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Dante on the Way to Rome and Jerusalem

by

Andrew Frisardi



DANTE ON THE WAY TO ROME AND JERUSALEM

“What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” the Church father Tertullian famously asked. Tertullian is usually quoted out of context, so his question has been interpreted as fanatically antirational, but he probably intended it as an aphoristic way of saying that the insights of philosophy are of another order from the revelations of scripture. It is likely that Dante himself would have agreed with this distinction, even while he was composing the philosophical *Convivio*. At the same time, for Dante, philosophy’s essence is divine and therefore implicit in theological and scriptural truth. Dante expresses this dual authority, civic and holy, not in terms of Athens and Jerusalem, but as the marriage of pre-Christian Rome and the imperial ideal on the one hand and Jerusalem and Christianized Rome on the other—each of them being a fundamental locus for his Christian faith as well as a poetic and political symbol.

In the Ptolemaic map of the universe that Dante follows, Jerusalem is the central point on earth, the *colmo* (highest point) of the *gran secca* (dry land),¹ a land mass situated only in the Northern Hemisphere. The Southern Hemisphere, *il mondo senza gente*, the uninhabited world,² is composed entirely of water—with the exception of the island of Purgatory and its mountain, which rise from the water exactly opposite to Jerusalem. This hemispheric polarity is opposite to how things were at the start of the creation, since dry land was originally in the South. Lucifer’s fall from Heaven restructured the earth, when dry land, dreading his approach, fled the South and pushed into the North, which became the hemisphere of sin and exile, where Christ would be born, crucified, and rise from the dead to atone for humankind’s fallen state.³

¹ *Inferno* XXXIV.113–14.

² *Inferno* XXVI.117.

³ *Inferno* XXXIV.112–26.

Since Jerusalem and Purgatory are antipodes, they share a horizon, which has its terminus at the Ganges River in the East and at the city of Cadiz in the West. Lucifer is located equidistant between Jerusalem and Purgatory. In an astronomical passage in *Purgatorio*, the two places' symmetrical opposition is emphasized, where Virgil explains to Dante that the sun's trajectory in Purgatory, when one is looking east, appears to the left, while in Jerusalem it appears to one's right; the same can be said about the equator in relation to the two poles.⁴ This emphasis on how the sun (which in Dante is always a symbol for God) comes from the left in Purgatory has allegorical significance as well. While the direction of Dante and Virgil's descent in Hell was nearly always toward the left, in Purgatory it is toward the right. The "sinister" connotations of left-wardness in Hell, then, have been replaced in Purgatory by right-mindedness; the sun coming from the left symbolizes the rectifying grace of the divine order. As Virgil and Dante learn, no ascent of Mount Purgatory is possible at night, precisely because the sun is absent.⁵ The summit of Mount Purgatory, directly in line with the Jerusalem-Lucifer-Purgatory axis, is Eden or the Earthly Paradise, the site of the primordial human state and its fall from grace.

Further symbolic meaning can be gleaned from this cosmic map, since Purgatory is where souls atone for their sins and Jerusalem for Christians is where the Savior was crucified and rose from the dead to redeem souls from original sin. The Cross itself is the axis that extends through the earth to Purgatory and on through the celestial spheres. The sense of Jerusalem as a spiritual center of gravity is expressed by Dante in one of his letters, where he says that the Florentine exiles, including Dante himself, were longing for their city the way the Hebrews had longed for Jerusalem during the Babylonian exile; and in *Paradiso*, where Dante describes earthly life as *lo essilio / di Babillòn*, a "Babylonian exile" from Jerusalem-Paradise.⁶

⁴ *Purgatorio* IV.61–84.

⁵ *Purgatorio* VII.56–57.

⁶ *Epistle* VII.30; *Paradiso* XXIII.134–35.

There are precedents in the Bible for Jerusalem's central geographical position. Jerusalem is King David's city, the place of the Holy Temple, chosen by God for his people;⁷ and it is inevitably associated by Dante and by all Christians with the Heavenly Jerusalem or the City of God—from the account in Revelation 21, to the eighth-century hymn *Urbs beata Ierusalem*, always imagined as an urban place replete with architecture and other products of art.⁸ Emperor Constantine built the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which became a cherished destination for Christian pilgrims; this and other sacred buildings on earth were to be modeled after the Heavenly Jerusalem.⁹ In this essay we will see how both these symbolic expressions—pilgrimage and the sacred architecture associated with Jerusalem—are structural elements of the *Divine Comedy* itself, as well as abiding symbols throughout Dante's work.

The image of Jerusalem appears in various ways throughout the *Comedy*. It is less surprising, perhaps, to find this symbolism in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* than in *Inferno*, but it is there as well. Dante's round, concentric depiction of Hell resembles medieval maps in which Jerusalem is circular in shape with a cross in the middle. The abyss of Hell and the cone of Mount Purgatory caused by the fall of Lucifer, which Virgil narrates to Dante at the end of *Inferno*, accounts for the symbolic map sketched above, where the Earthly Paradise and Jerusalem have complementary roles in salvation history. When Lucifer fell from the Southern Hemisphere, which is where dry land originally was, his impact was directly opposite to where Jerusalem would be built. The dry land fled before him as he fell, pushing through to the other side and forming the new land mass in the Northern Hemisphere. The land that was displaced in forming Hell pushed up to the side to form Mount Purgatory. So, Lucifer is head-down with respect to Heaven—with obvious symbolic implications. At the end of *Inferno*, when Dante and Virgil climb into the Southern

⁷ Ezekiel 5:5. See also Ezekiel 38:12 and Psalm 73:12.

⁸ See Claire E. Honess, "The City of Jerusalem in the *Commedia*," in *From Florence to the Heavenly City: The Poetry of Citizenship in Dante* (Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, 2006), 107–50; 108ff., for specifics about the New Jerusalem in Old Testament Apocrypha and Christian theology. Honess is a main source for this essay.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

Hemisphere, they have returned to the upright position of human beings in their primordial state and can begin their pilgrims' ascent of the mountain.

Inferno contains further traces of the image of Jerusalem as well. For example, canto XXXIV opens with a parody from the sixth-century hymn *Vexilla regis prodeunt* ("The banners of the king are advancing"), sung during Holy Week liturgy to commemorate the True Cross. Dante adds a word to the verse to make it, "The banners of the king of *Hell* [*inferni*] are advancing." *Vexilla* in this context refers to Lucifer's six bat-like wings. A frigid wind blows toward Dante and Virgil from Lucifer's three pairs of wings, which, as the scholar Claire Honess notes, "may also be seen as an infernal reflection of the two arms and the upper section of Christ's Cross. . . . Lucifer appears from afar to be almost cruciform."¹⁰ All of this suggests an inverted or demonically parodic relation between Lucifer frozen in the earth and Christ crucified in Jerusalem.

In addition, traditional thinking about the earthly Jerusalem would have influenced Dante's ideas about an infernal city. The Old Testament prophets do not exclusively praise Jerusalem's holiness; they also condemn its worldly and sinful aspects. The Jews' exile and the destruction of the city in 587 BC were seen by the prophets as divine punishments.¹¹ Isaiah and Jeremiah compare the citizens of Jerusalem to those of the prototypically wicked cities Sodom and Gomorrah.¹² Even Jesus condemns Jerusalem, in the Gospel of Luke: "And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes.'"¹³ Dante commentators have linked the passage in canto I of *Inferno*, where the protagonist Dante is mortally threatened by the three beasts blocking his ascent of the hill, to a section in Jeremiah which warns that three wild animals—a lion, a wolf, and a leopard or panther—will ravage the inhabitants of Jerusalem as a result of their transgressions.¹⁴ And although the sources for Dante's depiction of Hell are complex and numerous, the biblical image of Gehenna

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹ See, e.g., Jeremiah 31:38–40 and Ezekiel 22:3–4.

¹² Isaiah 1:10, Jeremiah 23:14.

¹³ Luke 19:41–42.

¹⁴ Niccolò Tommaseo's nineteenth-century commentary to *Inferno* I.49–51; and Jeremiah 5:6.

is one precedent. Gehenna was a valley outside the gates of Jerusalem where, in ancient times, an idolatrous cult had sacrificially burned children, and where, later, the inhabitants of Jerusalem incinerated their refuse. Isaiah says that God, in vindication of the punishments of Gehenna, will restore Jerusalem and have all the nations come there to glorify him. The people who come will see the bodies of those who have rebelled against God.¹⁵

A passage in canto XIX of *Paradiso* combines the images of the corrupt Jerusalem and the Heavenly Jerusalem. In this canto, which takes place in the sphere of Jupiter, the beatified spirits of rulers who exemplified justice glorify God collectively in the shape of an Eagle. The Eagle, which talks as one creature though composed of many beatified souls, explains to Dante that it (the Eagle) is the archetype of divine justice. As with other spirits in *Paradiso*, the Eagle anticipates Dante's question—which concerns the salvation of non-Christians and what this implies about God's justice. While explaining the latter, the Eagle launches into an excoriation of the rulers of Christendom whose names in the Book of God will be associated with corruption and misdeeds which led people astray, while many non-Christians will sit in judgment on them.

Among the corrupt rulers mentioned in this passage is one of Dante's *bêtes noires*, Charles II of Anjou, who had the title "King of Jerusalem," which he inherited from his father, Charles of Anjou, King of Naples and Sicily, who claimed to have acquired the right to it by purchase. Dante considers the younger Charles vastly inferior to his father, since Charles was a powerful enemy against the restoration of the monarchy upon which Dante had set his hopes for political stability in Italy.¹⁶ This passage of *Paradiso* states that the Book of God will mark an *I* (= 1) for the good that Charles has done, but an *M* (= 1,000) for his evil acts, which therefore far outweigh the good ones. The letters that quantify Charles's malice in Dante's view are derived from a wordplay on the first and the last four letters of *Ierusalemme*, since *emme* is the letter *M* spelled out in Italian. In typically compact and gnomic style, Dante here alludes to Jerusalem's transcendent symbolism as a contrast

¹⁵ Isaiah 46:24.

¹⁶ *Paradiso* XIX.127–29. See also *Purgatorio* VII.127–29 and XX.77–84 for polemical passages against Charles II.

to the squalor of his nemesis Charles. The play is on the numbers 1 and 1,000, since Dante was aware of the symbolic value of 1,000 as perfection, as he states explicitly in the *Convivio*.¹⁷ Jerusalem, then, contains in its very name both the 1 of the transcendental Unity and the 1,000 of the perfection of the return to the One. It is no coincidence, then, that an earlier passage in the *Comedy* states that the letter *m*, *emme* in Italian, is the very sign of man, between the two *o*'s of *omo*, "man," which Dante sees inscribed on the withered faces of the gluttonous souls he encounters there (their sunken eyes are like two *o*'s embedded in the curves of the *m*, the middle line of which is formed by the nose).¹⁸ Dante's symbolic point is that, for those who are dissipated in externalities and the surface of life, the sign of the *emme* (the human-divine to use a Blakean phrase) is distorted beyond recognition in the intractably superficial person—of which Charles II, for Dante, is a prime example.

Despite the well-known Christian notion of the *city* of God, Dante's representation of Heaven is not particularly urban. The dominant image for the setting of the final cantos of *Paradiso* is the celestial Rose, the petals of which are the resurrection or glorified bodies of the beatified themselves—who are not *seated* on petals, they *are* the petals, an important and highly suggestive detail. Still however, references to Heaven as a city do occur in the *Comedy*. Sapia, on the terrace of the envious in *Purgatorio*, refers to Heaven as the place where all are citizens of *una vera città*, a true city or city of truth.¹⁹ And elsewhere, the Heavenly City is referred to explicitly as the Jerusalem that is the destination of Dante's otherworld journey, as if in exodus out of Egypt.²⁰

In addition, for Dante and his contemporaries, the image of Jerusalem was closely linked to popular lore about the Crusades. In the central cantos of *Paradiso*, Dante meets his ancestor Cacciaguida, a knight and crusader who had followed the Emperor Conrad III on the Second

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles* IV.83: " 'The thousand' means perfection, since it is the cube whose root is ten, which also usually signifies perfection"; in Christian number symbolism, then, the number 1,000 combines the perfection of the number 10 with the Trinitarian number 3. See also Dante, *Convivio* II.xiv.4: "a 'thousand' is the largest number, beyond which further growth is not possible without multiplying it."

¹⁸ *Purgatorio* XXIII.31–33.

¹⁹ *Purgatorio* XIII.95.

²⁰ *Paradiso* XXV.55–57.

Crusade, dying in battle in Jerusalem in about 1147. Certainly, then, Jerusalem is implicitly evoked when Cacciaguida appears with the other holy warriors in the sphere of Mars, who collectively form the shape of the Cross.

In canto XXIII of *Paradiso*, in the sphere of the Fixed Stars, immediately after the descent and re-ascent of the Virgin, Christ, and the archangel Gabriel, Heaven is alluded to as that Jerusalem for which the exiles in Babylon or the souls alive on earth are longing.²¹ A little later in the narrative, Beatrice states that, because the theological virtue of hope is so alive in Dante, it has been granted that he come to see Jerusalem while he is still alive in his body.²²

Dante refers to the assembly of souls in the celestial Rose as the *beata corte*, blessed court, with the Virgin at their center. He uses ancient Roman and medieval metaphors to evoke the courtly atmosphere. The Virgin is called *Agusta*, a female Augustus; and in an earlier canto, Dante refers to the apostles Peter, James, and John as *baroni* (barons) and *Signore* (Lord), as in feudal lord.²³ In the Empyrean, Beatrice calls Heaven “our city,” *nostra città*, which many commentators have interpreted as a reference to the Heavenly Jerusalem.²⁴ However, the courtly imagery mentioned above, as well as the fact that one of the empty places in the Rose is explicitly reserved for Emperor Henry VII, shows that Dante also has imperial Rome in mind as an image of his Heavenly City. In *Purgatorio* he refers to *quella Roma onde Cristo è romano* (“that Rome where Christ is Roman”).²⁵ It is interesting to note in this context that medieval art sometimes portrays the saints in heaven as Roman dignitaries. For example, in the great mosaic in the nave of SS. Cosmas and Damian in Rome, the saints Peter and Paul are dressed and have the gestures of Roman senators. Likewise, the urban image of Heaven in Dante is a *hybrid* of Jerusalem and Rome, as well as of the Rose imagery itself. The Rose recalls several well-known symbols: the rose windows in cathedrals, the popular *Roman de la rose* (Romance of the Rose), and patristic and liturgical writings that figure the blessed

²¹ *Paradiso* XXIII.133–35.

²² *Paradiso* XXV.56.

²³ *Paradiso* XXXII.98, 119; XXIV.115.

²⁴ E.g., Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, comment to *Inferno* XXX.130–32.

²⁵ *Purgatorio* XXXII.102.

as flowers and Mary as a rose. This layering of symbolism is consistent with Dante's methods elsewhere in his work: Heaven in the *Comedy* combines biblical imagery with allusions to the *Aeneid* and Dante's monarchical or imperial ideal; and the rose that was an erotic symbol in the French romance is now an emblem of spiritual love. The Eagle in *Paradiso* XVIII–XX, mentioned above, alludes not only to the eagle that was a symbol for the Roman Empire, but also to the Evangelist-eagle St. John, and the eagle associated with Moses in Deuteronomy 32:11. Clearly then, Dante's statement in *Inferno*, that he is *non Enëa, . . . non Paulo*, "not Aeneas . . . not Paul" (both of whom journeyed to the otherworld and back),²⁶ is rhetorically meant to suggest the opposite, that in fact Dante does follow in the tracks of these two great predecessors, one Roman the other Christian. In the *Convivio* and the *Monarchia*, Dante stresses that Jerusalem was part of the Roman Empire at the time of Christ—which providentially created the cultural conditions for the Incarnation. In the *Convivio*, Dante's argument for the providential role of Rome in the salvation of humanity concludes:

We need look no further to perceive that a singular birth and a singular progression, conceived and ordained by God, belonged to the sacred city. Surely I am of the firm opinion that the stones which are in its walls are worthy of reverence, and the soil where it is built is worthy beyond what is proclaimed and affirmed by human beings.²⁷

Claire Honess shows that Jerusalem is also alluded to in *Paradiso* through abstracted iconographic details. For example, in the penultimate canto of *Paradiso*, the Rose is said to be divided into two semicircles. The mothers of the people of Israel, seated below the Virgin in the Rose, are collectively referred to as a wall between those who believed in Christ to come, *Cristo venturo*, and those who believed in Christ after his advent, *Cristo venuto*. This image, says Honess,

²⁶ *Inferno* II.32.

²⁷ *Convivio* IV.v.20.

draws on the vocabulary of the long tradition of “civic” heavens and their city walls.²⁸ The women—Mary, Eve, Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, and Ruth—were common allegorical figures for the Church. Since Jerusalem was often viewed allegorically as a figure of *Ecclesia*, the Church, each of these women is also implicitly associated with Jerusalem. Also, the figures in the amphitheater-shaped Rose, beatified spirits whom Bernard indicates to Dante, form the shape of a cross within a circle—a shape which, as stated earlier, was a common indication of Jerusalem on maps.

In addition, Dante’s very frequent use in *Paradiso* of the imagery of gemstones and precious metals recalls the representation of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. Like the *aurum mundum simile vitro mundo* (“pure gold, like clear glass”) of the Heavenly City,²⁹ Dante’s sphere of Saturn, the setting of contemplatives such as Benedict, features a ladder the color of gold within a crystal heaven; the just rulers in the sphere of Jupiter form golden letters against a silver background when they spell out the first verse of the Book of Wisdom, which refers to justice; Cacciaguida appears to Dante as a topaz set in the Cross shape formed by the beatified warriors. And there are many other, similar passages that evoke the imagery of gemstones, such as pearls and rubies, and resplendent metal, especially gold, consistent with Dante’s emphasis in *Paradiso* on the brilliant play of light in Heaven.

Crucial to Jerusalem imagery in Christian iconography is the association between the Heavenly Jerusalem and the resurrection of the flesh—a connection that Dante highlights. The glorified bodies in white that Dante describes in the Empyrean are the citizens of the Heavenly City, whether Jerusalem or Rome or a hybrid of the two. We may note, for example, the scene in canto XXV of *Paradiso* where St. James examines Dante on the theological virtue of hope. Hope is said to reside in the promise of resurrection, which includes references to the Book of Revelation and the New Jerusalem. As Dante tells James: “Isaiah says that each soul in its homeland will wear a double

²⁸ Honess, “City of Jerusalem,” 119.

²⁹ Revelation 21:18.

raiment: and its homeland is this sweet life [in Heaven]; and your brother [John, author of Revelation], where he writes about the white robes [or resurrection bodies], manifests this revelation more clearly to us.”³⁰

As mentioned, pilgrimage as a symbol for the spiritual journey is an important element in the *Comedy*, another way in which the image of the Heavenly City is present. Dante was heir to the extensive voyage and vision literature that was popular in the Middle Ages. This tradition commonly included landscapes that resembled the known, external world in many of their features but which also were embellished by the imagination of whoever wrote them down. Such narratives—for example, the popular twelfth-century Irish *Visio Tnugdali*, or Vision of Tundale—included a mix of spiritual and moral components, as well as visionary landscapes, similar to those that enable the *Comedy* to portray Dante-Everyman’s journey toward initiation, spiritual awakening, and salvation.³¹

In the opening of *Paradiso*, Dante sets out on his journey through the *gran mar de l’essere*, the great sea of being,³² like a pilgrim sailing to the shore near Rome from the Holy Land. Having arrived in Rome, the pilgrim would traverse the stations of the city up to the gate of St. Peter’s and the Veil of Veronica, where he would behold the visage of the Savior. Similarly, Dante, when he first sees the celestial Rose, is likened to the “barbarous” visitors from northern Europe arriving at St. John Lateran; he resembles a pilgrim reaching the temple-church that was the goal of his journey.³³ While Dante does not name a specific shrine for this simile, he is probably thinking of one or more of the most important pilgrim destinations: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, St. Peter’s in Rome, or St. James of Compostela in Spain. In a third pilgrimage simile in this scene, Dante says that his sighting of Bernard is like that of a pilgrim from Croatia first

³⁰ *Paradiso* XXV.91–96. A key passage for Dante’s thinking about the resurrection of the flesh is *Paradiso* XIV.37–60, where Solomon instructs him on the subject. On the connection between the resurrection and the New Jerusalem, see Augustine’s comment on Revelation 21:2, in *City of God* XX.17.

³¹ See Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989).

³² *Paradiso* I.113.

³³ *Paradiso* XXXI.31, 43–45.

glimpsing the Veil of Veronica and recognizing the face of the Savior. Symbolically, this means that an image of Christ's face is visible in Bernard's, which is an *impronta* or imprint of the face that Dante has been seeking, that of the *vivace carità*, or living love, of Christ.³⁴

The pilgrimage to Rome was especially popular for Christians during the Jubilee Year proclaimed by Boniface VIII in 1300. In his bull *Antiquorum fida relatio* (A Trustworthy Report of the Ancients), Boniface promised "not only full and copious, but the most full, pardon of all their sins," to pilgrims who confessed their sins during the Jubilee and visited St. Peter's and St. Paul's at least (in the case of residents of Rome) once a day for a month or (in the case of nonresidents) for fifteen days. Over two hundred thousand people made the pilgrimage to Rome that year, Dante probably among them: "the Jubilee, therefore, was a triumph for the pope . . . , for the coffers of the city, and, perhaps especially, for the doctrine of Purgatory," since a pilgrimage was touted as lessening the duration of one's own afterlife penance as well as that of loved ones.³⁵ The Jubilee is one reason, then, that Dante's otherworld pilgrimage in the *Comedy* takes place in the same year, 1300, as he is careful to specify in his narrative.

The most pervasive pilgrimage imagery in the three canticles of the *Comedy* is in *Purgatorio*. This makes symbolic sense, given that pilgrimages were seen as a means of atonement, which in turn is the aim of the souls on Mount Purgatory: the purification of the soul from disordered love and the harmonizing of the will with God's will. In canto II of *Purgatorio*, the souls arriving on the island of Purgatory are singing the opening of Psalm 114, *In exitu Israël de Aegypto* ("When Israel went forth from Egypt"), figuratively referring to their own imminent liberation from sin.³⁶ Virgil refers to them as *peregrin*,³⁷ and their arrival by boat recalls that of pilgrims at their holy destination. In this scene, the musician Casella informs Dante that the souls had boarded their

³⁴ *Paradiso* XXXI.103–11.

³⁵ Peter S. Hawkins, "Religious Culture," in *Dante in Context*, edited by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 333; the first quote is Hawkins's translation from the pope's proclamation.

³⁶ *Purgatorio* II.46–48. This psalm is referred to also in *Epistle* XIII.21 to give examples for the four levels of interpretation.

³⁷ *Purgatorio* II.63.

ship “where the Tiber’s water becomes salty,”³⁸ an allusion to the port of Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber, which was a frequent point of departure for pilgrim ships en route to the Holy Land. In addition, this passage alludes to the fact that during the year of the Jubilee more pilgrims than usual would have been departing for the long journey to Jerusalem from the estuary of the Tiber.³⁹

The ascent of Mount Purgatory becomes, then, a “figured pilgrimage from the Egypt of this world to the Jerusalem of the Earthly Paradise”;⁴⁰ and Dante’s journey in the otherworld is narrated with enough details to remind the reader of pilgrimages on earth, including ones to Jerusalem.⁴¹ There are several correspondences between the features of Dante’s climb and the medieval pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He and Virgil move, as John Demaray describes,

uphill over a desert strand, past a gate of confession and up the stone terraces and steps of Mt. Purgatory, and on to a summit Eden [*sic*] situated at the geographic center of the southern hemisphere. Then in a fulfillment of the presaging terrestrial movement of a Palmer to the temple, tomb, and cross of Redemption on the Jerusalem pilgrimage way of the cross, Dante in Eden moves to figural representations of the Jerusalem temple, tomb, and cross in encountering Beatrice, a type of Christ.⁴²

Indeed, the climb of Dante and Virgil up Mount Purgatory, as well as the entrance-gate to Purgatory proper, visually recalls the thirty-four hundred stone steps that led pilgrims to the stone Gate of Confession on Mount Sinai, and to the chapel of Moses beyond.⁴³

The climactic scene in the Earthly Paradise on the summit of the mountain, starting in canto XXIX of *Purgatorio*, is especially rich in allusions to Jerusalem and the Book of Revelation.

³⁸ *Purgatorio* II.101.

³⁹ John G. Demaray, *The Invention of Dante’s “Commedia”* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 66.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴¹ On the pilgrimage theme in *Purgatorio*, see Honess, “City of Jerusalem,” 123–29; and Demaray, *Invention of Dante’s “Commedia,”* 60ff., on which much of this section draws.

⁴² John G. Demaray, *Dante and the Book of the Cosmos* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1987), 17.

⁴³ See Demaray, *Invention of Dante’s “Commedia,”* fig. 18.

Demaray says that Beatrice appears in a stylized setting reminiscent of the Old Temple on Mount Sion. Elaborating on the imagery in this scene in the Earthly Paradise, Demaray writes:

Dante's worldly typology in the Eden section of the *Divine Comedy*, whatever its admitted indebtedness to biblical texts and other influences, must also be [seen in terms of] the famed "ring" of stations on Mt. Sion. For on the summit of Mt. Purgatory, Dante's viewing of the heavenly procession that introduces Beatrice to Eden mirrors an earthly Christian's observation of a Palm Sunday procession into the city of Jerusalem. . . . [The Old and New round Temples of Jerusalem] were restored in the Middle Ages to contain nested rings of stations about which pilgrims and others circled, in imperfect but solemn imitation of divine movements like those of the angels, to the holiest points at the center: the rock of the altar of Solomon at the Old Temple and the tomb of Christ at the New Temple.⁴⁴

During this scene, Dante turns to look toward the east at the moment of dawn, when the sun is rising.⁴⁵ In Constantine's construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, there were to be three gates facing the rising sun, symbolically receiving the light of Christ. Similarly, the Temple of Solomon was believed to have been oriented to receive the first rays of the sun:

Immediately one recalls how, in the account of St. Jerome, the pilgrim Paula stood in the Holy Land facing east and "as the sun rose, remembered the Son of righteousness"; how Constantine constructed the main basilica of the New Jerusalem with "three gates facing the rising sun" so as to receive the morning light of Christ; how the Temple of Solomon was commonly believed to have been similarly oriented to catch the sun's first rays.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ John G. Demaray, *Cosmos and Epic Representation: Dante, Spenser, Milton and the Transformation of Renaissance Heroic Poetry* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1991), 63.

⁴⁵ *Purgatorio* XXIX.7–12.

⁴⁶ Demaray, *Invention of Dante's "Commedia,"* 119.

Next in the *Purgatorio* scene, there is an allegorical procession of the twenty-four elders who represent the books of the Old Testament, as well as other figures signifying the books of the New Testament and the Church, culminating in Dante's reunion with Beatrice in a cart drawn by a Griffon. Demaray sees in this sequence of events a mirroring of the arrival of the pilgrim in Jerusalem, who prepared to receive Christ in the Host, after watching a procession of Church dignitaries. In addition, Beatrice's arrival is heralded by angels singing *Benedictus qui venis*, Blessed he who comes,⁴⁷ recalling words shouted by onlookers when Jesus entered Jerusalem on his donkey. Notably, Dante uses the masculine adjective *Benedictus* for Beatrice, suggesting that she comes not as herself but as a representative of Christ. Dante hears the first part of this biblical phrase much earlier in the pageant, when he perceives an indistinct melody of voices singing in a chorus, which he eventually realizes are uttering the word *Osanna*.⁴⁸ Beatrice is showered with flowers the way Jesus was greeted in Jerusalem with palm branches. In the arrival of Beatrice at the climax of the procession, then, Dante is like one of the onlookers in Jerusalem when Christ was entering the city. In another instance of Dante's hybridizing the imagery of Jerusalem and Rome, the angels around Beatrice are also singing words from Virgil's *Aeneid* as they toss the flowers: *Manibus . . . date lilia plenis* ("Give out lilies with full hands").⁴⁹

The allegorical pageant that Dante witnesses in the Earthly Paradise symbolically reenacts the events that pilgrims underwent in Jerusalem during Holy Week. For example, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, at the center of the scene and obviously recalling the sin of Adam and Eve, is bare until the Griffin (usually interpreted allegorically as Christ) attaches the cart to it, which brings about its renewal.⁵⁰ This action recalls the Crucifixion, as the shaft of the cart represents the Cross, which traditionally was said to be made from the wood of the Tree linked to

⁴⁷ *Purgatorio* XXX.19.

⁴⁸ *Purgatorio* XXIX.51.

⁴⁹ *Purgatorio* XXX.21, quoting *Aeneid* VI.883.

⁵⁰ *Purgatorio* XXXII.38–9, 52–60.

original sin. The rejoining of the shaft to the Tree, then, represents the redemption of the human soul by Christ's death. Next, the *puttana sciolta* (dissolute or immodest harlot),⁵¹ the *meretrix magna* of Revelation 17:1–5, who is seated on the beast and fornicates with kings, appears on the scene—a figure for the corrupt Roman Curia. As Honess observes, “Just as for John these disasters precede the Last Judgement and the coming of the Heavenly Jerusalem, so too for Dante they precede his immersion in Eunoë and his final readiness for his ascent to Heaven.”⁵² And lastly, an association to Jerusalem is made at the start of the final canto of *Purgatorio*, where the seven female figures around Beatrice, representing the theological and cardinal virtues, sing a fragment of Psalm 78, *Deus, venerunt gentes* (“God, the Gentiles have come”), which mourns the destruction of the Temple and its profanation. In Dante's allegory, this refers to the sacrilege of the Church by corrupt monarchs and popes.⁵³

The Christ- and Jerusalem-related symbolism of Beatrice had been established by Dante, years before he composed these culminating scenes of *Purgatorio*, in his youthful first book the *Vita nova*. For example, the earth quakes in Dante's dream of Beatrice's death in the *Vita nova*, during which he hears the very words, *Osanna in excelsis*, that occur with Christ's entry into Jerusalem and his ascension into Heaven, and that Dante also quotes when Beatrice reappears in the Earthly Paradise. Dante announces Beatrice's death in the *Vita nova*, not directly, but by suddenly interjecting the fervent language of Jeremiah, mourning the destruction of Jerusalem: *Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium!* (“How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is she become a widow, she that was great among the nations [lit. “the Lady of the nations/peoples]!”).⁵⁴ The parallel could not be clearer: the death of Beatrice resembles, for Florence, the destruction of Jerusalem that Jeremiah is lamenting, which in turn is associated in Christian liturgy with the death of Christ. For example, extracts from Lamentations are

⁵¹ *Purgatorio* XXXII.149.

⁵² Honess, “City of Jerusalem,” 127.

⁵³ *Purgatorio* XXXIII.1; Psalm 78:1.

⁵⁴ *Vita nova* 19.1 (XXVIII.1); Lamentations 1:1. Dante quotes the same passage at the start of *Epistle XI*, address to the Italian Cardinals in 1314.

used for the Matins office during the culmination of Holy Week and associated with the Passion of Christ. And other passages from Lamentations, also echoed by Dante in the *Vita nova*, have been used in liturgical verses and responses to indicate words spoken by Christ on the Cross or connected with the Crucifixion.⁵⁵ The image of Jerusalem as a widow occurs again in canto I of *Purgatorio*, when, just having emerged from Hell with Virgil, now in the Southern Hemisphere, Dante says he saw four stars that had not been seen since Adam and Eve were in the Garden. These stars represent the four cardinal virtues (fortitude, temperance, justice, and prudence), from which, Dante says, the Northern Hemisphere has been “widowed.”⁵⁶ A little later in *Purgatorio*, Dante says that Italy is similarly “widowed” in its lack of an emperor who can guide and order its conflicts.⁵⁷

The closing chapters of the *Vita nova* recall, not only Jerusalem and the Crucifixion, but the motif of pilgrimage that we have already considered in relation to the *Comedy*. Dante tells us that he had witnessed a group of pilgrims passing through Florence during Holy Week:

At that time when many people go to see the blessed image [the Veil of Veronica] that Jesus Christ left us as an imprint of his beautiful visage, which my lady sees in glory, it happened that certain pilgrims were passing along a street that runs virtually straight through the middle of the city where that most gracious of women was born, lived, and died.⁵⁸

Dante says he noticed that the pilgrims seemed preoccupied, and that they apparently came from a land so far away that they had not heard of Beatrice or her death. If they had come from nearby, Dante reflects, “something in their bearing would appear disturbed as they passed through the middle of the suffering city.” He decides that he will compose a sonnet in which he addresses them

⁵⁵ See, e.g., the poem *O voi che per la via d'Amor passate* (O you who pass along the road of Love), in *Vita nova* 2.14–17 (VII.3–6); and on this topic, Ronald L. Martinez, “Dante between Hope and Despair: The Tradition of Lamentations in the *Divine Comedy*,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 5, no. 3 (2002): 45–76.

⁵⁶ *Purgatorio* I.24–26.

⁵⁷ *Purgatorio* VI.113.

⁵⁸ *Vita nova* 29.1 (XL.1).

directly, telling them things that *farebbero piangere*, would get them to weep.⁵⁹ The poem's imagery echoes the encounter of the two disciples with Christ on the road to Emmaus, narrated in Luke:

You pilgrims walking by oblivious,
Your minds, it seems, on something not at hand,
Can you have come from such a distant land—
The way you look suggests as much to us—
That you're not weeping, even as you pass
Right through the suffering city, like that band
Of people who, it seems, don't understand
A thing about the measure of its loss?

If you'll just stop, because you want to hear
About it all—so says my sighing heart—
Your eyes will fill with tears before you leave.
For she who blessed the city is nowhere
In sight: what words about her we impart
Have force enough to make a stranger grieve.⁶⁰

The sonnet opens with the word *peregrini*, “pilgrims.” Dante's prose just before the poem glosses this term, explaining that he means *peregrino* in the broad sense of “anyone who is outside his homeland,” not the narrower sense of *peregrino* used for one traveling to or from Santiago di Compostela. And he adds the following aside:

⁵⁹ *Vita nova* 29.3–4 (XL.3–4).

⁶⁰ *Deh peregrini che pensosi andate; Vita nova* 29.9–10 (XL.9–10).

starving to death) when they were under siege by Titus. Again, losing Jerusalem is clearly a metaphor for losing the spirit's heavenly home.⁶⁵

For Dante, the point is that home is where Beatrice has gone—Florence, without its *speculum Christi*, or mirror of Christ, is not itself and certainly is not really home. In the next and penultimate chapter of the *Vita nova*, the last sonnet of the book prophetically narrates the journey to the Empyrean around which the entire *Comedy* and its more than fourteen thousand lines are constructed—in the sonnet reduced to fourteen lines. The sigh of the lover ascends to a vision of Beatrice in glory, where his *peregrino spirito*, pilgrim-spirit, is enraptured by its contemplative gaze upon the Beloved.⁶⁶ Only in this concluding scene of the *Vita nova*, in short, does the word *peregrino* begin to assume the symbolic import that we have seen it has in the *Comedy*—where the journey to God is represented as one that begins outside the *patria* and concludes *in patria*. The very opening of *Inferno* thus begins *nel mezzo del cammin*, in the middle of our life's journey, or pilgrimage.

Given this sequence of events in the *Vita nova*'s final chapters, it seems likely that Dante intends a parallel between the journey of the pilgrims passing through Florence to see the face of Christ and the young Dante's new stage in his understanding of love and the beloved. In the chapter just before the episode of the pilgrims, Dante had had a vision of Beatrice as she was the first time he saw her, when they were children. By sequencing the narrative in this manner, he implies an analogy between his vision of Beatrice and the pilgrims' anticipated viewing of the face of Christ in the Veil of Veronica. And we have already seen that Florence's grief and emptiness after Beatrice's death resemble that of Jerusalem after Christ's crucifixion. With this background, the beatified Beatrice will appear in the Earthly Paradise as the very face and guardian of the New Jerusalem.

—Andrew Frisardi

⁶⁵ *Purgatorio* XXIII.16.

⁶⁶ *Vita nova* 30.11 (XLI.11).