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# What is Beatrice asking for? Dante and the Poetics of the Vow

FRANCESCO GIUSTI

*libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio*

*Purg.* 27.140

*iustus commendatur a timore retrahente eum a bono,  
non quod sit absque omni timore*

*Summa Theologiae* II–II.126.1 ad. 1

That Dante—the-pilgrim is confronted in *Paradiso* 3–5 with the question of broken vows may seem a puzzling beginning for his journey through the heavenly spheres. Indeed, in the heaven of the moon, the pilgrim’s encounter with the first two blessed souls on his way to the godhead, Piccarda and Costanza, results in an extensive discussion of the excusability or compensability of this particular fault, a somewhat peculiar introduction to the realm of the blessed. This article reconsiders the question of broken vows, its position in the trajectory of the final cantica, and the radical poetics it entails. Underscoring lines of continuity in Dante’s lifelong meditation on human will, this essay draws attention to significant deviations from the crux of Beatrice’s rebuke in *Purgatorio* 30–31, associated with *Paradiso* 3–5 by Teodolinda Barolini in terms of the “mutability of the will.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it draws connections between these canti and the pilgrim’s conversation with Cacciaguida in *Paradiso* 15–18 with regard to the poetics of martyrdom presented therein, as investigated by Jeffrey T. Schnapp.<sup>2</sup>

In her discussion of Dante's *ferm voler*, Barolini seems to equate the promise of fidelity to Beatrice in the *Vita nova* with the vows discussed in the heaven of the moon, and, thus, the disconversion to the *donna gentile* with a broken vow to Beatrice.<sup>3</sup> I argue instead that through Beatrice's paradisiac viewpoint, Dante distinguishes between promises made to human beings and vows made to God.<sup>4</sup> This distinction clarifies the crucial function of *Paradiso* 3–5, preparing the pilgrim to make his vow to God and to accept the potential consequences of writing the poem. From this perspective, there is one vow that Dante is asked to make, disclosed in *Paradiso* 31: “E quasi peregrin che si ricrea / nel tempio del suo voto riguardando, / e spera già ridir com' ello stea” (43–45).<sup>5</sup> The “dialectic of forgetfulness followed by reengagement with the beloved,” as illustrated by Barolini, is nevertheless essential for preparing Dante to become the poet-martyr demanded by the poetics of the vow.<sup>6</sup> The pilgrim's initial association of his infidelity with Piccarda's fault is crucial in facilitating this transition: as defined and embraced in Paradise, the poetics of the vow requires the future poet to accept the suffering and potential death that may result from writing a poem that bears witness to divine justice for the good of other human beings.

However, in order to make a vow to God, one must recognize his goodness. According to Beatrice's rebuke in Purgatory, Dante did not follow her after her death because he failed to properly see the good shining in her—that is, a reflection of divine good. Yet, when the pilgrim reaches the first heaven of Paradise where the divine light shines in his mind and he can finally see the good, the discussion of broken vows crucially reframes the main point of Beatrice's rebuke. From this perspective, Dante's diversion from Beatrice after her death and his turning to lesser objects of desire takes on new significance. While in the Earthly Paradise, the issue was Dante's ignorance of the good found in her, in the heaven of the moon the problem becomes the fear of pursuing the good even when it is known. If mutual *consent* is required in a vow to God, a comparison with Dante's problematic consent given in the *Vita nova* helps clarify what is truly at stake for the pilgrim in *Paradiso* 3–5. Indeed, consent to an action should be given only after it has been carefully judged according to the goodness of its end goal, rather than as an end in itself or for the momentary pleasure it could provide, as Dante did with the *donna gentile*.

It is ultimately thanks to the reconsideration implied in the discussion on broken vows in the heaven of the moon that the pilgrim and future poet-prophet will later be able to reformulate the choice explored through the cases of Piccarda and Costanza: yielding to circumstances and following conditional will or embracing absolute will regardless of the consequences. Indeed, in the presence of his revered ancestor Cacciaguida, the future poet will adapt this choice to his own situation as a choice between silence and safety in the present, or avowal, eternal salvation, and lasting poetic and moral influence.<sup>7</sup> Embracing the prophetic role to which Dante is called means overcoming fear, following absolute will with determination, and consciously accepting the suffering that this may entail, as a martyr would do.<sup>8</sup> The question of the vow—addressing issues of knowledge, free will, consent, and, ultimately, self-sacrifice—transcends the boundaries of the theological problem discussed at the beginning of *Paradiso*, and constitutes a significant element within the textual poetics of the final cantica, shaping the motivation and purpose of the poem as a whole. Indeed, the poetics of the vow comes to form the rational and emotional background to Dante-the-poet's call to martyrdom.

### Knowledge and Fear

In the heaven of the moon, where two female protagonists are victims of violence due to forced dynastic marriages, the question of broken vows is closely linked to issues of knowledge and fear. In line with Thomas Aquinas's reflections on whether fear causes involuntariness, Beatrice explains to Dante that Piccarda and Costanza, following conditional will, have somewhat acquiesced to the violence exerted on them through their forced removal from the cloister (*Par.* 4.73–114).<sup>9</sup> If instead the women had followed absolute will, uninfluenced by circumstances, they would have remained absolutely constant and returned to the cloister as soon as they were physically free from violence, even at the risk of being exposed to further danger. Piccarda and Costanza's behavior did not follow that of Saint Lawrence and Mucius Scaevola (*Par.* 4.83–84), who are presented in this canto as two high examples of martyrdom: a Christian martyr and a pagan civic hero.<sup>10</sup> Beatrice, however, is perfectly aware that “così salda voglia è troppo

rada” (*Par.* 4.87), and that most people, even if unwillingly (“contra grato,” 101), resign themselves to following conditional will. The pilgrim notices the logical contradiction between Piccarda’s statement that Costanza “ma poi che pur al mondo fu rivolta / contra suo grado e contra buona usanza, / non fu dal vel del cor già mai disciolta” (*Par.* 3.115–17) and Beatrice’s assertion that Piccarda and Costanza cannot be excused because they were to some extent compliant with their fates (*Par.* 4.73–75). He is puzzled by the idea that a blessed soul could lie, whether Piccarda or Beatrice.<sup>11</sup> The contradiction, however, is resolved by Beatrice through her explanation that when a person submits to doing something that they do not want to (and should not) do out of fear, the will of the victim merges with the force of the perpetrator in such a way as to make the ensuing guilt not entirely excusable (*Par.* 4.106–14). Thus, both Piccarda and Beatrice are right: the former referring to Costanza’s absolute will, which resisted evil; the latter referring instead to her conditional will, which consented to the violence. Both types of will coexist in human beings.

Beatrice’s explanation leads the pilgrim, who now becomes aware that knowledge naturally progresses upwards from one truth to another until the human intellect finds rest in the ultimate truth (*Par.* 4.124–32), to ask a further question:

“[. . .] Questo m’invita, questo m’assicura  
con reverenza, donna, a dimandarvi  
d’un’altra verità che m’è oscura.

Io vo’ saper se l’uom può sodisfarvi  
ai voti manchi sì con altri beni,  
ch’ a la vostra statera non sien parvi.” (*Par.* 4.133–38)

Revealing considerable emotional involvement, the pilgrim asks whether there is anything that human beings can do to compensate for broken vows with some other good that would not weigh too lightly on the scales of divine justice. Beatrice’s reaction to this question offers an indirect but illuminating entry point into the problem of absolute and conditional will and its implications, both for theological arguments and for individual processes:

Beatrice mi guardò con li occhi pieni  
di faville d’amor così divini,

che, vinta, mia virtute diè le reni,  
e quasi mi perdei con li occhi chini. (*Par.* 4.139–42)<sup>12</sup>

The end of this canto is structurally similar but not identical to the end of the previous canto (*Par.* 3). There, it is Dante's gaze that "a Beatrice tutta si converse" (*Par.* 3.127); she shines so intensely that at first the pilgrim's eyes cannot bear such light and dazzled, he is slowed down in asking his question. Here, instead, in Canto 4, Beatrice looks at Dante and her eyes spark with love.<sup>13</sup> The pattern is thus reversed: Dante asks his question and this, in turn, makes Beatrice's divine eyes shine with such love that Dante's sight must recede and his eyes must be lowered.

Beatrice's sparkling eyes here could simply be a sign of approval. She rejoices in the progress of Dante's intellect's natural and insatiable desire for knowledge, which can only be satiated by God himself. As soon as the human intellect finds rest in the attainment of a truth, it is immediately seized by a new doubt, which prompts it to take a further step in its ascent to the supreme truth. In other words, the question could be a signal of the intellectual progression which Dante addresses in the preceding tercets (4.124–32), and which Beatrice explains in terms of love, light, and sight at the beginning of the following canto. However, in the broader context of the discussion of absolute and conditional will in Canto 4, Dante's question, and therefore Beatrice's reaction, may also take on a much more personal undertone in relation to the individual spiritual journey of Dante-the-pilgrim, which Beatrice finds intensely pleasing.

The pilgrim may still be pondering the crux of Beatrice's rebuke in the Earthly Paradise, connecting his experience to that of Piccarda and Costanza. A closer analysis of the relationships between broken vows and issues of knowledge and fear is thus necessary to contextualize the pilgrim's reconsideration of vows and their significance. In *Paradiso* 5, Beatrice prefaces her answer to Dante's question with an explanation of her blaze of love, which has overpowered Dante's sight:<sup>14</sup>

S'io ti fiammeggio nel caldo d'amore  
di là dal modo che 'n terra si vede,  
sì che del viso tuo vinco il valore,  
non ti maravigliar, ché ciò procede  
da perfetto veder, che, come apprende,  
così nel bene appreso move il piede.

Io veggio ben sì come già respolende  
ne l'intelletto tuo l'eterna luce,  
che, vista, sola e sempre amore accende;  
e s'altra cosa vostro amor seduce,  
non è se non di quella alcun vestigio,  
mal conosciuto, che quivi traluce. (*Par.* 5.1–12)

Employing the vocabulary of love, flames and sight, Beatrice once again addresses the progress of knowledge: the blaze of love emanating from her eyes derives from her “perfetto veder,” a perfected vision that takes a step towards the good as soon as it is apprehended. She is now aware that the eternal light already shines in Dante’s intellect—the eternal light which, once seen, always ignites love. And, Beatrice adds, if human love is enticed by something else, it is because that object is a poorly known trace of the eternal light reflected within it. In other words, Dante can see Beatrice’s loving brightness more vividly because he has progressed intellectually toward the eternal light, and his question about possible reparations for broken vows is an important sign of this progress. In explaining the mechanics of “perfetto veder,” Beatrice intertwines the question of broken vows more closely with the issue of knowledge. She closes with a crucial allusion to the fault for which she reproached Dante in *Purgatorio* 30–31: his inability to see the trace of the eternal light in earthly objects. If Beatrice is now aflame with love, it is because her “perfetto veder” can see that Dante can begin to take steps towards the good he has grasped.<sup>15</sup> Not only is Dante now able to see contradictions and ascend to the truth through Beatrice, he also realizes that knowledge of the good is a prerequisite for vowing to pursue it. Only at this point does she proceed to answer Dante’s question about reparation.

The discussion of broken vows enables the pilgrim to reframe the problem of diversion from the good in the context of a specific human emotion: even when the good is known, fear can prevent human beings from pursuing it. As Beatrice states, absolute will consents to the wrong only insofar as it fears falling into a greater trouble (“Voglia assoluta non consente al danno; / ma consentevi in tanto in quanto teme, / se si ritrae, cadere in più affanno,” *Par.* 4.109–11). It is thus fear and not only external coercion that renders Piccarda’s and Costanza’s conduct analogous to what Aristotle calls “mixed” actions, both voluntary and involuntary.<sup>16</sup> Aquinas explicitly links this type of actions to fear. Following Aristotle in distinguishing courage from an excess of fear, but

also from an excess of fearlessness (*Nicomachean Ethics* 3.7), for Aquinas, evils should be judged by reason, otherwise fear would be inordinate. Since “the evils of the soul are more to be feared than the evils of the body, and evils of the body more than evils of external things,” if, out of fear, “one were to incur evils of the soul, namely sins, in order to avoid evils of the body, such as blows or death, or evils of external things [. . .] one would not be wholly excused from sin.” Nevertheless, “one’s sin would be extenuated somewhat, for what is done through fear is less voluntary, because when fear lays hold of a man he is under a certain necessity of doing a certain thing. Hence the Philosopher (*Ethic.* iii, 1) says that these things that are done through fear are not simply voluntary, but a mixture of voluntary and involuntary.”<sup>17</sup> For Aquinas, fear is thus a factor that makes an action less voluntary and therefore less sinful. According to this argument, Piccarda’s and Costanza’s sin can be mitigated because their behavior was driven by fear, so their actions were only partly voluntary. However, even though writing from very different perspectives on death, both Aristotle and Aquinas agree that the most courageous person is the one who does not fear a noble death, nor the risk of immediate death, if it leads to a good end such as an act of virtue because fear of death has the greatest power to make human beings turn away from the good of reason.<sup>18</sup>

The question of fear is crucial throughout the *Commedia*. Indeed, *Inferno* 2 presents the reader with a preliminary discussion of fear—when it must be overcome with courage, when it is merely cowardice, and when one must restrain oneself—and the respective positioning of Beatrice and the pilgrim in relation to it. Beatrice explains to Virgil that “i non temo di venir qua entro” because “Temer si dee di sole quelle cose / c’hanno potenza di fare altrui male; / de l’altre no, ché non son paurose”; and she adds that God has made her so that she cannot be touched by infernal misery (*Inf.* 2.87–93).<sup>19</sup> The pilgrim, on the other hand, is seized by fear at the prospect of the journey ahead: “Per che, se del venire io m’abbandono, / temo che la venuta non sia folle” (*Inf.* 2.34–35).

It is significant that the question of fear appears immediately after the pilgrim’s self-comparison to Aeneas and Paul.<sup>20</sup> For different reasons, God consented to their respective journeys to the underworld and heaven, but “io, perché venirvi? o chi ’l concede?” (*Inf.* 2.31). This is just the beginning of a long process of overcoming fear and preparing the

pilgrim for a mission that combines the temporal functions of Aeneas and the spiritual functions of Paul, the litotes of line 32—“Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono”—already suggesting that he will indeed be both.<sup>21</sup> As we will see through a comparison to Dante’s diversion from Beatrice discussed in *Purgatorio* 30–31, a rational assessment of the possible risks that the poet may incur, and thus, an overcoming of fear in view of the good that may result from fulfilling the prophetic mission in accordance with the divine will, is instrumental in accepting it and making a vow to God. In order to make this rational assessment and to *choose* in a truly free way, knowledge of the good is necessary.

### Consent

In making a vow to God, human beings offer the most precious gift they have received from their creator, the one most conformed with his goodness, and thus the one he values the most: free will (*Par.* 5.19–22). As Robin Kirkpatrick puts it, “in making a vow [. . .], we freely give back to the source of our freedom that freedom we have freely been given—and bind ourselves by doing so to the ‘creando’ that is the origin and end of our existence.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in what Barolini calls “the ethics of consent,” “l’alto valor del voto,” is clear when the vow is accepted by God: “s’è sì fatto / che Dio consenta quando tu consenti” (*Par.* 5.26–27).<sup>23</sup> “On this account,” Kirkpatrick comments, “human beings are heroically and clear-sightedly capable of entering into a contract with God, and thus to be bound, as to an equal, by our words of consent.”<sup>24</sup> Given that nothing is more precious than free will and it cannot be offered twice, what is it that can be given as reparation if the vow is then broken? As previously in her discussion of the will, Beatrice provides a distinction between the matter (“quella / di che si fa”) and the form (“la convenenza,” 44–45) of the vow. She states that the form, or the contract, cannot be annulled if it is not fulfilled; however, the matter can be replaced with another matter (54), as long as the old one “come ’l quattro nel sei non è raccolta” in the new one (60).<sup>25</sup> Having said this, however, Beatrice reiterates the initial principle, “Però qualunque cosa tanto pesa / per suo valor che tragga ogne bilancia, / sodisfar non si può con altra spesa” (61–63), and then gives two examples of vows made by political and military leaders—one Biblical and one pagan—that

required terrible actions: Jephthah and Agamemnon had to sacrifice their daughters to fulfil their ill-conceived vows.<sup>26</sup> Beatrice thus warns Christians to know their limits and the consequences of their actions, to have a steadier will (“non siate come penna ad ogne vento,” 74), and not to believe that they can be washed clean by any water.

The question of self-knowledge underlying this canto is inextricably linked to the knowledge of the good.<sup>27</sup> Human beings should resist the temptations driven by “mala cupidigia” (79): “Non fate com’agnel che lascia il latte / de la sua madre, e semplice e lascivo / seco medesimo a suo piacer combatte!” (*Par.* 5.82–84). The old problem of “mala cupidigia” is reformulated here as a diversion from what would be the most natural desire and source of pleasure, but in the context of the knowledge of the good and where it lies that the rational adult should have attained. In this context where matters of divine justice are closely linked to problems of knowledge, Dante’s question about compensation for broken vows assumes interesting contours for the individual journey of the pilgrim, as does Beatrice’s reaction to his improved comprehension. After all, in *Purgatorio* 30 and 31, Dante is reprimanded by Beatrice for having strayed from her guidance after her death. Barolini connects *Purgatorio* 30–31 with *Paradiso* 3, 4, and 5 in terms of Dante’s lifelong meditation on the “mutability of the will” and his singular position on “*postmortem* fidelity,” maintaining that Dante did not remain absolutely constant in his faithfulness to Beatrice after her death, but turned to the *donna gentile*.<sup>28</sup> He did not behave like a martyr, and at this point in his journey he may consider redeeming his own broken vow to follow Beatrice—but did he ever make such a vow in the first place? Based on Beatrice’s definition of vows in the heaven of the moon, it is hard to consider Dante’s neglected promise to her as a broken vow. Not only was it not made to God, but, as will be discussed further, it was also not grounded in a clear understanding of the good shining in her and of her higher purpose. Indeed, in her purgatorial rebuke, Beatrice seems to overlook Dante’s return to her in the final part of the *Vita nova*, as well as his resolution to speak of her in a way that no other woman had ever been spoken of before.<sup>29</sup> From Beatrice’s perspective, the episode of the *donna gentile* does not appear to be resolved in the final chapters of the *Vita nova*. One might even speculate that if Dante had truly understood her role as a guide and mediator rather than as the ultimate goal he would not have promised to write about her but instead about the divine. In other words, had he

understood her role, his promise of fidelity to her would have taken the form of a vow to God.

The word *voto* is never used in the *Vita nova*, which Dante revisits in the Earthly Paradise through Beatrice's rebuke. However, if one looks for the occurrences of *consentire*, it is rather surprising to find that, as Barolini has noticed, the verb is used only in *Vita nova* 38, once in the sonnet and twice in the preceding prose.<sup>30</sup> Crucially, it is used in the context of the inner conflict between the pain for Beatrice's departure from this world and the consoling pleasure that Dante's eyes find in the *donna gentile*, instead of weeping for Beatrice until his death.<sup>31</sup> It is through the use of the verb *consentire*, which has not received sufficient attention in the scholarship, that the passage articulates the problematic climax in the story of Dante's diversion from Beatrice:

Rincontrai la vista di questa donna in sí nova condizione, che molte volte ne pensava sí come di persona che troppo mi piacesse; e pensava di lei cosí: "Questa è una donna gentile, bella, giovane e savia, e apparita forse per volontà d'Amore, acciò che la mia vita si riposi"; e molte volte pensava piú amorosamente, tanto che 'l cuore consentiva in lui, cioè nel suo ragionare. E quando io ave' consentito ciò, e io mi ripensava sí come da la ragione mosso, e dicea fra me medesimo: "Deo, che pensiero è questo, che in cosí vil modo vuole consolar me, e non mi lascia quasi altro pensare?". Poi si rilevava un altro pensiero, e diceami: "Or tu sè stato in tanta tribulazione, perché non vuoi tu ritrarre te da tanta amaritudine? Tu vedi che questo è uno spiramento d'Amore, che ne reca li disii d'amore dinanzi, ed è mosso da cosí gentil parte com'è quella degli occhi de la donna che tanto pietosa ci s'ha mostrata." (VN 38.1-3)<sup>32</sup>

In the glosses to the sonnet that translates this climactic moment into verse, Dante clarifies that the internal conflict here is not articulated as between the eyes and the heart, as in the previous sonnet, but rather between two parts of the self: the *cuore* (appetite) and the *anima* (reason). To explain why this sonnet does not contradict the previous one, Dante comments that, in "L'amaro lagrimar che voi faceste" (VN 37.6-8), "lo cuore anche intendo per lo appetito, però che maggiore desiderio era 'l mio ancora di ricordarmi de la gentilissima donna mia, che di vedere costei, avvegna che alcuno appetito n'avessi già, ma leggero pareva" (VN 38.6). The appetite, then, was still intent on remembering Beatrice and less on the *donna gentile*. With the verb *consentire*, Dante articulates a serious problem in the sonnet "Gentil pensiero che parla di voi" and in the related prose: the heart *consents* to reason at this point. Indeed, the

verb tenses “consentiva” and “ave’ consentito” confirm that consent has occurred.<sup>33</sup> As stated in the prose, the appetite is consenting to the rational consideration: “Questa è una donna gentile, bella, giovane e savia, e apparita forse per volontà d’Amore, acciò che la mia vita si ripossi.” This *consentire* makes it possible to think more amorously (“pensava più amorosamente”). However, reason questions itself again, considering its own thought, which tends to be dangerously dominant, as vile and aimed at consolation. Subsequently another thought emerges, one that favors finding some relief from the tribulation and bitterness long endured—explicitly called “nostri martiri” in the sonnet (l.14)<sup>34</sup>—in the amorous desire moved by such a compassionate woman as the *donna gentile*.<sup>35</sup>

Dante’s description of the act of *consentire* in the *Vita nova* bears a resemblance to the technical meaning of the term *consensus* in Augustine and Aquinas.<sup>36</sup> Examining Dante’s consent through the lens of their discussion of *consensus* helps to reveal its implications. For Aquinas, *assensus* is the necessary condition for *consensus*, but *assensus* is an act of the intellect and implies the distance of cognition, whereas *consensus* is an act of the will and concerns things as present. It is my view that Dante mobilizes this technical meaning in the *Vita nova*, identifying the transition from intellectual assent to a consent of the will to the *donna gentile*.<sup>37</sup> As Judith A. Barad explains,

Assent is satisfied with the object as known, while consent not only responds to the object as known, but as it is in itself. In consent, we turn to the object and it is upon it that our entire self is directed. [ . . . ] Consent brings all our powers into action: our affectivity and freedom, because it rises from love, our will to action, because it has to be built up, beginning with inward acts and proceeding to visible action, and our intellect because consent is preceded by assent. Consent is a movement whereby the entire person, with emotion and will, follows what assent has already recognized.<sup>38</sup>

In his discussion of consent in the *Summa Theologiae* (I–II.15), Aquinas engages directly with John Damascene (*De Fide Orthodoxa* 2.22) and Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (12.12).<sup>39</sup> For Augustine, in contrast to the reason of wisdom (*sapientiae*), which understands eternal spiritual things, “the reason of knowledge (*scientiae*) has appetite very near to it, seeing that what is called the knowledge of action (*scientia dicitur actionis*) reasons about the corporeal things themselves that are perceived by the sense of

the body. If it reasons well, it does so that it may refer that knowledge to the end of its highest good; but if badly, it is in order that it may rejoice, as it were, in such goods in which it rests in a false happiness.”<sup>40</sup> This carnal or animal sense can force upon the intention of the mind (*mentis intentio*) an inducement to enjoy itself in some personal and particular good, rather than the unchangeable common good. *Consensus*, for Augustine, is giving in to such an inducement. Consent may be limited to the pleasure of thought, when the authority of the higher counsel restrains the body from performing the sinful act, or it may entail that the sin is also accomplished by the body. For the latter to happen, the intention of the mind, which moves the body to act, has to also yield to the evil deed. Both forms of consent lead to sin, but the pleasure of thought is much less than the complete action. For Aquinas, “the will, to which it belongs to tend to the thing itself, is more properly said to consent: whereas the intellect, whose act does not consist in a movement towards the thing, but rather the reverse [ . . . ] is more properly said to assent.”<sup>41</sup> Consent, therefore, belongs to the higher reason, involves the will, and thus makes an action voluntary.<sup>42</sup> Referring to the same passage from Augustine, Aquinas maintains that the sins of thought (*cordis*), word (*oris*), and deed (*operis*) are not three different species, but rather three degrees of sin corresponding to three different stages: “cogitation, pleasure, and consent.”<sup>43</sup>

Consenting to the *donna gentile* would then be a much more complete movement towards her, implying a more radical (and sinful) diversion from Beatrice. Then again, as Barad explains, “the concept of consent implies that although we are intellectually separated from God, we move towards union with Him.”<sup>44</sup> The union achieved through love is more intimate than that achieved through knowledge, because “my will is conformed to the object causing the object to be effectively present in me.”<sup>45</sup> This closely resembles the consent that Dante owed to Beatrice: to know her as present even after her death, if not more so. Such is the experience of faith: not knowledge, but belief in the invisible until the beatific vision. That is, Dante should not have consented to other things merely because they were physically present. Indeed, this is precisely the core of Dante’s confession in the Garden of Eden, “Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi, / tosto che ’l vostro viso si nascose” (*Purg.* 31.34–36), when he should rather have consented to Beatrice’s miraculous nature, which was meant to support his faith.<sup>46</sup>

At the crucial moment of Dante's repentance and confession, a focus on the question of consent brings to the fore the inner dynamics and seriousness of Dante's *traviamento*, rather than the particular earthly objects that could not truly deliver the happiness they promised and led him astray.<sup>47</sup> As Barad summarizes,

in the act of consenting, a believer expresses an intention concerning his future conduct in relation to God. When the believer attains the level of consent, it will be reflected in the character of his faith. His acts of faith will reflect the trust and love to which his consent has led him. The inner act of consent finds its expression in outer actions whereas the outer actions take their significance from the inner act. Love does not attain the level of consent unless there is a doing of good. Through the act of consent, a person interiorizes the demands of faith and performs them spontaneously from love.<sup>48</sup>

Dante consented to the *donna gentile* in order to find respite from the emotional *martirio* to which Beatrice's death had called him. But only the endurance of such pain would have been "a doing of good" and would have reflected "the trust and love to which his consent" should have led him. Of the two options, consolation or suffering, only one would have moved Dante towards union with God.

The question of the constancy or mutability of the will as raised in the Garden of Eden ("questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui," *Purg.* 30.126) does not perfectly match the distinction between absolute and conditional will as outlined in the heaven of the moon. Piccarda and Costanza were forced out of the cloister and acted in accordance with conditional will because they feared greater external violence, not because of the mutability of their own desires. Dante, instead, was not forced by an external power to abandon Beatrice and seek consolation in another woman; he fell prey to his own misdirected desire, like the lamb that refuses its mother's milk (*Par.* 5.82–84). In fact, in *Purgatorio* 31, Beatrice seems to allude to the two possible reasons for Dante straying: on the one hand, external hindrances he might have encountered on his path to her, "quai fossi attraversati o quai catene / trovasti, per che del passare innanzi / dovessiti così spogliar la spene?"; on the other hand, the lure of other objects of desire, "E quali agevolezze o quali avanzi / ne la fronte de li altri si mostraro, / per che dovessi lor passeggiare anzi?" (*Purg.* 31.25–30). Dante's tearful confession is clear: it was a matter of desire for false but present pleasures and for the relief from pain that they

could offer, and not external coercion (*Purg.* 31.34–36). Moreover, and more interestingly in this context, it is not immediately obvious that either Dante or God could consent to Dante's possible vow to follow Beatrice at that time: as it becomes clear in *Paradise*, Dante did not know himself well enough at the time, nor the good, in order to truly exercise his will freely.

### Freeing the Will

According to Beatrice's retelling of the story, Dante's turn to the "pargoletta / o altra novità" (*Purg.* 31.59–60) as false and transient images of the good was due to the errancy of misdirected desire (*Purg.* 30.130–32 and *Purg.* 31.49–57).<sup>49</sup> What Dante did not understand at the time is that once Beatrice's "belle membra in ch'io / rinchiusa fui" (*Purg.* 31.50–51)—that is, the most pleasing things he could possibly find on Earth—were gone,

Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale  
de le cose fallaci, levar suso  
di retro a me che non era più tale.  
Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,  
ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta  
o altra novità con sì breve uso. (*Purg.* 31.55–60)

Beatrice's reprehension is precise. For Aquinas, "[s]ince the object of the will is the apprehended good, we must judge of the object of the will according as it is apprehended."<sup>50</sup> Dante might have seen some good in the "pargoletta / o altra novità," but Beatrice was a greater good than any other available to him on Earth, therefore he should have followed her. At the time, Dante did not realize that he was supposed to raise himself to the new heights reached by Beatrice, but was driven by "mala cupidigia" to lesser objects of desire; whereas between *Paradiso* 4 and 5, the eternal light shines in Dante's intellect and kindles love in him, and he can finally see (and not just be told) that when human love is seduced by some other object, that object is only a poorly known "vestigio" of the eternal light (*Par.* 5.1–12). In the Augustinian terms previously described, one could conclude that Dante consented to the *donna gentile* because his reason of knowledge did not "refer that knowledge to the

end of its highest good,” but reasoned “in order that it may rejoice, as it were, in such goods in which it rests in a false happiness.”<sup>51</sup> When he turned to her, Dante may have been seeking relief from the pain (*martiri*) of Beatrice’s death, but consent made his action voluntary, and therefore his behaviour cannot be mitigated. Beatrice’s joy at Dante’s achievement and her explanation of her loving blaze at the beginning of *Paradiso* 5 are instrumental in understanding the subsequent discussion of the compensability of broken vows: those who make vows must know what they are consenting to and to whom they are vowing in order to make a true vow.

According to Beatrice’s explanation, human beings seal their vows to God with their free will. If all human beings are endowed with free will as a faculty, their will must be properly free in order to be offered to God in a vow, which implies that they must know God. For Aquinas, “[t]he proper act of free-will is choice: for we say that we have a free-will because we can take one thing while refusing another; and this is to choose.” Distinguishing it from will, he adds, “on the part of the appetite, to *will* implies the simple appetite for something: wherefore the will is said to regard the end, which is desired for itself. But to *choose* is to desire something for the sake of obtaining something else: wherefore, properly speaking, it regards the means to the end.”<sup>52</sup> Dante could not have vowed to follow Beatrice because his will was not truly free, but rather, susceptible to desire, and he was not fully aware that the eternal light was shining in her. In other words, he could not have given something that he did not have in its full form: the free will that, to be truly free, must know and be oriented towards the good and its ultimate source (something that Piccarda and Costanza, on the contrary, did have and that had led them to choose monastic life over secular life), otherwise it would be subjugated to desire as in the case of Francesca.<sup>53</sup>

After all, it is only at the end of *Purgatorio* 27 that Virgil declares: “libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio / e fallo fora non fare a suo senno” (140–41). Aquinas insists that “the free-will is not sufficient thereto unless it be moved and helped by God,” but human beings should also be able to see the help that God offers.<sup>54</sup> According to Aquinas, a wicked man may know from universal knowledge that fornication is not good, but he is ignorant of the end goal. Because of the inclination of a contrary habit, he chooses a certain action without properly judging the goal. The man judges that it is good in itself to take pleasure in a woman,

and so, “due the inclination of habit and the influence of emotion, his mind does not perceive the murmur of synderesis because the soul is, as it were, drunk on passion.”<sup>55</sup> For Dante, divine assistance is needed, as well as training and the right context of development. As Marco Lombardo explains, “e libero voler; che, se fatica / ne le prime battaglie col ciel dura, / poi vince tutto, se ben si notrica” (*Purg.* 16.76–78); and as Beatrice states, “Ma tanto più maligno e più silvestro / si fa ’l terren col mal seme e non còlto, / quant’ elli ha più di buon vigor terrestre” (*Purg.* 30.118–20).<sup>56</sup> In her purgatorial rebuke, Beatrice makes it clear that Dante’s free will was not properly nurtured, even though he was old enough and therefore mature enough: he did not learn from the first wars with the heavens—“Novo augelletto due o tre aspetta; / ma dinanzi da li occhi d’i pennuti / rete si spiega indarno o si saetta” (*Purg.* 31.61–63)—so he did not properly see the reflection of the eternal good shining in her.

Therefore, now that he has finally arrived at this understanding, Dante-the-pilgrim can make a vow to God and seal it with his restored free will. Since free will is the heaviest thing that humans can put on the scale, he must be aware of the fact that this vow “sodisfar non si può con altra spesa” (*Par.* 5.63). With guidance from Beatrice, Dante is now able to make such a vow so that what is vowed with his informed consent would meet God’s consent. As Dante later states in *Paradiso* (33.97–105):

Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,  
mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,  
e sempre di mirar faceasi accesa.  
A quella luce cotal si diventa,  
che volgersi da lei per altro aspetto  
è impossibil che mai si consenta;  
però che ’l ben, ch’è del volere obietto,  
tutto s’accoglie in lei, e fuor di quella  
è defettivo ciò ch’è lì perfetto.

If *consentire* is read here in the generic sense of “to agree,” “to accept,” or “to permit” (e.g., the logical meaning of the verb as employed in *Inf.* 27.120), the passage would mean that it is impossible for the beholder of the light to turn away from it; in other words, the beholder would be deprived of free will and the will would be directed towards the good by necessity. On the other hand, giving *consentire* the technical meaning

it has in *Paradiso* 4 and 5 would preserve the orientation of the will as that act of free choice which is a requirement of charity.

When Dante turned his attention to the *donna gentile*, he did not keep faith with Beatrice, that faith which is “of what is not seen,” resorting instead to transient consolations for his pain. Now in Paradise the pilgrim has seen the love of charity, which, as Aquinas puts it, is “of that which is already possessed: since the beloved is, in a manner, in the lover, and, again, the lover is drawn by desire to union with the beloved.”<sup>57</sup> Now Dante can consent to a proper vow to the eternal light itself, a vow that, as Piccarda said, God would consent to if charity conforms it to his pleasure (*Par.* 3.101–2). Yet if he does this, he must be prepared to behave like a martyr in accordance with his absolute will, for while all humans can (and should) reorient themselves towards the greatest and ultimate Good, as Dante has now done, absolute constancy in their vows to God is reserved for martyrs. What is the violence that Dante would have to endure and the martyrdom to which he might be called if he made his vow to God? To answer this question, one needs to consider how Boethius and Cacciaguida are introduced in *Paradiso*.

### Martyrdom

In the fourth heaven of the sun and the fifth heaven of Mars respectively, Boethius and Cacciaguida are described as representative of two different activities in this world, leading to the peace of Paradise in similar ways. Both are presented as martyrs: Boethius as the blessed soul who makes this “mondo fallace” manifest to those who listen to him attentively (*Par.* 10.124–29); Cacciaguida as a crusader who fought against la “gente turpa” and was taken out of the “mondo fallace” by them (*Par.* 15.142–48).<sup>58</sup> Boethius “da martiro / e da essilio venne a questa pace”; the crusader says of himself that “venni dal martiro a questa pace.” As Ricardo J. Quinones notes, the rhyme-scheme indicates that “the way of martyrdom pertains to the philosopher as well as to the soldier.”<sup>59</sup> Boethius and Cacciaguida, linked by similarities in syntactic structure and vocabulary, together offer a model martyr of an exile who takes on the task of revealing the fallaciousness of this world to those willing to listen. Through their example, they provide a model for fighting the evil caused by the faults of the papacy and the excessive love of this world

that defiles so many souls.<sup>60</sup> It is not difficult to see how appropriate this model can be for the future poet of the *Commedia*. As Schnapp points out, “[t]ogether the twin sainted souls (“anime sante”) of 10.125 and 17.101 reveal the full extent to which Dante viewed martyrdom and theological/philosophical *gnosis* as indissociable.”<sup>61</sup>

In *Paradiso* 17, after foretelling his descendant’s exile and the pain it will entail, Cacciaguida endorses Dante’s role as scribe, even though it risks putting the poet’s life in danger; essentially, Cacciaguida tells Dante to do with his poem what Boethius, who suffered exile and martyrdom, had done with his *Consolatio philosophiae*.<sup>62</sup> If Boethius had made the “mondo fallace” manifest, Dante must make his “vision” manifest, the reality of the infallible world ordered by divine justice. Even if voicing such reality would put his life at risk, the task needs to be accomplished for a greater purpose: to give “vital nodrimento” to the fallible world (*Par.* 17.124–32).<sup>63</sup> Dante’s question, which Cacciaguida answers, clarifies what is at stake in such an undertaking:

Giù per lo mondo senza fine amaro,  
e per lo monte del cui bel cacume  
li occhi de la mia donna mi levaro,  
e poscia per lo ciel, di lume in lume,  
ho io appreso quel che s’io ridico,  
a molti fia sapor di forte agrume;  
e s’io al vero son timido amico,  
temo di perder viver tra coloro  
che questo tempo chiameranno antico. (*Par.* 17.112–20)

If Dante told in full what he had seen and understood, this truth would be bitter to many people and might provoke violent reactions; if, on the other hand, he didn’t tell it, or only told it in part, he fears that he would lose his seat in Paradise and possibly a long-lasting fame among future generations.<sup>64</sup> As Schnapp remarks, “[t]his endeavor, as Cacciaguida defines it, is an unabashedly prophetic one. But the adverse historical setting in which it is circumscribed, as well as the mortal risk involved, identify it more precisely with the *parrhesía* of Christ’s martyrs.”<sup>65</sup> According to Schnapp, Dante proceeds through a “peculiar synthesis of *word* and *act* that is characteristic of the Christian concept of martyrdom. The *parrhesiastes*, he who speaks out dangerously, at the risk of losing his life, is a figure who joins the epic action of the Classical

hero to the verbal action of the Christian prophet.”<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, Anne Leone, in her reading of the “poema sacro” as “a sacrificial offering of poetry,” emphasizes the loving reciprocity and communal dimension of Christian sacrifice, and points out the contrastive relationship between pagan heroism and Christian martyrdom in Dante’s treatment of Cacciaguida: “While pagan heroes in the tragic epic are represented as glorified human beings, exalted by their partly divine lineage and the favour gods show them, Dante’s example of a Christian martyr is an ordinary human being who followed the Emperor and gave his life unselfishly, and who, until Dante’s *Commedia*, enjoyed relative anonymity.”<sup>67</sup>

Crucially for the poetics of the vow traced here, the conundrum between safety in the present and eternal salvation (and lasting influence) can be read as a reformulation of the question of conditional will *versus* absolute will. According to conditional will, Dante should take into account the current circumstances and refrain from fully revealing divine truth to his unwelcoming contemporaries in order to avoid possible violent reactions against him. According to absolute will, Dante should tell his vision in its entirety, even at the risk of his own life—and of his exile being turned into martyrdom—because only in this way can he attain long-lasting fame among future generations, and possibly also realize the prospect of living among the blessed souls in Paradise. As Beatrice stated in *Paradiso* 4, “voglia assoluta non consente al danno; / ma consentevi in tanto in quanto teme, / se si ritrae, cadere in più affanno” (109–11). Fear, which returns in Dante’s question at line 119, may lead Dante to consent to the “danno” and thus to acquiesce to the violence that dominates the fallible world. According to Aquinas, who devotes to fear the *quaestio* immediately after the one devoted to martyrdom, “[h]uman acts are estimated chiefly with reference to the end [. . .]: and it belongs to a brave man to expose himself to danger of death for the sake of a good. But a man who exposes himself to danger of death in order to escape from slavery or hardships is overcome by fear, which is contrary to fortitude.”<sup>68</sup> The fortitude of martyrs is not overcome by fear, or more precisely by the inordinate fear that does not follow reason. Moreover, “[d]eath and whatever else can be inflicted by mortal man are not to be feared so that they make us forsake justice: but they are to be feared as hindering man in acts of virtue, either as regards himself, or as regards the progress he may cause in others.”<sup>69</sup> Declining

to write the poem for fear of its consequences would mean forsaking justice and hindering the good of others.

Aquinas mobilizes the distinction between absolute and conditional will in his discussion of the voluntariness of suffering in Purgatory in *Scriptum Super Sententiis*, his commentary to Peter Lombard's *Sentences*:

[s]omething is called voluntary in two ways. In one way, by an absolute will [*voluntate absoluta*], and no punishment is voluntary in this way, for the notion of punishment involves that it be contrary to the will. In another way, something is said to be voluntary by a conditional will [*voluntate conditionata*], as burning is voluntary because of the health that will result; and in this way a punishment can be voluntary in two ways. In one way, because by this punishment we acquire some good, and so the will itself takes on a punishment, as is seen in the case of satisfaction; or also because someone accepts it willingly, and would not wish it not to be, as happens in martyrdom. In the other way, because although no good accrues to us by the punishment, nevertheless we cannot attain the good without the punishment, as is seen in the case of natural death. And then the will does not take on the punishment but wishes to be freed from it; and yet the will endures it, and to this extent it is said to be 'voluntary.' And this is how the punishment of purgatory is voluntary.<sup>70</sup>

According to their absolute will, which is always and steadfastly directed towards the good, martyrs do not yield to the contraries that prevent them from achieving that good, so that punishment is not voluntary because it is not contrary to their will. According to their conditional will, which operates based on the circumstances and in view of the end of the action, they decide that the punishment must be endured because good will result from it, so they accept it willingly "and would not wish it not to be." Martyrs conform their own will to the divine will, and since they suffer punishment for God's will, they voluntarily endure it. In *Paradiso* 3, Piccarda aptly explains to the pilgrim what this conformity means: if Dante's will is in harmony with divine will, he can accept the prospect of martyrdom.<sup>71</sup> Of the two possible courses of action that the pilgrim contemplates in his question to the martyr Cacciaguida, only one follows absolute will, the one endorsed by his blessed ancestor; only this would be in conformity with divine will. Otherwise, the pilgrim's choice would be conditioned by fear. In *Inferno* 2, the pilgrim's fear emerged due to the seemingly excessive ambition of the journey; here in Paradise, making his experience manifest could arouse a fear that must be resisted: Dante cannot be a coward if he wants to commit himself to such an undertaking.

Marco Lombardo had aptly summarized the paradox of free will in his memorable words: “A maggior forza e a miglior natura / liberi soggiacete” (*Purg.* 16.79–80). For Dante, an act of free will is not the expression of freedom of a self-determined subject: paradoxically, the freest choice the will can make is to act in accordance with divine will. To put it differently, humans are freest when they accord their conditional will to their absolute will, which does not yield to contingent circumstances, like fire, which rises naturally regardless of forceful attempts to change its direction (in Beatrice’s words, “ché volontà, se non vuol, non s’ammorza, / ma fa come natura face in foco, / se mille volte violenza il torza,” *Par.* 4.76–78). Along the same (paradoxical) lines, according to Aquinas, taking a vow does not impinge on freedom: “the necessity resulting from a will firmly fixed to good does not lessen the liberty, as instanced in God and the blessed. Such is the necessity implied by a vow, bearing a certain resemblance to the confirmation of the blessed. Hence, Augustine says (*Ep. cxxvii, ad Arment. et Paulin.*) that *happy is the necessity that compels us to do the better things.*”<sup>72</sup>

### Avowal

*Paradiso* 25 and 26, in which Dante is examined on hope and charity by Saint James and Saint John respectively, are imbued with the prospect of Dante’s prophetic mission.<sup>73</sup> The fortitude he needs is indeed associated with hope and, as Piccarda observes, vows are accepted by Christ only when charity makes them conform to his pleasure (“quello sposo ch’ogne voto accetta / che caritate a suo piacer conforma,” *Par.* 3.101–2).<sup>74</sup> Not only does Canto 25 famously begin with the hope that the “poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra” would overcome the cruelty of the people who have banished its author and that Dante could return to his city as a different poet from the one he was (*Par.* 25.1–9),<sup>75</sup> but the pilgrim concludes his answer to Saint James with the idea of manifestation: “e ’l tuo fratello assai vie più digesta, / là dove tratta de le bianche stole, / questa revelazion ci manifesta” (*Par.* 25.94–96). Dante loses his eyesight at the end of this canto, and it is only restored after his examination on charity when he demonstrates that his sight is “smarrita e non defunta” (*Par.* 26.9).<sup>76</sup> Within her gaze Beatrice has the power to restore Dante’s sight, just as Ananias’s hand

did for Saint Paul. The “Vas d’elezione” (*Inf.* 2.28) is not only the apostle who ascended to the third heaven, but also the one who spread the Christian message to the world to the point of embracing the suffering and martyrdom that Christ had announced. Indeed, in Acts 9:13–20 the restoration of Paul’s sight is linked to God’s will for his *vas electionis* to see the suffering he must endure in God’s name. Dante has Saint John as the listener to his “professione” (*Par.* 26.54), the apostle who revealed the truth about love: “incominciando / l’alto preconio che grida l’arcano / di qui là giù sopra ogni altro bando” (*Par.* 26.43–45).<sup>77</sup> Those who know this truth must be moved to love the essence where the greatest good is. In other words, Dante can now discern the truth (“Tal vero a l’intelletto mio sterne / colui che mi dimostra il primo amore / di tutte le sustanze sempiterno,” *Par.* 26.37–39); he can profess such truth (“Tutti quei morsi / che posson far lo cor volgere a Dio, / a la mia caritate son concorsi,” *Par.* 26.55–57) and join the ranks of its champions.<sup>78</sup>

According to the connections traced here, Cacciaguیدا’s answer could not be clearer: Dante should behave like Boethius and Cacciaguیدا himself by following absolute will and accepting the possibility of martyrdom; furthermore, he should act like Saint Lawrence and Mucius Scaevola, and not like the defective spirits Piccarda and Costanza since it is not enough to remain faithful to one’s vows only in one’s heart, not least because this would not offer a much-needed medicine to others. Indeed, as Paola Nasti remarks in her discussion of Saint Francis in *Paradiso* 11, “per il poeta la *sequela Christi* non si realizza necessariamente attraverso il martirio di sangue ma attraverso l’imitazione del percorso apostolico di divulgazione della parola di Dio.”<sup>79</sup> Significantly, Dante himself, in *Paradiso* 31, identifies his task of reaching the “tempio,” the ultimate destination of his desire, as a “voto” when he arrives at the “candida rosa”:

E quasi peregrin che si ricrea  
nel tempio del suo voto riguardando,  
e spera già ridir com’ ello stea,  
su per la viva luce passeggiando,  
menava i occhi per li gradi,  
mo sù, mo giù e mo recirculando. (*Par.* 31.43–48)

In this passage Dante clearly links the pilgrim’s “voto” to reach the temple with the hope of describing what it was like, the avowal of

the truth he has witnessed. As seen in the previous pages, the journey through Paradise is a process in which Dante's call to martyrdom comes to coincide with the spiritual and political need to tell others what he learns during the course of his celestial journey.

In this light, the structural significance of beginning the journey through Heaven with a discussion of broken vows becomes clear in retrospect: Beatrice is asking Dante to make a vow to God and preparing him for this undertaking. If the poet makes such a vow, he must not hesitate or allow himself to be diverted by the circumstances. He must fulfill it with the unwavering determination of a martyr following absolute will without fear, as in the examples of Saint Lawrence and Mucius Scaevola, Boethius and Cacciaguida. The realignment of Dante-the-pilgrim's desire and will as well as his acquired knowledge of the divine are essential for him to be able to make a true vow to God, placing his free will on the scales of divine justice: the vow to make the divine realities manifest to others. This is a vow for which, if broken, there is no possible compensation. Actual martyrdom may be a possible consequence of following absolute will to the very end—which, as we have seen, is what Dante's poetic endeavor requires—but Dante-the-poet must be prepared to die if he is to consent to a vow that God, in turn, would consent to.<sup>80</sup> If the vow to write down the poem for the benefit of others is fulfilled—as we know it ultimately was—the poem will finally achieve the act of avowal to which it aspires.

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## NOTES

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1. Teodolinda Barolini, "Errancy: A Brief History of *Lo ferm voler*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, ed. Manuele Gagnolati et al. (Oxford University Press, 2021), 563–79, 578.

2. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History at the Center of Dante's "Paradise"* (Princeton University Press, 1986), 170–238.

3. Barolini, "Errancy," 563; See also Teodolinda Barolini, "Archeology of the *Donna Gentile*: The Importance of Disconversion in Conversion Narratives," in *Dante's Multitudes: History, Philosophy, Method* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 225–42.

4. As Aquinas reiterates in the *Summa Theologiae* (II–II.88), a vow is a promise made specifically to God. The specifics of the vow, including the necessity of consent from both the individual and God, are illustrated by Beatrice in *Par.* 5 and are discussed here in the "Consent" section.

5. Michelangelo Picone's suggestions in his essay "Paradiso V: Il voto di Dante," *Tenzone* 3 (2002): 169–86, are crucial in this regard, although he also emphasizes continuity from the *Vita nova* to the *Commedia* (see note 29).

6. Barolini, "Errancy," 578.

7. On the questions of will raised through Piccarda's example, see Patrick Boyde, *Perception and Passion in Dante's "Comedy"* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 193–214. See also Flavia Stara, "Il tema dei voti religiosi nei canti III, IV e V del *Paradiso* tra rivendicazione etica e fondazione teologica," *Forum Italicum* 31 (1997): 5–14; for a discussion of the structural function of these canti, see Giuseppe Ledda, "Canti III-IV-V: I segni del Paradiso," in *Esperimenti danteschi: "Paradiso" 2010*, ed. Tommaso Montorfano (Marietti, 2010), 27–60. Sofia Vanni Rovighi's *lectura* of *Par.* 4 is still the most theologically informed, "Il canto IV del *Paradiso* visto da uno studioso della filosofia medievale," *Studi danteschi* 48 (1971): 67–82.

8. An extensive study of Dante as a prophet is Nicolò Mineo, *Profetismo e apocalittica in Dante: Strutture e temi profetico-apocalittici in Dante: Dalla "Vita Nuova" alla "Divina Commedia"* (Università di Catania, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 1968). See also Gian Roberto Sarolli, "Dante's Katabasis and Mission," in *The World of Dante: Six Studies in Language and Thought*, ed. S. Bernard Chandler and Julius Molinaro (University of Toronto Press, 1966), 80–116; Robert Wilson, *Prophecies and Prophecy in Dante's "Commedia"* (Olschki, 2007); and Lucia Battaglia Ricci, "'Dice Isaia . . .': Dante e il profetismo biblico," in *La Bibbia di Dante: Esperienza mistica, profezia e teologia biblica in Dante*, ed. Giuseppe Ledda (Centro dantesco dei frati minori conventuali, 2011), 49–76. Barański has recently warned against a generic use of the term *profeta* in relation to Dante: "in termini concreti, almeno in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, [l'Alighieri] si presenta esclusivamente come un *denunciator* con responsabilità morali," Zygmunt G. Barański, "Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXXIII," in *Voci sul "Purgatorio" di Dante: Una nuova lettura della seconda cantica*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Maria Antonietta Terzoli, 3 vols. (Carocci, 2024), 2:885–924, 921.

9. *Summa Theologiae* I–II.6.6. See Manlio Pastore Stocchi, "Canto IV: Ragione teologica e ragione poetica," in *Lectura Dantis Romana: Cento canti per cento anni, III: Paradiso, 1: Canti I–XVII*, ed. Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Salerno, 2015), 111–30. For the Aristotelian discussion of voluntary and involuntary actions in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a background of *Paradiso* 3–5 and the scholastic distinction between absolute and conditional will, see Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and Aristotle on Voluntary and Involuntary Action: *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1 in *Inferno* 5 and *Paradiso* 3–5," *Textual Cultures* 16, no. 2 (2023): 247–74. See also Vanni Rovighi, "Il canto IV del *Paradiso*," 76–80, and "Arbitrio," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (1970), accessed November 20, 2025, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arbitrio\\_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arbitrio_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/); Giorgio Stabile, "Volontà," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (1970), accessed November 20, 2025, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/volonta\\_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/volonta_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/). The Latin originals and the English translations of all quotations from Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* and *Scriptum Super Sententiis* (hereafter *ST* and *Super Sent.*) are from the online edition of the The Aquinas Institute, <https://aquinas.cc>. Although Aquinas is a constant presence throughout this article, I am not using his works as an intertext or source to reconstruct Dante's doctrinal background. Instead, I use his reflections as a backdrop against which the issues discussed here can be seen more clearly.

10. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aquinas uses the example of Saint Lawrence, as well as the case of Alcmaeon, to which Beatrice refers in *Par.* 4.103–5 (*Sententia libri Ethicorum* 3.2.4); the latter is also used by Aristotle (*NE* 3.1, 1110a). See Vanni Rovighi, "Il canto IV del *Paradiso*," 78–79. See also George Corbett, *Dante's Christian Ethics: Purgatory and Its Moral Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 39–40. Inga Pierson, Alison Cornish, and

Barolini have addressed the discomfort caused by the association of weakness and inconstancy of will with female characters in the heaven of the moon, see Inga Pierson, “Piccarda’s Weakness: Reflections on Freedom, Force, and Femininity in Dante’s *Paradiso*,” *Speculum* 94, no. 1 (2019): 68–95; Alison Cornish, *Believing in Dante: Truth in Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 156–207; Barolini, “Dante and Aristotle,” 267–72. On this discomfort, Barolini has responded that “Dante acted as the historian of record for abused women otherwise consigned to historical oblivion” and, with reference to Beatrice’s reprimands of Dante in *Purgatorio* 30–31, that “the character who is most strongly chastised for fickle and inconstant behavior in the *Commedia* is a man, Dante himself, not a woman,” 267. One could also add that Piccarda and Costanza are undoubtedly relevant cases for the pilgrim’s journey, but they are not presented as the norm: as Piccarda says speaking of Saint Clare—who, having kept her vow, now abides in a higher heaven—nuns’ vows are made so that they can live with Christ until their death (*Par.* 3.97–102).

11. See Teodolinda Barolini, “Dante Squares the Circle: Textual and Philosophical Affinities of *Monarchia* and *Paradiso* (*Solutio Distinctiva* in *Mon.* 3.4.17 and *Par.* 4.94–114),” in Barolini, *Dante’s Multitudes*, 137–61; Cf. F. Regina Psaki, “Love for Beatrice: Transcending Contradiction in the *Paradiso*,” in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (Fordham University Press, 2003), 115–30, 121–22.

12. Quotations from the *Commedia* are from Dante Alighieri, *La “Commedia” secondo l’antica vulgata*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols., 2nd revised ed. (Le Lettere, 1994).

13. On the joy of the blessed, see Tamara Pollack, “Light, Love and Joy in Dante’s Doctrine of Beatitude,” in *Reviewing Dante’s Theology*, ed. Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne, 2 vols. (Peter Lang, 2013), 1:263–319. On the powers of Beatrice’s face, see Heather Webb, *Dante’s Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 175–84.

14. On sight and vision in the *Commedia*, see Simon Gilson, *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2000); Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 138–77; Mira Mocan, *La trasparenza e il riflesso: Sull’“alta fantasia” in Dante e nel pensiero medievale* (Bruno Mondadori, 2007).

15. The connection between intellect and will in this passage is discussed in Achille Tartaro, “La questione dei voti,” in *Lecture dantesche* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1980), 107–34.

16. “As for things done through fear of greater evils or for the sake of something noble [. . .] there is some dispute about whether they are involuntary or voluntary,” *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1, 1110a. All quotations are from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge University Press, 2004), hereafter *NE*. Barolini discusses Aristotle’s example of forced action in Barolini, “Dante and Aristotle on Voluntary and Involuntary Action.” Lansing points out that, in the third canto of each of the three realms, “Dante treats separately a particular aspect of the loss of faith and the consequences of a failed will,” Richard H. Lansing, “Piccarda and the Poetics of Paradox: A Reading of *Paradiso* III,” *Dante Studies* 105 (1987): 63–77, 71, but he does not really investigate Piccarda’s specific kind of fear.

17. “Sunt autem magis timenda mala animae quam mala corporis; et mala corporis quam mala exteriorum rerum. Et ideo si quis incurrat mala animae, idest peccata, fugiens mala corporis, puta flagella vel mortem, aut mala exteriorum rerum, puta damnum pecuniae; aut si sustineat mala corporis ut vitet damnum pecuniae; non excusatur totaliter a peccato. Diminuitur tamen aliquid eius peccatum, quia minus voluntarium est quod ex timore agitur; imponitur enim homini quaedam necessitas aliquid faciendi propter imminentem timorem. Unde philosophus huiusmodi quae ex timore fiunt, dicit esse non simpliciter voluntaria, sed mixta ex voluntario et involuntario,” *ST II–II.125.4* resp.

18. *ST II–II.126.1* ad. 2; see also *NE* 3.6, 1115a–b.

19. Vittorio Russo, “‘Timor’, ‘audacia’ e ‘fortitudo’ nel canto II dell’*Inferno*,” *Filologia e letteratura* 11 (1965): 391–408, then in *Sussidi di esegesi dantesca* (Liguori, 1975), 9–32. For a reading in terms of *pusillanimitas*, see Simon Gilson, “Lettura e interpretazione del canto II,” in *Voci sull’“Inferno” di Dante: Una nuova lettura della prima cantica*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Maria Antonietta Terzoli, 3 vols. (Carocci, 2021), 1:95–107, 101–3. On Aristotelian *timor*, see Roberto Rea, “Psicologia ed etica della paura nel primo canto dell’*Inferno*: La *compunctio timoris*,” *Dante*

*Studies* 130 (2012): 183–206, 184–85. See also the chapter on “Fear” in Boyde, *Perception and Passion*, 217–44, 220–25.

20. See Franziska Meier, “‘Una spada lucida e aguta’: La paura di Dante e l’*authoritas* letteraria di San Paolo nella *Divina Commedia*,” *Cuadernos de filología italiana* 28 (2021): 209–24.

21. As Schnapp points out in his discussion of the Cacciaguida canti, “[t]he voice that Dante inherits is thus one empowering him as the successor to both Virgil and Paul, as both epic singer of Rome and as Christian prophet,” in *The Transfiguration of History*, 233. On the relationship between Dante and Paul, see Giuseppe Di Scipio, *The Presence of Pauline Thought in the Works of Dante* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1995); and Giuseppe Ledda, “Modelli biblici nella *Commedia*: Dante e san Paolo,” in *La Bibbia di Dante*, 179–216.

22. Robin Kirkpatrick, “Massacre, *Miserere* and Martyrdom,” in *Vertical Readings in Dante’s “Comedy*,” ed. George Corbett and Heather Webb, 3 vols. (Open Book Publishers, 2015), 1:97–117, 101. Kirkpatrick asks an intriguing question for the poetics of the vow: “In the *Convivio*, Dante argues that his use of vernacular Italian in that work is itself a true gift to his reader. In *Paradiso* 2, he allows the reader freely to choose whether or not they will read *Paradiso*, as though there were no necessity to do so. Might not those readers who do freely choose to continue with the text be thought of as accepting a gift—or even as taking a vow of fidelity to its author?,” 109.

23. Barolini, “Dante and Aristotle on Voluntary and Involuntary Action,” 261. As Barolini points out, “Dante here treats consent as entirely internal, as a function of the will, rather than in law,” 251, note 8.

24. Kirkpatrick, “Massacre, *Miserere* and Martyrdom,” 100. According to Boyde, “Making a vow is not an *operatio mixta*. Renunciation of freedom is a free act of the will,” in Boyde, *Perception and Passion*, 204. For Barolini, “The issue of the commutability of vows is founded in the belief that free will once freely renounced cannot be revoked,” in Barolini, “Dante and Aristotle on Voluntary and Involuntary Action,” 260.

25. Aquinas discusses vows, including their dispensation and commutation, in *ST II–II.88*. According to Manlio Pastore Stocchi, Beatrice’s polemic here is against the interpretations of the Decretalists, aimed at granting reductions or substitutions in exchange for donations or bequests; see Manlio Pastore Stocchi, “I voti manchi (*Paradiso* V)” (1972), in *Il lume d’esta stella: Ricerche dantesche* (Salerno, 2013), 204–31, 218–22. Picone, on the other hand, argues that this canto makes no allusion to the simoniacal trade of *dispensatio* or *commutatio* of vows. As he writes, “A Beatrice insomma, e a Dante che trascrive il suo discorso, non interessa la bassa speculazione finanziaria fatta dai decretalisti sul voto, ma l’altissima speculazione intellettuale svolta dal poeta cristiano sul ‘patto’ che lega l’io a Dio”; Picone, “*Paradiso* V,” 182. See also, Eugenio Ragni, “‘Non prendan li mortali il voto a ciancia’: Volontà individuale e libero arbitrio nel cielo della Luna,” in *Lectura Dantis Romana: Cento canti per cento anni, III: Paradiso, 1: Canti I–XVII*, 131–60, particularly “Note di approfondimento,” 26.

26. The Hebrew Judge Jephthah is the example Aquinas also uses in his discussion of religious vows in his commentary on the *Sentences* (*Super Sent.* IV.38.1.1). The problem with Jephthah’s vow is that even if the vow itself (its form) showed faith, the choice of the matter lacked discretion because its outcome could be either good or evil, and he committed himself to fulfilling it in either case, which was imprudent. Pierson rightly observes that “Beatrice provides a list of inconsonant masculine heroes” who are “strange comparisons” given “the young religious women in question” (Pierson, “Piccarda’s Weakness,” 73). However, these comparisons seem fitting in terms of preparing Dante for his own call to martyrdom (see “Martyrdom” section).

27. As Kirkpatrick remarks, “there is, after all, no need for us to make vows (and it is stupid to do so) unless, in proper self-knowledge, we are certain we can keep them,” Kirkpatrick, “Massacre, *Miserere* and Martyrdom,” 100. Christian Moevs points out that Piccarda’s case “is a failure of perfect self-knowledge” and “[t]his obscuring of the light of the Empyrean by body is manifest in Piccarda’s own shadowy bodily form (*Par.* 3.10–30), which contrasts with the pure luminosity of the souls of upper Paradise,” in Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante’s “Comedy”* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 129. See also Christian Moevs, “Il punto che mi vinse,”

in *Dante's "Commedia": Theology as Poetry*, ed. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 267–85.

28. Barolini, "Errancy," 578, 576.

29. Picone identifies Dante's paradisiac vow with the promise made at the end of the *Vita nova* and concludes, "Si tratta di un patto che il giovane autore della *Vita Nova* ha stretto direttamente con Dio ('se piacere sarà di Colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni'): un patto che impegna e vincola il futuro autore della *Commedia* ('e di venire a ciò [a dire più degnamente di Beatrice] io studio quanto posso'). Ma è appunto questo proposito di comporre l'opera totale e definitiva su Beatrice ('io spero di dire di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna') il voto che l'autore della *Commedia* mantiene e scioglie, offrendo alla civiltà occidentale il poema che, benché scritto da un uomo, porta impresso il marchio dell'*aucltoritas* divina," (Picone, "*Paradiso V*," 185–86).

30. Barolini, "Errancy," 565.

31. The word *consentire* occurs six times in the *Commedia*, but only in *Par.* 4.109, *Par.* 5.27, and *Par.* 33.102 seems to be clearly used with the technical meaning outlined here. In the other occurrences in *Inf.* 25.48, *Inf.* 27.120, and *Purg.* 7.47, it is used in the more general sense of "to permit," "to accept," "to allow," or "to agree." In the *Convivio*, Dante uses *consentire* fourteen times, five of them with a similarly strong meaning and in the same context of inner conflict, whether induced by the *domina gentile* or by *Filosofia*: *Conv.* II.2.2, II.6.7–8, II.7.8, II.7.12, II.10.4; Cf. "Consentimento," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (1970), accessed November 20, 2025, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/consentimento\\_\(Enciclopedia-Dantesca\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/consentimento_(Enciclopedia-Dantesca)/); and Lucia Onder, "Consentire," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (1970), accessed November 20, 2025, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/consentire\\_\(Enciclopedia-Dantesca\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/consentire_(Enciclopedia-Dantesca)/).

32. All quotations are from Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, *Rime*, ed. Donato Pirovano and Marco Grimaldi, introd. Enrico Malato (Salerno Editrice, 2015), hereafter *VN*.

33. On the consent given in "Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete," see Teodolina Barolini, "Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete: A Dramatization of 'utrum de passione in passionem possit anima transformari': Conflict, Compulsion, Consent, Conversion," in Barolini, *Dante's Multitudes*, 266–84.

34. *Martirio* is used two other times in the *Vita nova*, always in the context of the pain and weeping for Beatrice: in chapter 39—"lo quale suole apparire per alcuno martirio che altri riceva"—and the related sonnet, "Lasso! per forza di molti sospiri"—"e spesse volte piangon sì ch'Amore / li 'ncherchia di corona di martiri," 7–8.

35. For a reading of the chapter and a discussion of "tribulazione," see Nicolò Maldina, "*Vita nova* XXXVIII and XXXIX [27–28]," in *Dante's "Vita nova": A Collaborative Reading*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Heather Webb (Notre Dame University Press, 2023), 336–48.

36. Judith A. Barad, "Aquinas on Faith and the Consent/Assent Distinction," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (1986): 311–21.

37. For the use of the term in the vernacular with a related meaning, see the occurrences listed under "Inclinazione, attrazione, tendenza dello spirito (verso il bene o il male)," meaning 2, in the "consentimento" entry in the *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini*, accessed June 26, 2025, <http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it>. The use of the term in the vernacular deserves further discussion, but this is beyond the scope of this article and will be addressed in a separate piece. In the context of the argument developed here, it is sufficient to refer to its elaboration in the works of Augustine and Aquinas.

38. Barad, "Aquinas on Faith," 316–17.

39. According to Vanni Rovighi, "Tommaso d'Aquino si serve di questa nozione [*sententia*] del Damasceno per integrare la nozione agostiniana di consensus nella descrizione aristotelica: egli identifica infatti il consensus con la *sententia* (I II 15 2 c) e ammette che, quando si trovi un solo oggetto che risponda al fine voluto, il consensus coincide con la *electio*. Si capisce quindi che D. chiami assenso l'atto col quale si sceglie un oggetto o ci si decide per una determinata azione, atto che dipende (e di cui de' tener la soglia) dalla ragione in quanto capacità di deliberare (*Purg.* 18.63)," ("*Arbitrio*").

40. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews, trans. Stephen McKenna (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 95. "Rationi autem scientiae appetitus vicinus est quandoquidem de ipsis corporalibus quae sensu corporis sentiuntur ratiocinatur ea quae scientia dicitur actionis; si bene ut eam notitiam referat ad finem summi boni; si autem male ut eis fruatur tamquam bonis talibus in quibus falsa beatitudine conquiescat," *De Trinitate* 12.12.17, in Sancti Aurelii Augustini, *De Trinitate libri XV*, ed. William John Mountain and Franciscus Glorie, CCSL 50 (Brepols, 1968).

41. "Et ideo voluntas, cuius est tendere ad ipsam rem, magis proprie dicitur consentire, intellectus autem, cuius operatio non est secundum motum ad rem, sed potius e converso, ut in primo dictum est, magis proprie dicitur assentire," *ST I-II.15.1* ad. 3.

42. See *ST I-II.15.4* resp.; *ST I-II.15.4* ad. 2.

43. *ST I-II.72.7*.

44. Barad, "Aquinas on Faith," 315.

45. Barad, "Aquinas on Faith," 317.

46. On this connection, and the potential mistakes it can lead to when the consent is not to Beatrice's *meraviglia*, see the canzone "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" (50–53): "E puossi dir che 'l suo aspetto giova / a consentir ciò che par meraviglia; / onde la nostra fede è aiutata: / però fu tal da eterno ordinata," *Convivio* III. See Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno, 2 vols. (Le Lettere, 1995). For a brief discussion of the relevance of this *canzone* in the context of Beatrice's reprimand, see Giuseppe Ledda, "Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXXI," in *Voci sul "Purgatorio" di Dante*, ed. Barański and Terzoli, 2:829–59, 843–44.

47. For a recent reading of *Purg.* 31, which discusses the authenticity of Dante's repentance and the vagueness with which Beatrice refers to his past earthly loves, variously identified by scholars (the *donna gentile*, philosophy, the lyric experience of the past), see Ledda, "Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXXI." See also Francesco Mazzoni, *Il canto XXXI del "Purgatorio"* (Le Monnier, 1965).

48. Barad, "Aquinas on Faith," 319.

49. On the *pargoletta* and the other novelties, see Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy"* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 54–55; Tristan Kay, "Dante's Cavalcantian Relapse: The 'Pargoletta' Sequence and the *Commedia*," *Dante Studies* 131 (2013): 73–97. An extensive study of the issue of moral choice between Beatrice and the "other woman" and its broader implications is Olivia Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds: Ethics and Erotics in the "Divine Comedy"* (Yale University Press, 2008). On the question of the *scola*, see John A. Scott, "Beatrice's Reproaches in Eden: Which 'School' Had Dante Followed?," *Dante Studies* 109 (1991): 1–23. For a reassessment of this question and Dante's *traviamento* (*Purg.* 33.73–90), see Zygmunt G. Barański, "(Un)Orthodox Dante," in *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Literature, Doctrine, Reality* (Legenda, 2020), 82–134. In his *lectura* of *Purgatorio* 33, Barański remarks that "è piuttosto ovvio che, anche considerato l'accento sulla comunicazione divina e sull'esegesi sacra che circoscrive il nostro canto, la donna si riferisce a esperienze intellettuali che non hanno fornito al *viator* i mezzi con cui capire e poi interpretare la *via divina* (v. 88)," Barański, "Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXXIII," in *Voci sul "Purgatorio" di Dante*, 2:914.

50. "cum obiectum voluntatis sit bonum apprehensum, hoc modo iudicandum est de obiecto voluntatis, secundum quod cadit sub apprehensione," *ST I-II.13.5* ad. 2.

51. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 12.12.17; Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 95.

52. "proprium liberi arbitrii est electio, ex hoc enim liberi arbitrii esse dicimur, quod possumus unum recipere, alio recusato, quod est eligere," *ST I.83.3* resp.; "ex parte appetitus, velle importat simplicem appetitum alicuius rei, unde voluntas dicitur esse de fine, qui propter se appetitur. Eligere autem est appetere aliquid propter alterum consequendum, unde proprie est eorum quae sunt ad finem," *ST I.83.4* resp.

53. On Francesca, Pia, and Piccarda, see Erminia Ardissino, "Nuclei tematici nel canto di Piccarda (*Paradiso* iii)," *L'Alighieri* 39 (2012): 109–21, 114 especially on the question of friendship with God; Piero Boitani, "Peace and the Mind in Love: Piccarda," in *Dante's Poetry of the Donati* (Maney and Society for Italian Studies, 2007), 27–41, 29 on the sequence from lust to charity; and Kirkpatrick, "Massacre, *Miserere* and Martyrdom." On lust in *Inferno* 5, see Elena Lombardi,

*The Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (McGill Queens University Press, 2012), 51–85.

54. “liberum arbitrium ad hoc non est sufficiens, nisi moveatur et iuvetur a Deo,” *ST* I.83.1 ad. 2.

55. “propter inclinationem habitus et impetum passionis non percipitur mente synderesis murmur, quia anima est quasi inebriata passione,” *Super Sent.* II.39.3.1 ad. 4. With reference to *Monarchia* 1.12.4–6 (“If the judgment completely directs the appetite and is in no way deflected by it, then it is free; but if the judgment is in any way deflected or influenced by the appetite it cannot be free”), Gragnolati comments: “it is precisely because the saintly souls cannot alter their permanent control over their appetites that they enjoy the maximum and most perfect freedom, which is a sign that the souls’ intellectual faculties are working at their best,” Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 83. For Aquinas, moreover, sin can “lessen” free choice: “Cum igitur libera electio vel fuga boni seu mali ad naturam liberi arbitrii pertineat, non potest esse ut per peccatum subtrahatur homini facultas fugiendi peccatum, sed solum quod minuat, ita scilicet quod illud peccatum quod homo ante vitare de facili poterat, postmodum difficulter vitet” (“Therefore, since the free decision of, or flight from, good or evil pertains to the nature of free decision, it cannot be the case that through sin man’s faculty of fleeing sin is withdrawn from him, but only that it is lessened, namely, in such a way that the sin that previously man was able to avoid with ease he afterwards avoids with difficulty”), *Super Sent.* II.28.1.2 resp.

56. The agricultural metaphor is also used to describe Saint Peter’s work: “ché tu intrasti povero e digiuno / in campo, a seminar la buona pianta / che fu già vite e ora è fatta a pruno” (*Par.* 24.109–11). The Scriptures no longer have the same effect and, as V. Stanley Benfell writes, “Dante must imitate these biblical authors by sowing the good seed, making the biblical message new so that it speaks to his contemporaries. It is for this reason, in fact, that Dante tells us that he writes, ‘in pro del mondo che mal vive’ (‘on behalf of the world that lives badly’ [*Purg.* 32.103]). He must turn his readers back to the sacred book so that they may find renewed faith, hope, and charity, as he has,” *The Biblical Dante* (University of Toronto Press, 2011), 76.

57. “amor caritatis est de eo quod iam habetur, est enim amatum quodammodo in amante, et etiam amans per affectum trahitur ad unionem amati,” *ST* I–II.66.6 resp.

58. On Cacciaguida as an exemplary case of *imitatio Christi*, see Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History*, 194–215.

59. Ricardo J. Quinones, *Foundation Sacrifice in Dante’s “Commedia”* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 128.

60. According to Barański, “*Purgatorio* IX thus intertextually confirms Dante-*personaggio*’s status as a ‘crusader,’ which the poet had first adumbrated in *Inferno* IX, although it is not until *Paradiso* IX that he referred to the crusades somewhat more directly” (“Reading the *Commedia*’s IXs ‘Vertically’: From Addresses to the Reader to the *crucesignati* and the *Ecloga Theoduli*,” *L’Alighieri* 44 [2014]: 5–35, 29). On Dante and the crusades, see John G. Demaray, *The Invention of Dante’s “Commedia”* (Yale University Press, 1974), 43–47; Michelangelo Picone, “*Paradiso* IX: Dante, Folchetto e la diaspora trobadorica,” *Medioevo romanzo* 8 (1983): 47–89, 80–89; Brenda Deen Schildgen, “Dante and the Crusades,” *Dante Studies* 116 (1998): 95–125, and *Dante and the Orient* (University of Illinois Press, 2002), 45–91; Lawrence Warner, “Dante’s Ulysses and the Erotics of Crusading,” *Dante Studies* 116 (1998): 65–93, and idem, “The Sign of the Son: Crusading Imagery in the Cacciaguida Episode,” *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*, September 16, 2002, <https://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/warner091602.html>, and “Dante’s Cato, Crusade Martyr,” *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*, August 24, 2004, <https://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/warner081904.html>; Mary Alexandra Watt, *The Cross that Dante Bears: Pilgrimage, Crusade, and the Cruciform Church in the “Divine Comedy”* (University Press of Florida, 2005), 62–75; Franco Cardini, “La crociata e la cortesia: Dante dinanzi all’islam, tra Maometto e il Saladino,” in *Lectura Dantis 2002–2009: Omaggio a Vincenzò Placella per i suoi settanta anni*, ed. Anna Cerbo, 4 vols. (Università degli Studi di Napoli L’Orientale, 2011), 2:575–81, and idem, “Acri, Palestina, Cielo di Marte: Dante e la crociata ‘tradita,’”

in “*Il mondo errante*”: *Dante fra letteratura, eresia e storia*, ed. Marco Veglia et al. (Cisam, 2013), 371–84; Nicol Fantappiè, “Profetismo, pellegrinaggio e crociata nella *Commedia*,” *L’Alighieri*, 59 (2022): 127–41; Gianluca Caccialupi, “Dante tra *crux transmarina* e *crux cismarina*: L’idea di crociata nella *Commedia*,” *L’Alighieri* 59 (2022): 111–26, and “The Cross of Mars: Crusade Imagery and Theology in the Prologue to the Encounter with Cacciaguida (*Par.* xiv–xv),” *Italian Studies* 79, no. 2 (2024): 107–20.

61. Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History*, 223.

62. Bausi points out that “l’ospitalità ampiamente concessa nelle due ghirlande a sapienti che pagarono un alto prezzo personale per la propria rettitudine e per la difesa coerente delle proprie idee (contro qualunque forma di potere, politico o religioso), offrendo così—al pari di san Francesco e san Domenico—anche un’alta testimonianza di vita, oltre che di dottrina”; and observes that Dante’s identification of Boethius “allude non tanto, genericamente, all’intero *De consolatione*, quanto, in particolare, all’elegia che lo inaugura, elegia in cui l’autore mette in guardia contro la fallacia dei beni mondani e della felicità terrena,” in Francesco Bausi, *Dante fra scienza e sapienza: Esegese del canto XII del “Paradiso”* (Olschki, 2009), 104 and 188. On Dante and Boethius, see Rocco Murari, *Dante e Boezio* (Zanichelli, 1905); Luigi Alfonsi, *Dante e la “Consolatio Philosophiae” di Boezio* (Marzorati, 1944); Francesco Tateo, “Boezio, Severino,” in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (1970), 1:654–58; Luca Lombardo, *Boezio in Dante: La “Consolatio philosophiae” nello scrittoio del poeta* (Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2013).

63. “His task is a literary intercession in the image of that of the martyr. On the one hand, by making the full vision manifest, he takes on his personal cross and is assured of the ensuing rewards. On the other hand, issuing forth linguistic signs that shall be a bitter cross to some, he advances the cause of Christ’s redemption of mankind,” Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History*, 229. Barański points out that “Non è cosa da poco che l’Alighieri non si riferisca mai a sé stesso come profeta, ma, come rivela *Purgatorio* XXXIII, collochi attentamente la sua funzione di *denonciator* in rapporto al suo dovere complessivo di ‘manifesta[re]’ ‘tutta [s]ua vision’ (*Par.* XVII 128), ossia riportare tutto quello che ha visto ma anche udito attraversando i tre regni dei morti” (“Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXXIII,” 922).

64. *Timiditas* and *timidus* are used in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* to mean cowardice and coward, for example in his discussion of fear and fearlessness: “Sed timor praecipuus est periculorum mortis, ut probatur in III Ethic. et ideo talis timoris inordinatio opponitur fortitudini, quae est circa pericula mortis. Et propter hoc antonomastice dicitur timiditas fortitudini opponi” (“But the greatest fear of all is that which has the danger of death for its object, as we find proved in *Ethic.* iii, 6. Wherefore the inordinateness of this fear is opposed to fortitude which regards dangers of death. For this reason timidity is said to be antonomastically opposed to fortitude”), *ST II-II.125.2* resp. For Aquinas, losing temporal goods or fame for the sake of Christ does not make someone deserving of the aureole of martyr; “soli injuriae quae irrogatur circa corpus proprium, ex qua nata est mors sequi, debetur aureola” (“it is only to an injury inflicted on one’s own body from which death naturally follows that an aureole is due”), *Super Sent IV.49.5.3.2* ad. 8.

65. Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History*, 235.

66. Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History*, 227.

67. Anne C. Leone, *Dante’s Blood* (Legenda, 2023), 141 and 132. For Quinones too, “Dante’s goal could not be simple accommodation but rather fuller reintegration of the larger forces of his community”; however, he emphasises the exceptional nature of Dante’s call: “We must recall that Dante’s poem, while available to Everyman, is not about Everyman. It is about an exceptional person, not only exceptional in abilities, but in his fate and calling. [ . . . ] Mars is the place of soldiers, and Dante adopts and assumes the soldierly roughness of Cacciaguida. These same qualities—an outspokenness that invites risk—that led to Dante’s being picked out and victimized are the very same qualities that led to his triumph. But this triumph too is by way of martyrdom,” Quinones, *Foundation Sacrifice*, 126 and 129.

68. “actus humani praecipue diiudicantur ex fine, ut ex supra dictis patet. Ad fortem autem pertinet ut se exponat periculis mortis propter bonum, sed ille qui se periculis mortis exponit

ut fugiat servitatem vel aliquid laboriosum, a timore vincitur, quod est fortitudini contrarium,” *ST II*–II.125.2 ad. 2.

69. “mors, vel quidquid aliud ab homine mortali potest inferri, non est ea ratione timendum ut a iustitia recedatur. Est tamen timendum in quantum per hoc homo potest impediri ab operibus virtuosis, vel quantum ad se, vel quantum ad profectum quem in aliis facit,” *ST II*–II.126.1 ad. 2.

70. “aliquid dicitur voluntarium dupliciter. Uno modo voluntate absoluta; et sic nulla poena est voluntaria, quia ex hoc est ratio poenae, quod voluntati contrariatur. Alio modo dicitur aliquid voluntarium voluntate conditionata, sicut ustio est voluntaria propter sanitatem consequendam; et sic aliqua poena potest esse voluntaria dupliciter. Uno modo, quia per poenam aliquid bonum acquirimus; et sic ipsa voluntas assumit poenam aliquam, ut patet in satisfactione; vel etiam quia ille libenter eam accipit, et non vellet eam non esse, sicut accidit in martyrio. Alio modo, quia quamvis per poenam nullum bonum nobis accrescat, tamen sine poena ad bonum pervenire non possumus, sicut patet de morte naturali; et tunc voluntas non assumit poenam, et vellet ab ea liberari; sed eam supportat; et quantum ad hoc voluntaria dicitur; et sic poena purgatorii est voluntaria,” *Super Sent IV.21.1.1.4* resp. The passage also returns in *ST III* Suppl. App1.4 resp.

71. See Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 182–89; Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, 123–24; Vittorio Montemaggi, “In Unknowability as Love: The Theology of Dante’s *Commedia*,” in *Dante’s “Commedia”: Theology as Poetry*, 60–94, 66.

72. “necessitas firmatae voluntatis in bonum non diminuit libertatem, ut patet in Deo et in beatis. Et talis est necessitas voti, similitudinem quandam habens cum confirmatione beatorum. Unde Augustinus in eadem epistola dicit quod *felix necessitas est quae in meliora compellit*,” *ST II*–II.88.4 ad. 1.

73. On the examination and profession of faith, its academic context and its function in legitimizing Dante’s status as a *scriba Dei*, see Zygmunt G. Barański, “‘Io credo . . .’: ‘Professing’ Faith in *Paradiso* 24,” *Forum Italicum* 55, no. 2 (2021): 496–523.

74. “ad actum martyrii inclinatur quidem caritas sicut primum et principale motivum, per modum virtutis imperantis, fortitudo autem sicut motivum proprium, per modum virtutis elicentis. Et inde etiam est quod martyrium est actus caritatis ut imperantis, fortitudinis autem ut elicentis. Et inde est quod utramque virtutem manifestat. Quod autem sit meritorium, habet ex caritate, sicut et quilibet virtutis actus. Et ideo sine caritate non valet” (“Charity inclines one to the act of martyrdom, as its first and chief motive cause, being the virtue commanding it, whereas fortitude inclines thereto as being its proper motive cause, being the virtue that elicits it. Hence martyrdom is an act of charity as commanding, and of fortitude as eliciting. For this reason also it manifests both virtues. It is due to charity that it is meritorious, like any other act of virtue: and for this reason it avails not without charity”), *ST II*–II.124.2 ad. 2.

75. Sarolli moves the beginning of the canto, “Se mai continga,” from the realm of uncertainty to the realm of hope in Divine Providence, and interprets it as: “If it should fulfil the design of Divine Providence that the sacred poem should defeat the cruelty,” Sarolli, “Dante’s *Katabasis* and Mission,” 88. In his reading of this canto, Giuseppe Mazzotta remarks that “[I]ike the prophets, Dante makes of exile a virtue and a necessary perspective from which to speak to the world and from which he can challenge its expectations and assumptions; like the prophets, he also acknowledges that the truth he communicates is, paradoxically, what further alienates him from the world he has already lost,” in Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante’s Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 179.

76. See Rachel Jacoff, “Dante and the Legend(s) of St. John,” *Dante Studies* 117 (1999): 45–57.

77. “Sed ad fidei veritatem non solum pertinet ipsa credulitas cordis, sed etiam exterior protestatio. Quae quidem fit non solum per verba quibus aliquis confitetur fidem, sed etiam per facta quibus aliquis fidem se habere ostendit, secundum illud Iac. II, *ego ostendam tibi ex operibus fidem meam*. Unde et de quibusdam dicitur Tit. I, *confitentur se nosse Deum, factis autem negant*. Et ideo omnium virtutum opera, secundum quod referuntur in Deum, sunt quaedam protestationes fidei, per quam nobis innotescit quod Deus huiusmodi opera a nobis requirit, et nos pro eis remunerat. Et secundum hoc possunt esse martyrii causa” (“But the truth of faith includes not

only inward belief, but also outward profession, which is expressed not only by words, whereby one confesses the faith, but also by deeds, whereby a person shows that he has faith, according to James 2:18, *I will show thee, by works, my faith*. Hence it is written of certain people (Titus 1:16): *They profess that they know God but in their works they deny Him*. Thus all virtuous deeds, inasmuch as they are referred to God, are professions of the faith whereby we come to know that God requires these works of us, and rewards us for them: and in this way they can be the cause of martyrdom”), *ST II–II.124.5* resp. On Dante’s identification with Saint John, see Barolini, “Arachne, Argus, and St. John: Transgressive: Art in Dante and Ovid,” in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, 158–71.

78. For a concise review of “Dante’s claim to theological authorship,” see Albert R. Ascoli, “Poetry and Theology,” in *Reviewing Dante’s Theology*, 2:3–42.

79. Paola Nasti, *I morsi della carità: Dante e la “Bibbia”* (Giorgio Pozzi Editore, 2024), 267.

80. For Aquinas, “fortitudo principaliter consistit circa pericula mortis, circa alia autem consequenter. Et ideo nec martyrrium proprie dicitur pro sola tolerantia carceris vel exilii vel rapinae divitiarum, nisi forte secundum quod ex his sequitur mors” (“fortitude regards danger of death chiefly, and other dangers consequently; wherefore a person is not called a martyr merely for suffering imprisonment, or exile, or forfeiture of his wealth, except insofar as these result in death”), *ST II–II.124.4* ad. 3.