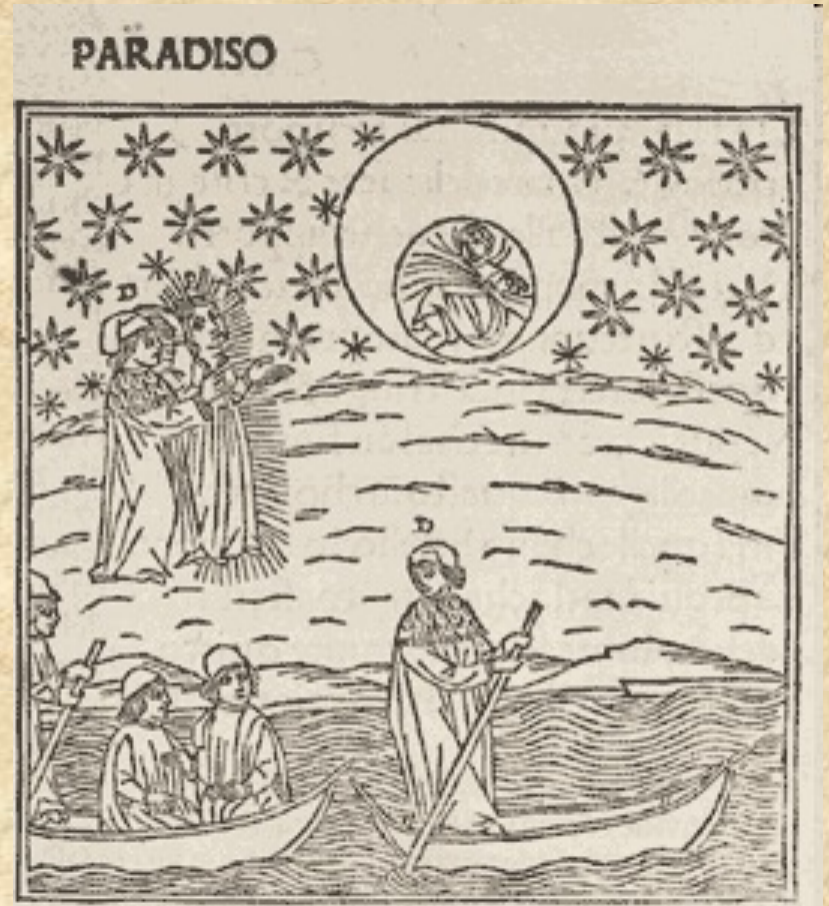
Structure of Heaven



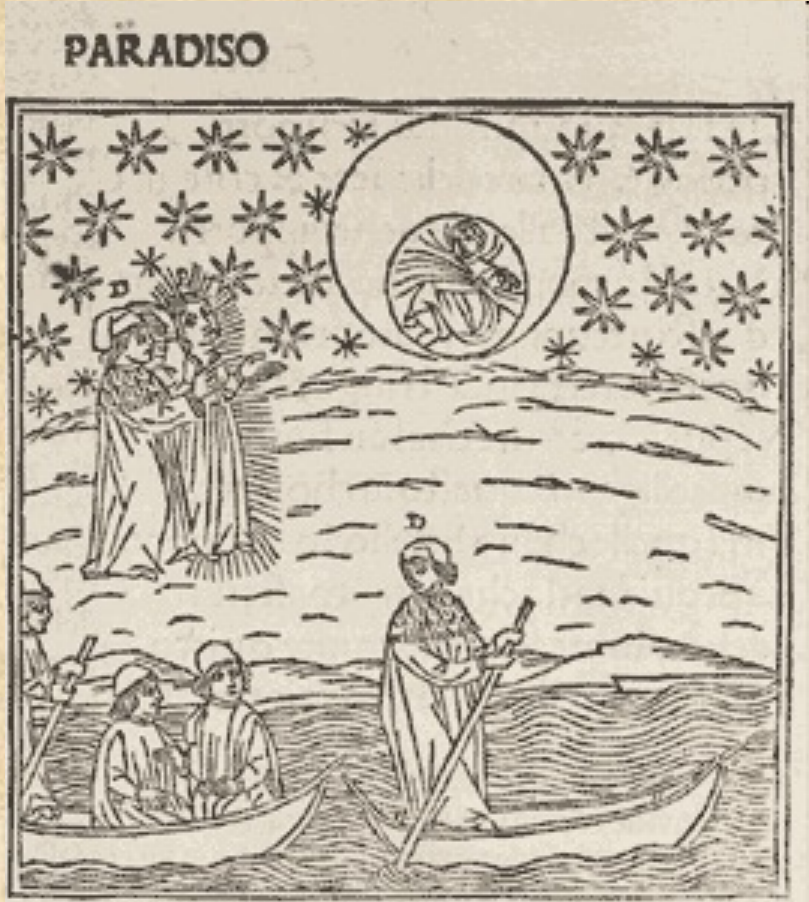


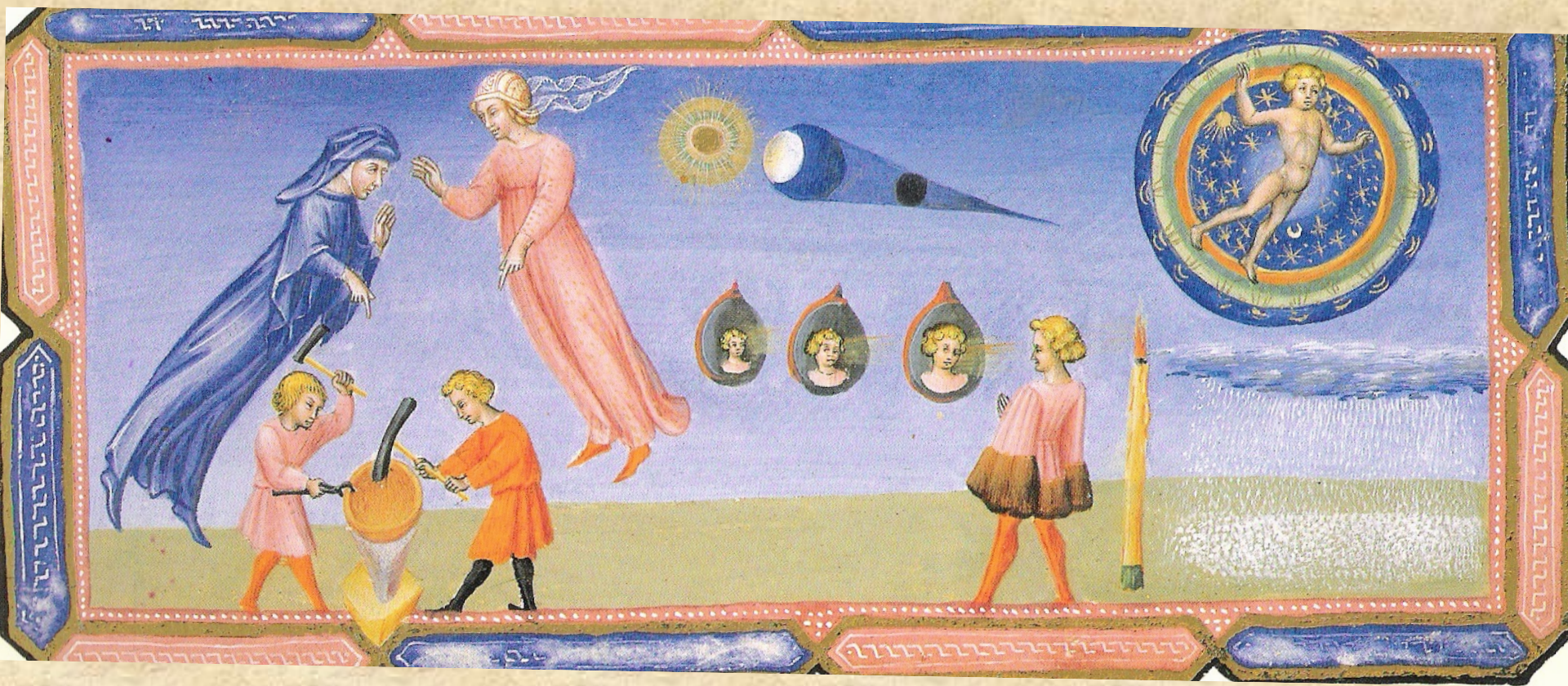
Canto 2

Oh you that are in your
little bark, eager/to
listen, following
behind/my ship that,
singing, crosses to deep
seas,/turn back to see
your shores again,/do
not attempt to sail the
seas/I sail: you may,
losing sight of me,/be
left astray



Canto 2





Beatrice explains to the appearance of the Moon and proposes a scientific experiment to test his theory and hers

Piccarda
and
Empress
Costanza
in the
sphere of
the
inconstant



Both were
forced to leave
convents by
male relatives
for political
reasons: third
time Dante
talks about
dynastic
marriages



“I fled, as a young girl, to follow [St. Clare]
And in her habit’s rule I closed myself,
And pledged to always follow in her practice.
Then men, acquainted less with love than hate,
Took me by force away from that sweet fold,
And God, alone, knows what my life became!
Piccarda

Costanza and Dante's doubts
about whether souls are "jealous"
and about where they really are



“Brother, the virtue
of our heavenly love,
Tempers our will and
makes us want no
more

Than what we have—
we thirst for this
alone... In His will is
our peace.”

--Piccarda Donati



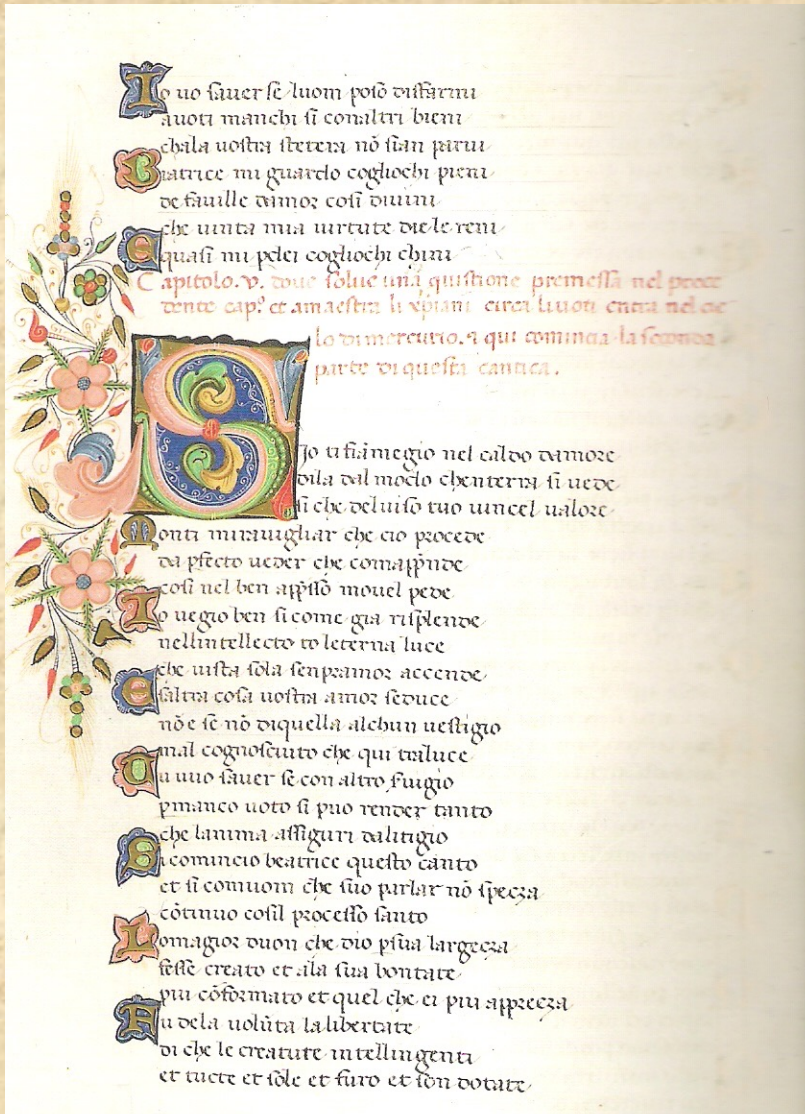
“She was the light
of the great
Empress Constance
Who, wed to
Swabia’s second
gust of wind,
Bore him the third
and final gust of
power”

Philipp Veit, Dante Meets Piccarda
and Constance. 19th century fresco,
Casa Massimo, Rome



Lorenzo Toncini, Piccarda Donati abducted from the convent of Santa Chiara by her brother Corso. 1864, Museo Civico Pavia.

Canto 5



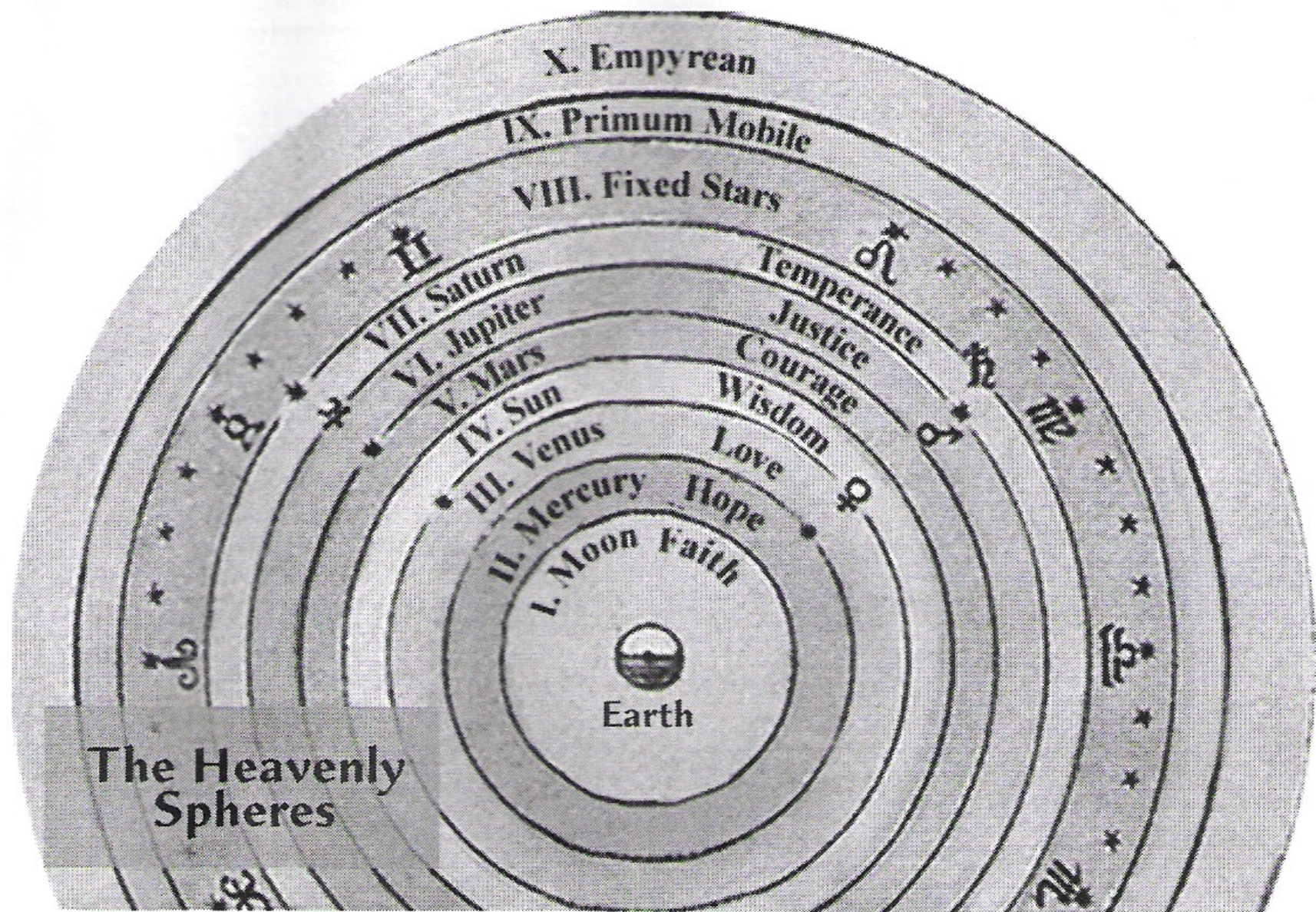
Dante is unable to stand the brilliance of Beatrice's smile, and averts his gaze. She explains,

As we come to know God better, we love him more and more. Later, he will be able to absorb greater light.

Christians, beware of rushing into vows.
Do not be like a feather in the wind
To think that every water washes clean!
You have the Testaments, the Old and New,
As guide you have the Shepherd of the church;
They should be all you need to save your soul!

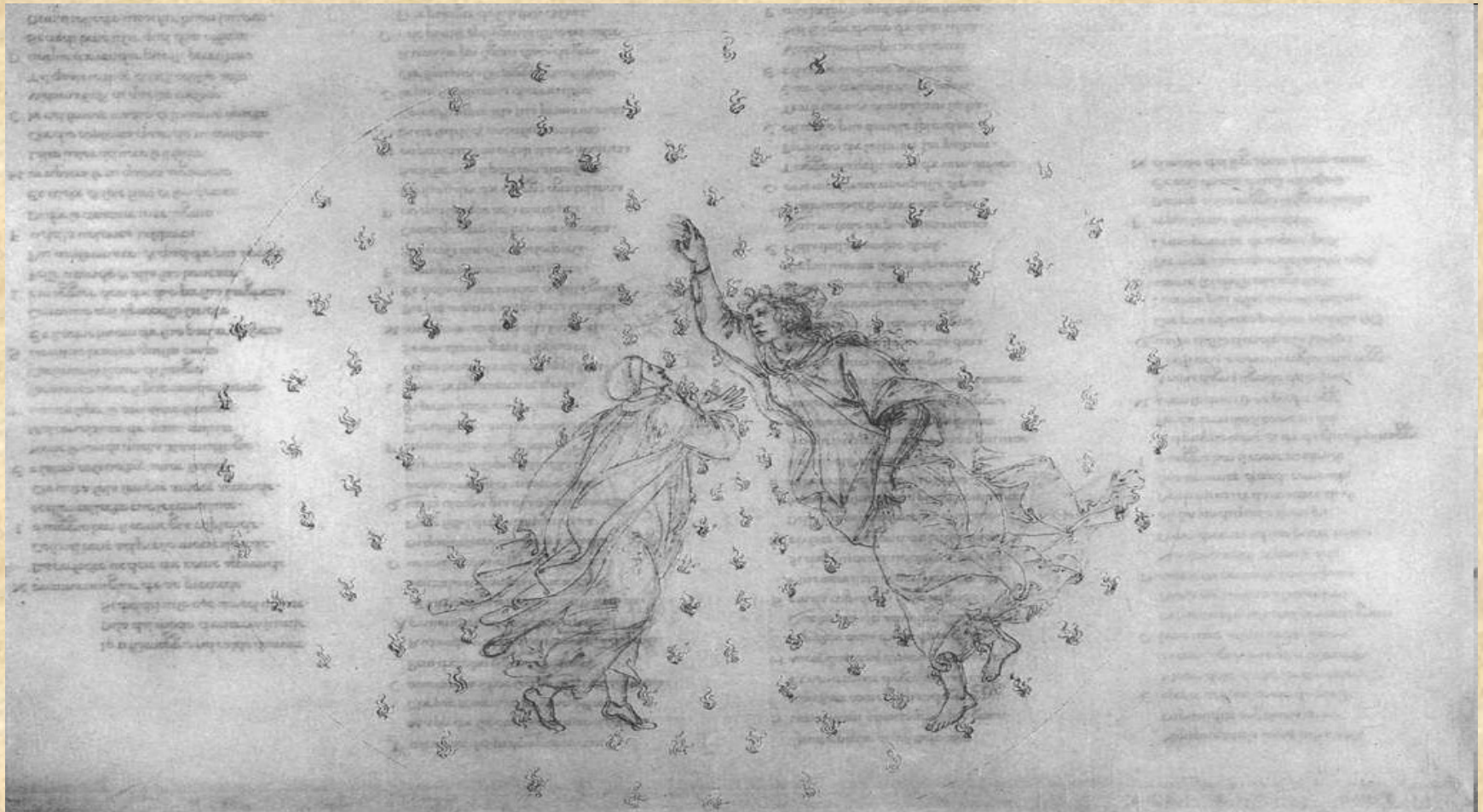
The sacred nature
of vows—Jeptha
and Agamemnon
made foolish
vows; St. Peter
giving absolution





The Heavenly
Spheres

Canto 6



Ascent to Mercury (Ambitious Souls)

I saw more than a
thousand splendors move
toward us





The Emperor Justinian,
who codified Roman law

“Caesar I was, Justinian I
remain

Who, by the will of the
First Love I feel,
Purged all the laws of
excess and of shame.”

Justinian: a short History of Rome.
From Aeneas to Constantine to
Justinian's conversion



Against the public standard one group sets the yellow lilies;
one claims for its own
The party flag—and who knows which is worse?



Fleur-de-lis, symbol of the French monarchy



Eagle symbol of the Holy Roman Emperor

Canto 7

The Mystery of Redemption



Canto 9

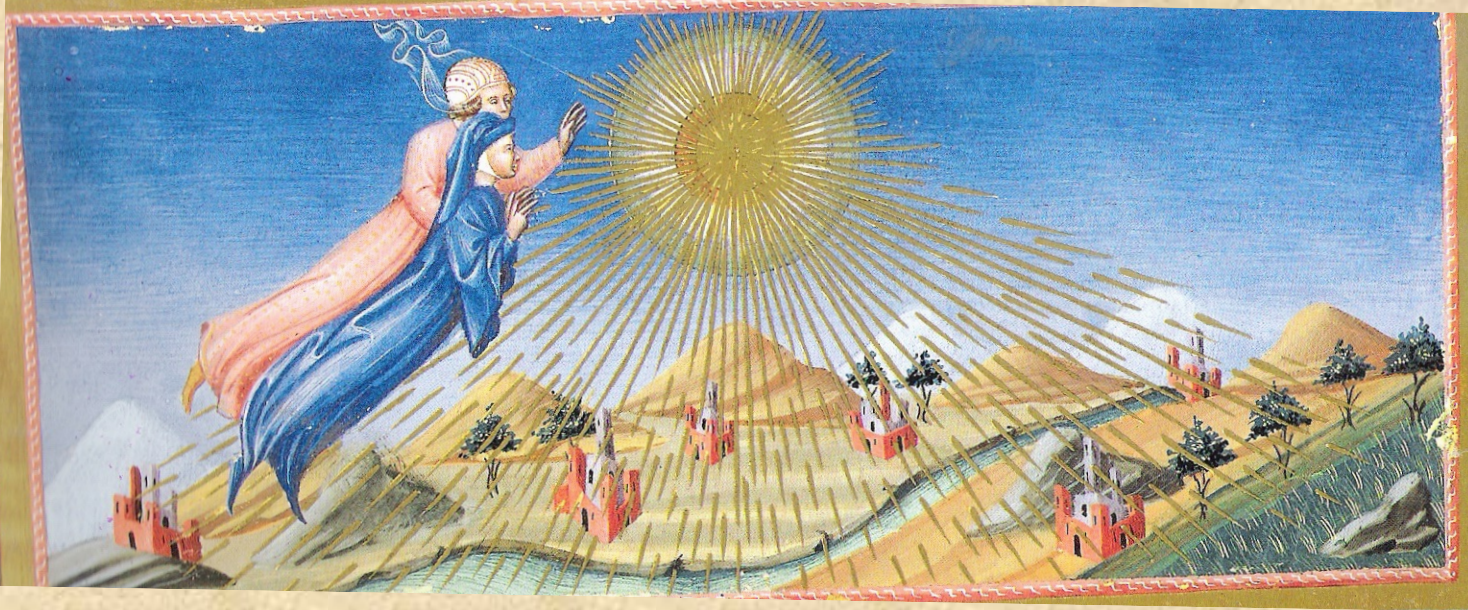


Cunizza da Romano after an eventful (sex) life lived quietly in Florence performing charity

Folco: The Avarice of the Church



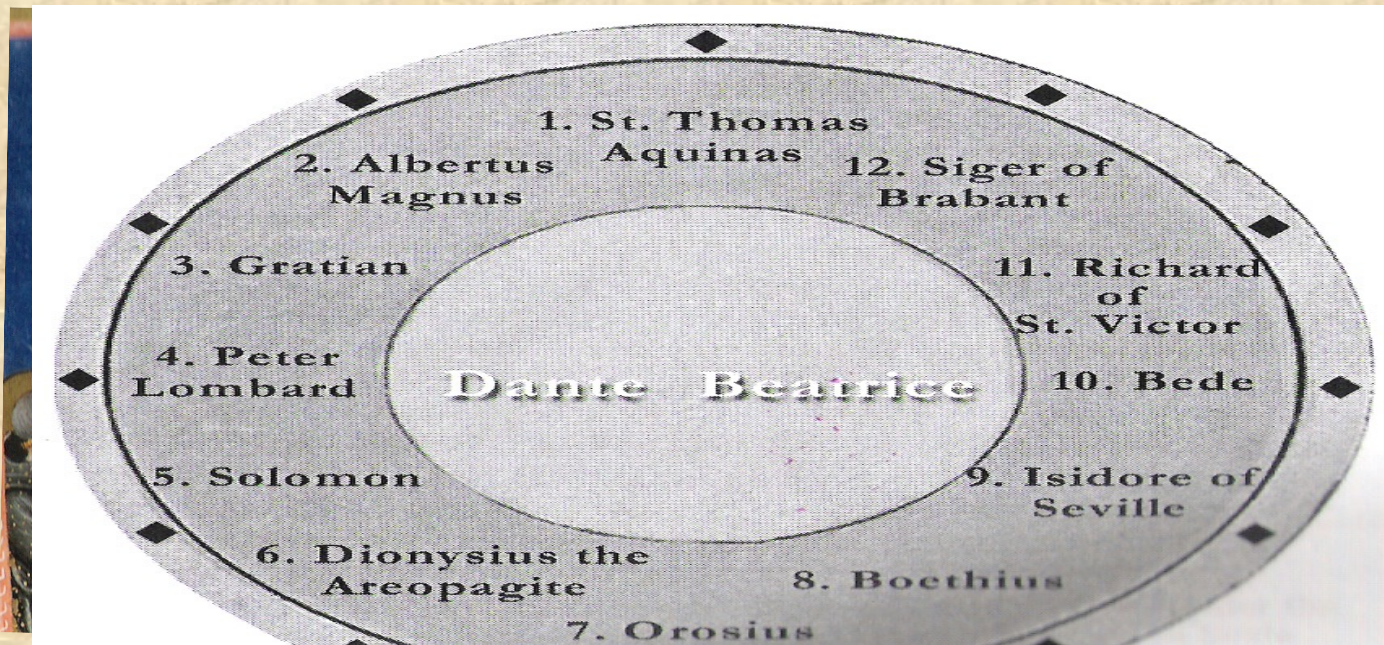




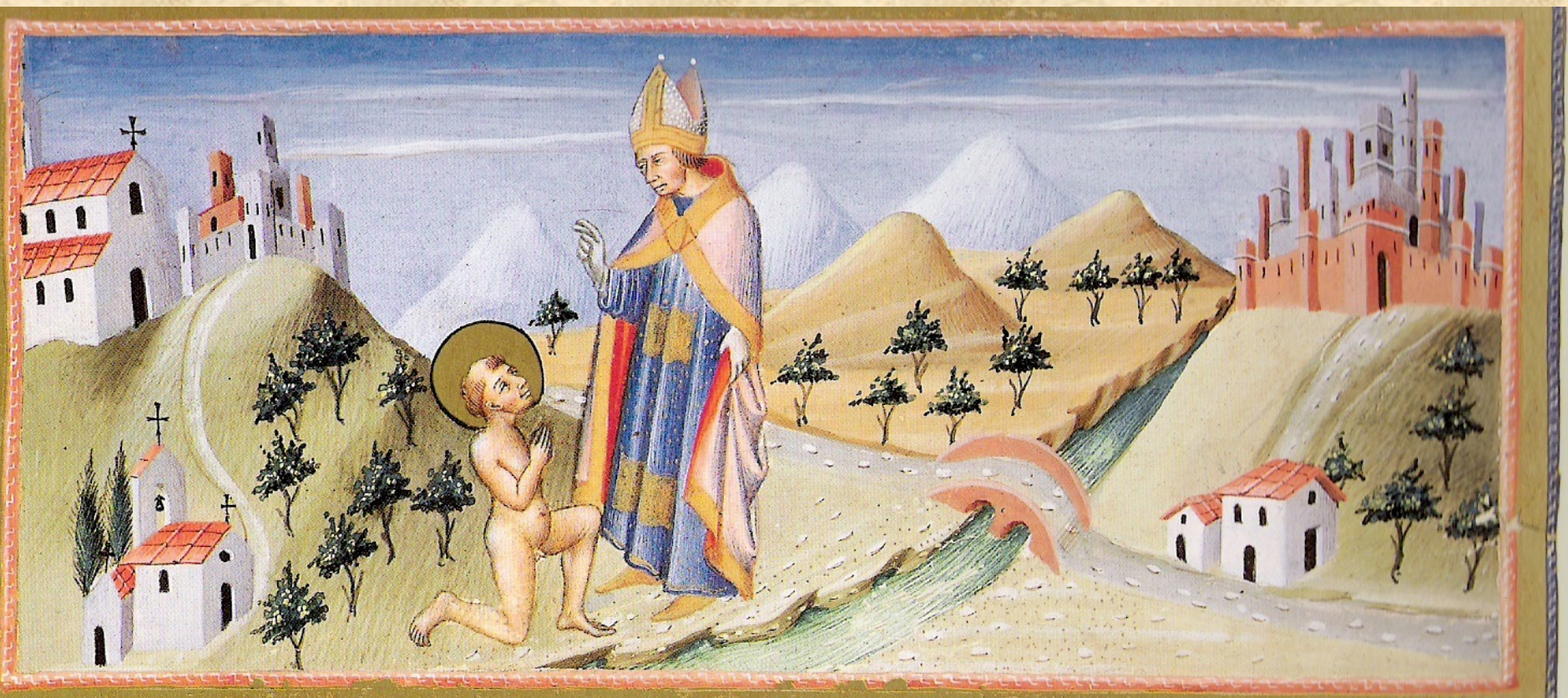
The
Heaven
of the
Sun

Canto 10

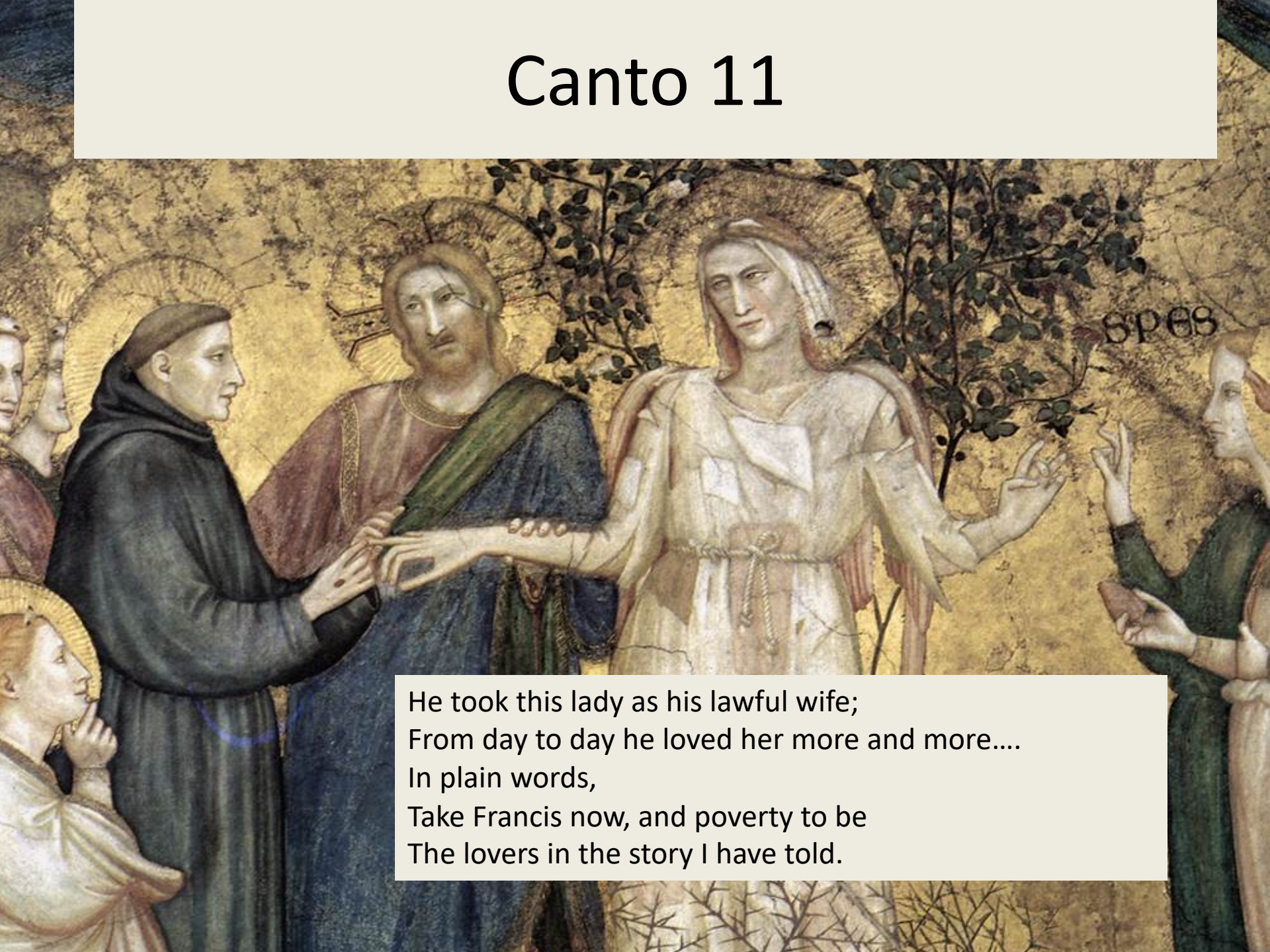
Ten Men of
Wisdom,
including
Christians,
and Hebrews



Born on this slope where steepness breaks the most,
A sun rose to the world as radiantly
As this sun here dose sometimes from the Ganges;
Thus, when this town is named let none call it
Ascesi, for the word would not suffice—
Much more precise a word is Orient.
While still a youth he braved his father's wrath,



Canto 11



He took this lady as his lawful wife;
From day to day he loved her more and more....
In plain words,
Take Francis now, and poverty to be
The lovers in the story I have told.



Then on the bare rock
between Arno and Tiber
He took upon himself
Christ's holy wounds,
And for two years he wore
this final seal.

Giotto, Stigmatization of St. Francis,
1291, made for Pisa, now in Paris.

Bonaventure tells story of Dominic preaching to the heathens



Confirmation of the Rule of St. Dominic's Order of Preachers by two successive popes. Bologna, Arca di San Domenico, carved around 1300 by Nicola Pisano's workshop



Coppo di Marcovaldo, Last Judgment, Ceiling of the Baptistery of Florence, c. 1260