

# Paradise Canto 1

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Christianity Index Divine Comedy Index Previous: Purgatory Canto 33 Next:  
Paradise Canto 2

## Canto I

### Argument

The Poet ascends with Beatrice toward the first heaven; and is, by her,  
resolved of certain doubts which arise in his mind.

His glory, by whose might all things are moved,  
Pierces the universe, and in one part  
Sheds more resplendence, elsewhere less. In  
That largeliest of His light partakes, was I, [Heaven  
Witness of things, which, to relate again,  
Surpasseth power of him who comes from thence;  
For that, so near approaching its desire,  
Out intellect is to such depth absorb'd,  
That memory cannot follow. Nathless all,  
That in my thoughts I of that sacred realm  
Could store, shall now be matter of my song.

Benign Apollo! this last labour aid;  
And make me such a vessel of thy worth,  
As thy own laurel claims, of me beloved.  
Thus far[1] hath one of steep Parnassus' brows  
Sufficed me; henceforth, there is need of both  
For my remaining enterprise. Do thou[2]  
Enter into my bosom, and there breathe  
So, as when Marsyas by thy hand was dragg'd  
Forth from his limbs, unsheathed. O power divine!  
If thou to me of thine impart so much,  
That of that happy realm the shadow'd form  
Traced in my thoughts I may set forth to view;  
Thou shalt behold me of thy favour'd tree  
Come to the foot, and crown myself with leaves:  
For to that honour thou, and my high theme

[1: "Thus far." He appears to mean nothing more than that this part  
of his poem will require a greater exertion of his powers than the former.]

[2: "Do thou." Make me thine instrument; and, through me, utter such  
sound as when thou didst contend with Marsyas.]

Will fit me. If but seldom, mighty Sire!  
To grace his triumph, gathers thence a wreath  
Caesar, or bard, (more shame for human wills

Depraved), joy to the Delphic god must spring  
From the Peneian foliage, when one breast  
Is with such thirst inspired. From a small spark  
Great flame hath risen: after me, perchance,  
Others with better voice may pray, and gain,  
From the Cyrrhaean city, answer kind.

Through divers passages, the world's bright lamp  
Rises to mortals; but through that[3] which joins  
Four circles with the threefold cross, in best  
Course, and in happiest constellation[4] set,  
He comes; and, to the worldly wax, best gives  
Its temper and impression. Morning there,[5]  
Here eve was well - nigh by such passage made;  
And whiteness had o'erspread that hemisphere,  
Blackness the other part; when to the left[6]  
I saw Beatrice turn'd, and on the sun  
Gazing, as never eagle fix'd his ken.  
As from the first a second beam is wont  
To issue, and reflected upward rise,  
Even as a pilgrim bent on his return;  
So of her act, that through the eyesight pass'd  
Into my fancy, mine was form'd: and straight,  
Beyond our mortal wont, I fix'd mine eyes  
Upon the sun. Much is allow'd us there,  
That here exceeds our power; thanks to the place  
Made for the dwelling of the human kind.

[3: "Where the four circles, the horizon, the zodiac, the equator,  
and the equinoctial colure join; the last three intersecting each other so as  
to form three crosses, as may be seen in the armillary sphere."]

[4: Aries. Some understand the planet Venus by the "migliore  
stella."]

[5: "Morning there." It was morning where he then was, and about  
eventide on the earth.]

[6: "To the left." Being in the opposite hemisphere to ours,  
Beatrice, that she may behold the rising sun, turns herself to the left.]

I suffer'd it not long; and yet so long,  
That I beheld it bickering sparks around,  
As iron that comes boiling from the fire.  
And suddenly upon the day appear'd  
A day new - risen; as he, who hath the power,

Had with another sun bedeck'd the sky.

Her eyes fast fix'd on the eternal wheels,  
Beatrice stood unmoved; and I with ken

Fix'd upon her, from upward gaze removed,  
At her aspect, such inwardly became  
As Glaucus, when he tasted of the herb  
That made him peer among the ocean gods:  
Words may not tell of that trans - human change;  
And therefore let the example serve, though weak,  
For those whom grace hath better proof in store.

If I were only what thou didst create,  
Then newly, Love! by whom the Heaven is ruled;  
Thou know'st, who by Thy light didst bear me up.  
Whenas the wheel which Thou dost ever guide,  
Desired Spirit! with its harmony,  
Temper'd of Thee and measured, charm'd mine ear,  
Then seem'd to me so much of Heaven to blaze  
With the sun's flame, that rain or flood ne'er made  
A lake so broad. The newness of the sound,  
And that great light, inflamed me with desire,  
Keener than e'er was felt, to know their cause.

Whence she, who saw me, clearly as myself,  
To calm my troubled mind, before I ask'd,  
Open'd her lips, and gracious thus began:  
"With false imagination thou thyself  
Makest dull; so that thou seest not the thing,  
Which thou hadst seen, had that been shaken off.  
Thou art not on the earth as thou believest;  
For lightning, scaped from its own proper place,  
Ne'er ran, as thou has hither now return'd."

Although divested of my first - raised doubt  
By those brief words accompanied with smiles,  
Yet in new doubt was I entangled more,  
And said: "Already satisfied, I rest  
From admiration deep; but now admire  
How I above those lighter bodies rise."

Whence, after utterance of a piteous sigh,  
She toward me bent her eyes, with such a look,  
As on her frenzied child a mother casts;  
Then thus began: "Among themselves all things  
Have order; and from hence the form,[7] which makes  
The universe resemble God. In this  
The higher creatures see the printed steps  
Of that eternal worth, which is the end  
Whither the line is drawn.[8] All natures lean,  
In this their order, diversely; some more,  
Some less approaching to their primal source.  
Thus they to different havens are moved on

Through the vast sea of being, and each one  
With instinct given, that bears it in its course:  
This to the lunar sphere directs the fire;  
This moves the hearts of mortal animals;  
This the brute earth together knits, and binds.  
Nor only creatures, void of intellect,  
Are aim'd at by this bow; but even those,  
That have intelligence and love, are pierced.  
That Providence, who so well orders all,  
With her own light makes ever calm the Heaven,[9]  
In which the substance, that hath greatest speed,[10]  
Is turn'd: and thither now, as to our seat  
Predestined, we are carried by the force  
Of that strong cord, that never looses dart  
But at fair aim and glad. Yet is it true,  
That as, oft - times, but ill accords the form  
To the design of art, through sluggishness  
Or unreplying matter; so this course  
Is sometimes quitted by the creature, who  
Hath power, directed thus, to bend elsewhere;  
As from a cloud the fire is seen to fall,  
From its original impulse warp'd, to earth,  
By vitious fondness. Thou no more admire  
Thy soaring (if I rightly deem) that lapse  
Of torrent downward from a mountain's height.  
There would in thee for wonder be more cause,  
If, free of hindrance, thou hadst stay'd below,

[7: This order it is, that gives to the universe the form of unity,  
and therefore resemblance to God.]

[8: All things, as they have their beginning from the Supreme Being,  
so are they referred to Him gain.]

[9: "The Heaven." The empyrean, which is always motionless.]

[10: "The substance, etc." The primum mobile.]

As living fire unmoved upon the earth."

So said, she turn'd toward the Heaven her face.