

DANTE'S PARADISO: CANTO I

TRANSLATED BY KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

THE following version is as literal as the translator can make it, having regard to the verse form and to poetic effect. Each line has four stresses, some of which are marked with a sign.

Dante, led by Beatrice, ascends into heaven. They take off from the Garden of Eden, which is on the top of the Mountain of Purgatory, in the southern ocean at the antipodes to Jerusalem. This fact is referred to in II. 43-45. The time is near the spring equinox.

The Universe glows with the glory of God,
poured down everywhere, penetrating,
splendidly various, áll póints.

Where the light is clearest I have climbed,
and seen such things unveiled as neither
mind can mirror now nor mouth express;
because the racing intellect's increasing
ecstasy takes it so far forward,
it utterly outstrips remembrance.

10 And yet such trace of the holy region's
treasure as I retain must be my
theme in the singing that now begins.

O for this final task, great Apollo,¹
fit me with fiery powers, no less than
promise the precious leaves of the laurel!

Only one of the Muses' mountains²
sufficed me till now; but now on doubled
help from the hills my wrestling reckons!

20 Enter me! Be Your breath within my
spirit such music as drew Marsyas
sheer from the sheath of his shivering limbs!³

Ah divine Master, if You grant me

1 God.

2 The two peaks of Parnassus.

3 The satyr Marsyas challenged Apollo to a musical match: he was beaten and skinned for the presumption.

strength and speech enough to express
 the shadow of bliss my brain yet bears,
 You will see me come to the laurel at last,
 and take the longed for leafy crown,
 Your fiery gift and my theme befitting!
 Father, so rarely the plucked laurel
 glitters in glory to poet or Caesar—
 30 shame on the weakling wills of men!—
 that redoubled joy must leap to the delighting
 god of Delphos, out of the branches
 Peneian, when anyone burns to win them.
 Fine sparks blaze into conflagration,
 and, after mine, perhaps to yet greater
 song may resound the Cirran mountain!⁴
 Always the point of sunrise varies
 to mortal eyes, but where four circles
 intersecting form three crosses,
 40 with a sweeter strength the sun rises,
 and warmer stars, and more to its measure
 it knits and kneads the waxing earth.⁵
 Near to this point had the morning risen
 yonder, and evening here, and white
 was all that half-world, and darkness this,
 when I saw Beatrice, turned to the left,
 look straight into the sun; no eagle
 ever there held its eyes so still.
 And as a shaft of light is reflected
 50 to form a new beam's leaping reversal,
 turned like a pilgrim homeward, so
 her attitude flashed through my eyes to form
 an image inward, whence rose in me
 marvellous strength to stare at the sun!
 Much may our human powers do yonder
 passing the dreams of those who mourn
 the country created for human kind.
 I could not endure it long, yet enough
 I glimpsed, to see it glitter around

⁴ Cirrha a peak of Parnassus sacred to Apollo.

⁵ The four circles are the celestial equator, the zodiac, the equinoctial colure and the horizon. At their point of intersection the sun rises in the spring equinox.

- 60 like boiling iron that flows from flame:
and suddenly then the daylight doubled,
light upon light, as if some Power
had set in the sky a second sun!
With eyes intent upon the eternal
sphere was Beatrice, and I to hers
my own eyes turned and fixed intently.
Gazing at her then I changed within me,
and became like Glaucus, when he tasted
grass that made him the sea-gods' kin.⁶
- 70 Words cannot say what it is to pass
beyond humanity: suffice then the symbol,
expecting from grace experience.
Love, if I was but what You latest
lifted, O star-swayer, into existence,
You, whose light now raised me, know!⁷
Then, as the spheres You build with everlasting
longing recalled my wits with music,⁸
mingling to Your wisdom's measure,
I saw such spaces of sky afire
- 80 in the flame of the sun, not rain or river
ever outstretched a flood so wide.
The sudden sound and the grand brilliance
set me on fire to know their reason—
ah the strange keenness of that need!—
So she who saw me as I myself,
opened her mouth to still my shaken
spirit, before I mine to beg,
and began: 'Your erring imagination
makes you dull and prevents your seeing
90 what you would see if you shook it aside.
You are not now on earth, as you suppose,
and lightning never fled so fast
its place as you fly back to yours.'
No sooner from one doubt was I loosed,
by the light and lovely little words,

6 The fisherman Glaucus saw a fish revive on eating a certain weed; ate it himself and turned into a sea-god.

7 Cf. 2 *Corinthians* xii, 2-3: 'whether in the body or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth.' The part of the human being created last ('latest') is the rational soul.

8 The music of the spheres: cf. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* V, 1.

than into another's net I ran;
 and I said: 'That great astonishment
 frets me no more; but now I marvel
 how over these light things I am lifted'.
 100 Sighed she gently at first, then turned her
 eyes to me, as a mother looks
 at her little fever-dreaming son:
 then spoke again: 'A many-folded,
 single order forever forms
 the Universe into a mirror of God.
 Therein the sovereign creatures follow
 the footprints of the eternal Good,
 to Whom, as end, that order moves.
 And drawn within that order onward
 110 to various endings, every nature
 turns to its Origin, near or far.
 Thus voyaging over the sea of being
 to this port or that port, to each is given
 a piloting longing that leads it on.
 Thus does fire leap at the moon,
 Thus life throbs in hearts of flesh,
 Thus earth's weight is welded in one.
 Nor do mindless creatures only
 fly from this bow, its arrows too
 120 are beings with love and intellect.
 Providence, all disposing sweetly,
 poises in light that land forever
 within which whirls the swiftest sphere.⁹
 Thither now, as to a mark determined,
 smites us that bow-string's strength, which always
 sends its shaft to a happy target.
 True, as in art, the form so often
 is out of tune with the mind's intention,
 because the dull material drags,
 130 so from this course that creature sometimes
 swerves, which ever is free to go
 its own way, though impelled to this
 (think how even fire may fall
 sheer from the clouds!), if its first upleaping

⁹ The Empyrean Heaven, containing the Primum Mobile.

twist awry to a false delight.
 If this be all true, you should no more marvel
 at your rising than at a mountain
 torrent tumbling down the valley.
 A marvel it were if you, unhindered,
 140 stayed at rest instead below,
 as, flat on the floor, a living flame.'
 Then she turned again to the Light her eyes.

ANTONIO ROSMINI ON THE MAGNIFICAT

ROBERT SENCOURT

IN 1955 Italy in general and the province of Novara in particular have been celebrating the Centenary of the death of Antonio Rosmini. While some point to his sagacious views on the Risorgimento, and others turn back to his philosophy which anticipated the revival of Thomism, others venerate him as the founder of the Institute of Charity and a master of the spiritual life.

His work in this direction was indeed inspiring: and one could hardly find a better example of it than what he wrote on the *Magnificat* for his Convent at Domodossola, that the nuns might recite it with fuller attention, deeper faith and fuller joy. The essay gains in interest when we know that he wrote it in 1849 after he had failed in a negotiation with Pius IX who had felt compelled to flee from Rome and who then turned against the conciliatory policy he had shared with Rosmini, allowed his works to be attacked, and refused the Cardinalate he had previously offered. None of these disappointments shook the profound spiritual life of Rosmini.

Apart from the Mass and Benediction there is little in Catholic worship better known than the *Magnificat*. Rosmini writes of it nevertheless in a way to unveil significances which come to most as a surprise. He finds in the famous canticle, a compendium of ancient prophecy and of Church history: in it is the pith of the