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1977

THE SYMBOLIC ROSE IN DANTE'S PARADISO

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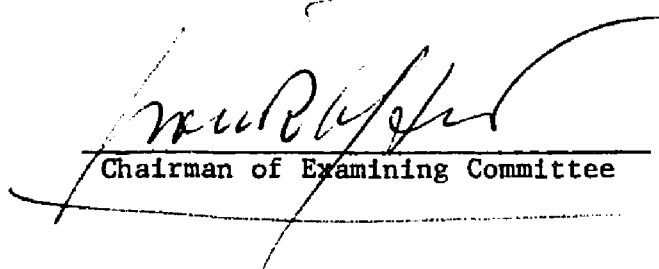
GIUSEPPE CARLO DI SCIPIO

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1977

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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To Daniela, Adriana and Alfredo

"le tre mie chiare stelle."

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Introduction

Status Quaestionis

In forma dunque di candida rosa
mi si mostrava la milizia santa
che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa;
ma l'altra, che volando vede e canta
la gloria di colui che la 'nnamora
e la bontà che la fece cotanta
sì come schiera d'ape che s'infiora
una fiata e una si ritorna
là dove suo laboro s'insapora,
nel gran fior discendeva che s'addorna
di tante foglie, e quindi risaliva
là dove 'l suo amor sempre soggiorna. (Par. XXXI, 1-12)¹

With these verses Dante introduces the reader to the City of the Blessed Souls, which has the shape of a white rose. These verses, and the whole question of the Rose, have not received proper attention. In light of the precedent of the Roman de la Rose and Dante's own adaptation in the Fiore (a highly probable contention supported by G. Contini²), the contrast of that "red" rose, symbol of earthly love, and this "candida rosa," a chromatic symbol of purity and faith, as we shall see, should pose a question for the attentive reader.

The problem of the Symbolic Rose, whose structure is described by St. Bernard in Paradiso XXXII, offers another key to the interpretation of the Divine Comedy according to the poet's forma mentis, his intentio and his fundamental philosophical and theological position within the context of medieval exegetical tradition. The "candida rosa" presents several problematic aspects or cruces which, to my knowledge, have never before been fully explored.

My aim is to resolve the problem of the Rose by utilizing a "globalistic" approach.

The tradition of Visions and Dante's innovation will be examined in Chapter I.

Chapter II will discuss the structure of the Rose, refuting the body of criticism which denies such a structure and those critics who claim that Dante destroyed the order he himself claims, by misplacing some of the blessed souls.

Chapter III will give an analysis of the personae of the Rose, in their literal and symbolic meaning.

Chapter IV will take into account numerical symbolism, a new approach in Dante's scholarship, but of extreme value since it is part of the poet's forma mentis and undeclared intentio. This view, therefore, is in opposition to the thesis of R.J. Pegis, who labels the numerical compositio a probability, which he derives from Gilson's statement "that if an author never specifically admits the use of numerical symbolism which is later found in his work, we should consider the possibility that it is totally unintentional."³

Chapter V will show the relationship of the Rose to Gothic architecture, in particular the cathedral and all its implications and the baptismal font.

A survey of the body of Dante criticism in reference to the structure of the Rose, shows how much this aspect has been neglected and misinterpreted. The most essential aspect is the position of the blessed, for if the position is misinterpreted, the structure as conceived by the author is destroyed.

A consideration of the problem of structure must begin with Jacopo della Lana. He perceives that the Rose has a certain order and structure, but he does not give the exact position of Anna and Lucia. Regarding the latter, he says: "... e per meco Adam si è Lucia," which might be taken as a correct interpretation. For the other blessed souls, his interpretation is correct.⁴

The commentary in the Ottimo does not offer the specific position of Adam, Peter, Moses and John the Evangelist. As for Anna and Lucia it states that "dirimpetto a santo Pietro siede santa Anna... dirimpetto Adamo si è santa Lucia." On the other hand, Benvenuto da Imola's commentary is very explicit in placing these "beati" in their proper place:

Unde nota quod illa pars media 'rose', in qua sunt hebrei, est a 'sinistra' Marie, quia non habent tantum felicitatis; alia vero in qua sunt christiani est a 'dextra', quia habent plus felicitatis, quam quiescent tempore gratie.

And even more important, Benvenuto graphically describes the positions of Anna and Lucia:

Hic Bernardus ostendit alium spiritum de numero patriciorum de manu sinistra hebreorum, scilicet Annam, quam describit a singulari letitia, quam habet in contemplando filiam suam... id est ex opposito, et per consequens in sinistra.... Et subdit alium spiritum de ordine patriciorum ex parte dextra christianorum, scilicet Luciam, quam describit a singulari beneficio quod contulit auctori....

The commentary of Cristoforo Landini offers no clear specification regarding the positions of Peter, Moses, Adam, John the Evangelist or Anna. In referring to Lucia, however, Landini clearly places her in the New Testament section, thus following the path of Benvenuto da Imola. Commenting on the verse "e contro al maggior padre di famiglia" (136), he states:

... Che è Adam, sedea Lucia, che significa grazia illuminante ... Adunque pone questa tra le donne cristiane.

Francesco da Buti, moreover, does not give any specific clarification for either Peter, Moses, or Anna and Lucia. When he says "dal destro," he does not specify to whose right or left he is referring.

The Venturi commentary imitates Buti in its vagueness. Saying "in faccia di Adamo all'altra mano del Battista siede Lucia" really means nothing, since he has not given Anna's position.

The Lombardi commentary places Anna on the Baptist's left, therefore in the New Testament; Lucia on his right, therefore in the Old Testament:

'Di contro' dunque san Pietro cioè al sinistro lato di san Giovanni Battista, dice sedere santa Anna, madre di Maria Vergine... dirimpetto ad Adamo, cioè al lato destro di san Giovanni Battista, Lucia, la santa vergine e martire siracusana. I motivi pe' quali dissi (*Inf.* II, 97), aver potuto Dante assumere santa 'Lucia' in simbolo della divina grazia, poterono eziandio fargliel collocare in questo ragguardevole posto.

The last sentence seems to suggest that Lucia's position is determined by her allegorical meaning, rather than the historical, which would place her in the Old Testament.

Tommaseo follows the same line by placing Anna in the New Testament and Lucia in the Old. In Tommaseo's case this is even more stunning, since he noted the architectonic order of the Rose. Both F. Ozanam and Tommaseo first alluded to the idea of a possible relationship between the rose-window of the Gothic cathedral and the "candida rosa." But unlike the Lombardi commentary, Tommaseo does not give any allegorical interpretation concerning Lucia.

The Andreucci commentary gives a wrong order by placing Anna on the Baptist's left and Lucia on his right.

More recent commentators have disregarded any direct or specific reference to the problem of the position of the blessed, either considering it irrelevant or unwilling to take up the challenge of a definite problem. Among these are the following: Pietro Fraticelli, Fausto Montanari, Giovanni Fallani, V. Rossi and S. Frascino, Piero Gallardo and Attilio Momigliano, as seen in their respective editions of the Divine Comedy. Among the translators and commentators who also neglect this important aspect, the most noteworthy are H.W. Longfellow and J.D. Sinclair. Mario Apollonio, in his entry in the Enciclopedia Dantesca on the "candida rosa," dismisses any allegorical, structural or symbolical meaning by stating

Dante è ormai estraneo a quel lavoro di assiduo accostamento di significato letterale e di significato allegorico che esigerebbero da lui gli zelatori del simbolismo.⁵

Those who correctly place Anna in the Old Testament and Lucia in the New are Daniele Mattalia, Paget Toynbee, C.H. Grandgent, Dorothy Sayers and Barbara Reynolds, Manfredi Porena, Siro A. Chimenez, Giovanni A. Scartazzini, and Giuseppe Vandelli, and most recently C.S. Singleton.

Those who give improper positions are Carlo Grabher, Francesco Torraca, Natalino Sapegno, Tommaso Casini and S.A. Barbi, and Antonio Russi. The latter, however, must be given credit for having pointed out that nobody had discussed the order of the blessed and that the critics who place Lucia on the side of the Old Testament never explained why. After all, St. Lucy was put to death in the Christian era under the Emperor Diocletian in circa 304 A.D.⁶ Antonio Russi, nevertheless, in his reading of Paradiso XXXII in the Lectura Dantis Scaligera,⁷ took it

upon himself to show that Dante made an obvious mistake in determining the position of Anna and Lucia, by placing the former in the section reserved for the blessed of the New Testament and the latter in that of the Old Testament. . According to Russi, this oversight destroys the order and the distribution in the Rose that the poet himself has so clearly claimed. Russi furthermore believes that Lucia is placed among the Old Testament figures because of her symbolical meaning. One must disprove this particular notion. Is it really Dante who makes this grave oversight, or the critic himself? The problem seems to be that Russi did not draw any geometrical figure -- at least the text in his reading does not have any drawing -- in contrast to such others as Dorothy Sayers or Paget Toynbee who, although they did not dedicate much time and thought to the Rose, did take the time to draw a circle and place the blessed in their correct position.

Moreover, if we examine the illustrators of the Divine Comedy, we will find that the artists did not follow the text; they did not place the blessed as indicated by the poet and did not identify them.

It must be pointed out that even those critics or commentators who placed the blessed in their correct position, as Dante intended, achieved this interpretation almost automatically, without giving it much thought. They did not question whether or not Anna belongs to the Old Testament and Lucia to the New. Neither did they give any thought to the question of whether or not the poet was trying to establish a specific order, according to well-defined literal and symbolical meaning. Even less did they consider the numerical symbolism or any possible architectural correspondence. If the Rose was questioned, it was questioned in terms of its unreal proportions (as in the case of Porena in his commentary on

Paradiso XXXII).

First, it is necessary to probe the structure, the symmetry and the division of the Symbolic Rose. This Rose has a definite structure and symmetry, and it follows a specific ordo within a geometrical design. This can be proven by drawing a circumference in which all the blessed who are mentioned are placed according to the directions provided by the poet in the text. It will be shown that the poet himself drew such a circle, and that by doing so, he could not have made a mistake.

The order of the blessed, then, comprises a clear and precise structure that follows a specific order; it can be constructed within a geometrical figure such as a circle or an octagon -- the shape of the baptismal font and the symbol of eternal life.⁸

It seems absurd that a rigorous medieval mind such as Dante's, trained according to a hierarchical view of the universe -- a perfect order in everything -- would commit a blatant oversight that destroys the perfect order describing the City of the Blessed; he himself points out that in this realm there can be no error and that nothing there is based on chance. In fact, it was the poet's intention to conceive and construct the Rose according to a perfect order, keeping in mind the famous phrase from the Wisdom of Solomon: "Omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti" (11:2). Had Dante disregarded such an essential notion in medieval tradition, he could not have claimed the prophetic nature of his mission by declaring his poem sacred:

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro
a] quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra,
sì che m'ha fatto per molti anni macro. (Par. XXV, 1-3)⁹

Having established the structural element of the Rose, one must consider the blessed souls who are its inhabitants. We must ask why

the poet has placed Mary, Peter, John the Evangelist, Lucy, John the Baptist, Anna, Moses and Adam on the first circle or tier of the Rose. Why the Hebrew women, namely: Eve, Rachel, Sara, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth? Why Francis, Benedict and Augustine? Such analysis is essential as a second step to the understanding of the whole Symbolic Rose. Each of these personae has a specific function as an individual and in relation to the group. This group, as Curtius points out in discussing "The Personnel of the Commedia,"¹⁰ must be examined and interpreted according to its literal and symbolic meaning.

It is indispensable to compare, moreover, Dante's description of his Rose Vision to the body of Vision literature, both secular and non-secular, that he might have known. Dante's vision is totally innovative in line with his special mission:

Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende
fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire
né sa né può chi di là sù discende;
perché appressando sé al suo disire,
nostro intelletto si profonda tanto,
che dietro la memoria non può ire.
Veramente quant' io del regno santo
ne la mia mente potei far tesoro,
sara ora materia del mio canto. (Par., I, 4-12)

Keeping in mind the structural analysis of the Rose and that of the blessed, we must examine a third aspect, which only recent criticism has taken into account, namely the numerical symbolism. This notion, derived from the previously cited phrase in the Wisdom of Solomon, has been totally ignored in connection with the Rose. No one has ever considered the simple fact that Dante names eight blessed souls on the first circle of the "candida rosa." The implication is immense, especially if one remembers the importance of mumerology in the Latin Middle Ages. As Emile Mâle puts it:

Cette doctrine venait des Pères de l'Église qui la tenaient sans doute des écoles néo-platoniciennes, ou revivait le génie de Pythagore. Il est évident que saint Augustin considère les nombres comme des pensées de Dieu... La science des nombres est donc la science même de l'univers; les chiffres contiennent le secret du monde... Qui sait les comprendre entre dans le plan divin.¹¹

One of the most eminent of the Latin Fathers of the Church, St.

Isidore of Seville, states

Non est superfluum numerorum causas in Scripturis sanctis attendere.¹²

And Rabanus Maurus states

Numerorum enim ratio in multis juxta allegoriam typica significatione mysterium nobis venerandum ostendit. Unde primus numerus, hoc est, unus ad unitatem deitatis refertur.¹³

Turning to Dante himself, let us recall for a moment the Vita Nuova (XXIX) where he speaks of Beatrice as a miracle, in terms of the number nine, and his reproach to Giovanni del Virgilio. The latter sent the poet a Latin Eclogue of 97 lines. Dante replied with the same number of lines, but regretting that Giovanni del Virgilio had not added three more lines to make it 100, a perfect number:

Et tria si flasset ultra spiramina flata,
Centum carminibus tacitos mulcebat agrestes. (Eclogue II, 42-43)¹⁴

It is not necessary to prove that numerical symbolism is present throughout the Divine Comedy.¹⁵ Let it suffice to refer the reader again to Ernst Robert Curtius, who, in his final paragraphs in the chapter "Numerical Composition," does justice to Dante by drawing the following conclusion:

... Dante's numerical composition is the end and the acme of a long development. From the enneads of the Vita Nuova Dante proceeded to the elaborate numerical structure of the Commedia: $1 + 33 + 33 + 33 = 100$ cantos conduct the reader through 3 realms, the last one of which contains 10 heavens. Triads and decads inter-

twine into unity. Her number is no longer an outer framework, but a symbol of the cosmic ordo.¹⁶

In addition to these basic observations one must consider the complexity, the precision and the beauty of the terza rima.

Numerical structure and symbolism are part of the poet's intentio and forma mentis. The numerical symbolism and structure present throughout Dante's work is undoubtedly present in the geometrical design of the Rose. Such a design points directly to the prevalent architecture of Dante's times, and therefore to an architectural analogy of the Rose.

The fourth aspect, then, is to establish an architectural correlation between the Rose and the Gothic cathedral. Ozanam and Tommaseo expressed such a hypothesis,¹⁷ but did not pursue it. When commenting on the word "scalee" of Paradiso XXXII (v. 21), Tommaseo states

Segue nella pianta il traslato dell'edificio.
E 'pianta' è traslato architettonico.¹⁸

Tommaseo did not pursue this intuition in all its implications. An understanding of this correlation is found, however, in Emile Male, who fully perceived how much Dante is part of the medieval world and its forma mentis. Male, in equating Dante and Thomas Aquinas as the great architects of that century, states

... C'est ainsi qu'il édifie 'cum pondere et mensura'
sa cathédrale invisible. Il fut avec saint Thomas,
le grand architecte du XIII siècle.¹⁹

The biblical notion of measure, number, and weight is central to the interpretation of the medieval world view. In fact Otto von Simson suggests that St. Augustine's application of this doctrine goes beyond that of the first book of De Musica. In other words, it needs to be applied to poetry, architecture, and to the other artes.²⁰ The Augustinian "philosophy of beauty," one must remember, was adopted by the

Platonists of the School of Chartres and by the ascetic movement headed by Bernard of Clairvaux. It was subsequently transmitted to Suger of St. Denis, who was such a tremendous generating force in the birth of the Gothic.²¹

Of this tradition Dante was well aware. Among other attributes, Dante refers to Paradise as "Miro e angelico templo," Par. XXVIII, 53; "Ierusalemme (celeste)," Par. XXV, 56; "superna Ierusalem," Epist. II, 5; "e piú di caritate arde in quel chiostro," Purg. XV, 57; "con le due stole nel beato chiostro," Par. XXV, 127; and finally, he calls the Church of Paradise "basilica," in the prophetic canto:

Inclita vita per cui la larghezza
de la nostra basilica si scrisse,
fa risonar la spene in questa altezza. (Par. XXV, 29-31)

The development of Gothic architecture could not but exercise a structural influence and produce an analogical vision in Dante's work. As Panofsky succinctly puts it,

A man imbued with the Scholastic habit would look upon the mode and architectural presentation, just as he looked upon the mode of literary presentation, from the point of view of manifestatio.²²

One can see, then, how Dante, in the apotheosis of his ascension toward the summum bonum, the summa pulchritudo, unfolds before our eyes the "milizia santa" in the "candida rosa," an image which may indeed point to the rose-window of the Gothic cathedral and to the analogous baptismal font. The Rose as the residence of the blessed is at the same time the Church Triumphant, "la milizia santa / che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa," and ultimately the Empyrean. Given the medieval forma mentis, one must consider, then, the formula: Commedia -- Cathedral, Church Triumphant -- Symbolic Rose, Symbolic Rose -- Rose Window.

These points have not been considered in the study of the Rose. The full meaning of the City of the Blessed has not been grasped. It seems that a serious study of this subject would yield a valid contribution to a further understanding of Dante's intentio, by simple proof and logical analysis. Dante's world was a whole, a total concept of symmetry, clarity, analogy, order and mathematical principles. The Rose in Paradiso XXXII cannot be isolated and considered apart from the total structure of the Commedia, nor can it be separated from the medieval notion of the artes. Perhaps because of its well-defined structure, or its lack of action -- since many critics seem to make action a requirement in order to find beauty in the Divine Comedy -- the Rose has been neglected or taken for granted. This static realm, as many would consider it, has to be probed by following the text and trying to incorporate it into the poet's cultural context. It then becomes clear that what may have been taken for granted or neglected, assumes a totally new outlook and value. The Rose, therefore, through an architectural and geometrical analysis, with all its correlative implications, may provide a key to a deeper understanding of the Divine Comedy in its totality. Without this kind of gloss one would still be reading this episode of the Commedia as it was read by the early commentators, with a limited scope. With this in mind one can ask: Why did Dante choose a rose as a symbol for the City of the Blessed? Why did he structure it the way he did? Why did he emphasize certain personae? Why did he follow a certain order? These questions have to be answered, as I intend to do.

Footnotes

Introduction

¹ All quotations from the Divine Comedy are taken from the text of Giorgio Petrocchi, La Commedia Secondo l'Antica Vulgata (Verona: Mondadori, 1966). All the other quotations from Dante's works are taken from the critical text of the Società Dantesca Italiana: Le opere di Dante, ed. M. Barbi et al., (Florence: Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960).

² See Gianfranco Gontini's article in the Enciclopedia Dantesca, "Il Fiore," II, pp. 895-901.

³ Richard J. Pegis, "Numerology and Probability in Dante," Medieval Studies, 29 (1967), 370-3. This article was written as a result of C.S. Singleton's "The Poet's Number at the Center," Modern Language Notes, 85 (1965), 1-10.

⁴ For convenience all the references and quotations of the early commentators, including Tommaseo's, are taken from Guido Biagi's edition of 'La Divina Commedia' nella figurazione artistica e nel secolare commento (Torino: Unione Tipografica - Editrice Torinese, 1939), III, Canto XXXII, pp. 706-729.

⁵ Enciclopedia Dantesca (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Giovanni Treccani, 1970), I, p. 787.

⁶ On St. Lucy see G.A. Scartazzini, Enciclopedia Dantesca (Milano: Hoepli, 1896), I, pp. 1159-1160; A Dictionary of Christian Biography, ed. William Smith, Henry Wace (London: John Murray, 1882), III, p. 744; The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F.L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 827; A Dictionary of Christian Antiquity, ed. William Smith and Samuel Cheetham (London: John Murray, 1880), II, p. 1061; Paget Toynbee, A Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante, rev. C.S. Singleton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 41.

⁷ Lectura Dantis Scaligera (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), pp. 1137-90.

⁸ Antonio Quacquarelli, L'Ogdoade patristica e suoi riflessi nella liturgia e nei monumenti (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1973).

⁹ For the interpretation of these critical lines I refer the reader to Sarolli's article "Dante's Katabasis and Mission," which appeared first in the World of Dante: Six Studies in Language and Thought (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966). This is also part of his Prolegomena (pp. 381-419). Dante's prophetic mission is strongly reinforced by the author's explicatio of the verses in Paradiso XXV (1-12, 49-57, 136-139).

¹⁰ Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 365-72.

¹¹ Emile Mâle, L'art religieux du XIII Siècle en France (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1948), pp. 9-10.

¹² Patrologiae cursus completus series latina, ed. J.P. Migne, 83, Liber Numerorum qui in sacris Scripturis occurrunt, Caput Primum. All future references to the Patrologia will be abbreviated as P.L.

¹³ P.L. 111, De Universo, Caput III, "De Numero."

¹⁴ Cfr. R.E. Curtius, op. cit., p. 508, and G.R. Sarolli, Analitica della 'Divina Commedia' (Bari: Adriatica, 1974), pp. 72-73. Most importantly the latter points out that "... il rimprovero e 'disposto' in quello stesso verso 43 nel quale Giovanni del Virgilio aveva espresso il suo affetto impiegando la metafora della 'vite' che 'per cento vincoli si avvolge all'alto olmo'." Which, as Sarolli says, is a counter-proof of the poet's intentio in the usage of numerical compositio.

¹⁵ The scholarship is relatively recent on this point, but ample proof will be found in G.R. Sarolli's Analitica and in his Prolegomena alla 'Divina Commedia' (Florence: Olschki, 1971). For number symbolism Curtius offers a comprehensive chapter "Numerical Composition," pp. 501-9 of his European Literature. These other works are also essential: Henri de Lubac, Exégèse Médiévale (Paris: Aubier, 1964), Part II, ch. VII "Symboles Numériques," pp. 7-40; Vincent F. Hopper, Medieval Number Symbolism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); Edgar de Bruyne, Études d'Esthétique Médiévale (Bruges: De Tempel, 1946); Manfred Hart, Die Zahl in der 'Divina Commedia' (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1973).

¹⁶ Curtius, op. cit., p. 509.

¹⁷ See Apollonio's article "candida rosa" in the Enciclopedia Dantesca, I, p. 787.

¹⁸ La 'Divina Commedia' nella figurazione artistica e nel secolare commento, III, p. 711.

¹⁹ Male, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁰ Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral, New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1956), pp. 22-23.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 9-11.

²² Erwin Panofsky, Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism (New York: New American Library, 1957), p. 58.

Chapter I

Tradition and Innovation

In order to understand the magnitude of Dante's innovation in his conception of Paradise, let us turn to the tradition of visions, both secular and non-secular, and to some of his so-called "precursors."

Dante tells us that his is a journey that no one has ever undertaken:

L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse. (Par. II, 7)

At the same time he indicates that his heavenly vision will be totally new, for God has given him such grace:

E se Dio m'ha in sua grazia rinchiuso,
tanto che vuol ch'i veggia la sua corte
per modo tutto fuor del moderno uso. (Purg. XVI, 40-45)

The reader is called upon to pause and reflect on these verses, for the poet is announcing a vision of the celestial city which will be granted to him alone in the last stage of his itinerary. God has given him the grace and the privilege to "see" heaven in a wholly new light and fashion.

Dante's Paradise is unique in Christian medieval literature. His "precursors" have provided very little inspiration, if any, for the description and the structure of Paradise, and in particular, for that of the Mystic Rose in the Empyrean. Whereas Dante's vision is spiritual, many of the ones he might have known were characterized by worldly details, such as knights in armour, feudal courts, beautiful gardens and many other mundane delights. The blessed souls in the Divine Comedy

enjoy the vision of God. All of them, although unequally blessed, are happy through God's justice and through the flame of charity. This flame grows in each blessed soul as their number increases. This is the city of light, for God is the Sun that illuminates and radiates the warmth of the blessed souls.

The various visions that are part of the medieval tradition seldom have much in common with Dante's.¹ In Giacomino da Verona's De Ierusalem Celesti,² the description of the City of God is that of a medieval city surrounded by walls, where gold, precious stones, beautiful palaces, gardens, waters and lights abound. God is amidst the angelic choirs, and Mary sits next to Him. God teaches His faithful to sing:

Emperçò ke'l Re
ke se' su lo tron santo
si ge monstra a solfar
et a su'r quel canto
si dolçement e tanto
no se ge tal davanço.³

This vision, De Ierusalem Celesti, has some details which resemble the Navigatio Sancti Brandani, a vision attributed to an Irish monk of the XII Century.

There are innumerable visions: the Visio Pauli (IV Century), the Visio Tugdali (XIII Century), the Visio Alberici (XII Century), the Visio Caroli Magni, the Visio Anselmi, the Visio Eynsham, the Escala de Mahoma, known in Italy as the Libro della Scala, narrating Mohammed's ascension to heaven, and many other visions. Various attempts have been made to identify them as Dante's sources or precursors.⁴ While it may be plausible that Dante knew of some of them, the reality is that the Commedia offers no proof that the poet was influenced by any of these visions. If they had any influence, it was to make Dante feel the need to create the "novella vista." Only the vision of the Apostle Paul, as

narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, was of great importance to Dante, for he will claim the same kind of vision in the Commedia. But I shall return to this later.

Among the many visions, the Fis Adamnáin⁵ should be mentioned, not so much for its value as source or precursor to the Commedia, but for its details. This is a vision attributed to Admnán of Iona (circa 625-704). The Old Irish text is of the X or XI Century.⁶ The soul of Adamnán leaves his body on the feast of St. John the Baptist and is led through the realms of Heaven and Hell by the Guardian Angel. The first land they visit is that of the Saints. The Saints of the Eastern world are in the Eastern part of this land, and those of the West, North and South are in the corresponding regions. This division and the presence of the Apostles, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Virgins and that of Mary and the children, offer an interesting parallel with the structure and the personnel of Dante's Heavenly Rose.⁷

There are other details worth examining in reference to the Commedia, such as the river before the gate of Heaven which washes the saints and is reminiscent of the river Lethe in Purgatorio, but I will go no further. C.S. Boswell does not claim that the Fis Adamnáin is a source for Dante, he simply considers it a precursor.⁸

Admnán's vision and all the visions of the medieval Christian tradition are to be considered examples of visio spiritualis or visio intellectualis.

Dante's vision is Pauline, it is a visio corporalis, an adtestatio rei visae. The poet himself says:

Ma io, perchè venirvi? o chi 'l concede?
Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono:
me degno a ciò nè io nè altri 'l crede. (Inf. II, 31-33)

Later he will say:

S'i' era sol di me quel che creasti
novellamente, amor che 'l ciel governi,
tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti. (Par. I, 73-75)

Again and again Dante re-emphasizes this essential point:

... .. ma ora ammiro
com'io trascenda questi corpi lievi. (Par. I, 97-99)

S'io era corpo, e qui non si concepe
com'una dimensione altra patio,
ch'esser convien se corpo in corpo cepe,
accender ne dovria piu il disio
di veder quella essenza in che si vede
come nostra natura e Dio s'unio. (Par. II, 37-42)

These are irrefutable proofs that the poet claimed to have made his journey with soul and body. The importance of this notion is a key to the reading of the Commedia as a whole (and to the interpretation of Dante's mission as Scriba Dei).⁹

It may well be stated with Miguel Asín Palacios that in none of the available visions or "precursors" of the Divine Comedy could the poet have found inspiration for his delicate picture of Paradise. Palacios states that before Dante, the description of Paradise in Christian tradition was coarse and sensual. According to this critic a similar situation exists in the Moslem tradition before the Futuhāt of the Murcian thinker and mystic Ibn Arabi. In the Escala de Mahoma, Eden and Paradise are not clearly delineated as two different places. Spiritual beatitude is mixed and confused with carnal pleasures. Moreover, Purgatory does not exist, for it does not exist in the Koran. Palacios compares the structural and moral order of Dante's vision with that of Ibn Arabi, and with other Moslem legends and visions.¹⁰ Although the denials and refutations of Palacios' thesis have been numerous -- not to mention the long polemic which spanned years -- its observations and richness of detail

remain quite valid and a significant scholarly contribution.

Dante's vision is unique in its sublimity and its vividness. In his reading of Paradiso XXX, Paolo Savj Lopez says:

Nessun occhio di mistico pellegrino, nessuna fantasia vigente d'asceta medioevale aveva, prima di Dante, contemplato un tal cielo di luce intellettuale. Il medioevo ebbe una profonda scienza dell'anima e un certo misterioso senso dell'indefinito, per cui si compiaceva, sovente ignaro del mondo esteriore, d'indugiarsi sulla soglia dei regni spirituali; ma affacciandosi a guardare oltre la vita non seppe veder che un misero riflesso di questa.¹¹

Dante, therefore, broke every tradition in order to give his particular description of Paradise, claiming for himself a special mission.

Within the biblical tradition, the most important visions are those of Ezekiel and the Apostle Paul. Ezekiel explained his in this way:

Et factum est in trigesimo anno, in quarto, in quinta mensis, cum essem in medio captivorum iuxta fluvium Chobar, aperti sunt caeli, et vidi visiones Dei. (Ezekiel I, 1-2)¹²

And Paul:

Si gloriari oportet (non expedit quidem), veniat autem ad visiones et revelationes Domini. Scio hominem in Christo ante annos quatuordecim, sive in corpore nescio, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit, raptum huiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum. Et scio huiusmodi hominem sive in corpore, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit: quoniam raptus est in paradysum, et audivi arcana verba, qua non licet homini loqui. (II Cor., 1-4)

These two visions are the most meaningful to Dante, as G.R. Sarolli says:

Degli exempla citati da Dante nell'Epistola a Cangrande così come degli autori, due soprattutto c'interessano, e precisamente il raptus paolino e la visione d'Ezechiele perché sono stati profondamente sentiti e dibattuti il primo da Sant'Agostino e il secondo da Riccardo da San Vittore, e perché costituiscono il perno, come si vedrà, intorno a cui nella Commedia come

nella tradizione esegetica saranno investigati i limiti estremi del senso letterale e il rapporto consequenziale tra visione e profezia.¹³

One could say that as Paul's vision is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's, by its extension, Dante's vision encompasses and fulfills both.¹⁴

The last vision I want to mention is that of Alanus de Insulis (1128-1202) found in the Anticlaudianus (P.L., 210). This vision, however, is totally allegorical. The author himself places it with those visions called imaginariae.¹⁵ In the Anticlaudianus Natura wishes to create a perfect man. Phronesis (Wisdom) is called because she can understand all the divine mysteries. A cart is prepared for the journey to heaven, so that the secrets of Noys and the will of the Highest Master may be penetrated. Phronesis presents Natura's wishes to Theology and asks to be shown the way to the "highest Jupiter." Phronesis reaches the Empyrean, which is the seat of the Virgin Mary, the blessed and the angelic choirs. Among the blessed we find Peter, Paul, Lawrence and Vincent of Lerins, a monk and theologian of the VI Century. Finally the new man is created. He is called Juvenis.

Ultimately, none of these visions have the deep significance, the richness of detail, the perfect structure and the beauty of order that, as will be shown, are present in Dante's Heavenly Rose.

Henry H. Milman in his History of Latin Christianity, while discussing Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, attributes to Dante the merit of having assimilated the various traditions, Jewish, Christian and Pagan, and of having created these three realms with originality, order and authority. According to Milman, the real and the unreal are mixed in such a way as to make the Commedia very popular and yet sublime:

Dante summed up the whole of this traditional lore, or at least, with a poet's intuitive sagacity, siezed on all which was most imposing, effective, real, and condensed it in his three coordinate poems... Above all, he brought it (Hell) to the very borders of our world; he made the life beyond the grave one with our present life; he mingled in close and intimate relation the present and the future. Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, were but an immediate expansion and extension of the present world.¹⁶

Let us set down, then, the essential structure of Dante's conception of Paradise and of the Symbolic Rose.

Dante's Paradise is based on the Ptolemaic system of the Universe, as he himself states in the Convivio:

... secondo lui (Tolomeo), secondo quello che si tiene in astrologia ed in filosofia... sono nove cieli mobili; lo sito de li quali è manifesto e determinato, secondo che per un'arte che si chiama prospettiva, e (per) arismetica e geometria, sensibilmente e ragionevolmente e veduto, e per altre esperienze sensibili...

Ed è l'ordine del sito questo che lo primo che numerano è quello dove è la Luna; lo secondo e quello dov'è Mercurio; lo terzo è quello dov'è Venere; lo quarto è quello dove è lo Sole; lo quinto è quello di Marte; lo sesto è quello di Giove; lo settimo è quello di Saturno; l'ottavo è quello de le Stelle (Fisse); lo nono è quello che non è sensibile,... lo quale chiamano molti (Cielo) Cristallino, cioè diafano, o vero tutto trasparente. Veramente, fuori di tutti questi, li cattolici pongono lo cielo Empireo, che è a dire cielo di fiamma o vero luminoso; e pongono esso essere immobile per avere in se, secondo ciascuna parte, ciò che la sua materia vuole. E questo è cagione al Primo Mobile per avere velocissimo movimento; che per lo ferventissimo appetito ch'è 'n ciascuna parte di quello nono cielo, che è immediato a quello, d'essere congiunta con ciascuna parte di quello divinissimo ciel quieto, in quello si rivolge con tanto desiderio, che la sua velocitate è quasi incomprendibile. E quieto e pacifico è lo luogo di quella somma Deitate che sola (se) compiutamente vede. Questo loco è di spiriti beati, secondo che la Santa Chiesa vuole, che no puo dire menzogna... E così ricogliendo ciò che ragionato è, pare che diece cieli siano. (II, iii, 6, 7-10, 12) ... per (Aristotile) ... è provato, questo

mondo, cioè la terra, stare in se stabile e fissa in sempiterno ... basta ... per la sua grande autoritade sapere che questa terra è fissa e non si gira, e che essa col mare è centro del cielo.

Questo cielo si gira intorno a questo centro continuamente. (III, V, 7-8)

Dante's ascension with Beatrice to the Empyrean follows faithfully the order given in the Convivio. In the Convivio (II, xiii, xiv), moreover, Dante establishes a correspondence between the first seven Heavens and the seven artes, and between the remaining three and the "scienza naturale," the "scienza morale," and the "scienza divina":

A li sette primi rispondono le sette scienze del Trivio e del Quadrivio, cioè Gramatica, Dialettica, Rettorica, Arismetria, Musica, Geometria e Astrologia. A l'ottava spera, cioè a la stellata, risponde la scienza naturale, che Fisica si chiama, e la prima scienza, che si chiama Metafisica; a la nona spera risponde la Scienza morale; ed al cielo quieto risponde la scienza divina, che è Teologia appellata. E ragione par che ciò sia, brevemente è da vedere. (Convivio II, xiii, 8)

Consequently we have the following order:

Luna	Gramatica
Mercurio	Dialettica
Venere	Rettorica
Sole	Arismetria
Marte	Musica
Giove	Geometria
Saturno	Astrologia
Cielo Stellato	Fisica e Metafisica
Cielo Cristallino (Primo Mobile)	Morale Filosofia
Cielo Empireo	Divina Scienza

In Convivio II, v, Dante also gives the order of the Angelic Hierarchies following Gregory the Great, as found in Book XXII of his Moralia. Dante establishes the correspondence between the angels, the spheres and the Trinity. Moreover, each person of the Trinity corresponds to each of the three "gerarchie":

Angeli	Somma e ferventissima	Luna
Arcangeli	caritate de lo	Mercurio
Troni	Spirito Santo	Venere
Dominazioni	Somma	Sole
Virtuti	Sapienza del	Marte
Principati	Figliuolo	Giove
Potestati	La potenza	Cielo Stellato
Cherubini	somma del	Cielo Cristallino
Serafini	Padre	Cielo Empireo

But in Paradiso XVIII Dante innovates by following Dionysius the Areopagite.¹⁷ The order of the spheres is not changed, but we have the following order:

<u>Paradiso</u>	<u>Convivio</u>
Angeli	Angeli
Arcangeli	Arcangeli
Principati	Troni
Potestati	Dominazioni
Dominazioni	Virtuti
Dominazioni	Principati
Troni	Potestati
Cherubini	Cherubini
Serafini	Serafini

In Paradiso, therefore, the Thrones have been moved from the third place of the lower hierarchy to the third place of the higher hierarchy. The Principalities have been moved from the third place of the second hierarchy to the third place of the lower hierarchy. The Dominations have been moved from the first place of the second hierarchy to the third place of the same hierarchy. The Powers, having been moved from the third place of the higher hierarchy, occupy the first place of the second hierarchy. Consequently Dante has adopted a wholly new order.

Upon leaving the earth, as the poet begins his journey in Paradise, he enters the first heaven, that of the moon:

Questi ne porta il foco inver' la luna;
 questi ne' cor mortali è permotore;
 questi la terra in sé stringe e aduna;
 nè pur le creature che son fore
 d'intelligenza quest' arco saetta,
 ma quelle c'hanno intelletto e amore. (Par. I, 115-20)

The souls he encounters there are those who have not been constant to their vows. Piccarda Donati and the Empress Constance are among those. Piccarda says:

E questa sorte che pargiù cotanto,
 pero n'è data, perchè fuor negletti
 li nostri voti, e voti in alcun canto. (Par. III, 55-57)

This heaven encompasses Canto II-V, and its corresponding angelic order is that of the Angels.

The second heaven, Mercury, is inhabited by those souls who, either for honor or for fame, performed great deeds. It is presided over by Archangels, and it encompasses Canto V-VII. Here the poet meets the Emperor Justinian and Romeo of Villanova. The former says:

Cesare fui e son Iustiniano,
 che, per voler del primo amor ch'i' sento,
 d'entro le leggi trassi il troppo e 'l vano. (Par. VI, 10-12)

In Venus, the third heaven, the poet meets the souls of lovers. He encounters Charles Martel, Cunizza da Romano (Ezzelino's daughter), Foulquet of Marseilles and Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho who saved Joshua's explorers (Joshua 2:1-24). The order of the Principalities governs this heaven, which is described in Cantos VII and IX.

The fourth heaven, that of the Sun, is found in Cantos X-XIV. It is presided over by theologians, teachers, historians; the souls of wisdom. The Powers correspond to this heaven, which is inhabited by some of the most meaningful names of Dante's world. Thomas Aquinas introduces the first group and points out the following: Albertus Magnus, Gratian, Peter Lombard, Solomon, Dionysius the Aeropagyte, Orosius, Isidore of Seville, Bede, Richard of St. Victor and Sigier of Brabante. The second group is headed by St. Bonaventure, and it includes Fra Augustino, Illuminato, Hugh of St. Victor, Petrus Comestor, Peter of Spain, Nathan the Prophet, Chrysostom, Anselm, Donatus, Rabanus Maurus and Joachim of Flora. This, perhaps, represents the most noble group of people found in the Divine Comedy, at least of the Christian tradition. A formidable assembly of wisdom whose meaning, as individuals and as a group, is still one of the cruces of the Divine Comedy.

The fifth heaven, Mars, is presided over by the Virtues. Dante encounters the souls of famous warriors who defended their faith, namely: Cacciaguida, his ancestor, Joshua, Judas Maccabeus, Charlemagne, Roland, William of Orange, Renouard, Godfrey of Bouillon and Guiscard (Cantos XIV-XVIII). In Jupiter, the sixth heaven, the poet finds the just and pious. The angelic order is the Dominations. The souls are David, Trajan the Emperor, Ezekiel, Constantine, William II of Sicily and Ripheus the Trojan (XVIII-XX).

The seventh heaven, Saturn, hosts the souls of the contemplative: Peter Damian, Benedict, Macarius, and Romualdus. The angelic order is the Thrones (XXI-XXII).

In the heaven of the Fixed Stars, the eighth, the Triumph of Christ is represented. Dante is examined on the three theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, by Peter, James and John. For a moment the poet sees thousands of lights (all the blessed) lit by a sun (Christ). This heaven is presided over by the Cherubim; while the Primum Mobile, the ninth heaven, is ruled by the Seraphim. In the heaven of the Fixed Stars all the blessed are assembled. In the Primum Mobile the poet sees all the angelic hierarchies. The three highest angelical orders correspond respectively to the three Persons of the Trinity: Seraphim -- Father; Cherubim -- Son; Thrones -- Holy Ghost.

Finally over and beyond all the heavens, is the Empyrean, the motionless and incorporeal heaven where the poet will be able to see both the militiae of Paradise, the angels and the blessed in their glory and in the abode of the Deity:

La natura del mondo, che quieta
il mezzo e tutto l'altro intorno move,
quinci comincia come da sua meta;
e questo cielo non ha altro dove
che la mente divina, in che s'accende
l'amor che 'l volge e la virtù eh'ei piove.
Luce e amor d'un cerchio lui comprende,
sí come questo altri; e quel precinto
colui che 'l cinge solamente intende. (Par. XXVII, 104-114)

As Etienne Gilson points out, Dante resolves quite well the problem of the addition of the Empyrean to Aristotle's nine movable spheres. Indeed, this is the passage from the spheres of astronomy and physics to that of theology.¹⁸

When the poet reaches the Empyrean, he sees the blessed souls in the form of a "candida rosa" (Par. XXI, 1-3). In Paradiso XXXII St. Bernard identifies the blessed and shows the main divisions of the Rose. Mary is seated at the highest circle; below her are Hebrew women, six of whom are named: Eve, Rachel, Sara, Judith, Rebecca and Ruth. (If the angelic hierarchies are placed in correspondence with these women, Rachel would be a Throne, and so would Beatrice who sits next to her, thus a symbol of the Holy Ghost.) This column of women form a wall dividing the Rose in two. The dividing wall opposite Mary is formed by a row of men led by John the Baptist and followed by St. Francis, St. Benedict and St. Augustine. These two walls form a central division, on either side of which are seated "beati" of the New and Old Testaments:

Or mira l'alto proveder divino:
 chè l'uno e l'altro aspetqo de la fede
 igualmente empierà questo giardino. (Par. XXXII, 37-39)

Only later in the canto does Dante clarify on which side of Mary or the Baptist the blessed of the two Testaments occupy their seats.

St. Bernard then explains that the Rose is horizontally cut in half. In the lower part are seated children who, having been unable to exercise their free will, were saved by Christ alone and not through their own merit.

After a theological discussion, spurred by the presence of the children, Bernard invites Dante to look at the other blessed souls who complete the vision:

colui che da sinistra le s'aggiusta
 è 'l padre per lo cui ardito gusto
 l'umana specie tanto amaro gusta;
 dal destro vedi quel padre vetusto
 di Santa Chiesa a cui Cristo le chiavi
 raccomandò di questo fior venusto. (Par. XXXII, 121-126)

Thus, on Mary's right side sits Peter; on her left, sits Adam. Diagonally opposite Peter is Anna, Mary's mother; diagonally opposite Adam is Lucia.

This is, in its simplicity, the total picture of the Heavenly Rose. It is a complete innovation in terms of visions and Paradise. Yet critics and commentators have created confusion, culminating in Russi's statement that Dante made an oversight, "una svista," as he calls it, in determining the position of Anna and Lucia.¹⁹ The following chapter will prove that such a structure and such order do indeed exist.

Footnotes

Chapter I

¹ On this argument the following studies are relevant: Alessandro D'Ancona, I precursori di Dante (Florence: Sansoni, 1874); Marcus Dods, Forerunners of Dante (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903); and besides the known studies of C. Labitte and A.F. Ozanam, we must point out the study of M. Asín Palacios, La Escatologia Musulmana en la Divina Comedia, 3rd (Madrid: Maestre, 1961); C.S. Boswell, An Irish Precursor of Dante (London: David Nutt, 1908); F. Torraca, "I Precursori della Divina Commedia" in Lectura Dantis; B. Nardi, "Pretese fonti della Divina Commedia," Nuova Antologia, XC (1955), pp. 383-98; Andrea Ciotti, "Il concetto della figura e la poetica della visione nei commentatori trecenteschi della Commedia," Convivium, XXX (1962), I-II, pp. 264-92, 399-415; G.R. Sarolli, "Profezia e visione: Profilo d'un genere letterario" in the Prolegomena, op. cit., pp. 75-119. A solid bibliography on the "Fonti" is found in Umberto Bosco, Guida a Dante, Bruno Maier ed. (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1967), pp. 154-160. See also the Enciclopedia Dantesca under "Visio."

² Nothing is known of this author except that which he himself states at the end of his other poem De Babylonia civitate infernali (V. 336): "Jacomini da Verona de l'ordeno de minori."

³ G. Contini, Poeti de Duecento (Milano -- Napoli: Ricciardo Ricciardi, 1960).

⁴ F. Novati, La Navigatio S. Brandani (Bergamo: 1892); L. Guercio, Su alcuni rapporti tra le visioni medievali e la Divina Commedia (Roma: 1909). On the Visio Pauli see Theodore Silverstein's "Did Dante Know the Vision of St. Paul?" Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, 19 (1937), 231-47, and "The Vision of St. Paul: New Links and Patterns in Western Tradition," Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age, 26 (1959), 199-248.

⁵ C.S. Boswell, op. cit.

⁶ The text is contained in the oldest of two manuscripts, the Lebor na h-Udri, or "Book of the Dun (Cow)," copied in circa 1103 from another manuscript, perhaps fifty years older, found in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy. This and the other manuscript (14th Century) were edited and printed by E. Windisch in Irish Texte, Vol. I, 1880.

⁷ "Now, the Twelve Apostles and Mary the pure Virgin form a band apart, about the mighty Lord. Next to the Apostles are the Patriarchs and Prophets, and the disciples of Jesus. On the other side are holy Virgins, at Mary's right hand, and with no great space between. Babes and striplings are about them on every side, and the bird choirs of the heavenly folk, making their minstrelsy. And amid these companies, bands of angels, guardians of the souls do perpetual suit and service in the Royal presence. No man is there in this present life who may describe

those assemblies, or who may tell of the very manner of them." The description continues with many interesting details, which Boswell then compares with the Commedia. See Boswell, op. cit. 31-47.

⁸ There is no ground to prove that Dante was aware of the Fis Adamnain, and there was no Latin translation of it. Dante was certainly familiar with Bede's work. Bede, as we know, is in the heaven of the Sun. According to Boswell, while Adamnan was in Northumbria, he became an intimate acquaintance of the Venerable Bede. Adamnan is described by Bede with these words: "Erat enim vir bonus et sapiens, et scientia scripturarum nobilissime instructus." Baede Opera Historica, trans. J.E. King (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), II, Ch. XV, p. 280. But Bede does not mention the Fis Adamnain or that Adamnan had a vision. The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 ed., states that there is no doubt that Adamnan of Iona is not the author of the Fis Adamnain.

⁹ G.R. Sarolli, Prolegomena, op. cit., pp. 75-119. See also Joseph A. Mazzeo, Structure and Thought in Paradiso (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

¹⁰ M.A. Palacios, op. cit., pp. 224-270.

¹¹ Letture Dantesche, ed. Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1961), p. 627.

¹² Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam (Matriti: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1965). All Biblical quotations are taken from this edition.

¹³ G.R. Sarolli, Prolegomena, p. 77.

¹⁴ For these two visions see Hugh of St. Victor's De visione Ezechielis and St. Augustine's De Genesi ad litteram.

¹⁵ G.R. Sarolli, Prolegomena, p. 105.

¹⁶ Henry H. Milman, History of Latin Christianity (New York: W.J. Widdleton, 1871), VIII, Book XIV, Ch. 2.

¹⁷ Aquinas discusses the two systems of Dionysius and Gregory in the Summa (Part I, Question 118) and in the Contra Gentiles. A thorough and most recent study on the angels is that of Ausberto Gonzalez, The Problem of Angelology in Dante's Works (Thesis, Hunter College, 1975).

¹⁸ Etienne Gilson, "A la recherche de l'Empyrée," Revue des Études Italiennes, 11 (1965), pp. 147-61.

¹⁹ Lectura Dantis Scaligera, op. cit., pp. 1137-90.

Chapter II

The Structure of the Rose

Although the full structure of the Rose is not given until canto XXXII, the Rose itself is introduced in canto XXX of Paradiso. As soon as Dante reaches the Empyrean, after having gone through the nine spheres which surround the earth, his eyes are blinded by a "luce viva," so that he cannot see anything at all:

Come subito lampo che discetti
li spiriti visivi, sì che priva
da l'atto l'occhio di piu forti obietti,
così mi circumfulse luce viva,
e lasciommi fasciato di tal velo
del suo fulgor, che nulla m'appariva. (Par. XXX, 46-51)

Shortly before this occurrence, Beatrice informed the poet that they had left the spheres and entered a heaven which is pure light, where love and joy are supreme. It is significant to note how the poet stresses the supremacy of love and joy by his use of a chiasmus culminating in the word "letizia":

... Noi siamo usciti fore
del maggior corpo al ciel ch'è pura luce;
luce intellettual, piena d'amore;
amor di vero ben, pien di letizia;
letizia che trascende ogni dolzore, (Par. XXX, 38-42)

The nature of this love is expressed by Dante in his Epistle to Can Grande de la Scala:

Et dicitur empyreum, quod est idem quod celum igne sui
ardoris flagrans; non quod in eo sit ignis vel ardor
materialis, sed spiritualis, quod est amor sanctus
sive caritas. (Ep. XIII, 68)

Beatrice explains to Dante that the blinding light which overcomes the soul upon entering the Empyrean prepares and disposes it for the beatific vision. It is, in a certain sense, Dante's final conversion and preparation for his mission, an echo of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus:

In quibus dum irem Damascum cum potestate et permissu principum sacerdotum, die media in via, vidi, rex, de caelo supra splendorem solis circumfulsisse me lumen, et eos qui mecum simul erant. (Acts 26: 12-13) ¹

Immediately after this momentary blindness, Dante perceives a flash of light in the shape of a river between two verdant banks from which living sparks (angels) fly. These sparks from here, there, and everywhere descend into the flowers (blessed souls). As soon as they are inebriated by the aroma, they fly out and new ones descend (XXX, 55-68).

Dante's preparation for the vision is, therefore, gradual, for he is not ready to receive this vision fully until his eyes drink of the river's water. As soon as he does so, the river of light becomes circular in shape.

e sí come di lei bevve la gronda
de le palpebre mie, cosí mi parve
di sua lunghezza divenuta tonda. (88-90)

In order to see the vision of the City of God, Dante's eyes must drink of the water that cleanses him of human frailty. This water, symbol of cleansing grace, is found also in Paul's episode, in the words of Ananias:

At ille dixit: Deus patrem nostrorum praeordinavit te, ut cognoscere voluntatem eius, et videres iustum, et audires vocem ex ore eius: quia eris testis illius ad omnes homines eorum quae vidisti et audisti. Et nunc quid moraris? Exsurge, et baptizare, et ablue peccata tua, invocato nomen ipsius. (Acts 22: 14-16)

In Paradiso XXX water is again a central symbol, as in Purgatorio XXXI where Dante is immersed in the river Lethe by Matelda. That immersion purified him of his sins, and the drinking of it took away the memory of those sins. As Dante heard the words from Psalm 50:9, "Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor," he was absolved of all his sins, moving nearer to the reign of the blessed.

As the river of light assumes a circular form, the flowers and the sparks take on human forms. The blessed souls and the angels, in assuming their proper shape, stand in brilliant contrast to the damned and the devils of the city of Dis. The poet thus has the opportunity to see assembled in a circumference all the souls, not only in their human form, but also in the glory of Heaven. Nevertheless, even though he has overcome the obstacle of the blinding light, he still needs God's help to describe "l'alto triunfo del regno verace":

O isplendor di Dio, per cu'io vidi
 l'alto triunfo del regno verace,
 dammi virtù a dir com'io il vidi!
 Lume è là su che visibile face
 lo creatore a quella creatura
 che solo in lui veder ha la sua pace.
 E' sì distende in circular figura,
 in tanto che la sua circonferenza
 sarebbe al sol troppo larga cintura.
 Fassi di raggio tutta sua parvenza
 riflesso al sommo del mobile primo,
 che prende quindi vivere e potenza.
 E come clivo in acqua di suo imo
 si specchia, quasi per vedersi addorno.
 quando è nel verde e ne' fioretti opimo,
 sì, soprastando al lume intorno, intorno,
 vide specchiarsi in più di mille soglie
 quanto di noi là su fatto ha ritorno
 E se l'infimo grado in sé raccoglie
 sì grande lume, quanta è la larghezza
 di questa rosa ne l'estreme foglie
 La vista mia ne l'ampio e ne l'altezza
 non si smarriava, ma tutto prendeva
 il quanto e 'l quale di quella allegrezza. (97-120)

The first mention of the Rose stands in direct contrast to "la città dolente." The magnitude of the Rose cannot be expressed in human terms, yet Dante can see it because he is now beyond time and space. It is only by keeping this in mind that the reader will not commit the error of considering the enormous dimensions of the Rose as in "stridente contraddizione con la verosimiglianza storica e morale," of which Porena speaks in his commentary on Paradiso XXXII.² The dimensions of Paradise cannot be given. The poet simply intends to convey a parallel or comparable image for the vastness, magnitude, and splendor of this realm. By saying "piú di mille soglie," the author is clearly expressing the idea of infinity and perfection.³

First a distinction has to be made between this description and the description of the flower by St. Bernard. Later, when Bernard didactically delineates the division of the Rose, its dimensions will be reduced to a human level so that the reader can perceive the order and the disposition of this heavenly city. Only then will the poet use a precise geometric structure. These are two different moments bound in the same image but conceived in different temporal and spatial terms. What is found here, however, is an inverse operation. Dante breaks down Paradise into different heavens and then gives its total view in the Empyrean. The infinite dimensions of Paradise are consistent with the theological dogma of God's infinity. The representation of Paradise arises from Dante's special privilege of seeing Paradise "sensibilmente," having to transmit it this way to the reader.

In Paradiso XXX Beatrice leads the poet to the "yellow" of the Rose, "nel giallo de la rosa sempiterna" (v. 124). (Let us recall that yellow, in chromatic symbolism, is the color of divinity, and white that of

humanity, as exemplified in the dual nature of Christ. Yellow, according to Alanus de Insulis, is the color of Theology. Moreover, the keys of the angel in Purgatory are yellow. The sacred letters are yellow, human letters, white.) There Dante, by looking upward, has a total vision of the Rose. Beatrice points to an empty throne on which a crown rests. This throne was preassigned to Emperor Henry VII, whose mission, according to the poet's political and theological philosophy, was to save Italy; Italy, however, was not ready:

E 'n quel gran seggio a che tu li occhi tieni
per la corona che già v'è sù posta,
prima che tu a queste nozze ceni
sederà l'alma, che fia giù agosta,
de l'alto Arrigo, ch'a drizzare Italia
verrà in prima ch'ella sia disposta. (133-138)

Beatrice, moreover, informs Dante that the seats of this city are almost all occupied:

Vedi nostra città quant'ella gira;
vedi li nostri scanni sì ripieni,
che poca gente più ci si disira. (128-132)

When Beatrice says "li nostri scanni," she is indicating that section occupied by the blessed souls of the New Testament. This point, however, can only be clarified when the structure of the Rose is examined.

Canto XXXI contains the formal introduction to the Rose:

In forma dunque di candida rosa
mi si mostrava la milizia santa
che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa. (1-3)

The poet is overcome by the beauty of the vision. The host of angels, in their constant flight between God and the blessed souls, do not obstruct his vision, for in their purity they are transparent. Nothing can impede divine light:

Né l'interporsi tra 'l disopra e 'l fiore
di tanta moltitudine volante
impediva la vista e lo splendore;

che la luce divina è penetrante
 per l'universo secondo ch'è degno,
 sì che nulla le puote essere ostante.
 Questo sicuro e gaudioso regno,
 frequente in gente antica e in novella,
 viso e amore avea tutto ad un segno. (19-27)

In front of such splendor the poet is overcome by marvel, similar to that of the pilgrim at the sight of the long-yearned-for sanctuary. While Dante is in this silent moment of contemplation, Beatrice disappears. As he is about to ask her some questions, he realizes that she has left and that her place has been taken by an elder, who identifies himself as St. Bernard. Dante simultaneously has three distinct reactions. He feels gratitude for Beatrice, the person he loved in human terms, who has brought him to the understanding of true love, and who has finally led him to this point of sublime contemplation and rapture. Thus Beatrice, typus Spiritus Sancti, has fulfilled her role. As she smiles at him from her throne on the third tier, the poet in gratitude expresses his feelings toward her

O donna in cui la mia speranza vige,
 e che soffristi per la mia salute
 in inferno lasciar le tue vestige,
 di tante cose quat'i' ho vedute,
 dal tuo podere e da la tua bontate
 riconosco la grazia e la virtute.
 Tu m'hai di servo tratto a libertate
 per tutte quelle vie, per tutt'i modi
 che di ciò fare avei la potestate
 La tua magnificenza in me custodi,
 sì che l'anima mia, che fatt'hai sana,
 piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi. (79-90)

The second reaction is triggered by the appearance of St. Bernard. Dante has barely finished expressing his love and gratitude for Beatrice when a new overpowering feeling overcomes him by the sight of this saint. He compares his admiration and stupor to that of a pilgrim at the sight of St. Veronica's veil.

Immediately afterwards, Bernard tells the poet to look at the Virgin, who sits at the highest tier. Mary's glory, her radiance, surpasses that of all the blessed. Her smiling beauty transmits happiness to all the blessed souls. The poet cannot but fix his gaze on her, warmly and admiringly:

Vidi a lor giochi quivi e a lor canti
ridere una belleza, che letizia
era ne li occhi a tutti li altri santi;
e s'io avessi in dir tanta divizia
quanta ad imaginar, non ardirei
lo minimo tentar di sua delizia.
Bernardo, come vide li occhi miei
nel caldo suo caler fissi e attenti,
li suoi con tanto affetto volse a lei,
che 'miei di rimirar fé piu ardenti. (133-142)

This gradatio of admiration, which goes from Beatrice to Bernard and culminates with the Virgin Mary, can be considered as the gradatio to beatitude, where human emotions are relinquished in the pursuit of the highest goal. Beatrice's disappearance is painful to the poet, yet it is this very disappearance that brings him closer to the supreme vision. Dante has already learned from Beatrice, in Purgatorio XXX and XXXI, how he chose the wrong way in turning his back on her:

Sí tosto come in su la soglia fui
di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,
questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui. (Purg. XXX, 124-126)

The disappearance of Beatrice coincides with Dante's surrender of human emotions; he serenely calls her "il sol de li occhi miei," and "sol" here is divine light. It is the same light which has guided him on his journey and which now liberates him from the servitude of human life. The words that he uses in praising Beatrice form images of eternity, true love and true life. Beatrice's reaction is one of satisfaction. She smiles and looks at him, but immediately turns to the "eternal fountain":

Cosí orai; e quella, sí lontana
 come pareva, sorrise e riguardommi;
 poi si tornò a l'eterna fontana. (91-93)

The mutual acquisition of confidence, on the part of Beatrice for the poet, whom she now considers ready to approach the final vision, and of Dante in himself for having obtained her confidence, is reflected in Beatrice's fleeting smile and in the poet's apostrophe to her.

In Virgil's departure in the Purgatorio, Dante experienced a sense of loss in very human terms, the loss of a father. His reaction was also quite human: he wept. In Beatrice's departure, however, he experiences the joy in the knowledge that this is the preliminary step to the beatific vision. Beatrice, in fact, warns him against his human emotions and tells him not to cry, for he must cry "per altra spada":

Ma Virgilio n'avea lasciati scemi
 di sé, Virgilio dolcissimo patre,
 Virgilio a cui per mia salute die'mi;
 né quantunque perdeo l'antica matre,
 valse a le guance nette di rugiada
 che, lagrimando, non tornasser atre.
 "Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada,
 non pianger anco, non piangere ancora;
 ché pianger ti convien per altra spada". (Purg. XXX, 49-57)

The role of St. Bernard as Dante's last guide assumes great importance for the poet's final movement in his itinerarium ad Deum. For Bernard is the only one who can intercede with Mary, being her most devoted servant, so that Dante can attain the grace of God's vision -- the ultimate peace and sanctity. Bernard alone can be the final guide for the poet's contemplation and ecstasy. He is, as Sarolli says, a typus Trinitatis who corresponds to the anagogical sense, completing the triad of the "movitori."⁵

This analogy refutes the body of criticism that attributed a non-essential role to Bernard. Vincenzo Pernicone, to cite only one critic,

reduces Bernard's function to that of "efficace orante" toward the Virgin. He maintains that Bernard cannot really add anything essential to Dante's mission and that any other blessed soul could be Bernard's substitute. Thus, according to the critic, Bernard's presence was "una soluzione poetica che ha consentito a Dante la sublime adorazione di Beatrice nel canto XXXI,"⁶

This kind of criticism is simplistic and fallacious, for it does not take into account the figural interpretation nor its analogia Trinitatis; neither does it take into account the more obvious function provided explicitly in the text that Bernard assumed "libero officio di dottore," and that his words are "sante" (Par. XXXII, 2-3). Although Bernard does not offer the detailed theological dissertations given by Virgil and Beatrice, he does give the blessed their positions; he identifies them by name and then explains the position theologically, and the reasons for the presence of children in the lower section of the Rose. St. Bernard, in fact, cannot be replaced. There is no other saint who could have introduced the poet to the Virgin. Bernard was Mary's devout servant, the one who loved her most. As E.G. Gardner says, Dante's admiration for Bernard was based on three things: the saint's reformation of ecclesiastical discipline, his mystical and inner life which he based on the Song of Solomon, and his devoted servitude to Mary.⁷

Paradiso XXX and XXXI, then, establish a number of essential points for the understanding of the Symbolic Rose. One of the most important points is that Dante is stationed "nel giallo della rosa sempiterna" (XXX, 124). He does not move from there while he is admiring the blessed. He simply moves his eyes, as confirmed in the following verses:

su per la viva luce passeggiando,
menava io li occhi per li gradi,
mo sù, mo giù e mo recirculando. (XXXI, 46-48)

Sanza risponder, li occhi sù levai,
e vidi lei che sì facea corona
reflettendo da sé li eterni rai. (70-72)

vola con li occhi per questo giardino;
ché veder lui t'acconcerà lo sguardo
più al montar per lo raggio divino. (97-99)

Dante's ascension will continue after the prayer to the Virgin in canto XXXIII. Meanwhile his vision of the Rose is not impaired by anything; it is clear and total, as stated in verses 118-120 of canto XXX. Even the constant movement of the Angels presents no obstacle to his view.

As St. Bernard begins his orderly lesson on the distribution of the blessed souls in canto XXXII, one must draw a geometric figure in order to establish the exact position of the various blessed, and in order to follow the subdivision of the Rose as given by St. Bernard (see Drawing #1).

We have already learned that Mary is seated at the highest circle (XXXI, 112-17). Below Mary is seated Eve, her theological opposite, as in the traditional Ave -- Eva (also Adamo -- Cristo). Dante makes use of much of his poetic art by noting Eve's position in a very compact *terzina* where the persona is identified through a periphrasis:

La piaga che Maria richiuse e unse,
quella ch'è tanto bella da' suoi piedi
è colei che l'aperse e che la punse. (4-6)

In these three verses there is a theological lesson, a physical description, and the position of the two women. First there is the wound, the original sin; then Mary, who tended and healed it, the alliterative "richiuse e unse." We are then given the woman's beauty, in contrast to her sin, and her position below Mary. Finally, Eve is

identified not by her own name, but through a rhetorical device which, with two verbs, enables the poet to narrate the famous episode of Genesis. It is a magnificent sketch, with which a Cimabue or a Giotto could have created a little masterpiece. The four verbs in contrast -- "richiuse, unse, aperse, punse" -- are perfect in their alliteration and assonance. The descriptive immediacy of these verses is further evidence against the many critics who maintain that there is no poetry in this canto.

Below Eve, on the third row, sits Rachel, says Bernard, with Beatrice at her side:

Ne l'ordine che fanno i terzi sedi,
siede Rachele di sotto da costei
con Beatrice, sì come tu vedi. (7-9)

At this stage, whether Beatrice sits on Rachel's left or right side, the reader does not know. This is determined by a latter clarification. Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth follow in the seating arrangement under the above women (10-15).

Ruth, the last woman mentioned by the poet, is introduced through a periphrasis in which another major persona is alluded to, namely, King David. Two personae are introduced, but as in the prior case of Mary and Eve, the device allows the poet to place greater emphasis on this major character. David is the perfect king, a typus Christi, a figural prefiguration of Christ. The felicitous intuition of David's importance is given to us by Sarolli:

E come già nella remota ma sempre presente storia del popolo eletto, -- il Medioevo, ed è comune nozione, ebbe altissimo il senso della continuità e non quello della prospettiva storica --, alla disobbedienza di Saul eran seguiti la perdita del regno e la morte, e l'avvento di Davide e del regno sempiterno per prefigurazione, così ora alla disobbedienza di Alberto tedesco, novello Saul, avrebbe dovuto corrispondere l'avvento del novello Davide, il cui

figlio, novello Salomone, come l'antico, affidato al
novello Natan e al novello Sadoc, avrebbe riportato
l'umanita allo stato edenico, alla Pax Romana.

Within this context David's figura is of extreme importance. It is quite significant that Dante has chosen the occasion in which Ruth is mentioned to emphasize David, including him indirectly among the blessed of the Rose.

Before proceeding to the structural significance of the women in the geometric design of the Rose, an observation must be made on the terms "soglia" and "foglia" in the following verses:

Sarra e Rebecca, Iudit e colei
che fu bisava al cantor che per doglia
del fallo disse 'Misere mei,'
puoi tu veder così di soglia in soglia
giù digradar, com'io ch'a proprio nome
vo per la rosa giù di foglia in foglia. (10-15)

"Soglia: means "scan, step." "Foglia" means "seat." The poet uses the latter interchangeably as "petal," thus remaining within the floral terminology. The former, instead, is used to render very clearly the fact that there are various descending and circular steps.

The women mentioned by Dante occupy seven seats. One does not know the total number of women forming this row or dividing wall. What is certain is that they are all Hebrew and that the ones mentioned are Mary, Eve, Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth:

E dal settimo grado in giù sí come
infino ad esso, succedono Ebree,
dirimendo del fior tutte le chiome;
perche, secondo lo sguardo che fée
la fede in Cristo, queste sono il muro
a che si parton le sacre scalee. (16-21)

This row of women, therefore, divide the rose in the middle, providing the central division for the blessed of the New and Old Testaments. On the side where all the seats are taken, "onde il fiore e maturo," are

the blessed of the Old Testament. On the other side are the blessed of the New Testament; this side is not yet full:

Da questa parte onde 'l fiore è maturo
di tutte le sue foglie, sono assisi
quei che credettero in Cristo venturo;
da l'altra parte onde sono intercisi
di voti i semicirculi, si stanno
quei ch'a Cristo venuto ebber li visi. (22-27)⁸

The reader cannot fail to notice that the seats are now referred to as "semicirculi," and with good reason. For if this realm is conceived in the shape of a rose, and the seats in the form of petals, it is evident that when one looks at a row of petals, one behind the other, it is not possible to view the whole petal, only half of it or part of it; one sees only a semicircle. This is an additional proof that Dante follows a geometric design and a mathematical pattern in the description of the residence of the blessed. Everything is arranged according to the principle of order and harmony.

Concerning the structure of the Rose there are, at this point, two indications which help determine the exact position of the beatified as it relates to Bernard and Dante. The saint says that the blessed of the Old Testament are "da questa parte"; while those of the New Testament are "da l'altra parte." Keeping in mind that the two are looking at the blessed souls from the calix of the flower, as stated in canto XXX (123-128), one cannot but conclude that "da questa parte" signifies the speaker's right. The speaker is St. Bernard, who appeared to the poet as soon as Beatrice disappeared, so that he (Bernard) also is "nel giallo de la rosa." Consequently "da l'altra parte" means Bernard's left. In the final analysis, all this shows that the blessed of the Old Testament are placed at Mary's left, Mary being seated on the first throne of the

dividing wall constituted by the Hebrew women. The blessed of the New Testament are at Mary's right,

Having established the above, one can say with certainty that Beatrice sits at Rachel's right side, and also Mary's right side. Beatrice does not belong to the group forming the dividing wall, since she is seated next to Rachel. But Dante must give her position: to have named her by herself would have broken the symmetry present here. The blessed, in fact, are named in groups. Moreover, by naming her along with Rachel, the poet declares that Beatrice sits on the third row, hierarchically very close to Mary.

As St. Bernard proceeds, the Rose begins to assume a more definite shape. A close reading of Bernard's words is very important here, for one is dealing with an architectural construction based on a geometrical design. When the saint affirms that John the Baptist and, below him, Francis of Assisi, Benedict, and Augustine form the dividing wall corresponding on the opposite side to that of the Hebrew women, their position depends upon a correct rendering of the words "quinci" and "di contra":

E come quinci il glorioso scanno
de la donna del cielo e li altri scanni
di sotto lui cotanta cerna fanno,
cosí di contra quel del gran Giovanni,
che sempre santo 'l deserto e 'l martiro
sofferse, e poi l'inferno da due anni;
e sotto lui cosí cerner sortiro
Francesco, Benedetto e Augustino
e altri fin qua giú di giro in giro. (28-36)

On one side there is a row of women. Directly opposite there is a row of men headed by the Baptist, as is shown in Drawing # 2. The intersecting diameter vertically divides the circumference in two. The essential issue is that Mary and St. John the Baptist are directly

opposite each other, being on opposite ends of the diameter. Since Bernard is the speaker, and he is in the calix of the Rose, "quinci" means: from this side, his right side; and "di contra" means: from this other side, his left.

This basic distinction is necessary to determine the position of the other blessed subsequently mentioned by St. Bernard. It establishes the positional significance of the blessed who sit opposite each other. If a line were to be drawn between the blessed souls who sit facing each other, that line would be the diameter.

St. Bernard goes on to explain that the Rose is horizontally cut in half. In the lower part are seated children, who were saved not through their own merit but by Christ alone. This additional division creates another dimension of the Rose. It can now be stated that the Rose is divided by two diameters, vertically and horizontally, into four parts, in the shape of a cross.⁹ It is well known that the shape of the cross is found in many ground plans of churches and cathedrals.

In the upper part of the Rose are found the adults of the New and Old Testaments; in the lower part, the children of the Old and New Testaments. Both sides will be filled equally. Even before the total structure is completed, it is evident that the figure delineated by Bernard is based on a design; the reader is compelled to draw it for himself. This kind of reading does not at all detract from the poetic beauty, rather it enhances it.

After a theological dissertatio on the problem presented by the children's presence, and after the introduction of the Archangel Gabriel, St. Bernard completes the structure of the Rose by naming some additional blessed souls:

Quei due che seggon là sù piú felici
 per esser propinquissimi ad Augusta,
 son d'esta rosa quasi due radici:
 \ colui che da sinistra le s'aggiusta
 è 'l padre per lo cui ardito gusto
 l'umana specie tanto amaro gusta;
 dal destro vedi quel padre vetusto
 di Santa Chiesa a cui Cristo le chiavi
 raccomandò di questo fior venusto.
 E quei che vide tutti i tempi gravi,
 pria che morisse, de la bella sposa
 che s'acquisto con la lancia e coi clavi,
 siede lung'h'esso, e lungo l'altro posa
 quel duca sotto cui visse di manna
 la gente ingrata, mobile e retrosa.
 Di contr'a Pietro vedi sedere Anna,
 tanto contenta di mirar sua figlia,
 che non move occhio per cantare osanna;
 e contro al maggior padre di famiglia
 siede Lucia, che mosse la tua donna
 quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia. (118-138)

The two roots of the Rose are Adam and Peter, who, due to their proximity to Mary, enjoy a higher degree of happiness. Adam sits at Mary's left, Peter at her right. Next to Peter sits John the Evangelist. Next to Adam sits Moses. The fundamental problem concerns the position of Anna, Mary's mother, and Lucia. The poet simply states that Anna sits "di contr'a Pietro" and Lucia "contro al maggior padre de famiglia." There should not be any quarrel as to the meaning of these phrases. They give the position of the two ladies as being directly in front of Peter and Adam. More precisely the two women are diagonally opposite the two men. As seen in Drawing # 4, this would place Anna on the side of the Old Testament and Lucia on the side of the New. And that is where they rightly belong.

A problem arises if this fundamental distinction is misinterpreted. Russi's position, which is an oversight on his part, is that Anna sits at John the Baptist's left, thus in the New Testament section; and that Lucia sits on his right, thus placing her in the Old Testament.¹⁰ If

this were so, the order of the blessed would certainly be erroneous, since Lucia cannot possibly be in the Old Testament section. Russi, furthermore, believes that even if one were to inverse the position of the two women, Dante would still be in error because Anna does not belong to the Old Testament. Russi's solution is that Dante has placed Lucia in the Old Testament section based on her allegorical meaning, as a symbol of illuminating grace, thus disregarding her historical meaning:

Lucia non è lì in rappresentanza privata ma simbolo della grazia illuminante, senza la quale non ci sarebbe stata la salvezza di nessuno dei credenti in Cristo venturo. Dante si è qui talmente concentrato sul significato allegorico, che ha addirittura perso di vista la biografia del personaggio.¹¹

This is simply a false deduction based on the distorted notion that Anna is among the blessed of the New Testament and Lucia among those of the Old Testament. Russi commits this error by not drawing a geometrical figure, which the poet undoubtedly did. Such a drawing offers clear and conclusive evidence of the correct position of the blessed souls as intended by Dante.

Furthermore, it is absurd to declare that Dante disregarded Lucia's literal meaning when one is aware of the Letter to Can Grande in which the poet explicitly states that the first meaning is the one obtained through the letter.

The point of departure of Russi's analysis is verse 31, where John the Baptist's position is given: "così di contra quel del gran Giovanni." This critic argues that if "di contra" is interpreted as meaning "directly opposite" or "diametrically opposite," then the Baptist is directly opposite Mary. And rightly so. Consequently the "di contra" and "contro" of verses 133 and 136 do have a similar meaning and place Anna and Lucia diametrically opposite Peter and Adam. Thus, Russi concludes that:

I beati non sono gli uni di fronte agli altri su due linee parallele; ma sono disposti in circoli e qui si tratta del primo, il più alto. Ora, l'unico modo per essere di fronte in un circolo è di trovarsi agli estremi dello stesso diametro.¹²

To be sure, if such is the interpretation, Anna will be found at the Baptist's left, directly opposite Peter, and Lucia on the other side, opposite Adam. But Russi has neglected to consider that the diameter of a circle is that straight line which passes through the center of the circle. The diametrical line can only be applied to the position of Mary and John the Baptist, who are at the center of the two semicircles. Peter and Adam, as well as Anna and Lucia, are not at the center of the two semicircles. The only way to draw a line connecting these four blessed, one diagonally opposite the other, is to draw diagonal lines, which in this case would be radii; namely, the straight lines which are extended from the center to the periphery of the sphere (Drawing # 5). This can be illustrated, for example, by the spokes in a wheel, as well as in the rose-windows of Gothic cathedrals. The resulting geometric figure is an octagon.

There is absolutely no doubt that Dante's intention is to place Anna diagonally opposite Peter, thus in the Old Testament section; and Lucia diagonally opposite Adam, in the New Testament. The poet has not made an error, nor committed an oversight. He has not placed Lucia according to her allegorical meaning, and he has not broken the perfect order he declares present in this kingdom:

Dentro a l'ampiezza di questo reame
casual punto non puote aver sito,
se non come tristizia o sete o fame:
ché per etterna legge è stabilito
quantunque vedi, sí che giustamente
ci si risponde da l'anello al dito; (52-58)

To accuse Dante of having made such a blatant error, as Russi proposes -- because he might be tired after such a long journey, and thus vulnerable to uncertainties and oversights -- is to violate the text, and to impose superficially and unjustly a viewpoint which disregards the text.

Regarding Antonio Russi's second argument, if indeed it is one, that even if Anna were to be placed in the Old Testament section, the poet would still have committed an error because both Anna and Lucia belong to the New Testament -- nothing could be more false. Neither one can be sitting on the Baptist's right, as Russi would say. The only solution left to Russi is that Lucia is placed according to her symbolic meaning, that of "grace," but he does not give any theological proof of Lucia as such a symbol. By doing this, he places Lucia in the Old Testament section.

There is no doubt, on the contrary, that Anna belongs to the Old Testament. There is absolutely no mention of Anna in the New Testament. The only source of information regarding her is in the Apocrypha, the Protoevangelium, also known as the Book of James, attributed to the 2nd Century and said to be well known in the Orient.

According to the Protoevangelium, Anna, which in Hebrew means "grace," was one of three daughters fathered by Mathan, a Bethlehemite priest. Her sisters Mary and Sobe married two Bethlehemites and bore daughters: the former bore Elizabeth (the Baptist's mother), and the latter bore Maria Salome. Anna married Joachim, who was Galilean. She was sterile and conceived late in life. Both Anna and Joachim died soon after Mary's birth. In historical terms, therefore, Anna died before Christ was born.¹³ This dispels any doubt that Anna belongs to the Old

Testament.¹⁴

In J.P. migne's Patrologia Cursus Completus, moreover, Anna appears in the "Index Figurarum Veteri Testamenti," and is designated as a typus Ecclesiae.¹⁵ Anna does belong to the Old Testament, as Curtius himself asserts when discussing the "Personnel of the Commedia":

The poem ends with a corporation of the blessed -- eight¹⁶ of the Old Covenant and seven of the New (Par. XXXII). Both groups form an "elite within the elite." The canon of Old Testament worthies (Adam, Moses, Eve, Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, Ruth, Anna) surprises us because women preponderate and the prophets are not represented.¹⁷

The two arguments advanced against Antonio Russi's supposition and unfounded intent to destroy the order of this "vast kingdom" are evident. It is absurd to maintain that Dante -- who has so carefully constructed the cathedral he named Commedia, and being nearest to God -- would commit such a fundamental error as misplacing Anna and Lucia. It is even more absurd to conceive that such a mistake was made because of poetic fatigue and distraction, as Russi would seem to imply. Just as Dante carefully constructed his poem by following mathematical and geometric patterns, he also constructed and designed the Rose.

The reader must do the same. In doing so, he will not fail to see that, in a circumference which has eight points of reference, the number of the blessed in the first circle of the Rose, the indications "di contra" and "contro" mean: diagonally opposite and on the same line, as the radii of the circumference.¹⁸ In following this design one will see that Anna sits diagonally opposite Peter and is at an end of the radius of which Peter forms the opposite end. Similarly Lucia sits diagonally opposite Adam. Thus Anna is in the section of the Old Covenant, and Lucia in that of the New. By doing this, the perfect order maintained

and professed by Dante is not disrupted.

It must be pointed out that as early as Inferno II, Virgil gives Beatrice's position as next to Rachel, when he informs Dante that it was Mary who summoned Lucia to send Beatrice to the poet's rescue (vv. 94-102). As early as Inferno II, Dante had designed and constructed the Rose. This fact can be seen by the structural correlation and antithesis of Inferno and Paradiso. If one includes the Vestibule of Hell, one will find that the total number of Circles is 10 (1+9), which corresponds, in malo, to the 10 Heavens of Paradiso, in bono. There is no doubt that the Vestibule should be included, since it is occupied by those sinners called "ignavi," or "the futile." A similar structure is found in the Purgatorio, where the seven "gironi" are preceded by three divisions in the Antipurgatorio: Terrace I, Terrace II, and the Valley of the Negligent Princes. The three Cantiche, therefore, have a structural division based on the number 10. To this is added the subdivision of Circle VIII of Hell, the Fraudulents, which has 10 "bolgie."

The perfect structure of the Commedia does not allow, as has been shown, that the corresponding order be destroyed in the City of the Blessed. Thus, to conclude, the first circle of the Rose has eight blessed people (Mary, Peter, John the Evangelist, Lucia, John the Baptist, Adam, Moses and Anna). The total number of the blessed whose position is given in the Rose is 18, including Beatrice (the above mentioned plus: Eve, Rachel, Beatrice, Sara, Rebecca, Judith, Ruth, St. Francis, St. Benedict and St. Augustine). By adding the presence of St. Bernard and that of Henry VII, whose positions are not determined exactly but who are definitely there, one would have a total number of 20. The number eight is a symbol of eternal life; ten is "perfectio" and "plenitudo sanctorum";

18 is a number signifying the Church; 20 symbolizes the two Decalogues. But of number symbolism I will write in a later chapter. Let us now consider the personae who are found in the Rose.

Footnotes

Chapter II

¹ See also 9, 3-19, and 22, 6-16.

² M. Porena, La Divina Commedia, op. cit., p. 318.

³ The number one thousand, according to medieval numerical symbolism, is the number of the "perfectionem beatitudinis" and "perfectionem retributionis," as Ramanus Maurus states in his De numero: "Millenarius numerus beatitudinis significat... pro cuius fructu ipse vir affert mille argenteos, hoc est, perfectionem retributionis." P.L. 111, col. 493.

⁴ For the chromatism of the angels in the *Commedia* and for angelology itself, the reader can consult the articles of Attilio Mellone and Fernando Salsano in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* and the M.A. thesis of Ausberto Gonzalez, The Problem of Angelology in Dante's Works (Hunter College, 1975).

⁵ G.R. Sarolli, Prolegomena, pp. 150-151.

⁶ Lectura Dantis Romana (Torino: Societa Editrice Internazionale, 1965), p. 8.

⁷ E.G. Gardner, Dante and the Mystics (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1913), p. 128.

⁸ I must point out Dante's continuous use of floral images, as shown in these verses, and the beauty of such images which again contradict some critics who do not attribute any poetic beauty to this canto. It is not my intention to take this up as a separate theme, but I shall comment on it when necessary.

⁹ See Drawing #3 and plate #1 of Francesco di Giorgio, where a human figure is contained within the ground plan of a church.

¹⁰ Lectura Dantis Scaligera, op. cit., pp. 1137-90.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 1187.

¹² Ibid., pp. 1178-79.

¹³ Bibliotheca Sanctorum (Roma: Istituto Giovanni XXIII, Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1961), I, p. 1270. See also Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, E.R. Pike ed. (New York, Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1958). In Jacobus de Voragine's Golden Legend, there is no mention made of Joachim and Anna after they brought Mary to the temple at age three. All information concerning Mary's parents is found under the story of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. Cfr. The Golden Legend of

Jacobus de Voragine, Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger trans. (New York, London, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969), pp. 519-30.

¹⁴ Dante mentions Joachim only in Conv. II, v, 2.

¹⁵ P.L. 219, Indices II, col. 247.

¹⁶ The total number should be nine, an involuntary lapsus. The original reads: "...acht Selige des Alten und sieben des Neuen Bundes." See Europäische Literatur Und Lateinisches Mittelalter (Bern und München: Francke Verlag, 1963), p. 371.

¹⁷ E.R. Curtius, op. cit., p. 367.

¹⁸ In Purgatorio X, 69, we have another example where "di contra" means directly opposite:

Di contra, effigiata ad una vista
d'un gran palazzo, Micòl ammirava
sì come donna dispettosa e trista.

Chapter III

The Personae of the Rose

Part I: The Hebrew Women

In examining the personae of the Rose, or to use Curtius' term, the "corporatism of the blessed," it is necessary to engage in a dual analysis: each blessed soul as an individual with his literal and symbolic meaning, and the blessed souls as a group within the context of the "corporatism of the Middle Ages." Curtius qualifies this corporatism as applied to Dante, and suggests that much more investigation is needed in order to obtain the full meaning of each individual blessed soul and of the group to which it belongs, because Dante enlarges the symbolical significance through his addition of numerical symbolism:

The division of the personnel of the Commedia into groups can suggest the corporative social forms of the Middle Ages only in those categories which correspond to the natural order of souls according to their value and quality. Where that order is perverted, as in Hell, another principle of grouping and arrangement must enter in: the (Aristotelian) classification of sins and sinners, which can be combined with the enumeration of exempla of some vice. But to this Dante also adds something of his own: As far as possible he assigns to each class a symbolically significant number of sinners. We pay no attention to such things, because numerical symbolism is something of which we no longer know more than the most rudimentary details. Even the commentators on the Commedia seldom analyze its structural principles (they have enough to do with explaining facts and giving "aesthetic" appreciations). But it is clear that precisely this kind of analysis permits us a glimpse into Dante's conception of art.¹

This dual analysis enables the reader to transcend the purely superficial assembly of names, and to penetrate the intentio auctoris. Curtius himself, after having illustrated how important it is to analyze the "Personnel of the Commedia," indicates that much more is demanded of us. Starting from this invitation, I shall attempt to probe the deeper meaning of these blessed souls.

The first group introduced to the reader by St. Bernard in Paradiso XXXII is the row of Hebrew women, at whose head is the Virgin. Mary is the principal character of the Symbolic Rose. At this point of the journey, the poet confronts Mary in her full perfection. His journey has now come full circle, for it was Mary who, at the beginning of the trip, took pity on him and sent rescue:

Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compiange
di questo 'mpedimento ov'io ti mando
sì che duro guidicio là sù frange. (Inf. II, 94-96)

And it is through Mary that the final mission is completed and gloriously accomplished. Mary's name could not be mentioned in the realm of sin; now, however, in Paradise, she appears in all her glory. She has rescued the poet and brought him, her son, to the heavenly Jerusalem, thus accomplishing her mission in accordance with Catholic dogma. As H.F. Dunbar says:

The Blessed Virgin, most glorious of creatures, alone
may prepare Dante for the ultimate vision.²

Mary, being the queen of this city, determines its symbolical representation, a white rose, as established by Church tradition. Through Mary the chromatic phytomorphic symbolism provides a unity of expression. She is the white rose that gave birth to the Son of God.³ The rose as symbol of Paradise, Christ, martyrdom and Mary, is well established and well known in Christian legends and tradition:

La rose ne fut pas seulement considérée par les écrivains mystiques du moyen âge comme la parure et l'ornement du paradis et du ciel, ils la regardèrent encore comme le prix de toute action noble et belle, l'emblème de ce qu'il y avait de plus auguste et de plus vénéré dans les croyances chrétiennes. C'est ainsi qu'elle devient le symbole et l'apanage de la Vierge et du Christ.⁴

According to Peter of Mora there are three mystic roses: the first is red and good, "est chorus martyrum"; the second is white and better, "Virgo Virginum"; the third, red and white, is excellent, "mediator Dei et hominum."⁵ In the Middle Ages, however, the rose is more frequently associated with Mary, as Joret states:

Mais quelque habituelle que soit la comparaison de Jésus et de sa passion avec une rose, la comparaison de la Vierge avec cette fleur se rencontre encore plus fréquemment au moyen âge.⁶

In fact, the tradition of the rose symbolizing Mary is very rich and was undoubtedly accessible to Dante. Adam of St. Victor, in his liturgical poems, greets Mary thus: "Ave, rosa / speciosa. / Rosa sine spina."⁷ And St. Bernard states that Mary is a white rose because of her virginity, whereas Eve is a thorn:

... et Maria de spinoso et hispido Judaeorum populo et arido procreata est, qui utique spinosus detractioe hispidus superstitione, aridus fuit unctione divinae gratiae. Unde spinosus spineam coronam Regi suo exhibuit, et in eum sicut ignis in spinis exarsit. Sethim enim interpretatur spineae. Aliter Eva spina, Rosa Maria... Eva ergo spina fuit, Maria rosa exstitit! Eva spina, vulnerando; Maria rosa omnium affectus nullo. Eva spina, infingens omnibus mortem: Maria rosa, reddens salutiferam omnibus sortem... Maria autem rosa fuit candida per verginitatem, rubicunda per charitatem; candida, carne; rubicunda, mente; candida virtutem sectando; rubicunda, vitia calcando; candida, affectum purificando; rubicunda, actum carnalem mortificando; candida, Deum diligendo; rubicunda, proximo compatiendo.⁸

The Virgin, then, had become a rose. And while Eve gave us death because of the original sin, Mary gave us life and hope.

Hugh of St. Victor, who also forms part of this tradition, refers to Mary as: "Rosa rubicunda, odorifera, speciosa ex spinis nascitur."⁹ He adds that she is "calida in semine," a fertility image which, when applied to the Rose of Paradise, exemplifies Mary as the generator of the warmth transmitted to the blessed souls. Through her, divine light emanates; its warmth makes this flower blossom.

St. Ambrose describes Mary as a rose without thorn, and St. Hildegard describes the valuable benefits of the rosa centifolia:

Surrexerat ante floribus immixta terrenis sine spinis
rosa, et pulcherrimus flos sine ulla fraude vernabat:
postea spina sepsit gratiam floris, tamquam humanae
speculum praeferens vitae, quae suavitatem perfunctionis
suae finitimis curarum stimulis saepe compungat.¹⁰

Sed et rosa ad potiones et ad unguenta atque ad omnia
medicamenta valet, si eis addatur; et tanto meliora
sunt, si eis aliquantum de rosa additum fuerit, quamvis
parum, hoc est de bonis viribus illius, ut praedicatum
est.¹¹

Walafrid Strabo, on the other hand, concludes his De Rosa by saying:

O mater virgo, fecunda germine mater,
Virga fide intacta, sponsi de nomina sponsa
Sponsa, columba, domus, regina, fidelis amica
Bello carpe rosas, laeta arripe lilia pace
Flos tibi sceptrigero venit generamine Jesse,
Unicus antiquae reparator stirpis et auctor.¹²

Mary is referred to as "Rosa florida, Rosa Paradisi" by Peter Damian, by Anselm, by Bernard and others.¹³ Adamus Perseniae in his Mariale calls her "Flos florum, Flos innocentiae, Rosarium gratiarum." Anselm names her "Flos aeternus," and Roudolphus Ardens calls her "Flos incomparabilis."¹³

The identification of the Virgin as a rose, and the symbolic image of the city of the blessed souls as a white rose assumes a vital significance when contrasted with the meaning attributed to the rose in medieval tradition. The rose was in fact not a symbol of purity but of sensual

love. The most representative poem of the Middle Ages containing this notion is Le Roman de La Rose. In this allegorical poem, love is sensual and the search of love takes place in a rose garden on a May day. Guillaume de Lorris, who wrote the first part of the poem in circa 1235, intended to create an ars amandi according to the codes of amour courtois. The Roman is a poem, as the author says, "ou l'art d'Amours est tote enclose."¹⁴ The object of love, the woman, is symbolized by a rose. Indeed this was not an original idea, for in the pre-Christian era the rose had been associated with woman as a fertility symbol, a symbol of birth and rebirth, or as a symbol of mother nature, of maternity and of mother country:

Certainly no other symbol than the rose could have better filled the complex modern need for affirmation, integration, and universality. Capable of bearing a vast range of meanings, the flower has symbolized man's happiest dreams for countless centuries. As a creation of beauty appearing in the spring, it has been associated with love and woman, concepts which have in turn been transposed to their religious equivalents, divine love and female fertility deities or Christ and the Virgin. The associations with women and female deities, reinforced by the flower's annual appearance after the barren winter season, have lead to further associations of the rose with ideas of motherhood and mother nature. From the concept of mother is is not a great step to the concept of the flower as a symbol of mother country, as it was used in ancient Gaul and is still used today in England and Ireland. But even more closely allied to mother are the ideas of birth and rebirth, both of wich have been symbolized by the rose, together with the joys of time or eternity to which the awakening soul has been born. Considered together, these associations with love, beauty, life, joy, creation, and eternity have made the rose relevant to all human ideals, whether the ideals be worldly or religious, personal or universal.¹⁵

Although the relation rose -- woman was not an original idea on the part of Guillaume de Loris, his attempt to bring earthly love closer to or to the same level as divine love is certainly original and innovative.

Jean de Meun, the second author of the Roman, is no idealist as Guillaume is. He shows little concern with courtly love. His 18,000 verses point to a totally new direction. He is very practical, realistic; he is didactic, for he discusses nature, power, government, economics, sociology, philosophy, everything that came to his mind or that he was interested in. This, then, was a didactic and cultural venture of his times. The rose and its symbolic meaning is well forgotten, or at least it does not assume its meaning as allegory of love. While Guillaume de Loris dreams of love and is inebriated with amour cortois, Jean de Meun wishes to enlighten his readers against love and the ideal of courtly love. He considers marriage and the notion of fidelity in courtly love both corrupt and useless. Women, according to Jean de Meun, create nothing but unhappiness. Courtly love, which held woman in the highest respect, almost to a religious point, is ridiculed by Jean, whose attitude is one of total disrespect:

Chez Jean de Meun le choses se présentent bien différemment. Tout cet édifice à la fois moral et sentimental n'est pour lui qu'une immense et ridicule illusion. L'amour, ainsi que le déclare Raison et comme le proclamera Genius à la fin du poème, n'est rien d'autre que l'imperieux instinct qui pousse les humains à s'unir; sa seule fin légitime est la procréation; son rôle, le maintien de l'espèce par le renouvellement des individus.¹⁶

One need only contrast with the world of Guillaume de Loris and Jean de Meun, the harmony, the charity, the purest love which reigns supreme in Dante's city of the blessed souls:

Vedea visi a carita suadi,
d'altrui lume fregiati e di suo riso,
e atti ornati di tutte onestadi. (Par. XXXI, 49-51)

The two authors of Le Roman were unable to reconcile heaven and earth. The concept of the "donna angelicata" will later be developed by the poets of the stil nuovo. But even Guinizelli's successful transformation

of earthly love into a nobler love -- the gentle hearts longing for a higher object of love -- was not the perfect synthesis. It was only with the Dante of the Commedia that the synthesis was achieved; "la donna amata," Beatrice, is totally different from the Beatrice of the Vita Nuova. Furthermore, with the heavenly Rose Dante changed the symbolic reference of the rose from an image of woman in general to an image of the Virgin Mary. As we know, Dante was also part of the rose -- woman, sensual love tradition. His Fiore consists of 232 sonnets based on the Roman de la Rose (it is taken from the narrative part, not the didactic or doctrinal one).¹⁷ In sonnet 230 l'Amante describes in explicit terms the deflowering of the woman:

Per più volte falli' a lui ficcare
 perciò che 'n nulla guisa vi capea;
 e la scarsella ch'al bordon pendea,
 tuttor di sotto la facea urtare,
 credendo il bordon meglio far entrare;
 ma già nessuna cosa mi valea.
 Ma a la fine i' pur tanto scotea,
 ched i' pur lo facea oltre passare.

Sì ch'io allora il fior tutto sfogliai,
 e la semenza ch'i' avea portata,
 quand'ebbi arato, sì la seminai.
 La semenza del fior v'era cascata;
 amendue insieme sì le mescolai,
 che molta di buon'erba n'è po' nata.

This "flower;" then, as well as that of the Roman, stands in anti-thesis to the "flower" of the Paradiso, for the flower of this tradition was merely sensual love. The Rosa fresca aulentissima of Cielo d'Alcamo falls also into this sensual tradition.

The most meaningful analogy of the rose to Mary is the one made by Dante himself. Before he arrives at the Empyrean, in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, he sees Mary for the first time, but not in her bodily form as she will appear later. Here the Virgin is seen as a rose in a garden.

Beatrice, in fact, tells Dante:

"Perché le faccia mia si t'innamora,
che tu non ti rivolgi al bel giardino
che sotto i raggi di Cristo s'infiora?
Quivi è la rosa in che 'l verbo divino
carne si fece: quivi son li gigli
al cui odor si prese il buon cammino." (Par., XXIII, 70-75)

A few verses later, Dante will allude to Mary as "bel fior." The poet himself, therefore, is the primary source of the analogy: Maria -- "candida rosa" -- Triumphant Church.

Dante's intention, then, is revealed as he unites the city of the blessed souls and Mary in perfect harmony of the white rose. Dante's achievement in the symbolic Rose is that of having reconciled the terrestrial rose of terrestrial love, with which Venus is identified, and the celestial rose of divine love, with which Mary is identified.

Mary's position, as it was determined in the previous chapter, is at the head of the Hebrew women, in the center of a semicircle, not in the center of the Rose. St. Bernard invites the poet to look at Mary:

"Figliuol di grazia, quest'esser giocondo,"
cominciò elli, "non ti sarà noto,
tenendo li occhi pur qua giù al fondo;
Ma guarda i cerchi infino al più remoto,
tanto che veggi seder la regina
cui questo regno è suddito e devoto." (Par., XXXI, 112-117)

Dante's reaction is one of joy and ardour, and even though he expresses poetic modesty and humility, professing to be unable to express in words what he sees, his similes and pictorial images, nevertheless, do justice to the colors, the light and the joy of the scene:

Io levai li occhi; e come da mattina
la parte oriental de l'iruzzibte
soverchia quella dove 'l sol declina,
così, quasi di valle andando a monte
con li occhi, vidi parte ne lo stremo
vincer di lume tutta l'altra fronte.

E come qui vi ove s'aspetta il temo
 che mal guidò Fetone, più s'infiama,
 e quindi e quindi il lume si fa scemo,
 così quella pacifica orifiamma
 nel mezzo s'avvivava, e d'ogne parte
 per igual modo allentava la fiamma;
 e a quel mezzo, con le penne sparte,
 vid'io più di mille angeli festanti,
 ciascun distinto di fulgore e d'arte.
 Vidi a lor giochi qui vi e a lor canti
 ridere una bellezza, che letizia
 era ne li occhi a tutti li altri santi;
 e s'io avessi in dir tanta divizia
 quanta ad imaginar, non arderei
 lo minimo tentar di sua delizia. (Par. XXXI, 118-158)

Only through Mary, porta coeli, as Bonaventure calls her, can the blessed souls acquire the final vision of the Triune God. Therefore, they all look at Mary. The same is true for Dante and Bernard. A similar operation occurs in Purgatorio XXXI (103-126), where the poet is invited by the four cardinal virtues to look at Beatrice's eyes, and Dante sees in them a reflection of the Gryphon. Mary's eyes are directed toward the Trinity; Beatrice's eyes are directed toward the Gryphon. The rapport is the following: Dante -- Beatrice -- Gryphon; Dante and the Blessed Souls -- Mary -- Trinity. In geometrical terminology, this would be an angle of reflection. The Trinity, therefore, is seen as an equilateral triangle (see drawing #6), which is a well-known symbol of the Trinity.

Mary's position is central, and her function as intercessor between man and her Son becomes evident in the Rose, where her role as the mother of humanity achieves its highest fulfillment. Similarly, the poet reaches the highest fulfillment of his journey by being able to look at her, for only through her he can perceive the final vision:

"Riguarda omai ne la faccia che a Cristo
 più si somiglia, che la sua chiarezza
 sola ti puo disporre a veder Cristo." (Par. XXXII, 84-87)

The Virgin's radiant presence, praised by the angels, the Archangel Gabriel and all the blessed souls, is perhaps the most beautiful scene witnessed by the poet in the Commedia. And it may be said that Canto XXXII in its totality is a preparation for St. Bernard's glorification of Mary in his prayer in Canto XXXIII. This magnificent hymn of praise is the culmination of the poet's desire and his most joyous moment, for it is the completion of the circle that began in Hell, where Mary, moved by pity, sent rescue to her son.

St. Bernard's "santa orazione," antithetical to the "Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni" of Inferno XXXIV, is divided into two parts. The first part, contained in lines 1-21, sings the glory and excellence of the Virgin, verses which no doubt were in Michelangelo's mind as he created the Pieta:¹⁸

"Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,
umile e alta piú che creatura,
termine fisso d'eterno consiglio,
tu se' colei che l'umana natura
nobilitasti sí, che 'l suo fattore
non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura.
Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore,
per lo cui caldo ne l'eterna pace
cosí è germinato questo fiore.
Qui se' a noi meridiana face
di caritate, e giuso, intra' mortali,
se' di speranza fontana vivace.
Donna, se' tanto grande e tanto vali,
che qual vuol grazia e a te non ricorre
sua disianza vuol volar sanz' ali.
La tua benignità non pur soccorre
a chi domanda, ma molte fiata
liberamante al dimandar percorre.
In te misericordia, in te pietate,
in te magnificenza, in te s'aduna
quantunque in creatura è di bontate.

The second part (vv. 22-39) consists of St. Bernard's intercession on behalf of Dante, so that the latter may attain the vision of the Divinity, and so that, upon returning to earth, he may continue on the

"quista via" and fulfill his mission. In this prayer, Bernard is joined by all the blessed souls, including Beatrice, as they join their hands in support of the poet's plea expressed in the words of the saint. Mary's happy and joyous agreement is signaled by a movement of her eyes, which she then raises to the Divinity. Thus ends Dante's tribute to Mary, Mary's tribute to herself and humanity.

In the discussion of the Rose and Mary, we must not forget the poet's utilization of the fourfold theological method in the Divine Comedy. The Rose, therefore, must be seen in light of this method. The best way to proceed is by following the poet's own exposition of the four senses. At one point in the letter to Can Grande, after having named the four senses (literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical), Dante states:

Qui modus tractandi, ut melius pateat, potest considerari in hiis versibus: "In exitu Israel de Egipto, domus Iacob de populo barbaro, facta est Iudea sanctificatio eius, Israel potestas eius." Nam si ad litteram solam inspiciamus, significatur nobis exitus filiorum Israel de Egipto, tempore Moysis; si ad allegoriam, nobis significatur nostra redemptio facta per Christum; si ad moralem sensum, significatur nobis conversio anime de luctu et miseria peccati ad statum gratie; si ad anagogicum, significatur exitus anime sancte ab huius corruptionis servitute ad eterne glorie libertatem. (Epist. XIII, 21-22)

In the literal sense, then, the Rose is a rose. Like the Hebrews travelling from Egypt to the promised land, Dante is journeying from Hell and arrives in the Rose.

In the allegorical sense the Rose is a Christological symbol, that of redemption. It is the Triumph of the Church and of the Empire according to Dante's political and theological system:

This same dilation, or expansion, indicates that man is simultaneously a member of the three communities -- city,

country, and Empire -- and it also reveals the polymorphic goal of Dante's mission, from the salvation of mankind realized for the whole of humanity in the salvation of one man, to the salvation of the city, the country, the Empire, and the Church -- combined in the corpus Christi figuraliter -- due to the perfectibility shown and described by the poet, truly the scriba Dei, as the mediator between spiritual and material power, between heaven and earth.¹⁹

In the tropological sense, the Rose is a symbol of the Holy Ghost, through which the blessed souls receive God's grace.

In the anagogical sense, the Rose is a manifestation of divine love. It is then God's flower. Analogically, it is Mary's flower.

Dante's utilization of these four senses, in their complexity and in their meaning, is unique in the Middle Ages, for no one uses them in secular literature. As Aquinas indicated, they were meant to be applied strictly to the Scriptures. This is, in fact, another of Dante's great innovations and an instance of his originality.

Let us now turn to the woman seated below Mary, Eve. One is compelled to consider these two women together, for both are the mothers of humanity. But as St. Bernard said, Eve was a thorn who gave us death, while Mary was a rose who gave us life. Nevertheless, their traditional relation is very close, as in Tertullian:

Eva, figura beatae Virginis Mariae, nam sicut haec nos damnari fecit per arboris pomum, sic illa absolvit per arboris fructum, quia et Christus in ligno pependit ut fructus.²⁰

Eve's position and significance in the Rose, therefore, must be examined in terms of her relationship to Mary, since chronologically she was the first woman created. Dante calls her "l'antica madre" (Purg. XXX, 52) and "prima mulier" (V. E. I, ii, 6). And he calls us "figliuoli d'Eva" (Purg. XII, 71).

As related in Genesis 3, the most essential pronouncement by God, after Eve says that she ate the fruit because the serpent deceived her, is His curse on the reptile:

Et dixit Dominus Deus ad mulierem: Quare hoc fecisti? Quae respondit: Serpens decepit me et comedi.

Et ait Dominus Deus ad serpentem: Quia fecisti hoc, maledictus es inter omnia animantia, et bestias terrae: Super pectus tuum gradieris, et terram comedes cunctis diebus vitae tuae.

Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et seme illius: Ipsa conteret caput tuum, Et tu insidiaberis calcaneo eius, (Gen. 3:13-15)

This episode, which the entire traditional exegesis considers as the announcement of Mary, "mulierem," and Jesus, "semen illius," is perhaps the most outstanding indication of Eve's position in the Rose, namely below Mary. Mary is the figural fulfillment of Eve. The figural equation: Eve -- Mary, and by extension, Eve -- Church, and Mary -- Church, well known and common in Ecclesiastical typological tradition, stems from this episode:

As early as the 2nd Century we find Eve made a type of Mary, as Adam was of our Lord. As Eve had brought the curse by listening to the Serpent, so Mary the blessing by listening to the Angel.²¹

Eve is a figura Ecclesiae and a figura Mariae. St. Ambrose states:

Eva, cunctorum mater viventium, de costis Adae edita, significat quod de latere Christi in cruce per mortem sopiti, sacramenta salutis essent exitura, videlicet sanguis et aqua de ouibus sponsa illi conderetur Ecclesia.²²

The rapport Eve -- Maria is exemplified by the notion common in the Middle Ages that the word Eva, spelled backward, was the first greeting of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary: Eva -- Ave, Ave -- Eva.²³ Not by chance, this episode is referred to in Paradiso XXXII, as Gabriel places his wings

in front of Mary and the blessed souls sing: "Ave, Maria" (94-99). Even if this notion were not to be given credence, the fact remains that Eve's position in the Rose is determined by the episode in Genesis, and the fact that she is the figural antecedent of the true mother to come.

It is significant that not until the end of Genesis 3 is Eve given a name. Earlier she is referred to as "the woman." Even when she is being tempted by the serpent and even after she speaks, she is still referred to as "mulier." Adam names her only after God has finished saying that man will now have to sweat for his bread till he returns to the earth from which he is made:

Et vocavit Adam nomen uxoris suae, Heva; eo quod mater
esset cunctorum viventium. (Gen. 3:20)

As "mother of all the living," Eve would be entitled to a high tier in Dante's Rose, notwithstanding her relation to Mary and the significance of the equation Eve -- Mary and vice versa.

It is in this light that her preeminent position is determined by the poet. Similarly he will place Adam closest to Mary, on her left. In the case of Eve, Dante follows biblical chronology and exegetical tradition, even though in the De Vulgari, he speaks of her as "presumptuosissimam":

Secundum quidem quod in principio loquitur Genesis,
ubi de primordio mundi sacratissima scriptura per-
tractat, mulierem invenitur ante omnes fuisse
locutam, scilicet presumptuosissimam Evam, cum
diabolo sciscitanti respondit... (I, iv, 2)

As it has been pointed out, Dante will call the Proud in Purgatory "figliuoli d'Eva." It seems appropriate that Dante derived this attribute from the whole Episode of the Fall, but particularly in the words of the serpent:

Scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo,
aperientur oculi vestris et eritis sicut dii, scientes
bonum et malum.

Dante's "presumptuosissimam" is an echo of St. Bernard's characterization of Eve as "spina, infingens omnibus mortem." Yet he could not disregard her role as mother of mankind. Although after the fall and the expulsion from Eden, man obtained a state of mortality, the presence of Eve (in Hebrew: hawwa = life) assured procreation and existence, thus the coming of Christ. The significant role and position of Eve was very much present in Dante's mind, for she along with Mary is at the head of the row of women that the poet uses to divide one section of the Rose from the other. Eve's importance is clearly summarized in the following quotation:

Les Pères de l'Église ont reconnu dans Ève un figure prophétique à un double titre: 1^o dans sa création; 2^o dans l'ordre du péché et de sa réparation. - 1^o Dans sa formation d'une cote d'Adam, elle représentait l'Église sortant du côté ouvert de Jésus sur la croix. - 2^o Dans l'ordre du salut et de la réparation du péché, Ève a été comparée à Marie, la mère du Sauveur, par contraste, plus que par ressemblance. Adam ayant été considéré par saint Paul et par les Pères comme la figure de Jésus, le second Adam, il était tout naturel qu'Ève devînt, elle aussi, la figure de la mère du Sauveur, bien que saint Paul n'ait pas marqué ce caractère figuratif de la première femme.²⁴

The Hebrew woman seated in the third row, below Eve, is Rachel. Sara follows her in the fourth seat. Dante evidently did not keep to the biblical order, since Sara is in fact followed chronologically by Rebecca and then by Rachel. In Dante's order, therefore, Rachel is seated third, and next to her, on the right, sits Beatrice. Why did he make this change?

Dante mentions Rachel in Inferno II, 102; this is indeed a very noteworthy point, as has been indicated in discussing the structure of the Rose. The reader learns there that Beatrice sits with Rachel. Rachel is again mentioned as being among those of the Old Testament whom Christ took to Heaven from Limbo:

Trasseci l'ombra del primo parente,
 d'Abel suo figlio e quella di Noè,
 di Moïse legista e ubbidiente;
 Abraam patriarca e David re,
 Israel con lo padre e co' suoi nati
 e con Rachele, per cui tanto fe,
 e altri molti, e feceli beati. (Inf. IV, 55-61)

In Purgatorio XXVII, Dante has a dream in which a beautiful woman appears to him, picking flowers in a field. She is Lia, who says that her pleasure is to be active, while her sister prefers to be in contemplation:²⁵

"Sappia qualunque il mio nome dimanda
 ch'i' mi son Lia, e vo movendo intorno
 le belle mani a farmi un ghirlanda.
 Per piacermi a lo specchio, qui m'addorno;
 ma mia suora Rachel mai non si smaga
 dal suo miraglio, e siede tutto giorno.
 Ell'e d'i suoi belli occhi veder vaga
 com'io de l'addornarmi con le mani;
 lei lo vedere, e me l'ovrare appaga." (Purg. XXVII, 100-108)

Contemplative life was considered supreme in medieval tradition, but contemplative did not mean inactivity; it meant contemplation in action, as in the case of St. Benedict, whom Dante encounters in the Heaven of Saturn, that of the Contemplatives, and of Peter Damian, the champion of active contemplation (Par. XXI, 117-26). Catholic theology teaches that salvation is achieved through both active and contemplative life, grace and action.

Lia and Rachel have traditionally represented active and contemplative life:

Per Liam, quae fuit lippa sed fecunda, significatur
 vita activa, quae dum occupatur in opere, minus videt;
 sed dum modo per verbum, modo per exemplum ad imita-
 tionem suam proximos accendit, multos in opere bono
 filios generat.²⁶

Quid per Liam nisi activa vita signatur? Quid per
 Rachelem nisi contemplativa?²⁷

Thomas Aquinas attributes the concept of active and contemplative life to all men and to human intellect:

Vita hominis convenienter dividitur per activam et contemplativam, (Summa Theol., II, ii, 179, 1)

Istae duae vitae significantur per duas uxores Jacob: activa quidem per Liam, contemplativa vero per Rachelem... Divisio ista datur de vita humana, quae quidem attenditur secundum intellectum. Intellectus autem dividitur per activum et contemplativum, quia finis intellectivae cognitionis vel est ipsa cognitio veritatis, quod pertinet ad intellectum contemplativum; vel est aliqua exterior actio, quod pertinet ad intellectum practicum sive activum. (Summa Theol. II, ii, 179, 2)

Aquinas adds that contemplative life is directed toward God, the active life toward our fellow men. Dante follows in his footsteps:

Onde, con ciò sia cosa che quella che è qui l'umana natura non pur una beatitudine abbia, ma due, sì com'è quella de la vita civile, e quella de la contemplativa, inraazionale sarebbe se noi vedemo quelle avere la beatitudine de la vita attiva, cioè civile, nel governare del mondo, e non avessero quella de la contemplativa, la quale è più eccellente e più divina... E perché questa vita è più divina, e quanto la cosa è più divina e più di Dio somigliante, manifesto è che questa vita è da Dio più amata; e se ella è più amata, più le è la sua beatanza stata larga: e se più l'è stata larga, più viventi le ha dato che a l'altrui. Per che si conchiude che troppo maggior numero sia quello di di quelle creature che li effetti non dimostrano. E non è contra quello che par dir Aristotile nel decimo de l'Etica, che a le sustanze separate convenga pure la speculativa vita. (Convivio II, iv, 10-13)

Dante's reference to Aristotle's 10th Book of the Nicomachean Ethics is quite a propos, since Aristotle's term "theoria" means contemplation, but is more precisely an activity of the intellect for its own pursuit of happiness:

Therefore, the activity of the divinity which surpasses all others in bliss must be a contemplative activity, and the human activity which is most closely akin to it is, therefore, most conducive to happiness.²⁸

Although both Aristotle and Dante discuss a perfect state of beatitude through contemplatio and speculatio, to which every man should ultimately aspire for true happiness, Dante remains strictly within the Christian concept of contemplation of God; as in the case of Rachel and himself. His ultimate goal in the Commedia is contemplation of the Divinity in a "status perfectionis." This notion is clearly expressed in another two passages of the Convivio:

Veramente è da sapere che noi potemo avere in questa vita due felicitadi, secondo due diversi cammini, buono e ottimo, che a ciò ne menano: l'una è la vita attiva, e l'altra la contemplativa; la quale avvegna che per l'attiva si pervegna, come detto è, a buona felicitade, ne mena ad ottima felicitade e beatitudine, secondo che pruova lo Filosofo nel decimo de l'Etica. (IV, xvii, 9-10)

Dante refers to the supremacy of contemplative life in Convivio IV, xxii, 13018, and in a third passage in the Monarchia:

Satis igitur declaratum est quod proprium opus humani generis totaliter accepti est actuare semper totam potentiam intellectus possibilis, per prius ad speculandum et secundario propter hoc ad operandum per suam extensionem. (I, iv, 1)

From all this, it must be deduced that since Rachel represents contemplative life, an activity given the highest value, Dante placed her right below Eve and before Sara and Rebecca because he wanted to give her a greater significance, which she would not have received had he followed the chronological order of the Bible and placed her according to chronology. There is another reason, however, for placing Rachel right below Eve, and it stems from the narration of the events surrounding Rachel's life.

The biblical episode in Genesis narrates Jacobs struggle in his desire to marry Rachel because of the deception of his uncle Laban.

When to his amazement Jacob discovers that the woman he has married is not Rachel but her sister Lia, he has to serve Laban seven more years before obtaining Rachel's hand. There was enmity between the women, and when the Lord saw that Lia was disliked, He made Rachel barren. In total, Jacob had twelve children from Lia and her maid Zelpha, Rachel and her maid Bala, whom Rachel gave to Jacob when she could not conceive. The struggle of these two women to obtain Jacob's favor is, to say the least, somewhat unusual in terms of morals. Rachel, however, was to be Jacob's rightful wife, as he himself had desired. His affection for Rachel is greater than that for Lia. To the eyes of the reader, Rachel becomes an interesting and sympathetic character, notwithstanding her obvious faults. When Jacob decides to leave Laban, both she and Lia do not hesitate to leave their father. Rachel, furthermore, even steals and successfully hides her father's teraphim, in the hope that they would bring prosperity to her husband and her family.

What is most relevant in this episode is the fact that Rachel and Lia are considered the foundresses of the house of Israel. Jacob is indeed called Israel. He had twelve sons. They are the direct link to the twelve tribes of Israel. In Ruth 4:11, it is written:

Respondit omnis populus, qui erat in porta, et
maiores natu: Nos testes simus: faciat Dominus
hanc mulierem, quae ingreditur domum tuam, sicut
Rachel et Liam, quae aedificarunt domum Israel.

Jacob's twelve sons (cf. 26, 22-26) provide the connection between the patriarchs and Israel's twelve tribes.

To conclude, Dante had ample evidence which enabled him to give Rachel a place of predominance in the Rose. Rachel is a typus Ecclesiae, a figure of prosperity, and with Lia, the foundress of the

house of Israel. It could be suggested, moreover, that there is a correspondence between the row of Hebrew women and the angelic hierarchies. Mary, Eve and Rachel would, then, correspond to the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones. It is very probable that Dante intended to make this change in order to create the correspondence: Rachel -- Thrones, thus, Beatrice -- Thrones. In so doing, the chronological order of the Hebrew women gives way to a hierarchical order based on preeminence, as in the angelic orders, and on the degree of beatitude which is determined by the degree of merit (Par. XXVIII, 109-114).

The woman sitting below Rachel is Sara. Her name means "princess." At first she was called Sarai, which according to some means "my princess." In Genesis, she is promised a son and her name is changed to Sara:²⁹

Dixit quoque Deus ad Abraham: Sarai uxorem tuam
non vocabis Sarai, sed Saram. Et benedicam ei, et
ex illa dabo tibi filium cui benedicturus sum, erit-
que in natione, et reges populorum orienter ex eo.
(Gen. 17: 15-16)

The narrative concerning Sara is similar, in certain aspects, to the one concerning Rachel. Both were unable to conceive. Sara induced Abraham to take her maid Hagar as a concubine, just as Rachel did with Jacob. Sara became jealous of Hagar and asked Abraham to send her away. Similarly, Rachel became jealous of her sister Lia, who was able to conceive and gave birth. Isaac's birth is announced to Abraham by three angels. Sara is listening, but she giggles; she cannot believe that she will conceive, due to her age. Thus, she finds all this amusing. The Lord reproaches her, even though she denies that she has laughed. The Lord promised Sara that she "shall become mother of nations" and that "kings of people shall be from her"

(17:16). But the Lord also said that He would establish his covenant with Isaac.

Sara, therefore, becomes a very noteworthy person in biblical history. Yet to Dante's eyes she is inferior to Rachel.

The change of name, Sarai to Sara and Abram to Abraham, is, no doubt, an indication that there is an important turn in the life and the significance of these two characters. In a way it marks a new era. The Scripture itself gives no reason for the change of name. If indeed Sarai means "my princess" and Sara simply "princess," it would seem that her role has become more universal; she is no longer Abraham's princess. Since she is going to become "a mother of nations," it is obvious that she has to be a "princess." Similarly, whereas Abram means "high father," Abraham means "father of a multitude." The same concept applies to both Sara and Abraham because they are assuming the role of universal parents, for what is involved here is the birth of a nation.

In the Patristic tradition, Sara is a *typus Ecclesiae*:

Sara, intacta ab Abimelech Abrahae restituta, praeclarus est sanctae Ecclesiae typus.³⁰

St. Augustine also considers her a *figura Ecclesiae*.³¹

Dante mentions Sara only in *Paradiso* XXXII. In the New Testament, Sara is referred to as a figure of conjugal obedience (I Peter, iii, 5-6). St Paul in Hebrews 11:11 refers to Sara as one of the figures of faith:

Fide et ipsa Sara sterilis virtutem in conceptionem seminis accepit, etiam praeter tempus aetatis...

Sara sits high in the row of women, yet not higher than Rachel, to whom Dante attributes a superior degree of merit. And so Rebecca, who in

biblical order should precede Rachel, sits below Sara.

In Genesis 25, Abraham tells his oldest servant to go to his land in order to obtain a wife for Isaac. The servant goes to Aram Naharaim, where Abraham's brother, Nahor, lived. As the servant reaches the well outside the city, he prays for a sign which will indicate the bride destined by the Lord for Isaac. The young woman who has come to draw water and who offers water to the servant and his camels is Rebecca. Laban, Rebecca's brother, agrees that she be taken as wife by Isaac, recognizing the will of the Lord. Laban, however, wants to detain Rebecca a little longer. Abraham's servant, Eliezer, refuses, and Rebecca herself states that she will go with this man. Rebecca's relatives then bless her, and she departs to join Isaac. Isaac married Rebecca and prayed to the Lord because she was barren. The Lord answered Isaac's prayer and Rebecca conceived:

*Sed collidebantur in utero eius parvuli; quae ait:
Si sic nihi futurum erat, quid necesse fuit concipere? Perrexitque ut consuleret Dominum. Qui respondens ait: / Duae gentes sunt in utero tuo. / Et duo populi ex ventre tuo dividuntur, / Populusque populum superabit, Et maior serviet minori.
(Genesis 25 : 22-23).*

Rebecca's favoritism for Jacob and her complicity in having Jacob secure his father's blessing change the image of the early Rebecca, the one at the well, who was simple, innocent, fresh, and who did not hesitate in following Eliezer to marry Isaac, a man she did not know. He loved her as soon as he saw her, and theirs seems to have been a monogamous marriage. But as Rebecca became old and had twins, the early image is replaced by that of a blind woman who would do anything to make certain that her favorite son would succeed. Her

love for Jacob was such that she practically had no regard for the higher loyalty of impartial maternal love and respect for her husband. This biblical story also has a coherent psychological persuasiveness. Parents do often favor one child over another.

Moreover, Rebecca might have had a reason which was in the Lord's own words: "Duae gentes sunt in utero tuo . . ." ³² The Lord, in fact, had predestined that Jacob would be superior to Esau. Rebecca, therefore, might have had a legitimate ultimate reason to justify her behavior. St. Paul (Rom. 9:10) refers to her as having known God's wish before her children were born. Yet all of Rebecca's actions make her less deserving than Rachel, thus adding another justification for the latter's position in the Rose.

In conclusion, Rebecca did what was prescribed, but she did not leave matters in the Lord's hands; rather, she used deceit to obtain her purpose. Thus, her place in the Rose, in the hierarchy of women, is certainly lower than Rachel's, who in turn marries Jacob, thus becoming Rebecca's daughter-in-law.

In his other works, Dante does not mention Rebecca. The Church Fathers, however, considered Rebecca a figura Ecclesiae. Augustine says: "Rebecca est figura Ecclesiae . . . Haec Ecclesia significatur in Rebecca uxore Isaac" (P.L. 37, col. 1673; 38, col. 38). And St. Ambrose says: "Rebecca, e camelo decendens in occursum Isaac . . . Ecclesiam figurat et gentilitatem venientem" (P.L. 14, col. 452; 16, 1245).

Rebecca, therefore, joins the women placed above her as a pre-figuration of the Church.

Seated below Rebecca is Judith, then Ruth. The biblical chronological order is again disregarded, since the Book of Ruth comes before the Book of Judith.

The events surrounding Judith's life determine her presence in the Rose. Upon hearing that Ozias, one of the rulers of Bethulia, will deliver the city to Holofernes within five days, unless the Lord comes to their help, Judith decides to see the ruling elders. She tells them that the whole city should be penitent and that the Lord should not be provoked by their setting up a time limit. Judith informs the elders that she and her maid will go past the gate to put into action a plan she has devised. She prays to the Lord to assist her and give her strength to kill Holofernes. Judith was a beautiful, virtuous and rich widow. She was greatly admired by everyone. Her beauty and eloquence convinced the Assyrians and Holofernes that they could trust her. After a banquet during which Holofernes drank excessively, Judith, taking advantage of his drunkenness, cut off his head and brought it to her people. The Assyrians, leaderless and confused, were destroyed by the Israelites. Great honor is rendered to Judith by the people and the high priest, who came from Jerusalem:

Ioachim autem summus pontifex de Ierusalem venit in Bethuliam cum universis presbyteris suis ut videret Iudith. Quae cum exisset ad illum, benedixerunt eam omnes una voce, dicentes: Tu gloria Ierusalem, tu laetitia Israel, tu honorificentia populi nostri: quia fecisti viriliter, et confortatum est corum tuum, eo quod castitate amarevis, et post virum tuum alterum nescieris: ideo et manus Domini confortavit te, et ideo eris benedicta in aeternum. Et dixit omnis populus: Fiat, fiat. (Judith 15: 9-12)

Judith's widowhood, as well as her piety, her faith in God and her ability to obtain strength through prayer, are all very highly

praised. Her wisdom, her courage, and her reliance on the Lord's will to pursue her goal and save Israel make her an outstanding woman. Such a woman was very attractive to Dante. She is, therefore, an eminent figure to be placed in the row of women which divide the Rose in two. Being a figure of piety, beauty, courage and chastity, she is the perfect typus Ecclesiae:

Iudith, post peractam orationem exuens se vestimentis lugubribus, et induens se vestibus iucunditatis signum est sanctae Ecclesiae, quae licet aliquando pro peccatis suis poenitentiae gerat affectum, spe tamen remissionis et future praemi anxium satis exilarat animum.³³

Judith's presence in the Rose becomes magnified due to her role as a woman, as the savior of the Jews and the representative of the Jewish nation.³⁴

Ruth, the Moabite woman described by Dante as: "colei / che fu bisava al cantor che per doglia / del fallo disse Miserere mei," important to the poet because she was the ancestress of King David and preserver of his ancestral line -- and therefore of Christ -- is seated last.

The Book of Ruth, which begins with a dark and somber tone, describing famine, death and exile, ends in an idyllic mood, depicting pastoral life, peace and order. Its central point seems to be Ruth's role in preventing the extinction of an elect family. Notwithstanding Ruth's virtues which exemplify filial and marital fidelity, the revival of Elimach's line through her is of essential importance to Dante. When Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus, Ruth is one of the four women mentioned. The others are Tamar, Bathsheba and Mary (Matthew 1:5).

The narrative of the Book of Ruth indicates that a famine in the land of Judah forced Elimelech from Bethlehem to the land of Moab, taking his wife and two sons. By the time the famine had stopped, Elimelech and his two sons were all dead. His wife Naomi decides to go back to Bethlehem and tells her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to stay and remarry among their own people, the Moabites. Both refuse to leave Naomi, but after her insistence, Orpah does leave. Ruth, however, informs Naomi that she will never leave her, she will never abandon her, and will follow her wherever she goes. Naomi and Ruth thus arrive at Bethlehem. Being the beginning of the barley harvest, Ruth goes to glean in the field of Boaz, a rich relative of Elimelech. Encouraged by the kind and respectful reception which Boaz has given Ruth, Naomi incites her to claim his hand by going to him at night and sleeping at his feet, thereby claiming his protection. Afterwards, Boaz acquires Elimelech's portion of the land, which is Naomi's inheritance, and also involves his marrying Ruth. The people and the elders blessed Ruth by saying:

Respondit omnis populus, qui erat in porta, et maiores natu: Nos testes sumus: faciat Dominus hanc mulierem, quae ingreditur domum tuam, sicut Rachel et Liam, quae aedificarunt domum Israel: ut sit exemplum virtutis in Ephrata, et habeat celebre nomen in Bethlehem: fiatque domus tua, sicut domus Phares, quam Tamar perperit Iudae, de semen quod tibi dederit Dominum ex hac puella. (Ruth 4:11-12).

Ruth then conceived and gave birth to Obed, who was the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:17).

The essential theme of the Book of Ruth, whose canonicity is unquestioned, was a significant factor in Dante's choice of Ruth as one of the seven women to be seated in the Rose. The book's significance

can be described in this way:

The scope of the book is to set forth the origin of David historically and genealogically, showing how a heathen, belonging to a people so hostile to the theocracy as the Moabites, was honored to become the progenitor of the great and pious King David, because she placed unlimited trust in the Lord, and sought protection from the God of Israel.

Furthermore, the purpose of the book was:

... to preintimate, by recorded adoption of a Gentile woman into the family from which Christ was to derive His origin, the final reception of the Gentile nations into the true Church, as fellow-heirs of the salvation of the Gospel.³⁵

Ruth is also a figura Ecclesiae and is thus entitled to join the other six women. Of her, Isidore of Seville says:

Ruth, sicut dormivit ad pedes Booz, ita Ruth spiritualis, scilicet Ecclesia, dormivit ad pedes Christi, cum in spe incarnationis eius, unde sibi certam salutem credebat esse venturam, quasi requiescens, patienter eum expectabat. (P.L. 83, col. 1112)

Ruth's position in the row of women seems to be determined not only by her historical and symbolical meaning, otherwise Ruth would precede Judith, but by the poet's own particular design and technique. The circumlocution used at the beginning to describe the seating of the women serves to introduce Mary and Eve:

La piaga che Maria richiuse e unse,
quella ch'è tanto bella da' suoi piedi
è colei che l'aperse e che la punse. (Par. XXXII, 4-6)

To end the list, the poet utilizes another circumlocution for both Ruth and David. The last woman could not be Judith. She had to be Ruth, for she provides the direct link to the New Covenant by being an ancestress of the house of David. A link which is renewed again by having Mary seated first and Ruth seated last. This is further evidence that the Hebrew women named as the dividing wall are seated not

chronologically, but according to their degree of excellence in the eyes of the Lord, and according to how they fit the poet's philosophical purpose.

In conclusion, as we have seen, all the Hebrew women mentioned in the Rose are figurae Ecclesiae. While providing a dividing line between the Old and the New Law, they simultaneously provide the unity and the link that binds the two Laws. The Church is the ultimate manifestation of their figurative meaning. These women, moreover, as historical characters, were all influencing factors in the shaping and determining of events as narrated in the Scriptures. And as pointed out by Professor F. Nichols, the women become more active as we go down their row. Even if only considered within their historical meaning, they acquire a place of excellence. All of them, with the exception of Judith, were associated with the house of David. It must be added that the Lord's intervention played a great part in the women's ability to conceive and give birth, so that the line of descendancy would not be extinguished. In Judith's case, the Lord provided her with the necessary strength and courage to deliver Israel from peril. In the case of Eve, the first mother of humanity, the Lord provided Mary, who closed the wound and became the new mother of mankind. Eve, nevertheless, would still have to be considered the foundress of the house of David.

Once the Hebrew women are examined individually according to their literal and symbolic meaning, their presence in the "candida rosa" is justified, indeed made necessary, due to their excellence, their place in history, and their role in the coming of Christ. As a group and as symbols of womanhood, they represent the Church.

Their number, seven, is not accidental. Although there are more women sitting along the dividing wall, Dante mentions only seven. As there are here seven women, all typi Ecclesiae, there are seven Churches in the Apocalypse. The sacred character of this number is well known: the sacred seventh day, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven orders and the seven ages of Joachim of Flora, the seven angels, to forgive seventy times seven, and many more. These Hebrew women, bound by humanity and love, are most appropriate characters in the realm of love and light.

Dante's intent in not following a chronological order for the Hebrew women is to be explained by his philosophical and artistic purpose. Leaving out Mary, who stands above the rest of the women, the two orders are the following:

Biblical Order	Dante's Order
Eve	Eve
Sara	Rachel
Rebecca	Sara
Rachel	Rebecca
Ruth	Judith
Judith	Ruth

When Mary is included, Dante's order provides the following correspondence with the angelic orders:

Mary	Seraphim
Eve	Cherubim
Rachel	Thrones
Sara	Dominations
Rebecca	Virtues
Judith	Powers
Ruth	Principalities

Dante, therefore, wanted to place these women according to their degree of excellence, and in the case of Ruth, he wanted to reestablish the bond between Mary, mother of Jesus, and Ruth, ancestress of David. By specifically mentioning David through Ruth, and by placing Ruth last in the row of women, Dante emphasizes the direct link between Ruth and Mary. Without Ruth, the direct lineage of consanguinity from Abraham to David and Jesus would have been broken. The mentioning of Ruth in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus was indeed present in Dante's mind. Thereby completing a circle whose center and conclusion is Christ, the true King of this realm. Furthermore, Beatrice could only sit on the throne next to Rachel, the latter being one of the most worthy of all the Hebrew women. Since Beatrice is a typus Spiritus Sancti, her seat could only be on the third row.

Having completed our study of the women dividing the Rose in the upper half of the circle, let us turn our attention to the blessed souls who are placed on either side and across from the Virgin Mary.

Footnotes

Chapter III -- Part I

¹ E.R. Curtius, op. cit., p. 367.

² H.F. Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in the 'Divine Comedy' (New York: Russel & Russel, 1961), p. 93.

³ Cf. Convivio IV, v, 5-6. "E però (che) anche l'albergo, dove il celestial rege intrare dovea, convenia essere mondissimo e purissimo."

⁴ Charles Joret, La Rose dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Age (Paris: Émile Bouillon, 1892), p. 237.

⁵ Ibid., p. 240.

⁶ Ibid., p. 245.

⁷ Adam of St. Victor, P.L. 196.

⁸ P.L. 184, col. 1020.

⁹ P.L. 177, col. 159.

¹⁰ P.L. 14, col. 175.

¹¹ P.L. 197, col. 1139.

¹² P.L. 114, col. 1129.

¹³ P.L. Indices II, Index Marianus.

¹⁴ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Le Roman de la Rose (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1965), I, v. 37.

¹⁵ Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 6.

¹⁶ Le Roman de la Rose, op. cit., p. XXI.

¹⁷ See Gianfranco Contini's article in the Enciclopedia Dantesca, "Il Fiore," II, pp. 895-901. The text of the sonnet is taken from Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore, ed. E.G. Parodi (Florence: Bemporad, 1922), p. 118

18 G.R. Sarolli, "Michelangelo the Poet of the Night," Forum Italicum, 1 (1967), pp. 133-55.

19 G.R. Sarolli, Prolegomena, op. cit., pp. 416-7.

20 P.L. 2, col. 782. See also Ambrose, 17, col. 692.

21 Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937).

22 P.L. 17, col. 813. See also Jerome, 22, col. 1101; Augustine, 24, col. 215; Isidore, 83, col. 99; Rab. Maurus, 107, col. 484; Peter Lombard, 112, col. 215.

23 G.R. Sarolli, "Eva," Enciclopedia Dantesca.

24 Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique (Paris: 1913).

25 Rachel and Lia have been rightly considered prefigurations of Beatrice and Matelda respectively.

26 St. Gregory, Homily 14.

27 St. Gregory, Moralia VII, 28.

28 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Trans. Martin Ostwald (New York -- Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1962), p. 293.

29 In the Clementina the names are Sarai and Saram. The change occurs also with Abraham, who was called Abram. The importance of the change of name is often overlooked.

30 Ambrose, P.L. 14, col. 434, 436; Rab. Maurus, 107, col. 560.

31 P.L. 42, col. 1475.

32 It is significant to note that the episode of Esau and Jacob is mentioned in Paradiso XXXII by St. Bernard, when he explains the different degree of grace with which individuals are endowed by God.

33 P.L. Indices II, col. 249.

34 "Judith: 'The Jewess': this rather uncommon name is chosen because Judith represents the Jewish nation. Her long genealogy firmly establishes Judith's membership in the covenanted nation." The Jerome Biblical Commentary, eds. R.F. Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 626.

35 Smith's Comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible, ed. Samuel W. Barnum (New York, London: D. Appleton & Company, 1915), p. 944.

Chapter III

The Personae of the Rose

Part II: Remaining Figures

On Mary's left side sits Adam, and next to him sits Moses. On Mary's right side are Peter and John the Evangelist. This completes the number of the blessed in the upper semicircle. Peter and Adam are described as the roots of the Rose:

Quei due che seggon la sú piú felici
per esser propinquissimi ad Augusta,
son d'esta rosa quasi due radici:
colui che da sinistra le s'aggiusta
è 'l padre per lo cui ardito gusto
l'umana specie tant amaro gusta;
dal destro vedi quel padre vetusto
di Santa Chiesa a cui Cristo le chiavi
raccomando di questo fior venusto. (Par. XXXII, 118-126)³⁶

Adam, besides being the father of mankind, therefore the root of mankind, and the one from whom we inherited sin and death, is a typus Christi. St. Paul writes:

Propterea sicut per unum hominem peccatum in hunc mundum intravit, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiit, in quo omnes peccaverunt. Usque ad legem enim peccatum erat in mundo: peccatum autem non imputabatur, cum lex non esset. Sed regnavit mors ab Adam usque ad Moysen etiam in eos qui non peccaverunt in similitudinem praevaricationis Adae, qui est forma futuri... Igitur sicut per unius delictum in omnes homines in condemnationem: sic et per unius iustitiam in omnes homines in iustificationem vitae. Sicut enim per inobedientiam unius hominis, peccatores constituti sunt multi: ita et per unius obeditionem, iusti constituentur multi. Lex autem subintravit ut abundaret delictum. Ubi autem abundavit delictum, superabundavit gratia:

ut sicut regnavit peccatum in mortem; ita et gratia
regnet per iustitiam in vitam aeternam, per Iesum
Christum Dominum nostrum. (Ro. 5 : 12-21)

Paul, then, saw the analogy between Adam and Jesus. In another epistle he states, in fact, that Jesus is the second Adam:

Factus est primus homo Adam in animam viventem,
novissimus Adam in spiritum vivificantem. Sed non
prius quod spiritale est, sed quod anemale; deinde
quod spiritale. Primus homo de terra, terrenus;
secundus homo de caelo, caelestis. Qualis terrenus,
tales et terreni et qualis caelestis, tales et
caelestes. Igitur, sicut portavimus imaginem
terreni, portemus et imaginem caelestis. (I Co. 15 : 45-50)

For this reason the Evangelist Luke, whom Dante calls: "Scriba Christi Lucas qui omnia vera dicit" (Mon. II, viii, 14), traces the ancestry of Jesus back to Adam (3 : 23-38). Matthew, on the other hand, traces it back as far as Abraham (1 : 2). Moreover, Luke explicitly calls Adam "the son of God." The genealogy, therefore, begins with Jesus "son of God" and ends with Adam "son of God." Since Adam is "the son of God," all of mankind shares this denomination. But with the coming of Christ, the full circle came to completion. Because of the dual nature of Christ, all of humanity enjoys the privilege of being sons of God. Jesus is both the second Adam and the first true Adam, being the true son of God. This notion is present in St. Paul both in its parallelism and its contrast, as seen in the passage of his Epistle to the Romans quoted above. Both Adam and Jesus had a deep effect on the future of mankind. The former, by bringing sin and death, the latter, by bringing redemption and eternal life. The most significant contrast is Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience, through which He suffered death on the cross. Whereas Adam deceived himself by wanting to be equal to God, Jesus, being God, did not consider Himself equal to God the Father, as St. Paul states:

Hoc enim sentite in vobis, quod et in Christo Iesu: qui cum in forma Dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse se aequalem Deo: sed semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens, in similitudinem hominum factus, et habitu inventus ut homo. Humiliavit semetipsum factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis. Propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum, et donavit illi nomen, quod est super omne nomen: ut in nomine Iesu omne genu flectatur caelestium, terrestrium et infernorum, et omnis lingua confiteatur, quia Dominus Iesus Christus in gloria est Dei Patris. (Phil. 2: 5-11).

Notwithstanding the consequences of his sin, Adam was an instrument of God for the coming of His Son. As Tertullian states, Adam is a figura Christi:

Adam, sexta die formatus, Christum sexta mundi aetate natum praebet, et quemadmodum in illo omnes moriuntur, ita et in Christo vivificantur. Quando Deus immisit Adamo saporem, ut de latere illi conjugem faceret, typum gerebat Christi dormientis in cruce. Latere illo Christi latus apertum ostendebatur.³⁷

Apart from being a typus Christi, Adam is also a typus et custos Ecclesiae.³⁸

In Dante's works, Adam is frequently mentioned. The poet's notion concerning "il primo parente" (Inf. IV, 55), or "l'uom che non nacque" (Par. VII, 26), follows the medieval scholastic line, in particular that of Thomas Aquinas. Dante believed that Adam's sin was one of pride and disobedience. In breaking God's precept he damned himself and all his progeny:

Per non soffrire a la virtù che vole
freno a suo prode, quell'uom che non nacque,
dannando sé, danno tutta sua prole;
onde l'umana specie inferma giacque
giù per secoli molti in grande errore,
fin ch'al Verbo di Dio discender piacque
u' la natura, che dal suo fattore
s'era allungata, unì a sé in persona
con l'atto sol del suo eterno amore. (Par. VII, 25-33)

In Paradiso XXVI, as Adam speaks to Dante, he makes it very clear that his sin was not caused by the desire to taste the forbidden fruit, but "il trapassar del segno":

Or, figliuol mio, non il gustar del legno,
fu per se la cagion de tanto essilio,
ma solamente il trapassar del segno. (115-117)

As Aquinas says, his disobedience was caused by his pride:

Primum autem, quod inordinante voluit, fuit propria
excellencia, et ideo inobedientia in eo causata fuit
ex superbia.³⁹

Dante's various references to Adam reflect the ambiguous duality ascribed to him by St. Paul, and in general by the Church Fathers. On the one hand, Adam is referred to as: "il primo parente" (Inf. IV, 55); "il primo generante" (Conv. IV, xv, 3); "l'umana radice" (Purg. XXVII, 142); "l'anima prima" (Purg. XXXII, 62); "seme de l'umana natura" (Par. VII, 86); "di tutta l'animal perfezione" (Par. XII, 82-3); "il primo padre" (Par. XII, 3); "padre antico" (Par. XXVI, 92); "il maggior padre di famiglia" (Par. XXVII, 136); and in De Vulgari Adam is referred to as: "radix humane propaginis" (I, vii, 1); "primus homo," as well as "primus noster" and "primus loquens."

On the other hand, Adam is described as: the "petto onde la costa / si trasse per formar la bella guancia / il cui palato a tutto il mondo costa" (Par. XII, 37-39), or as the "padre per lo cui ardito gusto / l'umana specie tanto amaro si gusta" (Par. XXXII, 122-123). The damned souls are called "il mal seme d'Adamo" (Inf. III, 115).

Adam is one of the personae of the Rose whom the poet meets directly, namely in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, where he is "il quarto lume" (the other three "lumi" are Peter, James and John). In this encounter the reader learns that Adam had to wait 4,302 years in Limbo

before Christ took him to Paradise, having spent 930 years on earth. The reader also learns that the language spoken by Adam ceased to exist before the erection of the Tower of Babel, and that Adam was in Eden only seven hours, approximately.

Dante's reason for placing Adam in such a privileged position is found in Paradiso XIII, when Thomas Aquinas, speaking of Christ and Adam, declares that in these two persons mankind reached its highest form of perfection:

Però se 'l caldo amor la chiara vista
de la prima virtù dispone e segna,
tutta la perfezion quivi s'acquista.
Così fu fatta già la terra degna
di tutta l'animal perfezione;
così fu fatta la Vergine pregna;
sì ch'io commendo la tua oppinione,
che l'umana natura mai non fue
né fia qual fu in quelle di persone. (79-87)

This was reason enough for Dante to assign Adam to one of the highest thrones in the Rose, immediately next to Mary. Just as Adam is "l'umana radice," he is a root of the city of the blessed souls, for this is the true Jerusalem, where man is perfected man.

Next to Adam, on the Old Testament side, sits Moses. He also occupies a preeminent position, very close to Mary. Nonetheless he is second to Adam. Like Adam, Moses is considered a typus Christi:

Moyses, qui populum suum e servitute Aegyptiorum
liberavit, fere per omnes suae vitae eventus Christum
Salvatorem mundi exprimebat.⁴⁰

Moses was the first prophet. He was the great prophet of the people of God: "Ex non resurrexit ultra propheta in Israel sicut Moyses, quem nosset Dominus facie ad faciem" (Deut. 34:10). Although Dante does not call Moses a prophet as such, his presence contradicts Curtius' statement that there are no prophets in the Rose. Moreover,

the prophet John the Baptist is also in the Rose, as we shall discuss later. As Moses was the first, Jesus Himself was the last of the prophets, the culmination of all prophecies. Through Moses mankind received the Law; through Jesus it receive grace:

Quia lex per Moysen data est, gratia et veritas per
Iesum Christum facta est. (John 1:17)

Moses and Jesus are related in several instances. Moses is present in the episode of the Transfiguration, where he appears with Elias (Luke 9:30). When Jesus spoke to the Jews who had accused Him of violating the sabbath and of making Himself equal to God by calling Him His own Father, Jesus likened Himself to Moses:

Noliti putare quia ego accusaturus sim vos apud Patrem:
est qui accusat vos Moyses, in quo vos speratis. Si
enim crederetis Moysi, crederetis forsitan et mihi:
de me enim ille scripsit. Si autem illius litteris
non creditis, quomodo verbis meis credetis? (John 5:45-47)

Moses' preeminence as a prophet, leader and lawgiver compelled Dante to place him on a superior throne. As an historical character Moses is very important:

But because Moses was the representative of the Old Dispensation, Jesus and the New Testament writers thought of him as something more. He was a historical personage of such unique prominence in Israel's history, that his whole career appeared to them to afford parallels to spiritual factors with the New Covenant.⁴¹

Dante refers to Moses in several of his works. In the Commedia he ranks him with the Seraphim:

Di Serafin colui che piú s'india,
Moïse, Samuel, e quel Giovanni
che prender vuoli, io dico, non Maria,
non hanno in altro cielo... (Par. IV, 28-31)

As St. Peter examines Dante on the Christian faith, the poet states that his faith was established through the writings of Moses,

as well as those of the other prophets and Evangelists:

E io rispondo: Io credo in uno Dio
solo ed eterno, che tutto 'l ciel move,
non moto, con amore e con disio;
e a tal creder non ho io pur prove
fisice e metafisice, ma dalmi
anche la verità che quinci piove
per Moïse, per profeti e per salmi,
per l'Evangelio e per voi che scriveste
poi ch'è l'ardente Spirto vi fé almi... (Par. XXIV, 130-138)

In Paradiso XXVI the poet quotes the words of God as He spoke to Moses:

"Io ti farò vedere ogni valore" (v. 42). And in the Monarchia he states that Moses' writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit because God is the only dictator who inspires divine scribes:

O summum facinus, etiamsi contingat in somniis
eterni Spiritus intentione abuti. Non enim pec-
catur in Moysen non in David, non in Iob, non in
Matheum non in Paulum, sed in Spiritum Sanctum
qui loquitur in illis. Nam quamquam scribe divini
eloqui multi sint, unicus tamen dictator est Deus,
qui beneplacitum suum nobis per multorum calamos
explicare dignatus est. (III, iv, 11)

Finally, in a passage of the Epistle directed to the kings, the Senators of Rome, and all the rulers of Italy, Dante announces the coming of Henry VII and compares the latter to Moses:

Arrexit namque aures misericordes Leo fortis de
tribu Juda; atque ullulatum universalis captivi-
tatis miserans, Moysen alium suscitavit qui de
grava minibus Egiptiorum populum suum eripiet,
ad terram lacte ac melle manantem perducens. (Ep. V, 4)

The prominent seat of Moses in the Rose and his proximity to Mary is supported and justified by the historical facts surrounding his life and mission. Moses, "legista e obediante" (Inf. IV, 57), was for Dante a great leader, the foremost representative of his people for whom he suffered and sacrificed himself. Dante had hoped that Henry VII would be such a leader for the "nave senza nocchiere in gran tempesta" (Purg.

VI, 77).

The counterpart of the two great men on Mary's left side, Adam and Moses, are the two men on her right side, Peter and John. Peter, the other "root," and his brother Andrew were followers of John the Baptist, together with James and John. In the Gospel of John, Andrew takes Simon Peter to Jesus, telling him that the Messiah has been found (1:40-42).

Peter was the first Apostle, although first among equals. Christ's designation of Peter as such occurs on one of the solemn occasions when Christ no longer calls him Simon, but Cephas (Petrus), "the rock," on which the Church is to be founded:

Venit autem Iesus in partes Caesareae Philippi:
et interrogabat discipulos suos, dicens: Quem
dicunt homines esse filium hominis? At illi
dixerunt: Alii Ioannem Baptistam, alii autem
Elia, alii vero Ieremiam, aut unum ex prophetis.
Dicit illis Iesus: Vos autem quem me esse
dicitis? Respondens Simon Petrus dixit: Tu
es Christus, filius Dei vivi. Respondes autem
Iesus, dixit ei: Beatus es, Simon Bar Iona:
quia caro et sanguis non revelabit tibi, sed
Pater meus, qui in caelis est. Et ego dico
tibi, quia tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram
aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non
praevallebunt adversus eam. (Matt. 16:13-18)

Christ's predilection for Peter is shown again at the Transfiguration. Perhaps Peter's rugged character made him so valuable to Jesus.⁴² Dante attests to Peter's character in the Monarchia (III, ix, 9) when he attacks the position of the Decretalists.

Another instance in which Peter distinguishes himself is when in the synagogue of Capharnaum Jesus delivers a speech in which he declares himself to be the bread of life. He goes on to say that unless one eats his flesh and drinks his blood, one cannot have eternal life. This discourse was difficult and confusing for his listeners; they were

hoping for a Messiah who would restore the throne of David. Upon hearing their murmurs, Jesus asks his disciples if they wish to leave. At this point Peter answers:

Domine, ad quem ibimus? Verba vita aeternae habes:
et nos credidimus, et cognovimus quia tu es Christus
Filius Dei. (John 6: 69-70)

In his works Dante refers to all the important episodes of Peter's life.⁴³ Besides being mentioned with his first name, either as Pietro, Pier, Petrus or Cephas, Dante refers to him as: "il maggior Piero" (Inf. II, 24); "il Pescatore" (Purg. XXII, 63); "Archimandrita" (Mon. III, x, 17); "Barone" (Par. XXIV, 15); "santo Padre" (Par. XXIV, 124); "Padre vetusto di santa Chiesa" (Par. XXII, 124); "also primipilo" (Par. XXIV, 59); "Primizia dei vicari di Cristo" (Par. XXV, 14); "Dei vicarius" (Epist. V, 30); "gran viro" (Par. XXIV, 34); "colui che tien le chiavi" (Par. XXII, 139). And in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars where Peter is the representative of the faith, he is alluded to as: "foco felice," "foco benedetto," "luce eterna," "luce," "amore acceso," "luce profonda," "apostolico lume" (Par. XXIV). In Paradiso XXVII, Peter's glow increases with indignation as he denounces the popes for their corruption and wickedness.

In contrast to Adam, Peter is the new "umana radice," the leading representative of the new faith and the new Gospel. Dante's opinion of Peter is succinctly expressed in the Monarchia when he discusses the separation between the spiritual and temporal power, convincingly proving with the Evangelical text that only the spiritual power is relegated to the Pope:

Et quod Petrus de more ad superficiem loqueretur,
probat eius festina et impremeditata presumptio, ad
quam non solum fidei sinceritas impellebat, sed, ut

credo, puritas et simplicitas naturalis. Hanc suam
presumptionem scribe Christi testantur omnes. (Mon. III, 9-10)

Dante goes on to give specific instances of Peter's faults, if they may be called that, for it was his sincerity of faith and his natural simplicity which made him at times presumptuous. But these are the same qualities which made him the rock and the pillar of the Christian faith. Consequently, since Peter goes to Rome to establish this city as the center of Christianity and the see of the popes, Dante refers to Paradise as "quella Roma onde Cristo e romano" (Purg. XXXII, 102). In Dante's eyes, Peter's mission to Rome was extremely important in terms of his theological and political idea of the empire united under the Christological figures of the Emperor and the Pope. In the Empyrean, therefore, Peter cannot but be nearest to the Queen of Heaven, for he, having been the first prince, is now the first citizen of the new and true Rome.

Next to Peter is seated John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, author of the fourth Gospel. John was called by Jesus, together with his brother James, as Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18-22). From his own account, it appears that John was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-39).

John was a special person to Jesus. Whenever the twelve Apostles are listed, John is always mentioned among the first four. In Luke and Matthew, he is named after Peter, Andrew and James (Luke 6:13; Matt. 10:2). In Mark he is mentioned third, after Peter and James (3:14). During Christ's ministry, John had the distinction of being part of the trio (Peter, James, John) whom Jesus took into his confidence. At the resurrecting of Jarius' daughter, Jesus allowed no one to follow him but Peter, James and John. They are also present at the Transfiguration,

as told by the three Synoptists. And at the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus again takes them aside. It is noteworthy that Jesus surnamed John and James "Boanerges," meaning, as Mark says, "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17).

Moreover, and most important, John is present when Jesus is arrested and taken to the high priest and the praetorium. He is present at the crucifixion, when Jesus entrusts to him his mother Mary, and entrusts John to her as her son (John 19:25-27). John was the disciple whom Jesus loved most, as the Apostle states in describing the Last Supper:

Erat ergo recumbens unus ex discipulis eius in sinu Iesu, quem diligebat Iesus. (John 13:23)

And as he will restate at the end of his Gospel:

Conversus Petrus vidit illum discipulum, quem diligebat Iesus, sequentem, qui et recubuit in coena super pectus eius, et dixit: Domine, qui est qui tradet te? Hunc ergo cum vidisset Petrus, dixit Iesu: Domine, hic autem quid? Dicit ei Iesu: Sic eum volo manere donec veniam, quid ad te? tu me sequere. (John 19:20-21)

Mention of John is found throughout the Commedia, and in some instances in the Convivio, Monarchia, in the Quaestio and in the Epistle XIII. As in Peter's case, the most meaningful episodes of John's life are referred to by Dante, especially in the Commedia. John's presence at the Transfiguration is found in Purg. XXXII, 76; Convivio II, i, 5; Monarchia III, ix, 11; Quaestio 80. The episode describing John reclining his head on Jesus' bosom, as well as the episode by the cross, is referred to in Paradiso XXV:

"Questi è colui che giacque sopra 'l petto
del nostro pellicano, e questi fue
di su la croce al grande officio eletto." (112-114)

In Paradiso XXVI Dante is examined by John on the subject of love. The poet had looked at John, hoping to see his earthly body. The Apostle reproaches him, reminding him that the only bodies who ascended to heaven were those of Christ and the Virgin Mary. As the poet looks with intensity at the Apostle's light, he is blinded by so bright a light. He recovers his sight after he has answered the questions on the third theological virtue, an indication of the power of love, without which neither faith nor hope can exist. John, then, as a representative of love, assumes an essential role in Dante's journey to the Beatific Vision.

John's presence is felt in the mystical procession of Purgatorio XXIX. His Gospel appears as one of the "quattro animali / coronati ciascun di verde fronda" (vv. 92-93). His Epistles and the Apocalypse appear as elders:

Poi vidi quattro in umile paruta;
e di retro da tutti un vecchio solo
venir, dormendo, con la faccia arguta. (142-144)

Of the Apostles, Peter and John are the most distinguished, because of their deeds, both in the Gospels and in their apostolic life, and because of Jesus' special predilection. The third one, James, is not found in the Rose. Dante, therefore, more than any other apostles had to choose these two. As Adam and Moses can be called the two pillars of the Old Law, Peter and John are the pillars of the New Law, as well as the New Testament counterparts of Adam and Moses.

In the center of the other semicircle and sitting across from Mary, John the Baptist is enthroned,

The Baptist is perhaps the most honored of saints. His birth and mission were announced by an angel to his father Zachary:

Ait autem ad illum angelus: Ne timeas Zacharia, quoniam exaudita est deprecatio tua; et uxor tua Elisabeth pariet tibi filium, et vocabis nomen eius Ioannem: et erit gaudium tibi, et exultatio, et multi in navitate eius gaudebunt: erit enim magnus coram Domino: et vinum et siceram non bibet, et Spiritu sancto replabitur adhuc ex utero matris suae: et mutos filiorum Israel convertet ad Dominum Deum ipsorum; et ipse praecedet ante illum in spiritu et virtute Elia: ut convertat corda patrum in filios, et incredulos ad prudentiam iustorum, parare Domino plebem perfectam. (Luke 1:13-17)

Indeed, John shall be great in front of the Lord. Six months after Elizabeth conceived, the same angel, Gabriel, visited Mary to announce that she would conceive and give birth to Jesus. Soon after, Mary visited Elizabeth, and upon greeting her, the child leapt in Elizabeth's womb. John's birth, therefore, preceded that of Jesus by approximately six months. John grew strong in spirit, leading a very austere life:

Puer autem crescebat, et confortabatur spiritu; et erat in desertis usque in diem ostensionis suae ad Israel. (Luke 1:80)

After the episode of the baptism of Jesus, John sends two disciples to ask him: "Tu es qui venturus es, an alium expectamus?" (Luke 7:20). To which Jesus replies: "Euntes renuntiate Ioanni quae audistis et vidistis: Quia caeci vident..." (7:22-23). As the Baptist's disciples leave, Jesus gives testimony concerning John by saying to the crowds:

Quid existis in desertum videre? arundinem vento agitatam? Sed quid existis videre? hominem molli-bus vestimentis indutum? Ecce qui in veste pretiosa sunt et deliciis, in domibus regum sunt. Sed quid existis videre? prophetam? Utique dico vobis, et plus quam prophetam: hic est, de quo scriptum est: Ecce mitto angelum meum ante faciem tuam, qui praeparabit viam tuam ante te. Dico enim vobis: Maior inter natos mulierum propheta Ioanne Baptista nemo est: qui autem minor est in regno Dei, maior est illo. (Luke 7:24-28)

This is the highest praise bestowed upon John, who faithfully and humbly completed his mission as the forerunner of Christ (as "plus quam prophetam," John is the most notable prophet; this again contradicts Curtius' statement on the absence of prophets in the Rose).

John's death occurred during Jesus' ministry. Jesus alludes to it upon descending from the mountain of the Transfiguration, predicting his own passion:

Qui respondens, ait illis: Elias cum venerit primo, restituet omnia; et quomodo scriptum est in Filium hominis, ut multa patiatur et contemnatur. Sed dico vobis quia et Elias venit (et fecerunt illi quaecumque voluerunt) sicut scriptum est de eo. (Mark 9:11-12)

The Gospels, therefore, offer abundant justification for Dante's choice of placing the Baptist in such a high position. The greatness of John the Baptist is best described by St. Augustine in his Sermo CCLVIII "In Natalis Ioannis Baptistae":

Ioannes plus quam propheta, se abjecto Christum commendabat. Fuerunt Prophetæ ante Ioannem, et multi, et magni, et sancti, digni Deo, Deo pleni, Salvatoris prænuntiatores, veritatis attestatores. Veruntamen de nullo eorum dicit potuit, quod dictum est de Ioanne: "In natis mulierum nemo exsurrexit maior Ioanne Baptista (Matt. XI, 11). Quid ergo sibi vult ista magnitudo præmissa ante magnum? Ad testimonium magnæ humilitatis. Tam enim magnus erat, ut Christus posset putari.⁴⁴

Dante himself refers to the high degree of beatitude enjoyed by the Baptist as well as John the Evangelist, as we pointed out with Moses:

D'i Serafin colui che piú s'india,
Moïse, Samuel, e quel Giovanni
che prender vuoi, io dico, non Maria (Par. IV, 28-36)

Finally the Baptist's greatness and the poet's admiration toward him is emphasized in these verses from Purgatorio XXII:

Mele e locuste furon le vivande
che nodriro il Batista nel diserto;

per ch'elli è glorioso e tanto grande
quanto per lo Vangelio v'è aperto. (151-154)

Regarding the position of John the Baptist and Mary, C.S. Singleton points out that Dante chose two figures who lived "in both B.C. time and A.D. time,"⁴⁵ Apart from this, it must be added that it is necessary to compare the two in terms of their affinities, the most striking of which are their humility and self denial. Each had to fulfill a role. Mary brought Jesus into the world; the Baptist introduced him to the world. Theirs was a common mission. They were sent by God to pave and prepare the way for the Messiah. St. Augustine, in the Sermon "In Natalis Ioannis Baptistae," provides a very close relationship between the two by stating:

In matre Ioannis sterilitas accepit fecunditatem,
in matre Christi fecunditas non corrumpit integritatem.⁴⁶

In a certain sense Mary and John were the first believers in Christ. Consequently they are the true pillars of the new faith. By encompassing the Old and the New Law, they form -- particularly in John's case -- the bridge which connects the two Laws. The close relationship of Mary and John in the Rose is effectively described by Tommaseo:

Di faccia alla santa tra le donne siede il santo
tra gli uomini, padre d'anime a Dio conquistate:
sotto lui i fondatori d'ordini religiosi, vengon
di contro alle madri giudee, come padri d'anime
anch'essi.⁴⁷

Below John the Baptist, then, are seated St. Francis, St. Benedict and St. Augustine. The three of them are founders of religious orders. St. Francis founded an order whose life was based on absolute poverty. Benedict, considered the founder of western monasticism, believed in an active monastic life ("ora et labora" was his motto). Monasticism, in fact, took up the task of searching for and then

preserving for posterity, classical knowledge, as well as Christian learning, tradition and history. St. Augustine, more than a founder of a religious order, although it is believed that he was the author of the so-called "Regula Sancti Augustini," was the greatest of the Church Fathers and a theological pillar of the Church.

Dante refers to Francis, Benedict, Augustine and to St. Dominic in the Convivio (IV, xxviii, 9) when he states that one can lead a very religious life without having to take the habit of these four orders "che Dio non volse religioso di noi se non lo cuore." What is of interest to us is the fact that these three men in the Rose are seated under the Baptist, and the order in which they are seated. As Buti points out, when Dante places Francis below John, he also means St. Dominic. And so it is with Benedict and Augustine, in terms of monks and Church Doctors:

Francesco... per lui s'intende anco santo Domenico, imperò che, quello che si dice dell'uno s'intende anco dell'altro; Benedetto... (e per lui s'intendono tutti li altri monaci et eremiti santi, che sono stati), et Augustino, che fece anco religione... dottore della Chiesa (e per lui s'intendonon li altri dottori esseri ancora locati in su quello 'scanno'.⁴⁸

By placing Francis above Benedict and Augustine, Dante might be following the Christian medieval notion of the three Vitae as exemplified in St. Bernard himself, who, in describing Jacob's stairway, says:

In hac scala sunt positi omnes ad vitam aeternam predestinati..., tres ordines hominum, scilicet saeculares, activi et contemplativi. Saeculares sunt in minoris gradu, activi sunt in altiori loco et contemplativi vero sunt in summo.⁴⁹

Thus Francis would be "in summo loco," Benedict "in altiori loco," and Augustine "in minori gradu." Of the three, only Benedict is present

in one of the Heavens of Paradiso, Benedict talks to Dante in the seventh heaven, that of Saturn. But this heaven is that of the contemplative spirits. The poet asks to see St. Benedict in his body, as he truly is, but the saint tells him that his desire "s'adempiera in su l'ultima spera, / ove s'adempion tutti li altri e 'l mio" (Par. XXII, 62-3). In Paradiso XXXII Dante's desire will in fact be fulfilled as promised. The true contemplative, however, is Francis, who perceived the presence of God through his senses. His image is reflected in man, creatures, and things. This sort of contemplation and mysticism is, in fact, found in Bonaventura's Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum.

St. Francis' life is told by Thomas Aquinas in the Heaven of the Sun, but Dante never meets the saint in person. The twelve spirits found in the second Corona of lights are almost all followers of St. Francis. Among them are Bonaventura, who tells St. Dominic's life, Illuminato and Agostino, two of Francis's first followers. Joachim of Flora is also there. Dante sees St. Francis only in the Rose, seated on one of the highest thrones, right below the Baptist.

St. Augustine is not found in any heaven. Besides his presence in canto XXXII, he is only referred to indirectly, when Dante mentions "quell'avvocato de' tempi cristiani" -- whom some believe to be Orosius -- amongst the sapienti of the fourth heaven:

Ne l'altra piccioletta luce ride
quello avvocato de' tempi cristiani
del cui latino Augustin si provide. (Par. X, 119-20)

Augustine's most appropriate place is, however, the Heaven of the Sun. Why Dante did not include St. Augustine in any heaven, directly or indirectly, is a question to be pursued elsewhere. Dante, however, also excludes any mention of the three other great Doctors, namely: Ambrose,

Jerome and Gregory, although they are mentioned in the Letter to the Cardinals.

The presence of both St. Francis and St. Benedict provides the opportunity to rebuke the conduct of their religious orders, even though it is Aquinas, a Dominican, who does the reproaching on Francis' behalf. The other rebuke is made by Bonaventura while he praises St. Dominic. The connecting link between the depravity of the religious orders, which had become greedy for material things, and the presence of St. Augustine, is to be found in the latter's role in the preservation and defense of the faith; his writing in defense of the Church; his defense against the Manichean and Pelagian heresies; and above all, his teaching inspired by love and stemming from love. The gift of wisdom, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, brought him close to the spirit of Francis and his mystic fervor in the search for God. This is what differentiates Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, or in the words of Jacques Maritain:

The essential difference between St. Augustine's teaching and St. Thomas' is a difference of perspective and point of view. With St. Thomas, it is theological wisdom in the strict sense of the word; with St. Augustine, it is infused wisdom. With the former we explore essences; with the latter we are drawn to an experience of Him whom we love.⁵¹

These facts would place Augustine, more than any other Church Doctor or Father, close to Francis and Benedict. Augustine's rejection of material images, and of matter, in his theology and philosophy is analogous to Francis' and Benedict's rejection of vain things, and their embrace of Christianity under the aegis of poverty. Augustine's way of teaching and understanding -- with the heart and according to the order of charity -- is the way which leads the being toward its beginning

and its end, which is God. By means of love, he reaches his true love. This allows Augustine to be present in the Empyrean and to be pointed out explicitly by St. Bernard. At this point of the poet's vision, the only criterion to be applied for the degree of beatitude is that of caritas. Human understanding and reason fail, only to be replaced by Love.

Let us now move from the figures below the Baptist to those on his right and left. The two remaining blessed figures who are on either side of the Baptist are Lucia and Anna. The former is on the side of the New Law; the latter is on the side of the Old Law.

Lucia's name first appears in Inferno II when Virgil informs the poet that three ladies were mobilized for his rescue. He, in turn, was mobilized by Beatrice. All three ladies are referred to as "tre donne benedette," who care about him "ne la corte del cielo" (Inf. II, 124-5). The three ladies, Maria, Lucia and Beatrice, are in fact found in the Rose, where the last mentioned is Lucia. Dante is Beatrice's "fedele," but he is also said to be Lucia's "fedele" (v. 98). Beatrice qualifies Lucia as "nimica di ciascun crudele" (v. 100).

In the past, many commentators have understood "il tuo fedele" to mean that Dante might have had eye trouble (Conv. III, ix, 14-16), and that therefore Lucia was his protectress, for she traditionally was considered the patroness of those who suffer from eye ailments. As regards the reference to "Lucia, nimica di ciascun crudele," which definitely discards the simplistic notion of eye trouble, the traditional commentary has interpreted her allegorically as the symbol of illuminating grace. But, as Curtius effectively argues, Lucia has to be more than this allegorical symbol, if Beatrice is not simply

the Beatrice Portinari of Florence;

But if Beatrice is more than and different from the immortalized woman of Florence, if Lucia is more than and different from an almost unknown saint of the Breviary, if both intervene in the action at the bidding of a higher who remains unnamed -- then the three heavenly ladies must be understood as parts of a supernatural dispensation. Pietrobono attempts this: The liberation of mankind from the she-wolf requires a process of redemption in which the tre donne benedette act together as did the three persons of the Trinity in the "first" redemption. The explanation is unsatisfactory in this form. But it is in the right direction: Beatrice can be understood only as a function within a theological system.⁵²

Lucia also must be understood within such a system. It is essential not to neglect the other instance in which Lucia is found in the Commedia besides Inferno II and Paradiso XXXII, for in Purgatorio IX she is associated with the "aguglia," the eagle;

Ne l'ora che comincia i tristi lai
la rondinella presso a la mattina,
forse a memoria de' suo' primi guai,
e che la mente nostra, peregrina
piú da la carne e men da pensier presa,
a le sue vision quasi è divina,
in sogno mi pareva veder sospesa
un'aguglia nel ciel con penne d'oro,
con l'ali aperte e a calare intesa;
ed esser mi pareva là dove fuoro
abbandonati i suoi da Ganimede,
quando fu ratto al sommo concistoro.
Fra me pensava: 'Forse questa fiede
pur qui per uso, e forse d'altro loco
disdegna di portarne suso in piede'.
Poi mi pareva che, poi rotata un poco,
terribil come folgor discendesse,
e me rapisse suso infino al foco.
Ivi pareva che ella e io ardesse;
e sí lo 'ncendio imaginato cosse
che convenne che 'l sonno si rompesse. (13-33)

The poet then wakes up in a state of fear and astonishment. Virgil, aware of this, explains to him what has happened:

"Non aver tema", disse il mio signore;
"fatti sicur, ché noi semo a buon punto;
non stringer, ma rallarga ogne vigore.

Tu se' omai al purgatorio giunto;
 vedi là il balzo che 'l chiude dintorno;
 vedi l'entrata là 've par digiunto.
 Dianzi, ne l'alba che procede al giorno.
 quando l'anima tua dentro dormia,
 sovra li fiori ond'è la giú addorno
 venne una donna, e disse: "I' son Lucia;
 lasciatemi pigliar costui che dorme;
 sì l'agevolerò per la sua via." (46-57)

Lucia in this passage undoubtedly performs a special mission. She has come again to the poet's rescue, this time directly, in order to make his journey easier. If Lucia is identified with the eagle, which besides being a symbol of the Emperor is also a Christological symbol, it stands to reason that she is to be associated with the Second Person of the Trinity. The three blessed ladies, Mary, Lucia and Beatrice, are by analogy the figures of the Female Trinity.

Helen F. Dunbar, in her chapter "Its Center in the Sun," sets forth the symbolical meaning and the trinitarian identification of the three blessed ladies whose counterpart in malo are: Circe, the Siren, and Medusa.⁵³ Dunbar sees the blessed ladies "... functioning in the Divina Commedia as an expression of the Divine Power, Wisdom, and Love." This critic also states:

In the trinity of the three blessed ladies through whom is made know the will of the Divine Sun, Beatrice appears as she did in the Paradiso, as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, and through her is revealed the will of the two, Mary and Lucia who send her forth.⁵⁴

And as the cosmic meaning of the three blessed ladies is discussed, we are given the closest definition of Lucia's function:

The blessed Tri-unity of love, light and heat had guided him on his journey, through the ministration of the blessed ladies, Mary, Lucia, and Beatrice, of whom, in the distress of the Dark Wood, Virgil had brought him word. Whatever may have been the individual associations for Dante of these three living symbols, their significance is cosmic. In Mary is

the perfect instrument through which the infinite life may find expression, as through her all creation has welcomed its redemption. In the name of Lucia, whatever her human identity, is the perfect surrogate of the Divine Logos, the light giver in whose name is Salvation, Sancta Sophia, the guide of life... Like Christ, Lucia was mediator of Dante's salvation, and, in the form of the eagle, she it was who raised to purgatory gate, from whence he might hope at last to ascend beyond the reaches of time and space, to that eternity which Christ in his ascension made accessible to men.⁵⁵

The question raised by Curtius regarding the meaning of Lucia is best answered by G.R. Sarolli, who goes beyond the nominum interpretatio by considering the word "fedele" and depriving it of any relevance to the optomological significance, and even that of Dante being "one of the faithful." Thus "fedele" is not simply "faithful" but Faith, the first virtue.⁵⁶ Lucia Virgil and Statius are "figures of Christ" and of the "militant Church," consequently of the Holy Roman Empire. Having found Lucia's name in one of the "Ordines" of the Pontificiales, Sarolli points out how this substantiates the fact that Lucia has a meaning more important than that of being related to eye problems.⁵⁷

Indeed, only if Lucia is analyzed in this fashion can she be seen as having a function within a theological system, as Curtius says of Beatrice. I believe, however, that the designation of Lucia as "nimica di ciascun crudele," has a further dimension and deeper implication. If Lucia is a typus Christi, and if faith-- whose "consummation" is charity as Gilson states -- is a Christocentric virtue, Lucia "nimica di ciascun crudele" implies another virtue, namely Justice. This virtue is the attribute of the perfect monarch or emperor, Christ, "justi regis" who was made to "omnem iustitiam implere" (Letter to Henry VII). It would seem that hidden in these words, there is a principle of faith which Peter Lombard calls "fides formata caritate," encompassing

also Hope and Justice. That is, faith formed by love gives hope of the final justice, as Paul states:

Evacuati estis a Christo, qui in lege iustificamini:
a gratia excidistis, Nos enim spiritu ex fide,
spem iustitiae expectamus. Nam in Christo Iesu
neque circumcisio aliquid valet, neque praeputium:
sed fides, quae per charitatem operatur, (Gal. 5:6)

To conclude, in examining how the three blessed ladies are characterized, one will note that there are three attributes referring respectively to the three theological virtues, thus to each person of the Trinity. Mary, who is not named by proper name, keeping to Dante's rule of not naming either her, Christ or God in the Inferno, is referred to as "Donna gentil" (II, 94). Charity and the concept "gentil" form a perfect union. Lucia, with the words "fedel," Lux, Lumen and the phrase "nimica di ciascun crudele," stands in perfect analogy to Christ and Faith. And finally, Beatrice "loda di Dio vera" (Inf. II, 103), who is greeted by Dante with the word LAUDE -- found in the acrostic of verses 52-69 of Paradiso XXXI -- is in harmony with Hope and the Holy Spirit.

The last blessed soul to be considered is Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary. She occupies the seat next to John the Baptist, on his right, thus in the Old Testament section. Her distinction is that she cannot but stare joyously at her daughter.

Di contr'a Pietro vedi sedere Anna,
tanto contenta di mirar sua figlia,
che non move occhio per cantare osanna. (Par. XXXII, 133-35)

As some commentators point out, Dante brings out a human touch by showing the emotional fulfillment of Anna in the contemplation of her daughter. But besides this element, Anna shares with the other women present in the Rose the fact that she is also a typus Ecclesiae:

Anna sterilis, custodiens et servans quae Dominum
non clamorosa petitione, sed modeste et tacite
intra ipsas pectoris latebras precabatur, typum
referit Ecclesiae, quae prius sterilis nunc largi-
ter foecunditata pollet,⁶⁰

The other element which Anna shares with women such as Sara, Rebecca and Rachel is that she conceived at a very advanced age. Anna died a few years after the birth of the Virgin. The Bibliotheca Sanctorum relates the following concerning her life:

Stando al Protovangelo, Anna (dall'ebraico Hannah, "grazia") era figlia del sacerdote betlemite Mathan. Le sue sorelle Maria e Sobe sposarono due betlemiti e divennero rispettivamente madri di Maria Salome e d'Elisabetta. Anna, invece, sposò il galileo Gioacchino in età assai avanzata. La Vergine Maria fu poi a tre anni consacrata al servizio del tempio di Gerusalemme. Entrambi i genitori morirono non poco tempo.⁶¹

Like the other blessed souls present in the Rose, Anna also was placed there by the poet because of her historical and symbolical meaning.

Having probed the rest of the personae in the Rose, we must conclude that the same criterion of excellence applied to the row of women forming the dividing wall is applied to the row of men under the Baptist. St. Francis, chronologically after Augustine and Benedict, is certainly the most worthy of the three. This proximity to Mary is determined by his excellence. What is more important here, however, is that the total design of the Rose, with all its personae, shows that Dante has achieved a harmonious whole through a qualitative and quantitative balance. The qualitative balance results from the choice of the personae who are, for Dante, the most outstanding in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The quantitative balance is established by the presence of ten women and ten men (including Bernard and Henry VII):

Mary, Eve, Beatrice, Rachel, Sara, Rebecca, Judith, Ruth, Anna, Lucia;
John the Baptist, Peter, John the Evangelist, Adam, Moses, Francis,
Benedict, Augustine.

The more detailed numerical implications of this balance will be
examined in the next chapter, which deals specifically with numerical
symbolism.

Footnotes

Chapter III -- Part II

³⁶ Mary, with Peter on one side and Adam on the other, is another figura Trinitatis.

³⁷ P.L. 2, col. 782. See also Ambrose, P.L. 15, col. 1611; 17, cols. 98, 813.

³⁸ P.L. 15, col. 1632.

³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Th., II, II, i, 163, art. 1 ad 1.

⁴⁰ Tertullianus, P.L. 1, col. 667; 2, col. 347.

⁴¹ Dictionary of the Bible, op. cit., 678.

⁴² Ibid., p. 713. "The distinction of Peter lies less in the qualities of his mind than in those of his heart. He was impulsive, 'ever ardent, ever leaping before his fellows' (Chrysostom), and often speaking unadvisedly and incurring rebuke. This, however, was only the weakness of his strength, and it was concomitant of a warm and generous affection. If John, says St. Augustine, was the disciple whom Jesus loved, Peter was the disciple who loved Jesus."

⁴³ It is important to note that Dante uses the same evangelical text in the letter to Arrigo: "Verum quia sol noster, sive desiderii fervor hoc submoneat sive facies veritatis..." (7).

⁴⁴ P.L. 38, col. 1302-3.

⁴⁵ C.S. Singleton, The Divine Comedy, III, op. cit., p. 538.

⁴⁶ P.L. 38, col. 1302.

⁴⁷ La 'Divina Commedia' nella figurazione artistica..., op. cit., p. 713.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 712.

⁴⁹ P.L. 184, col. 1199. Beatrice, then, would be a "seculares," and that is why she sits in the third row, below Eve,

50 Gregory, Ambrose and Augustinus are mentioned in the Epistle to the Cardinals (15-16), along with the Pseudo Areopagite, John Damascene and Bede. Of these, Dante says that they are neglected because in the Vatican they study the texts of the Decretalists.

51 Jacques Maritain, "St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas," in St. Augustine, His Age, Life and Thought (New York; Meridian Books, 1969), pp. 205-6.

52 E.R. Curtius, op. cit., pp. 376-7.

53 H.F. Dunbar, op. cit., p. 236.

54 Ibid., pp. 168-69.

55 Ibid., pp. 234-5

56 G.R. Sarolli, Prolegomena, op. cit., p. 164.

57 Ibid., p. 251.

58 "The general economy of the poem demands that charity should be added to faith and be its consummation, jsut as faith is added to reason and enlightens it." E. Gilson, Dante and Philosophy, trans. David More (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 238.

59 G.R. Sarolli, Prolegomena, p. 162.

60 P.L. 219, "Indices II," col. 247.

61 Bibliotheca Sanctorum, op. cit., p. 1270.

Chapter IV

Numerical Symbolism

The numerical structure of the Rose is based on the number eight. This will be proven in the course of the chapter as the Rose is examined in terms of its numerical symbolism. In order to arrive at an understanding of what numerical symbolism meant to the medieval writers, it is necessary to explore the historical background of numerical tradition, which falls into two parts: secular (Pythagorean -- arithmological) and sacred (biblical and liturgical). The underlying source for the sacred tradition is the well-known phrase from the Book of Wisdom: "Sed omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere disposuisti" (11:21); and Isidore's statement: "Tolle numerum in rebus omnibus, et omnia pereunt."¹ The notion of numerical composition and number symbolism became an unquestioned part of medieval literature and biblical exegetical tradition. It has been suggested that this principle might have been borrowed from Plato,² or from Pythagoras, who said that everything is arranged according to number.³

With the verse from the Book of Wisdom, number became an essential factor of the medieval forma mentis and the medieval world order. Curtius states:

Through this verse, number was sanctified as a form-bestowing factor in the divine work of creation. It acquired metaphysical dignity. This is the imposing background of numerical composition in literature.⁴

As Edgar de Bruyne points out, this same verse was so important and so crucial that it established a whole new system of esthetics which he calls "Sapiential."⁵ From the three elements (mensura, numerus, pondus), Augustine obtained three esthetic principles: mode, form and order, which he claimed to be present in all things. St. Bernard, on the other hand, maintained an esthetic based on a mystical interpretation of the Canticum Canticorum. This must be kept in mind in examining the role of St. Bernard -- as "dottore" -- in the Rose. In other words, Dante -- as he did with Gregory the Great, who smiles at his mistakes concerning the hierarchy of angels -- chooses St. Bernard to show the structure and number of the Rose. In doing so, he reconciled the two esthetics.

The esthetic of number, therefore, along with those of light and symbol, was incorporated into all forms of art, whether poetry, like the Divine Comedy, or architecture, particularly in the cathedral, or painting, for instance in the work of Giotto.

Number symbolism and numerical composition are a basis of Dante's work, especially the Commedia:

Il numero in tal modo era diventato uno dei principia individuationis della forma mentis medievale che concepiva opere rigorosamente numerologiche, e i pochi esempi citati da Agostino a Rabano Mauro, ad Ugo di Santo Caro e al Dante della Vita Nuova ... e dell'Egloga II ... con gli altri testi che dovremo escutere, valgono a confermare anche nell'Alighieri quella forma mentis e per consequens che il simbolismo numerologico è insieme "fundamentum" della stessa architettoniche della Divina Commedia e, come intimava l'esegesi scritturale, viatico alla lettura simbolica in una con i restanti simbolismi matematici: musica, geometria e astronomia.⁶

The metaphysical conception of number came to the Middle Ages from antiquity. Number symbolism was developed first in Babylonia;

numbers and stars were closely related, and all numbers were sacred. The number seven, for example, was considered especially sacred. Pythagoras and his school maintained that everything had a mathematical basis. Pythagorean thought, known mainly through Plato -- for there was no Pythagorean literature before Plato -- conceived the cosmos as order, structure and beauty; elements which cannot be separated. The whole universe based on a mathematical principle was, therefore, in harmony. According to Pythagoreans, if one were to observe and study the harmony of the universe, one would reproduce such harmony in one's soul. They regarded the soul as the harmony of the body. These notions are discussed by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*:

Contemporaneously, and even before them, the so called Pythagoreans, the first to be absorbed in mathematics, not only advanced this particular science, but, having been brought up on it, they believed that its principles are the principles of all things. Now, of these principles, numbers are naturally the first. As a result, they seemed to see in numbers, rather than in fire, earth, and water, many similarities to things as they are and as they came to be... And all other matters appeared to be ultimately of the nature of numbers; and numbers were for them the primary natures. In view of all this, they took the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be harmony and number. They were adept at finding numbers and harmonies, both in patterns of change and in the structure of parts. And the organized and unified the whole arrangement of the heavens to exhibit its harmony.⁷

The mysticism of the Pythagoreans, integrated with mathematics, produced the correspondence between numbers and things, so that numbers with their symbolism were a key to the understanding of the cosmos. They held that the decad contained all the numbers, thus, everything.

The Pythagoreans derived from the Babylonians and the Egyptians not their interest in pure arithmetic, but in the mysticism of numbers, so that science was combined with religion.

To the Babylonians, as mentioned before, all numbers were sacred. They had individual deities for the numbers sixty to one (60 = Anu, 60 = Bel, 40 = Ea, 30 = Sin, etc.).⁸ In Greek religion and mythology, the most meaningful numbers were 3, 9, and 12. To the Romans the leading number was three and its multiples. Three is a number universally attributed to the deity.

All of this numerical symbolism filtered down to the Middle Ages not only through Plato and Neoplatonism, but also through the Gnostics of Alexandria, whose aim was the union of Eastern science and religion with Greek philosophy. The mysticism of numbers, as we can see, had ample influence on Christian thought and biblical exegesis.

The development of arithmology, that is, the mystical meaning of numbers, can be traced to Nicomachus of Gerasa (1st-2nd century A.D.). whose Introductio Arithmetica was translated by Boethius, and to the Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 245 A.D.), who wrote De Comuni Mathematica Scientia, which deals with the philosophy of mathematics. Iamblichus' other work, In Nicomachi Arithmeticae Introductionem or Theologumena Arithmeticae, is a commentary on Nicomachus of Gerasa's Introductio.⁹

Iamblichus was not interested in pure arithmetic, but in arithmology, the hidden symbolism of numbers as initiated by the Pythagoreans. As J. Fontaine states, his principle of departure is that theological speculation is rooted in mathematics:

La connaissance mathématique n'a plus pour lui d'intérêt en elle même; elle n'est, selon une

conception traditionnelle depuis la République de Platon, qu'une introduction à la philosophie. La recherche rationnelle, appuyée sur le calcul et la construction des figures, passe décidément au second plan. La preuve en est l'importance primordiale que Jamblique accord à ce qu'il appelle la "mathématique théologique", c'est-à-dire à la spéculation philosophique qualitative sur les nombres, à l'arithmologie: lui il consacre le traité spécial des Theologumena arithmeticae.¹⁰

Of the early Church Fathers who concerned themselves with number symbolism, it is worthwhile mentioning Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - c. 215), Origen (c. 185 - c. 254), who was the former's disciple, and the Greek Apologists: Justin Martyr (c. 100 - c. 165), Irenaeus (c. 130 - c. 200), and Hippolytus (c. 170. - c. 236). Mention must also be made of the two Latin Apologists, Tertullian (160 - c. 220) and Lactantius (c. 240 - c. 320).

Another early Christian writer who concerned himself with arithmology is Martianus Capella. His De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii is a treatise on the liberal arts, which, along with the works of Boethius, was considered by many the foundation for the trivium and the quadrivium. De Nuptiis became well known in the Middle Ages through the famous Commentum of Remigius of Auxerre (9th century).

Two authors of extreme importance to the development of number symbolism in biblical exegesis are Cassiodorus (c. 485 - c. 580) and Boethius (c. 480 - 524). Cassiodorus' Institutiones, or De Institutione Divinarum Litterarum, is a kind of encyclopedia on the liberal arts. His chapter "De Arithmetica" provided, along with the Introductio Arithmetica of Nicomachus, the basis for the development of Isidore's Liber Numerorum.

Boethius, who considered the quadrivium "the quadruple road to wisdom,"¹¹ wrote De Institutione Arithmetica, whose basis is Nicomachus' text. He also wrote De Geometria, based on the work of Euclid. Boethius states that everything that is constructed follows a numerical pattern, since this is the principle followed by the Creator -- a design based on number.¹² These texts and the one on music (De Institutione Musica) became a prime source of knowledge in the Middle Ages. In the Consolatio Boethius reaffirms the notion of the numerical harmony of the whole:

... tu cuncta superno
 Ducis ab exemplo, pulchrum plcherrimus ipse
 Mundum mente gerens, similique imagine formans,
 Perfectasque jubens perfectum absolvere partes.

 Tu numeris elementa ligas, ut frigora flammis,
 Arida convenient liquidis: ne purior ignis
 Evolet, aut mersas deducant pondera terras ...¹³

All these authors, as well as Macrobius (4th-5th cent.) in his Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, were concerned with arithmology and influenced the Church Fathers in their application of numerical symbolism to biblical exegesis.

It is with St. Augustine that number symbolism assumed a prominent role in theology and biblical exegesis:

It was Augustine who gave the final stamp of approval to number symbolism... As a matter of fact, Augustine is one of the most comprehensive sources of information concerning Neo-Pythagorean number theory, and he misses few opportunities to discuss the science. In his commentary on John, he overlooks no single numerical reference, not even the hours of the day of the "25 or 30 furlongs" (John 6:19).¹⁴

In commenting on the episode of the Flood, Augustine attributes great importance to numerical symbolism. V.H. Hopper calls it: "... an example of his striking ingenuity, as well as a comprehensive survey of

the method of medieval exegesis in regard to number."¹⁵ It must be kept in mind that Augustine saw in these numbers the hidden theological message of the biblical writer which had to be revealed for the benefit of the Christian reader. Because this was a hidden meaning, Augustine believed that not only Christian but also pagan learning was to be used for the understanding of the mysteries of numbers:

Augustine is willing to accept the prophecies of the Sybil or Hermes or Orpheus or any of the heathen poets, to aid the faith of the heathen. In regard to number, therefore, Hermes is recognized as a master, and it is recalled that Plato himself represented God as framing the world on numerical principles.¹⁵

Let us examine Augustine's explicatio of the flood episode and the Ark in the Contra Faustum Manichaeum.¹⁷ The symbolic meaning of the numbers 7, 6, 50, 40, 4, and others is given as Augustine applies them to the interpretation of the narration. One can see that the numbers 6, 7, and 8 are extremely meaningful. Number 8 in particular is associated with resurrection and Christ; the eighth day, which is also the last, is the day of Christ's resurrection.¹⁸ Augustine followed this interpretation because of his principle that sapientia derives from number and exists on number. The summa sapientia is God; in order to understand God's word, one must understand numbers:

Dubitare non possum. Sed pervellum scire utrum uno aliquo genere contineantur haec duo, sapientia scilicet et numerus, quia conjuncta etiam in Scripturis sancti haec posita esse commemorasti; ad alterum existat ab altero, aut alterum in altero consistat, veluti numerus a sapientia, vel in sapientia. Nam sapientia existere a numero, aut consistere in numero, non ausim dicere...¹⁹

When St. Augustine discusses the meaning of the 153 fishes found in the Gospel, he interprets the number as the "universum sanctorum et justorum numerum":

Centum ergo quinquaginta tres pisces non tantum numerum sanctorum significat; sed universum sanctorum et justorum numerum certa causa tanto numero significat Scriptura, ut omnes intelligantur in illis centum quinquaginta tribus pertinentes ad resurrectionem vitae aeternae.²⁰

Through Augustine's impact on number symbolism, the Church Fathers received a tremendous impulse to pursue this notion and apply it to their biblical commentaries. Augustine, therefore, was a major force in the development of arithmology as distinguished from arithmetic. He was an inspirational force, because of his reputation, as well as an active participant in this field. Yet, even though he considered numbers most sacred and full of mysteries, he did not dedicate a treatise or a chapter completely to numerology. That was left to the great encyclopedists, such as Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636), Rabanus Maurus (c. 776-856) and others.²¹

Isidore's Etymologiarum Sive Originum is an encyclopeida containing practically everything available in terms of the knowledge of his times. The third book is entitled De Arithmetica, a treatise intended to expound the knowledge available on pure arithmetic. In it, Isidore names the authorities on arithmetic, stating that Pythagoras was the first among the Greeks to write of this science, and that Nicomachus of Gerasa -- whose work was translated into Latin by Apuleius and later by Boethius -- treated it more fully.²² Isidore's source, however, is Cassiodorus, whose definitions of arithmetic he practically copies. It is interesting to note, however, that in this treatise Isidore is already leaning toward arithmology -- revealing his true intention -- which will be the subject of his Liber Numerorum. He is therefore departing from the notions of mathematics strictly as science, and putting mathematics in the service of theology in order to penetrate the

hidden meaning of numbers found in the scriptures. Let us see how Isidore does this.

After defining his subject as: "Arithmetica est disciplina quantitatis numerabilis secundum se," and "Arithmetica est disciplina numerorum" or "Numerus autem est multitudo ex unitatibus constituta," he declares:

Ration numerorum contemnenda non est. In multis enim sanctarum scripturarum locis quantum mysterium habent elucet. Non enim frustra in laudibus Dei dictum est (Sap. 11, 21): 'Omnia in mensura et numero et pondere fecisti.'²³

From this it is evident that Isidore is primarily interested in numbers as applied to biblical exegesis. For this reason he will say: "Tolle numerum in rebus omnibus, et omnia pereunt." And he will give to numbers, as did St. Augustine,²⁴ infinite dimensions:

Numeros autem infinitos esse certissimum est, quoniam in quocumque numero finem faciendum putaveris, idem ipso non dico...²⁵

Isidore, therefore, was aware of all the tradition and the sources concerning arithmetic and arithmology. In terms of strict arithmology, however, the most important influence or source for his Liber numerorum qui in sacris scripturis occurrunt is Maritanus Capella's De Nuptiis. In this work Martianus offers the mystical interpretation of the first ten numbers.²⁶ But Isidore's Liber Numerorum is, nonetheless, a new genre in Christian Latin literature, as Jacques Fontaine states:

Ce traité crée donc bien un genre nouveau dans la littérature latine chrétienne,

Il faut sans doute, comme on le verra en particulier par le nombreux emprunts à Augustin, chercher une grande partie de sa substance dans les oeuvres patristiques antérieures, mais c'est ne point dans cette tradition chrétienne que l'on trouvera le modèle du genre. Par sa forme, ce catalogue numérique trouve son équivalent le plus approché

dans les traités d'arithmologie païenne, en particulier, à l'intérieur de la tradition latine, dans l'encyclopédie de Martianus Capella. Le livre VI de cette dernière contient un abrégé arithmologique sur les dix premiers nombres dans lequel Isidore a largement puisé.²⁷

As one investigates Isidore's De Arithmetica, and especially his Liber Numerorum, one has to agree with Fontaine that he is the founder of arithmology in biblical exegesis.

In the Liber Numerorum Isidore states:

Non est superfluum numerorum causas in Scripturis sanctis attendere. Habent enim quandam scientiae doctrinam, plurimaque mystica sacramenta.²⁸

He defines number as:

... congregatio unitatis, vel ab uno progrediens multitudo, cujus quidem universitas infinita est, nec ulla potest multitudine terminari.²⁸

He then arrives at the concept of unitas by taking an even number such as 64 and retracing its divisors to the number one, which is indivisible; therefore:

Unitas est pars minima numerorum, quae secari non potest. Idem autem unus semen numerorum, non numerus. Ex ipso enim caeteri manant vel procreatur...²⁹

Consequently, by calling unitas not "numerus," but "semen numerorum," unitas is the numerical symbol of God.³⁰ Isidore, in fact, will illustrate this by stating:

Idem etiam, insecabilis est, nec per ullas partes dividi potest, quia ubique pars est, ubique totus est, ad cujus exemplum unus est. Deus, unus est mediator Dei et hominum Homo Christus Iesus. Paraclitus quoque Spiritus unus; una est Mater Ecclesia...³¹

Isidore goes on in giving the symbolic meaning of numbers by beginning with the number two, which, as he says, must be examined in bono

et in malo.³² In so doing, he sets the rule for all the other numbers.

The next authors forming the backbone of arithmology in biblical exegesis are: Rabanus Maurus and Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096-1141).

Rabanus, in the chapter De numero from his encyclopedia De Universo (P.L. 111), begins with these words:

Numerorum enim ratio in multis juxta allegoriam
typica significatione mysterium nobis venerandum
ostendit. Unde primus numerus, hoc est, unus ad
unitatem deitatis refertur. De quo en Exodo
scriptum est: "Audi Israel, Dominus Deus tuus,
Deus unus est (Deut. VI)". Item unus ...³³

Rabanus continues in this fashion and lists the numbers, giving their meaning and the exempla to which they relate in the Scriptures. It is noteworthy to point out that the whole of De Universo consists of an allegorical examination of things. Hugh of St. Victor's De numeris mysticis sacrae Scripturae, in his De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris Praenotatiuncula, is of extreme importance, for it lists nine rules with which one must interpret the significance of numbers in biblical exegesis:

Numer igitur novem modis significat in divino eloquio:
secundum ordinem positionis, secundum qualitatem com-
positionis, secundum modum porrectionis, secundum
formam dispositionis, secundum computationem, secundum
partium aggregationem, secundum multitudinem, secundum
exagerationem.³⁴

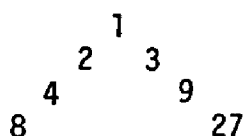
Hugh elaborates on these definitions by giving numbers as exempla, so that in the second rule, "according to the quality of their composition," to name only one, the exemplum of the number two is given. Since this number can be divided in two, it assumes the meaning of corruptibility and transitoriness:

Secundum qualitatem compositionis numeri significat,
ut idem binarius qui sectionem recipit, et in duo
dividi potest, corruptibilia et transitoria signifi-
cat.³⁴

In another work, the Didascalicon, Hugh of St. Victor states:

Hujus quoque progressionis regressionisque rationem ipse etiam numerus docet. Dic ter unum fiunt III: dic ter tria fiunt IX: dic ter novem fiunt XXVII: dic ter XXVII: fiunt LXXXI... Rectissime autem simplex animae essentiae unitate exprimitur, quae ipsa quoque incorporea est. Ternarius quoque propter indissolubile mediae unitatis vinculum congrue ad animam refertur, sicut quaternarius, quia duo media habet, ideoque dissolubilis est, et proprie ad carpus pertinet.³⁵

The same notion pertaining to the quality of the even and odd numbers is found in chapter VI of Macrobius' In somnium Scipionis, which the latter derived from Plato's Timaeus; it reproduces the diagram usually found in the commentaries on the Timaeus, namely:



Macrobius attributes to the numbers four and three the same qualities given to them by Hugh of St. Victor.

The application of numerical symbolism to biblical exegesis was present, in various degrees, in all the Church Fathers. They followed the guiding principles of the authors that have been mentioned in the course of this brief excursus. As Henry de Lubac states:

La speculation sur les nombres, qui sont "sacratissimi et mysteriorum plenissimi" et jugée par tous, exégètes et philosophes, chose très importante. Plusieurs y voient le premier degré de la contemplation. En raison de ce "mystère de nombres," l'arithmétique est estimée indispensable à la théologie, et la beauté qu'elle fait découvrir en un tel mystère la fait comparer à Venus. Ces conceptions dominent tout le haut moyen âge.³⁷

The Venerable Bede follows the notion of the indispensability of arithmetic in theology by stating that there are four parts in the Scriptures: "Canon divinus, Historia, Numerus, Grammatica."³⁸ Number,

therefore, is an essential part of the Scriptures. Bede, in fact, restates the phrase of Isidore: "Tolle numerus in rebus et omnia pereunt."³⁹

As has been said before, the Pythagoreans considered the numbers of the decade sacred, both in themselves and in their combination. This view was adopted by the Church Fathers, who applied it to the Bible.

The number one is indispensable to theology for it provides the idea of indivisibility, of unity, of the Supreme Being. "Unus est Deus," said Isidore, echoing the Bible:

Audi, Israel, Dominus Deus noster, Dominus unus est. (Deut. 6 : 4)

St. Paul says:

Unum corpus, et unus Spiritus, sicut vocati estis in una spe vocationis vestrae. Unus Dominus, una fides, unum baptisma. Unus Deus et Pater omnium, qui est super omnes, et per omnia, et in omnibus nobis. (Eph. 4 : 46)

The number two, according to Isidore, must be seen in bono and in malo. While it is related to the two Testaments, to the two tables of law given to Moses, to the two natures of Christ, and to the many other examples given by Isidore and Rabanus, it implies disunity and diversity. The impure animals entering Noah's Ark went two by two. Consequently this number belongs to the body, not the soul.

The number three, which can only be divided by one and by itself, is the trinitarian number par excellence, and consequently the symbol of Unity and of God. The triad of deities is not a Christian concept only, but also Greek (Zeus, Neptune and Pluto -- three sons of one, Saturn), Roman (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva), Egyptian (Osiris, Isis and Horus), Babylonia (Bel, Anu and Ea), and Hindu (Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu).

This number is universally a symbol of deity. It is the beginning, the middle and the end, or as Dante says:

Quell'uno e due e tre che sempre vive
e regna sempre in tre e 'n due e 'n uno,
non circunscritto, e tutto dircunscribe,
tre volte era cantato da ciascuno
di quelli spirti con tal melodia
ch'ad ogni merto saria giusto muno. (Par. XIV, 28-33)

In the Old Testament (I Paral., 21:12) David is given the choice of three things: three years of famine, three months to flee his enemies and succumb to their sword, or three days of pestilence. In the New Testament, let us remember that Christ rises on the third day. Both Isidore and Rabanus give numerous exempla of this number.

Four is the number of the earth, or the number of the body, as mentioned. Besides being the number of the earth (four winds, four seasons, four quarters of the earth), four is geometrically and mathematically a perfect number. It is the square and the last digit of the sequence $1+2+3+4=10$. To the Church Fathers, four meant: the Evangelists, the liturgical seasons, the cardinal virtues, the four animals in Ezekiel and in the Apocalypse.⁴⁰

Of the number five Rabanus Maurus says:

Quinarius ergo numerus ad quinque legis libros Moysi
significationem aliquando trahit, de quibus Aposto-
lus ait: "Volo in Ecclesia quinque verba sensu meo
loqui" (I Cor. 14), vel ad quinque sensu corporis,
id est, visum, auditum, gustum, odoratum et tactum.⁴¹

Rabanus then mentions the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25), five foolish and five wise. And Isidore states that this number is perfect because when multiplied by an odd number "se semper ostendit." The number five, moreover, is often used in the episode of Joseph in the Old Testament (five days of pestilence, Benjamin ate five times more

than his brothers, five festal garments, etc.).

The number six, in addition to being perfect ($1+2+3=6$), is related to the six days of creation and the six ages of the world. Together with the number twelve, six is seen in reference to time (six months, twelve months, six hours, twelve hours, the sixth hour).

Seven is especially sacred not only in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but also in the Babylonian, Egyptian, Assyrian and Persian religions, because of its relation to the seven heavenly bodies. This number receives great attention from Isidore and Rabanus Maurus because of its identification with: the sacred seventh day, the sacred seventh year, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven virtues and the seven vices; the seven stars, the seven candelabra, the seven Churches of Asia, and the fourteen generations. It is also important in other computations of seven: the 70 descendants of Jacob, 70 years of captivity, and the forgiving 70 times seven, stated in the New Testament.

The number eight is of extreme importance for our purposes, since it is the symbol of resurrection, baptism and eternal life. Rabanus Maurus states:

Similiter septem et octo quietis et resurrectionis obtinet sacramentum. Octo enim ad diem Dominicae Resurrectionis sive omnium sanctorum futuram resurrectionem pertinet. De qua in titulo psalmi sexti scribitur: "In finem pro octava."⁴²

It must be pointed out also that Rabanus in his De Laubibus Sanctae Crucis has a diagram, "De octo beatitudinis," in which the beatitudes appear within eight octagons forming a cross (P.L. 107, col. 133).

Isidore expands on this number, declaring it "perfect," "holy," "first," and also stating that it is a symbol of Christ and the hope of eternal resurrection:

Octonarius primus et perfectus est; nam ex primo motu, id est, ex duobus per duos quatuor generat, et bis facit octoadum perfectum. Hic autem numerus sanctus est, et in figura veræ circumcisionis ascriptus. Quin etiam et septenario numero primus est, et ex septem est, sicut in principio idem, qui fuit octavus in creatione mundi, et perfectio unitatis est.

Sed sicut in septenario numero praesens vita voluitur, et designatur, ita per octonarium spes aeternae resurrectionis ostenditur. Hoc enim die Dominus a mortuis resurrexit, qui scilicet a passione Domini computatur tertius; in ordine creationis mundi, ut praedictum est, post septimum reperitur octavus ad demonstrandam utique futurae resurrectionis beatitudinem; quod non immerito Scriptura sic ait: Da partem septum, nec non et octo, quia ignoras quid mali futurum sit super terram; quasi diceret: Sic dispensa sollicite temporalia, ut studeas cogitare aeterna; necesse est namque ut bene agendo praecogites, quia de futuris iudicii malis quid denuo tibi incurrat, incertus es (Eccle. XI, 2). Convenit denique numerus iste et Domino, et ejus corpori, quasi uni, et septem.

Inde est, quot octo animæ cum Noe introierunt in arcam. Sed in illis septem septiformis Ecclesia designatur, in octavo Noe Christus, qui est caput Ecclesiae, figuratur. Ad hoc etiam pertinet quod in Michaela legitur, septem pastores, et octavus utique Christus cum septiformi corpore suo. In Evangelio quoque de hoc numero legitur, quod post dies octo coram tribus discipulis suis facies Domini in monte refulsit.

Idem etiam Salvator post octo dies resurrectionis Didymo se non credenti manifestavit. In sese triplicatus iste numerus propter Trinitatem viginti quatuor seniores efficit qui coronas suas efferunt coram Agno. At contra octavus scribitur in Apocalypsi diabolus, qui inter septem reges Romanorum a Joanne visus est, quasi occisus, octavus utique, sed in prodicione. Denique et octo principalia vitia describuntur, ex quibus multitudo omnium vitiorum exoritur, id est, invidia, iracundia, tristitia, avaritia, ingluvies, luxuria, inanis gloria, superbia.⁴³

Isidore's quotation on the number eight is reproduced here in full, for it provides the most complete analysis of this number and its relationship to Christ, his resurrection, and the resurrection of the blessed souls. The exemplum of Noah as a typus Christi, for Noah was the

eighth member of the Ark, is the most outstanding. The Ark designates the Church, whose head is Christ. Noah, therefore, is a prefiguration of Christ. The number eight is the symbol of the New Testament through Christ's resurrection. It is the symbol of salvation and beatitude, both in terms of Noah's deliverance from the flood and humanity's deliverance through Christ. This point is elaborated by Manfred Hart, who indicates that the eight people in the Ark are equivalent to the mystery of baptism; the wood of the Ark and the water are, respectively, the wood of the Cross and the water of baptism.⁴⁴ It is from the Apostle Peter, in fact, that this symbolism is derived:

... qui increduli fuerant aliquando, quando expectabant Dei patientiam in diebus Noe, cum fabricaretur arca: in qua pauci, id est octo animae factae sunt per aquam. Quod et vos nunc similis formae salvos facit baptisma... per resurrectionem Iesu Christi. (I Peter, 3:20)

Peter again mentions the "octo animae" when he says:

Et originali mundo non pepercit, sed octavum Noe iustitiae praeconem custodivit, diluvium mundo impiorum inducens. (II, 2:5)

Isidore, moreover, provides another meaning for the number eight by saying that if it is multiplied by three, we have the symbol for the 24 elders. Isidore also adds that in malo this number refers to the eight vices.

The meaning of the number eight as the symbol of resurrection and eternal life is also found in Augustine, Ambrose, Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor and Honorarius of Autun.

Augustine states:

Quod ipse Noe cum suis octavus numeratur: quia in Christo spes resurrectionis nostare apparuit, qui octavo die, id est, post sabati septimum primo, a mortuis resurrexit, qui dies a passione tertius,

in numero autem dierum qui per omnes tempus volvuntur,
et octavus et primus est.⁴⁵

Elsewhere, he reiterates that the eighth day is the first day, because it is the day of Christ's resurrection;

Dies tamen dominicus non Judaeis, sed Christianis
resurrectione Domini declaratus est... Talem quippe
actionem significat die octavus, qui et primus, quia
non aufert illam requiem, sed glorificat.⁴⁶

Ambrose in discussing this number points out that it is the symbol of a new day through Christ's resurrection:

Novit ogdoadem istam; quam octavam Latine dicimus,
Vetus Testamentum; siquidem ait Ecclesiastes: "Da
partem illis septem, et illis quidem octo (Eccl's. XI,
2)." Hebdomas veteris Testamenti est octava novi,
quando Christus resurrexit, et dies omnibus novae
salutis illuxit.

Later on, Ambrose states that this number renewed man:

Quis autem dubitet majus esse octavo munus, quae
totum renovavit hominem ut jam nihil posset dolere?⁴⁷

Finally, it is noteworthy that St. Bernard wrote the Octo Puncta Perfectionis.⁴⁸ Hugh of St. Victor states that: "Octonarius ultra septenarium aeternitatem post mutabilitatem."⁴⁹ And Honorarius of Autun states: "Octavus dies Domini resurrectione sacratus."⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that the idea of eight as a perfect number is already found in Cicero's Republic:

Sed eius temporis ancipitem video quasi fatorum
viam. nam cum aetas tua septenos octiens solis an-
fractus reditusque converterit, duoque ii numeri,
quorum uterque plenus alter altera de causa
habetur ⁵¹

This notion, as Macrobius points out in his Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis, was derived from the Pythagoreans and, as mentioned before, from Plato's Timaeus. Macrobius, furthermore, gives the properties which make this number perfect. In a concluding paragraph he states;

Pythagorici vero hunc numerum justitiam vocaverunt, quia primus omnium ita solvitur in numeros pariter pares, hoc est. in bis quaterna, ut nihilominus in numeros aequae pariter pares divisio quoque ipsa solvatur, id est, in bis bina ..., et seorsum sua plenitudine nitatur, jure plenus vocatur.⁵²

The same characteristic is found in Remigius of Auxerre's Commentum in Martianum Capellam,⁵³

Of the remaining numbers in the decade, the number nine is considered perfect by Isidore, for it is a multiple of three. But it is imperfect in malo because it lacks one digit to make ten, the symbol of the Law. Rabanus Maurus, however, finds the mystic significance of this number in Christ's hour of death, "quia ipse Dominus hora nona, clamans voce magna emisit spiritu."⁵⁴ He also relates the number nine to the 99 sheep of the Gospel and the angelic orders.

To Isidore, the number ten is more perfect than any other. It is the number of completeness and finality:

Denarius vero ultra omnes habendus est numerus, quia omnes numeros diversae virtutis ac perfectionis intra se continet...⁵⁵

Of the exempla given by Isidore and Rabanus, the most outstanding is the Decalogue.

Of the numbers outside the decade, it is noteworthy to mention twelve, since it relates to the Apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel.

The foregoing illustrates how number symbolism was directly applied to biblical exegesis. This kind of allegory is an essential aspect of the Divine Comedy.⁵⁶

The most direct proof of Dante's use of number symbolism (besides the episode of Giovanni del Virgilio in the IInd Eclogue, which I have already cited) is found in the Vita Nuova. Dante speaks of the number

three in relation to the Trinity, and of the number nine in relation to Beatrice. The root of nine is three; Beatrice is therefore "uno miracolo":

Io dico che, secondo l'usanza d'Arabia, l'anima sua nobilissima si partio nella prima ora del nono giorno del mese; e secondo l'usanza di Siria, ella si partio nel nono mese de l'anno, però che lo primo mese è ivi Tisirin primo, lo quale a noi è Ottobre; e secondo l'usanza nostra, ella si partio in quello anno de la nostra indizione, cioè de li anni Domini, in cui lo perfetto numero nove volte era compiuto in quello centinaio nel quale in questo mondo ella fue posta, ed ella fue de li cristiani del terzodecimo centinaio. Perché questo numero fosse in tanto amico di lei, questa potrebbe essere una ragione: con ciò sia cosa che, secondo Tolomeo e secondo la cristiana veritate, nove siano li cieli che si muovono, e, secondo comune oppinione astrologa, li detti cieli adoperino qua giuso secondo la loro abitudine insieme, questo numero fue amico di lei per dare ad intendere che ne la sua generazione tutti e nove li mobili cieli perfettissimamente s'aveano insieme. Questa è una ragione di ciò; ma piu sottilmente pensando, e secondo la infallibile veritate, questo numero fue ella medesima; per similitudine dico, e ciò intendo così. Lo numero del tre è la radice del nove, però che, senza numero altro alcuno, per se medesimo fa nove, sì come vedemo manifestamente che tre via tre fa nove. Dunque se lo tre è fattore per se medesimo del nove, e lo fattore per se medesimo de li miracoli è tre, cioè Padre e Figlio e Spirito Santo, li quali sono tre e uno, questa donna fue accompagnata da questo numero del nove a dare ad intendere ch'ella era uno nove, cioè uno miracolo, la cui radice, cioè del miracolo, è solamente la mirabile Trinitade. Forse ancora per piu sottile persona si vederebbe in ciò piu sottile ragione; ma questa è quella ch'io ne veggio, e che piu mi piace. (XXIX)

The poet leaves no doubt as to the meaning attributed to the number nine, to Beatrice, "she was a nine, that is a miracle," and to the importance he gives to numerical symbolism. Throughout the *Vita Nuova*, Dante refers to Beatrice with this number.⁵⁷ When he first meets her, both are nine years of age, "dal principio del suo anno nono apparve a me, ed

io la vidi quasi da la fine del mio nono" (II, 2-3). He sees her again nine years after the first meeting, and she first greets him at the ninth hour of the day. The dream vision Dante has that same night takes place at "la prima ora de le nove ultime ore de la notte" (III). There are other well-known instances in chapters VI, XII, XXIII and XXXIX of the Vita Nuova. The poet states in no uncertain terms that he intended to use this symbolism:

Tuttavia, però che molte volte lo numero del nove
ha preso luogo tra le parole dinanzi, onde pare che
sia non senza ragione, e ne la sua partita cotale
numero pare che avesse nolto luogo, convenesi di
dire quindi alcuna cosa ... (XXVIII)

"Not without reason" is a key phrase, for it states the poet's intention in using numerical symbolism.

Discussing the form of the Divine Comedy, Dante states in his Epistle to Can Grande, which incidentally has 33 divisions, that the form of the Commedia is double: the form of the treatise and that of the treatment. He then adds:

Forma tractatus est triplex, secundum triplicem divisionem. Prima divisio est, qua totum opus dividitur in tres canticas. Secunda, qua quelibet cantica dividitur in cantus. Tertia, qua quelibet cantus dividitur in rithimos. Forma sive modus tractandi est poeticus, fictivus, descriptivus, digressivus, transumptivus, et com hoc diffinitivus, divisivus, probativus, improbativus, et exemplorum positivus. (9)

The author's intention in providing this division according to the number three is very evident. It is essential to add, however, that the form of the treatment is composed of ten items.

In the Convivio also, the poet sets down a numerical structure: "La vivanda di questo convivio sarà di quattordici maniere ordinata" (I, i, 14). Another passage is extremely interesting. In discussing the sphere of the Sun, Dante says that this sphere can be compared to

Arithmetic because of two mutual characteristics:

... l'una si è che del suo lume tutte l'altre stelle s'informano: l'altra si è che l'occhio nol può mirare. E queste due proprietadi sono ne l'Arismetrica: che del suo lume tutte s'illuminano le scienze, però che li loro subietti sono tutti sotto alcuno numero considerati, e ne le considerazioni di quelli sempre con numero si procede... Non solamente in tutti insieme, na ancora in ciasuno è numero, chi ben considera sottilmente: per che Pitagora, secondo che dice Aristotile nel primo de la Fisica, poneva li principi de le cose naturali lo pari e lo dispari, considerando tutte le cose esser numero.

Dante, as has been seen, accepts the Pythagorean theory that everything is number, as he learned through Aristotle. Most important, in the latter part of this discourse, Dante gives the analogy: Sun -- Number -- God:

L'altra proprietade del Sole ancor si vede nel numero, del quale è l'Arismetrica: che l'occhio de lo 'ntelletto nol può mirare; però che 'l numero, quant'è in se considerato, è infinito, e questo non potemo noi intendere. (Convivio, II, xiii, 15-19)

This discourse implies the notion "omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti," but it goes further, for although God created the universe according to this rule, this same rule cannot be applied to Him. God, like number, is infinite and cannot be comprehended. He, as Clement of Alexandria, St. Bernard and Bede had indicated, is not subject to number. He is beyond number.⁵⁸

When in Paradiso X-XIV, Dante discussses the sphere of the Sun, he places in it theologians, teachers, historians, a prophet (Nathan), and a king (Solomon). These people are divided in two corolle, each corolla containing 12 persons. The most immediate numerical association suggested by this is the twelve Apostles, the twelve Patriarchs, and the twelve Prophets. Dante's analogy of the Sun to Arithmetic in the Convivio, and his application of it in Paradiso, is indeed very noteworthy.

Let us now turn our attention to the object of this study, the Rose, which in its perfection contains the numerical principles that function in the Commedia as a whole, the Spitzerean concept of the detail leading to the whole, in particular, the number eight.

The numerical symbolism of the Rose is provided and established by the personae present in it. The first circle or tier of the Rose has eight blessed souls: Mary, Peter, John the Evangelist and Lucia (these three are all on Mary's right), Adam, Moses, Anna (on Mary's left) and John the Baptist (directly across from Mary).

The poet has, therefore, chosen this number of blessed souls to represent resurrection and eternal life, symbols which, as we have seen, are well established in the patristic tradition. The Rose, with its eight most important blessed souls on the first row, is the city of resurrection and eternal beatitude. Christ and the other persons of the Trinity are in the center of the Rose, presiding over it. The number eight assumes its mystical meaning through Christ's resurrection and baptism. In this canto, in fact, grace and baptism are central and of extreme importance. St. Bernard explains that circumcision was a form of imperfect baptism. With the coming of Christ and by his redemption, the unbaptized were received in Limbo:

Ma poi che 'l tempo de la grazia venne,
 senza battesimo perfetto di Cristo
 tale innocenza la giù si ritenne. (Par. XXXII, 81-84)

Circumcision took place on the eighth day: "Infans octo dierum circumcidetur in vobis, omne masculinum in generationibus vestris" (Genesis 17:12). The "battesmo perfetto di Cristo" and His resurrection took place on the eighth day,

Let us recall that eight is the number of the beatitudes with which, as mentioned before, Rabanus Maurus forms eight octagons shaping a cross. St. Augustine in the De sermone Domini in monte states that in the first and the last beatitude, we find the kingdom of heaven:

Octava tanquam ad caput redit; quia consummatum perfectumque ostendit et probat: itaque in prima et in octava nominatum est regnum coelorum, Beati pauperes spiritu; quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum; et, Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam; quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum... Septem sunt ergo quae perficiunt: nam octava calificat, et quod perfectum est demonstrat, ut per hos gradus perficiantur et caeteri, tanquam a capite rursum exordiens.⁵⁹

The "regnum coelorum" is the meaning of the number eight, and for this reason Dante put eight blessed souls in the first row of the Rose. But there is an additional correspondence. The eighth circle of Hell is Malebolge, the evil pit of malicious fraud. After the seventh "girone" in Purgatorio, we find the Earthly Paradise with the Church Militant. In the eighth heaven of Paradiso, the sphere of the Fixed Stars, we find the Triumph of Christ. There is no doubt, then, that Dante attributes to this number a special meaning which he surely derived from the rich and well-established tradition on the number eight.⁶⁰ Dante's intention in basing and constructing the Rose on the number eight receives and unquestionable confirmation by the fact that in Paradiso XXXII Christ is mentioned eight times: seven times as Cristo and once as Figliuol di Dio. These are the verses in which the names appear:

la fede in Cristo, queste son il muro (20)
 ei che credettero in Cristo venturo; (24)
 quel ch'a Cristo venuto ebber li visi. (27)
 senza battesimo perfetto di Cristo (83)
 Riguarda omai ne la faccia che a Cristo (85)

sola ti puo disporre a veder Cristo (87)
giuso a Maria, quando 'l Figliuol di Dio (113)
di Santa Chiesa a cui Cristo le chiavi (125)

This is unshakeable proof substantiating the special significance of the number eight in this canto. It becomes still more solid, and it confirms Dante's use of numerical symbolism, when we find that in Paradiso XXXII the Trinity is alluded to three times and Mary is mentioned ten times. In verses 61 and 42, we find the reference "rege" and "primo amore"; in verse 93, "Dio. Maria is named or referred to in verses 4, 29, 85-86, 95-96, 104, 107, 113, 119, and 148.⁶¹ There is no number that better symbolizes God than the number three, the unity of the triad in one. And there is no number that can represent Mary better than the number ten, symbol of finality and perfection, describing the quality of Mary, the most perfect and the most complete of women.

The combined total number of the blessed souls mentioned in the Rose is 18: Mary, Peter, John the Evangelist, Lucia, John the Baptist, Francis, Benedict, Augustine (all New Testament figures), and Moses, Adam, Anna, Eve, Rachel, Sara, Rebecca, Judith, and Ruth (Old Testament figures). To these must be added Beatrice, since Dante places her next to Rachel.

Unlike Curtius and Hopper, I do not believe that Mary is outside of the Old and New Testaments. She is the Queen of the Rose, the Queen of Heaven, consequently she is superior to all the others; but she is part of the New Testament, the link between the two Testaments. The total number of the blessed is then 18. What about the number 18? It is Isidore who provides the answer:

Huius numeri mysterium evangelica mulier illa, typum
Ecclesiae gerens, expressit, qua a Domingo post octo
et decem annos erecta atque sanata est.⁶²

The episode in question is found in Luke 13:11-13. If this woman is a typus Ecclesiae, the equation of the number 18 with the Rose as Church Triumphant is clear. But 18 can also be understood as 10+8: ten commandments + eight beatitudes = eternal life and regeneration.

If, moreover, we add to the combined number of the blessed souls in the Rose the figures of St. Bernard and Henry VII -- the former being the guide of this city, the latter having a throne reserved for him -- we have a total number of twenty blessed figures. Of the number twenty, Rabanus Maurus says:

Viginti ad perfectionem operum, quae per charitatem operantur. Decalogus enim legis per duo dilectionis praecepta duplicatus viginti efficit.⁶³

This number, therefore, is perfect because of its relation to the Decalogue. It is, consequently, related to the Rose, the final realm of the blessed souls of both Laws.

And so it is that Dante's application of numerical symbolism cannot escape the alert reader. The poet, turning to the well-established tradition of the mystical meaning of numbers that came before him, chose to base the design and the symbolism of the Rose on the number eight; the number of rebirth, baptism, resurrection, eternal life, and the number of the perfect age -- the eighth age -- that of Final Redemption.

The number 8, as we shall see in the course of the following chapter, determines the design of the rose-window in some Gothic cathedrals, and the structure of the baptismal fonts.

Footnotes

Chapter IV

¹ Isidori Hispalensi Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), II, Liber III, i-iv.

² The Jerome Biblical Commentary, eds. Raymond F. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968). p. 564.

³ Matila C. Ghyka, Le nombre d'or (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), p. 18. Similarly, Plato says that number is knowledge itself.

⁴ E.R. Curtius, op. cit. p. 504.

⁵ Edgar de Bruyne, Études d'esthétique médiévale, op. cit.

⁶ G.R. Sarolli, Analitica, pp. 41-2.

⁷ Aristotle, Metaphysics, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 15.

⁸ Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.). See the article "Numbers."

⁹ John M. Dillon, Iamblichus Chalcidensis, In Platonis Dialogos Commentarium Fragmenta (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), p. 20.

¹⁰ Jacques Fontaine, Isidore de Seville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne Visigotique (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959), I, p. 342.

¹¹ Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 97.

¹² De Institutione Arithmetica, P.L. 63, col. 1083b.

¹³ Where the original reads: "Tu numeris elementa ligas . . .," Richard Green in translating chose the word "harmony" for "numeris": "You bind the elements in harmony . . ." See The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. Richard Green (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Library of Liberal Arts, 1962), p. 60.

¹⁴ Vincent Foster Hopper, Medieval Number Symbolism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 78-9.

- 15 Ibid., p. 80.
- 16 Ibid., p. 79.
- 17 P.L. 42, cols. 262-65.
- 18 Ibid., col 263.
- 19 De Libero Arbitrio, P.L. 32, col. 1258.
- 20 P.L. 36, col 571.
- 21 Peter Comestor, Historia Scholastica; Alanus de Insulis, Theologicae Regulae; Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum. All these authors attribute great importance to numerology.
- 22 Isidori Hispalensi Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), II, Liber III, i-iv.
- 23 Ibid., i-iv.
- 24 Civitatis Dei, Book XII, Ch. 9.
- 25 Isidori Hispalensi, op. cit., Liber III, ix.
- 26 William H. Stahl, Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 22.
- 27 J. Fontaine, op. cit., p. 371.
- 28 P.L. 83, cols. 179-80.
- 29 Ibid., col. 180.
- 30 G.R. Sarolli, Analitica, op. cit. pp. 49-50.
- 31 P.L. 83, col. 179.
- 32 Ibid., col. 180.
- 33 P.L. 111, col. 489.
- 34 P.L. 175, col. 22.
- 35 P.L. 176, cols. 753-4.
- 36 Macrobius states: "Ergo hi duo numeri, tria dico et quator, tam multiplici inter se cognatus necessitate sociati, effeciendis utrisque corporibus consensu ministri foederis obsequuntur... sed quaternarium... ad perfectionem animae pertinentem inter arcana venerantur... ternarius vero assignat animam tribus suis partibus absolutam..." Commentarius Somnium Scipionis, Firmin-Didot Frères édition Macrobie, Varron, Pomponius Mela (Paris: Firmin-Didot Frères, 1874), p. 25. William of Conches, in his commentary on the Timaeus, and Thierry of Chartres, in his De Sex

Dierum Operibus, give to these numbers the same meaning.

- 37 Henry de Lubac, Exégèse Médiévale, op. cit., II, pp. 12-13.
- 38 P.L. 90, col. 647.
- 39 Ibid., col. 642.
- 40 P.L. 83, col. 181
- 41 P.L. 111, col. 490.
- 42 Ibid., col. 491.
- 43 P.L. 83, col. 489.
- 44 Manfred Hart, op. cit., p. 78.
- 45 P.L. 42, col. 263.
- 46 P.L. 33, col. 215.
- 47 P.L. 16, cols. 1137 and 1140. Ambrose in the Psalmum David CXVIII (P.L. 15, col. 1198) states: "Ubi autem venit resurrectionis dies, convivificati Domino Iesu resurreximus et erecti sumus, in novitate vitae ablutionis gratiam pareferentes... sed octava die qua omnes in Christi resurrectione non solum resuscitati, sed etiam confirmati sumus."
- 48 P.L. 184, col. 1186.
- 49 P.L. 175, col. 22.
- 50 P.L. 172, col. 345b.
- 51 Cicero, De Re Publica (London, New York: William Heineman and G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), p. 264.
- 52 Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis, op. cit., p. 20.
- 53 Remigii Autissiodorensis Commentum in Martianum Capellam, ed. Cora E. Lutz (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), II, p. 193.
- 54 P.L. 111, col. 491.
- 55 P.L. 83, col. 190.
- 56 G.R. Sarolli, Analitica, op. cit., p. 41.
- 57 Some recent commentators (De Robertis, Musa) do not give much importance to the number nine.
- 58 Henry de Lubac, op. cit., p. 13.

59 P.L. 34, col. 1234.

60 The number eight in relation to Christ appears also in another way. As V.F. Hopper points out, the Gnostics through the use of gematria referred to Christ as 801, the number resulting from the word "dove." They would also derive the number 888 from the word "Iesous." See Hopper, p. 63. It is also noteworthy that the Nativity of Mary is celebrated on September 8th, an old tradition of which Jacobus de Voragine speaks in his Legenda Aurea.

61 In verses 4, 95, 107 and 113, she is referred to with her proper name. In the other verses, she is: "la donna del cielo" (29), "la faccia che a Cristo più somiglia: (85-6), "lei" (88, 96), "Augusta" (119), "quella che puote aiutarti" (148), and "la nostra regina" (104).

62 P.L. 83, col. 193.

63 P.L. 111, col. 492.

Chapter V

The Rose and the Gothic Cathedral

The development of Gothic architecture and the appearance of its most outstanding manifestation, the cathedral, are closely related to the development of Scholasticism and the esthetics of the Middle Ages. In his discussion on Scholasticism and the Gothic cathedral, Erwin Panofsky describes the correlation and the interchange between their basic principles, manifestatio and concordantia:

As High Scholasticism was governed by the principle of manifestatio, so was High Gothic architecture dominated -- as already observed by Suger -- by what may be called "the principle of transparency."¹

Dante based the Commedia on these same principles and worked to achieve something comparable to the totality of Scholasticism and the cathedral. What Panofsky says of the High Gothic cathedral and High Scholasticism can also be said in relation to the Commedia:

In its imagery, the High Gothic cathedral sought to embody the whole of Christian knowledge, theological, moral, natural, and historical, with everything in its place and that which no longer found its place, suppressed.²

These three components -- Scholasticism, Gothic architecture, and the Divine Comedy -- are the structural synthesis and the product of a way of life which strove to glorify the Creator. Like the Gothic cathedral, the Divine Comedy embodies man's highest pursuit, the contemplation of Divinity. It rises -- through the poet's developing journey, his

ascension, his gradatio -- as a Gothic cathedral. All the esthetic elements, delineated by De Bruyne,³ are present in both the cathedral and the Commedia.

What is a cathedral and what did it mean to the people of the Middle Ages? This makes direct reference to the correlation between the Commedia, the Rose, and the Gothic cathedral.

The medieval cathedral represents medieval life in its fullness. Its elements, its decorations and ornamentations reflected the spirit of the age, the discrepancy between the common masses on the one hand, the aristocracy and the clergy on the other. Yet the cathedral was the place where these groups were on common ground. This was so, above all, because the cathedral was built as a result of a common belief, a common element which touched people of all walks of life and every rank -- the Christian faith and its heritage. It was this faith, and the glorification of all that it represented, that brought together rich and poor, clergy and serfs, exemplifying the notion of "comunitas."

The funds for the construction of the cathedral were raised not only through the contributions and donations of the aristocracy and the rich burgeoisies, but also through the poorer classes, according to their means, whose faith was often greater because they believed that relics and miracles would improve their lot. In this fashion these breathtaking and majestic monuments were built. The actual labor was provided by volunteers, artisans, skilled and unskilled workers, masons, carpenters, stone cutters, and others. People would donate their time and money, because this represented to them the center of their life, a communal project which would bring glory and honor. At the same time, the cathedral's construction employed many people, thus providing

livelihood.

The architects, such as Villard de Honnecourt, Hugues Libergier and William of Sens, were all imbued with Scholastic thought, biblical learning, and a thorough knowledge of geometry and mathematics:

The architects, many of whose names are a matter of historical record, were respected eminent men, likened to the most learned. It was expected that they would be both mathematicians and artists, personalities of first order, since on their expertise everything depended.⁴

As Panofsky points out, although the architects may not have read the theological tracts in the original, they were still imbued with this kind of learning. In the practice of their art, the ars practica, they manifested the theory, ars theoretica, of the theologians and Scholastics:

It is not very probable that the builders of Gothic structures read Gilbert de la Porrée or Thomas Aquinas in the original. But they were exposed to the Scholastic point of view in innumerable other ways, quite apart from the fact that their own work automatically brought them into a working association with those who devised the liturgical and iconographic programs. They had gone to school; they listened to sermons; they could attend the public disputationes de quolibet which, dealing as they did with all imaginable questions of the day, had developed into social events not unlike our operas, concerts, or public lectures; and they could come into profitable contact with the learned on many other occasions.⁵

The architects were immortalized in effigies in the cathedral itself.

These were high honors granted only to princes and kings:

After Hugues Libergier, the master of the lost St. Nicaise in Reims, had died in 1236, he was accorded the unheard-of honor of being immortalized in an effigy that shows him not only clad in something like academic garb but also carrying a model of "his" church -- a privilege previously accorded only to princely donors. And Pierre de Montereau -- indeed the most logical architect who ever lived -- is designated on his tombstone in St. Germain-des-Prés as

"Doctor Lathomorum": by 1267, it seems, the architect had come to be looked upon as a kind of Scholastic.⁶

The Abbot Suger of St. Denis, who was a major force in the introduction of the Gothic, was directly involved in the construction of his church, and provided the artistic inspiration, the symbolic meaning of its designs, decorations, ornaments and structural elements, based on theological principles and biblical exegesis. The special emphasis Suger gave to light, an outstanding feature of the Gothic cathedral, was one of the theological aspects of light metaphysics, derived from Plato, Neoplatonism and the Pseudo Dionysius. This light, of course, was divine light:

Suger's infatuation with light which had so decisive an influence in formulating the Gothic style was but an extreme manifestation of a view widely supported by the Scholastics which received expression from men as different as Hugh of St. Victor, Gilbert de la Porree, St. Thomas Aquinas and Robert Grosseteste, who hailed light as the most direct corporeal manifestation of the Divine... Light, which could pass through glass without breaking it, was likened to "the Word of God, Light of the Father, that had passed through the body of the Virgin" and became a symbol of the Immaculate Conception. This concept, too, derived from Dionysius the Areopagite, who had propounded the thesis that the contemplation of the light emanating from material objects could aid in the comprehension of Divine Light.⁷

The architects, therefore, followed the same rules, numerus, mensura, pondus, and the "Sapiential" esthetics which encompassed the artes. Even St. Bernard, who in his rigid asceticism objected to the embellishments and ornamentations of the churches, conceded, mainly through Suger's arguments, that these decorations might move the mind toward the spiritual values. He explicitly states this when he differentiates between what should be in a monastic church and what should be in a cathedral, because; "... carnalis populi devotionem quia spiritualibus non

possunt corporalibus excitant ornamentis,"⁸ Since the esthetic of light and symbol were part of the study of the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy), the Gothic cathedral became the focus and the inheritor of this philosophical and theological system. To illustrate this point, let us recall some episodes concerning the construction of the Milan Cathedral and the Duomo of Siena. Both these structures, although subsequent to Dante, show to what extent and for how long these principles permeated the thinking of the medieval architect.

During the construction of the Cathedral of Milan, a quarrel took place between Jean Mignot, the French architect, and the Italian masters. Mignot objected strongly that his Italian craftsmen were disregarding the rules of geometry. He presented a list of fifty-four written objections. The Italians backed off and gave their total support to Mignot, stating that geometry must never be excluded from architecture. It is during this series of quarrels that Mignot said that "art without science is nothing."⁹

Another episode regarding the construction of the Milan Cathedral illustrates the architect's reliance on perfect numbers and geometric figures. Heinrich Parler from Gmund was called to replace the other German expert, Johann von Freiburg, in 1391. The builders of the cathedral were facing a number of problems:

Uncertain how best to proceed, they called a conference of master-builders to determine the section through the Church; they asked not so much how high the vaults should be, but, rather, which geometric figure should govern the section. After maintaining that the design under construction was structurally unsound because of inadequate foundations, piers and buttressing, and because the geometrical basis had been compromised, one of the German consultants,

Heinrich Parler, who was steeped in Gothic structural theory, actually proposed that the height be increased yet further to make the section conform to a square.¹⁰

In 1322 the Sienese architect Lorenzo Maitani headed a commission of inquiry to evaluate the extension which was being built in Siena's Duomo. The report issued by this commission shows the concern given to measure, proportion and church law. These are some of the items:

Item, that it sould not proceed because when completed it will not have the measurements of a church in length and breadth and height as postulated by church law.
Item, that it should not proceed further for the old church is so well proportioned and its parts agree so well in breadth, length, and height that if anything were added to any part, it would be better instead to destroy the said church completely, wishing to bring it reasonably to the right measure for a church.¹¹

One need only observe the geometric patterns found in the ground plans of churches, and especially of Gothic cathedrals, in order to be convinced of the essential role of geometry. If the architect were to disregard the rules of geometry, he would certainly fail. In Dante, this is "l geometra che tutto s'affige / per misurar lo cerchio" (Par. XXXIII, 133). The medieval architect could only design according to the same principles -- measure, number, and weight -- that the Architect of the Universe used. God, in fact, is often represented with a compass in His hands (plate #2). The same analogy can be applied to Aquinas and Dante, and indeed Male likens them to architects.

As the cathedrals were being built -- usually the completion took whole decades -- there was constant cooperation between the builders and the theologians or clergy. As Paul Frankl points out, the clients had to approve the style and the details; the architect implemented and executed the ideas transmitted by the theologians:

Every step in the development of the Gothic style was a logical one, but each had to have the approval of the

clergy.¹²

Every element of the Gothic cathedral had to have a theological or symbolic meaning. Let us take for example the most evident symbolic structure, the front doors of the main façade. The three doors figured not only the Trinitarian concept (God the Father, main door; the Son, right door; the Holy Ghost, left door), but also the gateway to heaven: through these doors, in the unity of the Trinity, the faithful would be admitted to the Heavenly Jerusalem. At St. Denis, the chevet has twelve columns symbolizing the Apostles. Suger himself attests to this:

Medium quippe duodecim Apostolorum exponentes numerum, secundario vero totidem alarum columnae Prophetarum numerum significantes, altum repente subrigebant aedificium, juxta Apostolum spiritualiter aedificantem.¹³

The twelve columns in the side-aisles symbolize the Prophets. In this way, the cathedral, through structural means, symbolizes the two Testaments. Let us remember Suger's utilization of light through the stained-glass windows, the analogy of divine light illuminating the church.

How can one explain the cruciform shape of the ground plans so common to Gothic cathedrals? Although the cruciform shape was also found in the churches of the East, in the Carolingian and Romanesque periods, the Gothic period elongated the shape of the cross so as to correspond to the human figure, to the crucified Christ.

The medieval cathedral was the essence of the incarnation and integration of life and religion. The masses learned from the cathedral what they would find in the Bible; "To the unlettered masses of the Middle Ages the cathedral was the Biblia Pauperum." This was the only place around which was centered the entire life of the city or town. It is important to note that although the cathedral was used as a meeting

place to resolve civic affairs,¹⁵ like the Roman Forum, its primary concept and that of the church in general, is to represent the "habitaculum Dei in Spiritu," as St. Paul says (Eph. 2:19). It is, then, an image of the City of God, the New Jerusalem, as we read in the Book of Revelations (21:1-2, 9-10), and as Dante says in his Epistle to Oberto and Guidoni of Romena "... nunc regie sempiterne aulicus preelectus in supera Ierusalem cum beatorum principis gloriatur" (see also Par. XXV, 55).

The tradition of the church and the temple as a symbol of Heaven is found in the Old Testament. Noah's Ark, the Tabernacle of Moses, the Temple of Solomon, and the escatological temple of Ezekiel are all images of and analogies to Paradise. The medieval theologians consequently, extended the analogy to the Body of Christ, the Church, and the cathedral. Otto von Simson points out that the binomial Church--Heaven was largely expounded by medieval theologians:

The Church is, mystically and liturgically, an image of heaven. Medieval theologians have, on innumerable occasions, dwelt on this correspondence. The authoritative language of the dedication ritual of a church explicitly relates the vision of the Celestial City, as described in the Book of Revelations, to the building that is to be erected.¹⁶

This is the reason behind Suger's claim that the inspiration for the building of his church was the Solomonic Temple. In saying this, he is also saying that his inspiration came directly from God:

Conferebam de minimis ad maxima, non plus Salomonianus opes templo quam nostras huic operi sufficere posse, nisi idem e jusdem operis auctor ministrantibus copiose praeperaret. Identitas auctoris et operis sufficientiam facit operantis.¹⁷

In medieval tradition the human body and the soul were often associated with the Temple of God; another reason for the human body and

the cross to serve as ground plans for churches. But the most important idea in this tradition is the temple's relation to the image of Christ, therefore, to the mystic body:

L'église rappelle le Tabernacle de Moïse et le Temple de Solomon qui la prefigurèrent, elle est en même temps l'image du Christ et l'image du corps mystique, qui prolongue la Passion à travers le siècles.¹⁸

Henry de Lubac devotes a whole chapter, "Symboles Architecturaux." to this correspondence; he shows that the entire medieval tradition adopted this basic notion: Temple of Solomon -- Church -- Body of Christ -- Heavenly Jerusalem:

Dans le Temple de Solomon, reconstruit après l'exil, Jésus lui-même avait engagé ses disciples à reconnaître "le temple de son corps; ce temple édifié, dit Raban Maur, par "les Pères de l'Ancien Testament, d'où le Seigneur tire son origine selon la chair"; on y voyait encore naturellement, outre l'édifice matériel où se célèbre le culte de la Loi nouvelle, l'Église de la terre et la Cité céleste, et les deux piliers qui en marquaient l'entrée symbolisaient les saints de l'un et l'autre Testament.¹⁹

It is noteworthy to remember that St. Paul employs architectural terms and images, although using metaphorical language, when stating that we are all members of God's household:

Ergo iam non estis hospites, et advenae: sed estis cives sanctorum, et domestici Dei: superaedificati super fundamentum apostolorum, et prophetarum, ipso summo angulari lapide Christo Iesu: in quo omnis aedificatio constructa crescit in templum sanctum in Domino, in quo et vos coaedificamini in habitaculum Dei in Spiritu. (Eph. 2: 19 ff.)

As Simson has pointed out, Suger related St. Paul's imagery directly to his "temple."²⁰

Let us further keep in mind Jesus' words to Peter: "... et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam." The verb "aedificare" was

extremely important to the medieval theologian and architect in its relation to the Christian "aedificatio" and the "spirituale aedificium." Dante refers to the Empyrean as "lo soprano edificio del mondo" (Conv. II, iii, 11); he refers to the soul as "la donna che nel dificio del corpo abita" (Conv. III, viii, 9). Suger and Dante were certainly aware of this tradition as exemplified in St. Augustine:

Si autem fundamentum nostrum in caelo est, ad caelum aedificemur. Corpora aedificaverunt istam structuram, quam videtis amplam surrexisse huius basilicae; et quia corpora aedificaverunt, fundamentum in imo posuerunt. Quia vero spiritaliter aedificamur, fundamentum nostrum in summo positum est... Et quia aedificium spirituale similitudinem quandam habet aedifici corporalis, ideo aedificatur ut civitas.²¹

Once the correlation: Kingdom of Heaven -- Cathedral, Body of Christ -- Cathedral, Church -- Cathedral, is accepted as part of the medieval theological tradition, we can establish the analogy Divine Comedy -- Cathedral.

The cathedral, with its ornaments, biblical episodes, symbolic representations, animals, monsters, devils, angels, Apostles, Prophets, virgins and all the rest, summarized the religious and secular life of the times along with its philosophy and theology. It embodied the age of Scholasticism in all its unifying ramifications. A counterpart to the cathedral's structure found its strictly theological expression in the Summa of Thomas Aquinas; its artistic, theological and political expression in the Divine Comedy. The Summa is divided into three parts. The first part, containing 119 questions and answers, deals with theology: the nature, attributes, and relations of God. The second part deals with man and the problems of ethics. The third part is concerned with Christ and the sacraments. Of this part, only 90 questions and

answers were written by Thomas. In Dante's work, also a Summa, the theological, philosophical, and encyclopedic knowledge of the times are synthesized to reach their highest expression.

In the Divine Comedy the elements of number, measure, and weight are its foundations, as they are for the cathedral. The numerical and geometric structures of the three realms, the use of the tercet, the correspondence in the divisions of Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso reflect the spirit of the age where, as we have seen in the previous chapter, number was an essential component of any artistic or theological expression. As Emile Male says of Dante:

Il ordonna l'univers suivant les lois d'une géométrie sublime... Tout est réglé avec la même précision dans le détail... Dante accepta la loi des nombres comme un rythme divin auquel l'univers obéit... C'est ainsi qu'il édifie "cum pondere et mensura" sa cathédrale invisible.²²

This invisible cathedral becomes visible once the reader enters through the gates of Hell. Accompanying the poet on his journey through the two other doors, the reader arrives at last at the altar, in the presence of God. In Hell the poet-pilgrim proceeds always toward the left; in Purgatory, toward the right; and in Paradise, always straight ahead. Dante's journey moves toward the East, the New Jerusalem. Let us recall that the altar and the chevet of Gothic cathedrals face the East. Dante, therefore, follows the same itinerary as the pilgrim who enters the cathedral and slowly walks up to the main altar. Let us not forget that the poet also calls his poem "sacro." As Suger claimed divine inspiration and assistance in the construction of his church at St. Denis, so Dante claims that both heaven and earth had a hand in his " ... 'l poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra" (Par. XXV, 1-2).

When Dante, led first by Beatrice and later by Bernard, arrives at the Empyrean and sees all the blessed souls in their glory, he says that this realm--which Beatrice calls "la nostra basilica" (Par. XXV, 30)-- is in the shape of a white rose. We may ask: Why did Dante utilize this symbol, and from where did he derive it? He has built an architectonic structure, following the same principles as the Gothic architect. As he is about to complete his work, he correlates the realm of the blessed souls with architectural structures, the rose-window of the Gothic cathedral and the baptismal font. The poet-pilgrim looks up in order to see the blessed souls in their glory, as the pilgrim visiting the cathedral would look up and see the rose-windows whose stained-glass patterns usually depict saints and apostles. Dante, consequently, obtained his symbol from a deep meditation on the significance of the cathedral, because in this, the greatest single representation of the Christian faith, he found the unity and totality that the medieval man aspired to attain through closeness to God, and that he, as creator, aspired to achieve in the Commedia. Dante, like the cathedral architect, had to use Mary's symbol, the rose.

During the Gothic period, the rose-window became an outstanding feature of the cathedral's west façade. The first appearance of the rose-window is found in Suger's St. Denis:

So far as we know, west façades were pierced by normal windows, and not by roses, until Suger--perhaps impressed by the magnificent specimen in the north transept of St. Etienne in Beauvais--chose to adopt the motif for the west facade of St. Denis...²³

The rose-window -- perhaps derived from the medieval "Wheel of Fortune"²⁴ -- was not a true Gothic feature, but Romanesque. It needed to be absorbed within the Gothic façade. As Panofsky points out, this represented a problem because of its awkwardness withing the pointed arch. Esthetically the rose-window was in conflict with the Gothic:

... the very concept of an isolated, circular unit conflicted with the ideals of the Gothic taste in general, and with the ideal of a Gothic facade -- adequate representation of the interior -- in particular.²⁵

The fact that Suger had incorporated the rose-window in the façade of St. Denis, proved to be an authoritative innovation which had to be followed. Even though Normandy and England for the most part rejected it, Germany and Italy welcomed it. On the other hand, "The architects of the Royal Domain and Champagne... felt bound to accept a motif sanctioned by the authority of St. Denis...." ²⁶

The rose-window received its confirmation as a central feature of the Gothic cathedral with the discovery of its "final solution":

It was not until 1240-50 that the school of Reims, culminating in St. Nicaise, discovered its final solution: the rose was inscribed within the pointed arch of a huge window, thereby becoming elastic, as it were... The whole arrangement mirrored the cross section of the nave, and yet the window remained a window and the rose a rose.²⁷

The rose-window, as previously mentioned, was perhaps derived from the medieval "Wheel of Fortune" found, among others, in Boethius' De Consolatione (Lib. II, 2, 9 ff.), and in Hugo de Folieto's De Rota Verae et Falsae Religionis. Within the spokes of this wheel are usually represented human being as the mercy of fate.²⁸ The architects, however, perfected and refined the rose-window, making it look more like a flower. The rose-windows (west front façade) of Laon (begun c.

1190) and Chartres (c. 1196) are less flower-shaped or rose-shaped than those of Reims (west front begun in c. 1241), Rouen (c. 1281). Strassburg (c. 1277), to mention only a few. The change is gradual, but it indicates clearly the architect's intention of using more and more the flower symbol rather than the "wheel-of-fortune window." Another dimension is given to the rose-window by its comparison to the sun:

The terms "wheel-window" and "rose-window" are usually used indiscriminately, but the comparison with a rose is better suited to oculi with tracery such as that used at Reims and Strassburg, with pointed petals lying in a circle. Such windows have sometimes been compared with the sun -- a comparison referring to thier raidiating rays -- and, because of this likeness, the French call the whole High Gothic sytle Rayonnant.²⁹

The use of the flower symbol, however, is to be attributed essentially to the rose as a symbol of Mary, to whom most Gothic cathedrals were dedicated. Since the cult and fervor for Mary were deeply felt, the architect had to reflect them in his creation. As Henry Adams says, describing Chartres, the architect did everything to please Mary, because at Chartres the Virgin is everywhere:

At Chartres, one sees everywhere the Virgin, and nowhere any rival authority; one sees her give orders, and architects obey them... He felt the value of the rose in art, and perhaps still more in religion, for the rose was Mary's emblem. One is fairly sure that the great Chartres rose of the west front was put there to please her... The value of the rose among architects of the time, was great, since it was the only part of the church that Villard de Honnecourt sketched... ³⁰

The fact that Villard de Honnecourt sketched the rose-window of Chartres is of extreme importance, for he believed that the principles of any artistic composition are geometrical. Villard's notebook shows that Gothic architecture and the metaphysics of the time were interconnected,

and that the thirteenth-century architects "did think and act in strictly scholastic terms."³¹ Gothic architecture, like the Divine Comedy, is geometric without necessarily being symmetrical.

In France the rose-window became an essential part of the Gothic façade, and it was harmoniously incorporated above the central door. It assumed a position of central importance both architecturally and theologically. The idea of a circumference amid the pointed arch, the ribs, spires and the cruciform plan heightens the idea of perfection and divinity. At the same time, the rose-window did not detract from the pure Gothic. Describing the rose-window of Reims Cathedral, Paul Frankl says:

With this organic system, the rose-window forms a point of rest and stability in the upward stream of gables and spires.³²

While there is no textual or documented proof that Dante was aware of the birth and development of Gothic architecture in Europe and particularly in France, one can assume that he had knowledge of and was interested in this development. Dante indeed refers to the art of miniature when he meets Oderisis da Gubbio: "...l'onor di quell'arte / ch'alluminar chiamata è in Parisi?" (Purg. XI, 80-1). Although the debate is unresolved on whether or not Dante was in France during the unaccounted ten years of his life, it is significant that his early biographers, such as Boccaccio, do say so. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were, after all, the periods during which the major Gothic cathedrals of France were built or were under construction. The façade of Notre Dame in Paris was built between 1200 and 1250, for example. The west front of the Cathedrals of Rouen and Strassburg were begun in 1277 and 1281, respectively. Those of Laon, Reims, and Amiens were begun in circa 1190, 1241, and 1220. But Dante did not have to look

far to see the Gothic architectural developments. It is true that Italy did not adopt Gothic architecture in its purity, as it is generally agreed among art historians. Italy, however, incorporated Gothic elements into the Romanesque structures, or modified them, precursing Renaissance architecture. Rose-windows, flying buttresses, pointed arches, stained glass, and other elements were accepted, but they were given an Italian character. As mentioned previously, Panofsky states that the rose-window was accepted with great enthusiasm in Italy "because of its au fond anti-Gothic character."³³ It must be pointed out that Gothic architecture was brought to Italy by the Cistercians, the Franciscans and the Dominicans as a result of their own expansion throughout Europe. Dante, let us recall, attended the sermons of the Franciscans at S. Croce and those of the Dominicans at S. Maria Novella "le scuole de li religiosi" (Conv. II, xii, 7). All their churches incorporated Gothic elements, whether it was the more severe and simple architecture of the Cistercians, or that of the larger and more complex Franciscan and Dominican churches. The final result was that the local tradition and the Gothic style mixed, thus achieving an impure Gothic when compared to the French standard.

An example of the mixture of local tradition and Gothic elements is the church of S. Andrea in Vercelli, built in circa 1219 ("se mai torni a veder lo dolce piano / che da Vercelli a Marcabò dichina" (Inf. XVIII, 74-5). Whether or not this can be considered "the earliest really Gothic building in Italy," as Frankl indicates,³⁴ the fact remains that the Gothic elements are there. It is interesting to note that the east-end part of S. Andrea has an eight-spoked rose-window. Another church with a mixture of Gothic elements is the Cistercian

church of Fossanova, near Rome -- begun in c. 1187 -- whose chevet also has a rose-window of eight spokes, although much simpler than the one at Vercelli.

There are a number of churches and cathedrals where Dante could have admired beautiful rose-windows. The church of S. Francesco in Assisi, founded in 1228, finished in circa 1239, and consecrated in 1253, has a rather elaborate and majestic rose-window. The nave decorations of the upper church, with scenes from the two Testaments and with the presence of Christ, the Virgin, John the Baptist, Francis, and Doctors of the Church, might have inspired Dante. Of this church, John White says:

Breadth and airiness are combined with a firm sense of architectural mass. Balance is the keynote. Every vertical acceleration is held by a horizontal of equivalent power, and each strong horizontal broken by a vertical.³⁵

The same sense of balance is reflected in the nave decorations. It is interesting that a scene from the St. Francis cycle attributed to Giotto, The Lament of the Poor Clares, depicts a church with two wheel-windows of eight spokes.

The basilica of S. Antonio in Padua and the church of S. Lorenzo in Vicenza have, among their Gothic elements, rose-windows which are composed of eight spokes. S. Antonio at Padua was completed by 1307; S. Lorenzo at Vicenza, toward the end of the century. The façade of S. Maria della Spina at Pisa has two rose-windows within the two pointed arches above the twin doors. Both of them have eight spokes.

In Italy the most spectacular and elaborate rose-window of Dante's time is that of the Cathedral of Orvieto. This cathedral, begun in 1290, was at first under the architectural direction of Lorenzo Maitani, the

Sienese architect, whose successors were Andrea Pisano and Andrea Orcagno. It is almost certain that Arnolfo di Cambio was also involved. Arnolfo was for a time the capomastro at S. Maria del Fiore in Florence, whose construction was begun in 1296. The rose-window at Orvieto is as elaborate and rich as the west front façade. It is made of 24 spokes. It is the only rose-window, as far as I could find, that has in the middle the face of Christ. Moreover, in its four corners are represented St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory. The niche around the rose-window has eight figures on each side and eight figures above. The main gable depicts the Coronation in mosaics.

Finally, the west front façade of the Florence Cathedral has a rose-window. Although it was executed after Dante's death, it certainly was designed before, at least around the time the actual foundation was begun (1296).

It can be safely concluded that Dante was well aware of the widespread use of the rose-window in France and Italy. Undoubtedly, in the selection of a symbol for his assembly of the blessed souls, the poet was influenced by the only architectural structure that simultaneously symbolized both Mary and Heaven. With the rose-window he crowned his own architectural structure. This aspect of the relationship between the rose-window and Dante's Rose is reinforced by the numerical symbol found in the rose windows.

An investigation of rose-windows in Gothic cathedrals and churches indicates that the architects chose to design them mostly with eight, twelve, sixteen, and twenty-four spokes. Having already established the significance of the numbers eight and twelve, let us note that the Cathedral of St. Nicaise, built between 1230 and 1263, which, as noted

by Panofsky, provided the final solution for the amalgamation of the rose in the Gothic cathedral, had a rose-window of eight spokes. The rose-window of Amiens (1220-1288), a cathedral considered "the purest realization of classical High Gothic,"³⁶ also has eight spokes. The interior south aisle of St. Étienne at Beauvais has an eight-spoke rose-window. As mentioned, the churches of S. Andrea at Vercelli and of Fossanova both have rose-windows of eight spokes in the west front, as well as S. Maria della Spina in Pisa, S. Maria Assunta in Siena (begun 1245), S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, S. Maria Matri-colare in Verona, and Prato's Duomo. Moreover, the small rose-window of the central portal of Peterborough Cathedral in England has eight spokes, as does the Cathedral of Andernach in Germany (c. 1200).

The Cathedrals of Rouen (begun 1281), Toul, Strassburg (1277), and Tours (rose window of the south transept also) all have rose-windows of sixteen spokes. The rose-windows of the Cathedrals of Chartres, Laon, Reims, Notre Dame, Bourges, Carcassonne, and Suger's St. Denis have rose-windows of 24 spokes, which can be considered 12. The Cathedral of Florence has a central rose-window of 12 spokes and a rose-window on each side-portal.

The rose-window with eight spokes was, therefore, one of the forms chosen by medieval architects, and it reinforces the assertion that Dante maintained a similar structural pattern in depicting the Rose of the blessed souls. There are other architectural structures and pictorial representations which add weight to this thesis.

As mentioned earlier, most ground plans of Gothic cathedrals and churches are cruciforms.³⁷ What is of extreme interest to us is that the ground plan of the Cathedral of Florence has an octagonal crossing.

The transepts and chancel are also octagonal, showing five sides of an octagon (plate #3). Above this octagonal substructure, Brunelleschi built his magnificent octagonal dome. In France the Cathedral of Coutances has an octagonal crossing. Many Gothic churches and cathedrals have an octagonal shape in the apse and high altar -- Amiens, Cluny, Sens, Laon, to mention a few. And so does S. Michele in Pavia.

The lanterns of Coutances, Ely, and Burgos Cathedrals are octagonal. At Ely the face of Christ is in the center of the lantern. The flying vaulting ribs in the Gothic chapel of St. Catherine in Vienna are structured around an octagon. The medallion in the center shows Mary holding a sword and a Wheel of Fortune.

There is another architectural structure which has a direct relationship to the number eight, the baptistery and the baptismal font within it. According to Male, octagonal baptismal fonts are much more numerous than circular ones, both in France and in Italy, because the number eight is the symbol of new life:

Il est tel cas où la concordance des textes et des monuments nous conduit à des probabilités qui approchent fort de la certitude. La forme octogonale des fonts baptismaux, qu'on voit adoptée dès les temps les plus anciens et qui persiste pendant toute la durée du moyen âge, n'est pas un pur caprice. Il est difficile de n'y pas voir une application de l'arithmétique enseignée par les Pères. Pour eux, le nombre huit est le chiffre de la vie nouvelle... Il est le symbole de la vie nouvelle, de la résurrection finale et de la résurrection anticipée qu'est le baptême... La piscine des plus vieux baptistères de l'Italie, ou de la Gaule, affecte presque toujours la forme de l'octogone... Au moyen âge les fonts baptismaux sont souvent circulaires, mais ils sont plus souvent encore octogonaux.³⁸

Male points out that St. Ambrose himself states that the baptistery has to be octagonal in a little poem he wrote which was to be inscribed on the baptistery of Milan.³⁹ Some of the octagonal baptisteries mentioned by Male are those of: Ravenna, Novara, Cividale, Trieste, Torcello,

Aix-en-Provence, and Fréjus. He adds, moreover, that a study made by M. Santenay -- in the *Annales de la Societe Archeologique de Bruxelles* (1891-92) -- covering the period from the eleventh to the sixteenth century reveals the following: 32 circular baptismal fonts, 67 octagonal, and a few more in other forms, but a very small number.⁴⁰ In Italy other octagonal baptisteries are found in Asti, Bergamo, Parma, Milan, and Florence. On the Tecla baptistery of Milan are inscribed the following verses:

Octachorum sanctos templum surrexit in usus,
 octagonus fons est munere dignus eo.
 Hoc numero decuit sacri baptismatis aulam
 surgere, quo populis vera salus rediit
 luce resurgentis Christi...⁴¹

Finally, the Baptistery of Florence, Dante's "bel San Giovanni," is octagonal. The poet definitely knew this and was aware of its numerical symbolism.

The presence of the octagonal form in the rose-window, in the ground plans of churches and cathedrals, in the baptisteries and baptismal fonts, and even in many cupolas and bell-towers, and the well-established symbolism of the number eight could not escape Dante's eye. As the architect applied the octagonal shape to its structure, so Dante applied it to his Rose of Paradise, where completion and perfection cannot be achieved "sanza battesimo perfetto di Cristo."

In addition to the architectural structures, there are miniatures which might have considerable influence in Dante's pattern of the Rose. There is a miniature of the Mystical Paradise in the Ratisbon Manuscript (c. 1170-85) at the Staatsbibliothek of Munich.⁴² This miniature (see plate #4) illustrates a circle in whose center is the Agnus Dei. From the center, eight main spokes are formed; each spoke has a

medallion at its end, Four of these medallions depict a cardinal virtue, and four depict the animals symbolizing the Evangelists. We have then: prudentia with the symbol of Matthew next to it, fortitudo with Luke's ox next to it, temperantia on whose side is John's eagle, and justitia with Mark's lion at its side. Four smaller spokes, alternating between each two of the larger ones, are connected to small medallions depicting the four Doctors of the Church; these medallions are being held by human figures representing the four rivers of Eden. They are matched in this fashion: Phison -- Ambrose, Gehon -- Ieronimus, Euphrates -- Gregorius, Tigris -- Augustinus. Above this circle, there is a smaller one with the figure of Christ as Magister. On Christ's right side there is an angel carrying the cross; at His left there are the instruments with which He was tortured. In the words of Katzenellenbogen:

... it is as if the illustration were intended to comprise the whole course of world history -- the beginning (earthly paradise), middle (Evangelists, Church fathers, the forces of salvation, i.e. the Church) and the end (Last Judgement as the gate to heavenly paradise).⁴³

Another illustration of the Mystical Paradise is found in the Speculum Virginum (second quarter of the twelfth century, British Museum -- see plate # 5). Here Paradise "is depicted as a rose which, in close adherence to the text, includes the cardinal virtues and the other theological groups of four."⁴⁴ In this miniature, therefore, we can see the four rivers of Eden, the four Evangelists, the four Doctores, and the four cardinal virtues. There are a pair of Virgins below each medallion of the cardinal virtues, symbolizing the eight beatitudes. In the center there is Christ, the fount of all the rivers, virtues, Evangelists and Doctors:

The readers of the Speculum Virginum were thus given a complete picture of the Church with its strength-giving foundation (Christ), its scriptures of revelation (Evangelists), its teachings (Church Fathers) and its effect of saving grace (Virtues and Beatitudes). At the same time the rivers of Paradise (historical) correspond with the Evangelists (typological) and the cardinal virtues (moral).⁴⁴

In Chartres, moreover, there is a stained-glass window representing the Transfiguration, in which Christ is at the center of a circle of eight spokes.⁴⁵

These illustrations give added support to the claim that Dante conceived and structured the Rose according to the architectural modes of his times and according to the traditional representation of Paradise as seen in these miniatures. The notion "ut pictura poesis" functions also as "ut architectura poesis" or "ut sculptura poesis." It must be pointed out that the various illustrators of Dante's *Empyrean* hardly followed the poet's text. They relied mainly on their imaginations and artistic genius. No one depicted the Rose as a rose with eight petals. An Italian illustrator of the 14th century⁴⁶ depicts the Rose as a circumference divided into eight, but Dante's personae are not represented. Similarly, the illustrations of Giovanni di Paoli (15th cent.)⁴⁸ do not follow the text in the shape of the Rose and in the collocation of the blessed people. In the modern age, Gustave Dore's illustration, to name only one, is circular, full of light and angels, truly a picture of paradise; but he does not follow the exactness of details given by the poet.

Naturally, the artists cannot be blamed because their creations were based on different esthetics which knew little, and perhaps cared even less for the philo-theological prescriptions of the Middle Ages.

This, however, has been a factor in the neglecting of the correlations we have shown between Dante's Rose and the other arts. Dante could have described a paradise based solely on his imagination and exaltation. But his art, like that of the medieval cathedral, painter, miniaturist, was more precise and had to follow tradition in order to create in God's image. Dante was inspired by the rose-window, the baptistery, the baptismal font and the other structures because of their artistry and their symbolism. The traditional representation of the Mystical Paradise added to his creation. Although he innovated this tradition for his own representational needs by making the Rose simpler, imbuing it with more mystic power, he nevertheless maintains it on a human level. He had before him a tradition and art that he was compelled to incorporate into his own creation, thereby reflecting the totality and perfection strived for by the medieval artist.

The Rose is a cathedral; it is the "Ecclesia Triumphans." Just as the Divine Comedy, in its totality, wants to embrace the whole body of Christian knowledge, so the poet wanted to represent in his vision of the Rose the "habitaculum Dei in Spiritu." By analogy, the whole third Cantica is a cathedral corresponding to and contained in the Rose; the eight blessed souls of the first tier may be seen as a rose window. All the other blessed souls in their order and position correspond to the order, the symmetry, the hierarchy found in the medieval cathedral and its art. The medieval conception of the world is one of order, analogy, and hierarchy. Society, knowledge, and dogma reflected these principles, so that art was also organized accordingly. Indeed the medieval cathedral is a book, and Dante's poem is a cathedral. Both the Gothic cathedral and the Divine Comedy become the Biblia Pauperum in Dante's

image:

Nei suo profondo vidi che s'interna
legato con amore in un volume,
ciò che per l'universo si squaderna. (Par. XXXIII, 85-7)

Footnotes

Chapter V

¹ E. Panofsky, Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism, op. cit., p. 43.

² Ibid., pp. 44-5.

³ Edgar De Bruyne, Études d'esthétique médiévale, op. cit.

⁴ The Horizon Book of Great Cathedrals, ed. Jay Jacobs (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1968, p. 18.

⁵ E. Panofsky, op. cit., p. 23.

⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷ Wim Swann, The Gothic Cathedral (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 48.

⁸ Apologia, XII, P.L. 182, col. 914.

⁹ John White, Art and Architecture in Italy: 1250 to 1400 (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 343-4.

¹⁰ W. Swaan, op. cit., p. 51.

¹¹ J. White, op. cit., p. 165.

¹² Paul Frankl, Gothic Architecture, trans. Richard Clay (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 260

¹³ Erwin Panofsky, Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and its Art Treasures (Princetonw, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 104.

¹⁴ W. Swaan, op. cit., pp. 34-7.

¹⁵ Horizon Book of Great Cathedrals, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁶ Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1962), pp. 8-9.

¹⁷ E. Panofsky, Abbot Suger, op. cit., p. 90

- 18 Edgar De Bruyne, Études, op. cit., vol. II, p. 363.
- 19 Henry De Lubac, Exégèse Médiévale, op. cit., II, ii, pp. 42-3.
- 20 Simson, op. cit., p. 130.
- 21 Ennarat. super Psalmos, P.L. 39, col. 1615.
- 22 E. Mâle, L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
- 23 E. Panofsky, Gothic Architecture, op. cit., p. 70; Abbot Suger, op. cit., p. 36.
- 24 See Mâle, L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle, pp. 93-7. Male does not specifically advance the relation "Wheel of Fortune" -- rose-window, but he does state that the example of Amiens, where the "Wheel of Fortune" is depicted around the southern rose, is not unique, for it is found in the northern rose-windows of St. Etienne at Beauvais, S. Zeno in Verona (one of the places where Dante was in the last few years of his life), and in the Cathedral of Bale. Paul Frankl, however, makes a more specific reference to this relationship (Gothic Arch., pp. 222-3). Nevertheless, this is a subject to be developed, since it has not received proper consideration.
- 25 E. Panofsky, Gothic Architecture, p. 71.
- 26 Ibid., p. 72.
- 27 Ibid., p. 73.
- 28 Dante in Inf. XV, 95, says: "... giri Fortuna la sua rota / come le place, e 'l villan la sua marra." In the Fiore XXXVIII, 13: "Se Fortuna m'ha tolto or mia ventura, / ella torna la rota tuttavia." The concept of Fortuna in Dante is replaced by Providence, but this is a topic outside the scope of this work, requiring a study in itself.
- 29 P. Frankl, op. cit., p. 223.
- 30 The Horizon Book, op. cit., pp. 58-9.
- 31 E. Panofsky, Gothic Architecture, p. 87.
- 32 P. Frankl, Gothic Architecture, p. 118.
- 33 E. Panofsky, Gothic Architecture, p. 72.
- 34 P. Frankl, Gothic Architecture, p. 118.
- 35 J. White, Art and Architecture, p. 3.
- 36 F. Baumant, A History of Architectural Styles (New York, Washington: 1970), p. 99.

37 This is a partial list; Chartres, Laon, Sens, Amiens, Reims, Cologne, S. Lorenzo (Vicenza), S. Michele (Pavia), Milan (Duomo), Pisa (Duomo), Florence (Duomo), Siena (Duomo), S. Giovanni al Sepolcro (Brindisi), and innumerable others. This can also be seen in the ideal ground plan of a chevet by Villard de Honnecourt (Panofsky, p. 156).

38 E. Mâle, L'Art religieux du XIII^e siècle, pp. 13-4.

39 Ibid., p. 14, n. 1.

40 Ibid., p. 14, n. 2.

41 See Manfred Hart, Die Zahl, pp. 80-1, n. 80.

42 Adolf Katzenellenbogen, Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art, trans. Alan J.P. Crick (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1964), p. 70.

43 Ibid., p. 70.

44 Ibid., p. 69.

45 E. Mâle, L'Art religieux du XII^e siècle en France (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1947), p. 96.

46 See P. Brieger, M. Meiss, C.S. Singleton, Illuminated Manuscripts of the 'Divine Comedy' (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

47 Ibid., p. 511.

48 Ibid., p. 512.

Conclusion

My intention in this dissertation was to prove that Dante's vision of Paradise is as unique as his mission. The various earlier visions, forming a whole body of literature, provided little or no inspiration for Dante. His vision is wholly spiritual and mystic, excluding all the worldly details so prominent in previous visions. Through a perfect structure and a perfect order -- attributes of clarity and simplicity -- Dante achieved, in a way, "tutto fuor del moderno uso," the sublime and delicate picture of Paradise in the Symbolic Rose.

A close analysis of the Rose has shown that Dante used a mathematical and geometric pattern in structuring the realm of the blessed souls. In following the poet's design step by step, we have been able to observe that the position of the blessed souls on the first tier does not conflict in any way with the geometric figure of a circle; rather, it is only by drawing a circle that we can admire the poet's precision and the totality of his design. It can then be seen that all eight blessed souls of the first tier are placed in their proper place and section with respect to their literal meaning and degree of excellence. Anna and Lucia are not misplaced; their position is in line with the poet's design and with his intention. As a result, the perfect order of the Rose is not destroyed; on the contrary, it offers a significant insight into the perfect construction and the order of the Commedia as a whole.

I have attempted to show, moreover, through a deep probing of the personae of the Rose, individually and as a group, Dante's intention in choosing each specific persona. In so doing, the relationship Rose -- Maria was established, as well as that of the Rose and Divine Love, in contrast to the binomial rose -- sensual love, which is part of a whole tradition exemplified by the Roman de la Rose and Il Fiore. We have observed that in the row of women Dante disregarded the chronological order, using instead an order based on the degree of excellence. Rachel, consequently, is placed on the third throne -- biblically, she would have to be on the fifth throne, after Sara and Rebecca -- corresponding to the angelic Choir of Thrones, to whom in fact Beatrice corresponds. In the case of Ruth, whom Dante placed last among the women, it is suggested that the poet did so in order to renew the direct link with Christ, uniting her with Mary. Since Mary is seated first and Ruth last, the link is re-established to emphasize the bond of the mother of Jesus and the ancestress of David, a bond which unites all these women as typi Ecclesiae.

Regarding the blessed figures forming the row of men and all the other personae of the Rose, we have noted that Dante used the same principle of excellence in their collocation, so that Frances comes before Benedict and Augustine, and Benedict before the latter. The same degree of excellence applies to the position of the figures on either side of Mary. The belief that an historical-literal analysis of each persona would provide a deeper understanding of Dante's intention in choosing them was constantly reinforced and demonstrated by the significance each persona assumes. The qualitative and quantitative balance of the personae in the Rose adds another dimension to Dante's

use of structural and numerical symbolism in the Rose itself and in the harmonious whole of the Commedia.

The importance of numerical symbolism in Dante's opus, and in the Rose particularly, was demonstrated through an excursus on the medieval numerical tradition and the well-established mystical significance of the number eight. It was determined that this number assumes a central role in the structure and significance of the Rose, for the poet willingly adopted it because eight is the number of baptism, resurrection and eternal life. For Dante there was no better choice to represent the realm of happiness and eternity. This claim received a strong confirmation with the discovery that the name of Christ is mentioned eight times in Paradiso XXXII, the canto in which St. Bernard, as magister, reveals the structure of the Rose. May's name, moreover, is mentioned ten times, and the Trinity, three times. The total number of the blessed figures is twenty symbolizing the Decalogue and consequently representing the two Testaments in the unity of the final and eternal realm.

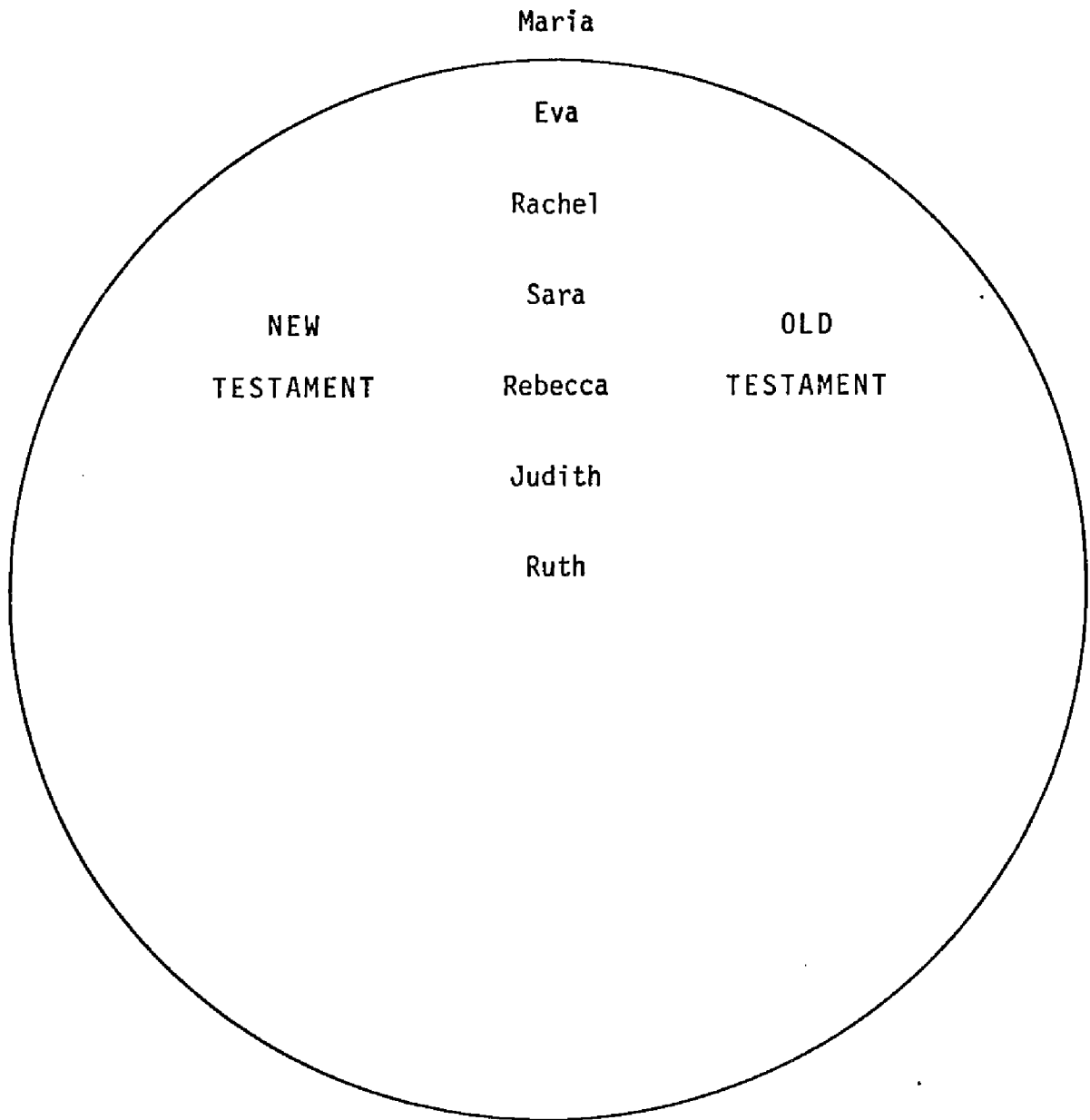
All this points conclusively to the fact that Dante followed the medieval numerical tradition, using its various elements for his own artistic and representational purposes, while at the same time creating a picture of Paradise that has no antecedent or equal. The idea that the Rose is based on the number eight is a new page in the study of Dante, an additional proof for the skeptics that numerical composition is indeed an essential component of the Divine Comedy.

In the last chapter, the discussion centered on the Gothic cathedral, which, as a symbol of Heaven on earth, built following the medieval esthetics of numerus, mensura, pondus and light-metaphysics,

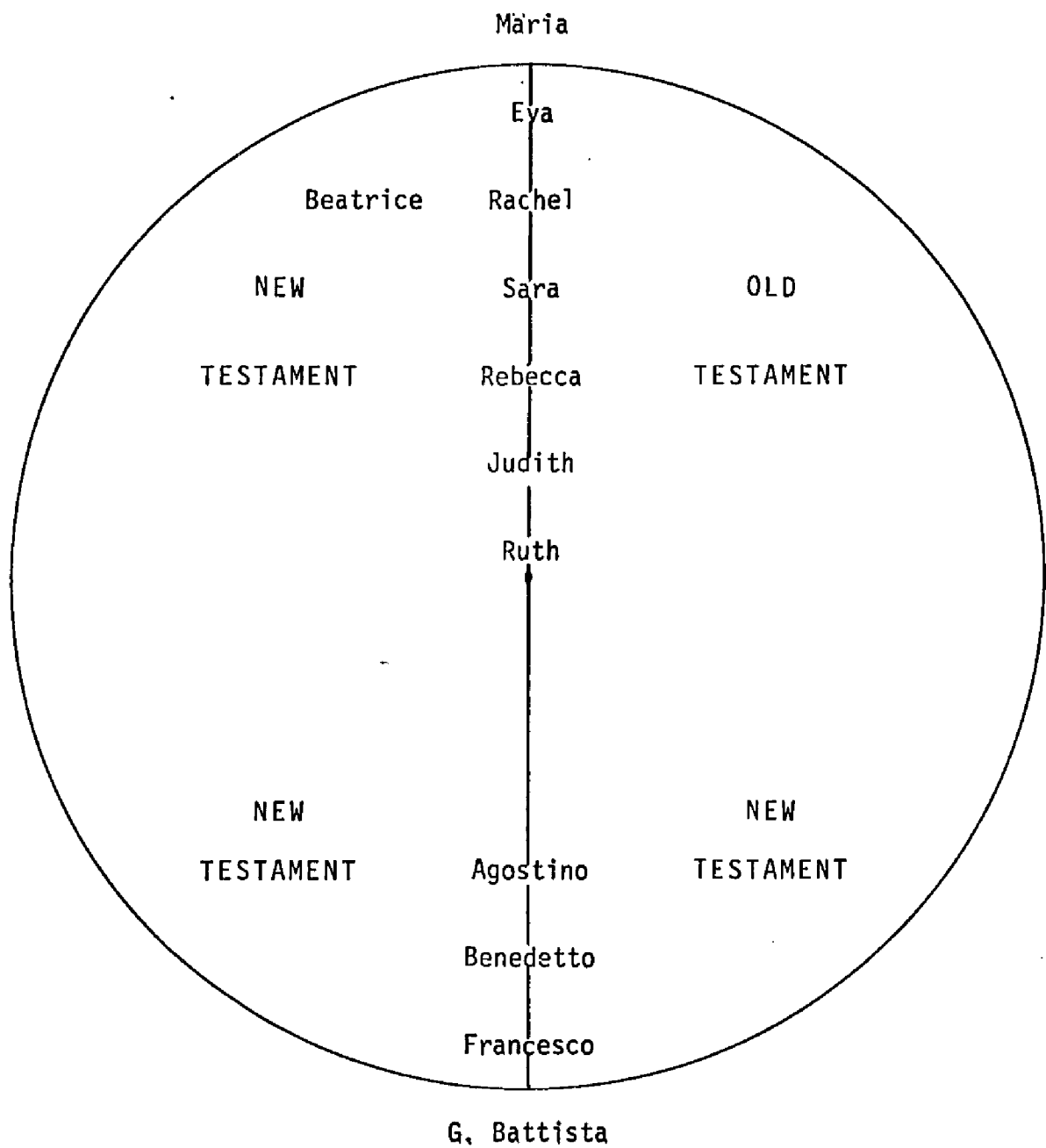
stood in analogy to the order followed by the Architect of the Universe. The analogy, Kingdom of Heaven -- Gothic cathedral -- Church -- Body of Christ, was presented following this same line of thought and the medieval theological tradition. Consequently, I established the analogy Divine Comedy -- Cathedral, Symbolic Rose -- Cathedral, Symbolic Rose -- Rose-window, for Dante also built his Commedia faithfully in keeping with medieval esthetics. As the Gothic architect incorporated the rose-window within the façade of the cathedral, Dante took the rose -- as a symbol of Mary, Queen of the Rose and the cathedral -- and incorporated it into his own creation, the City of God and of the Blessed Souls. The notion "ut pictura poesis" is expanded to "ut architectura poesis." The fact that the rose-windows of a number of cathedrals and churches have eight spokes, that the baptismal font and the baptistery are often octagonal (as the one in Florence), and that other sections of the cathedral are octagonal (apse, crossing, lanterns), is added proof that Dante used a similar structural pattern in depicting the Rose of Paradiso. The representation of the Mystical Paradise in the two miniatures discussed give further support to my thesis, especially because the illustration of the Mystical Paradise found in the Speculum Virginum depicts a rose. Dante, therefore, drew upon a rich artistic tradition that permeated the representational parameters of the Middle Ages. Dante, however, while showing signs of his ductus, integrated it within his own creative vision, thus creating the paradigm of his genius: that while attaining the highest level of poetic expression, he erected a monument of synthesis to the Scholastic Age.

APPENDIX

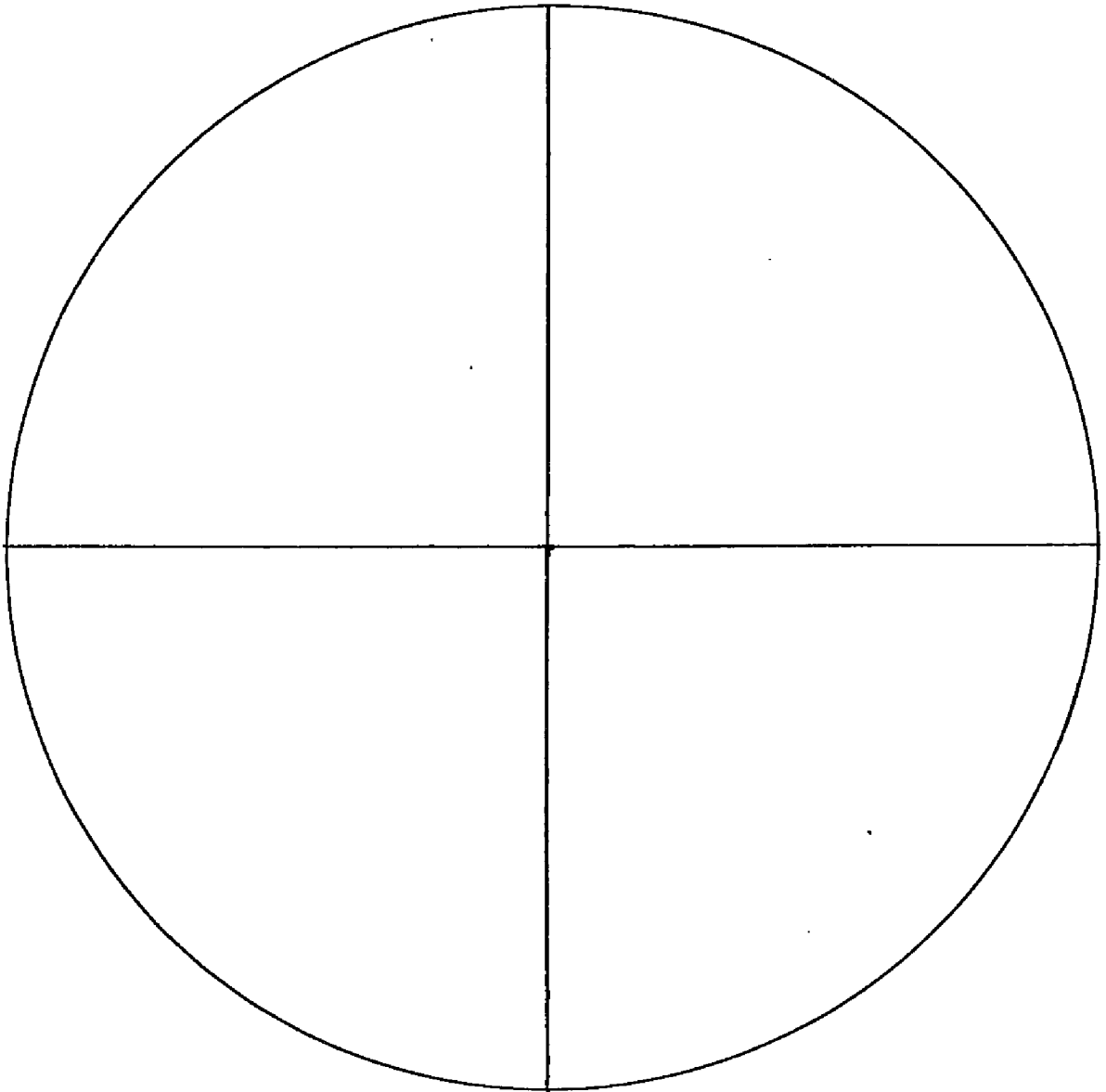
Drawing #1



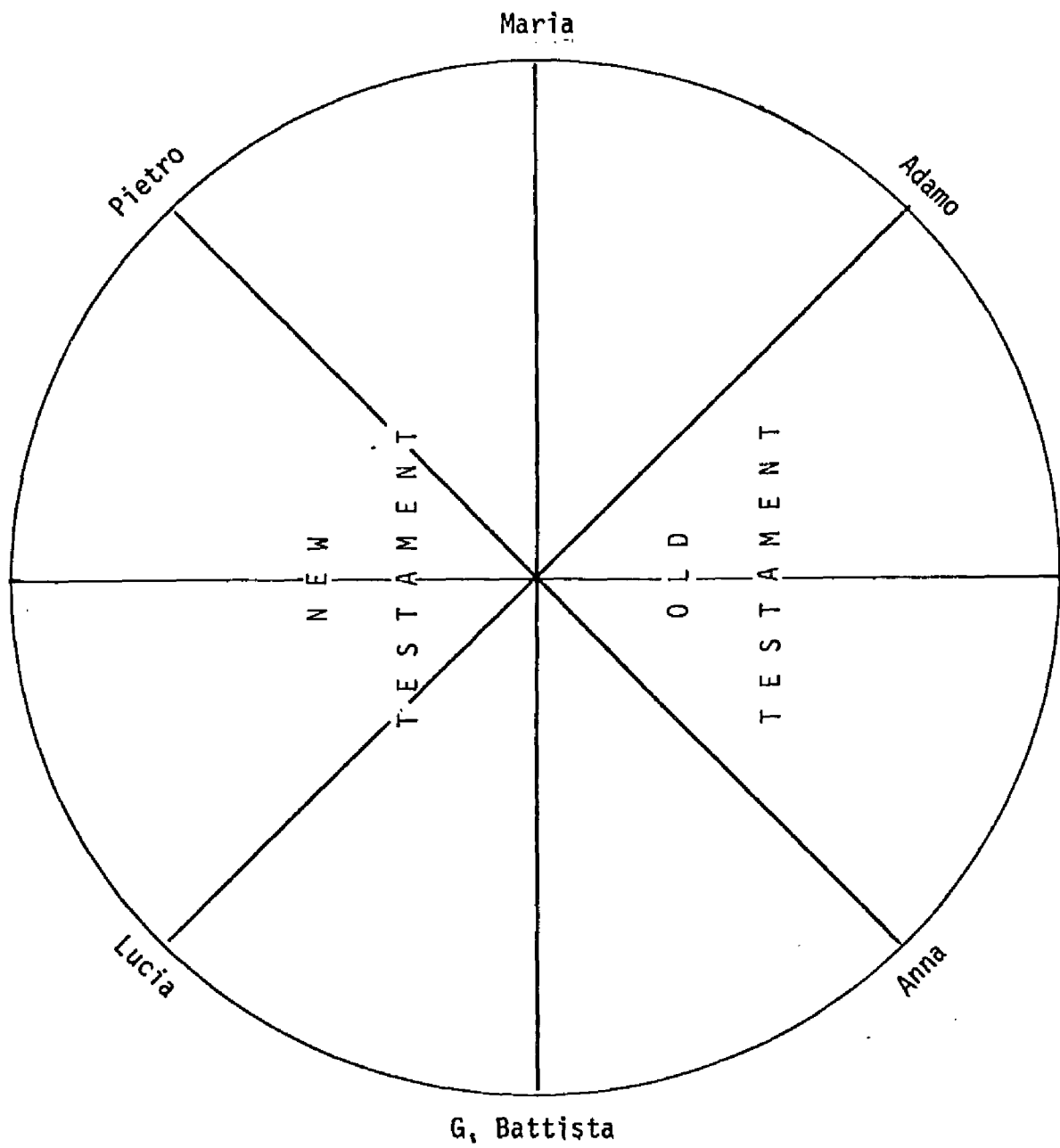
Drawing # 2



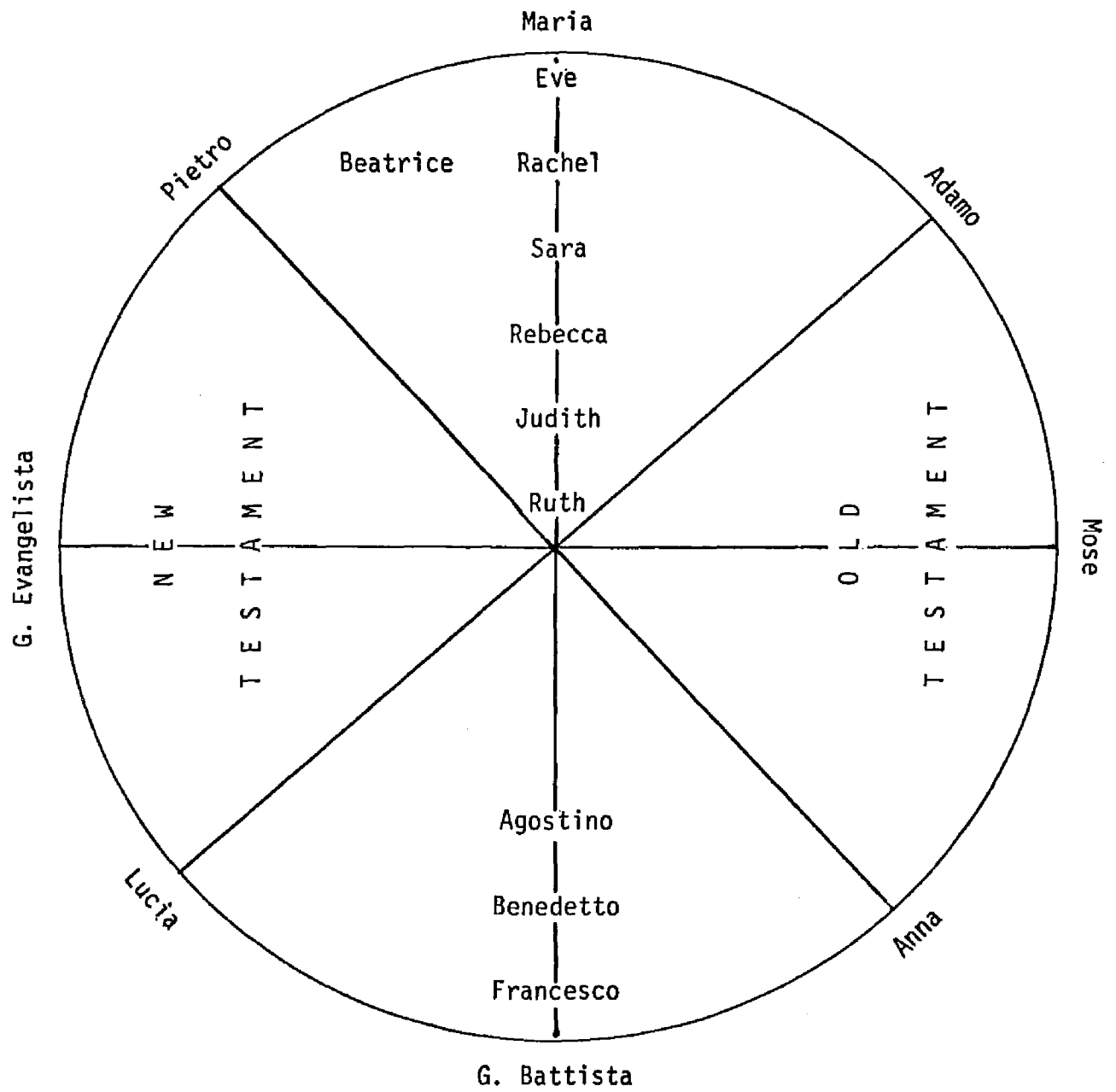
Drawing # 3



Drawing #4



Drawing # 5



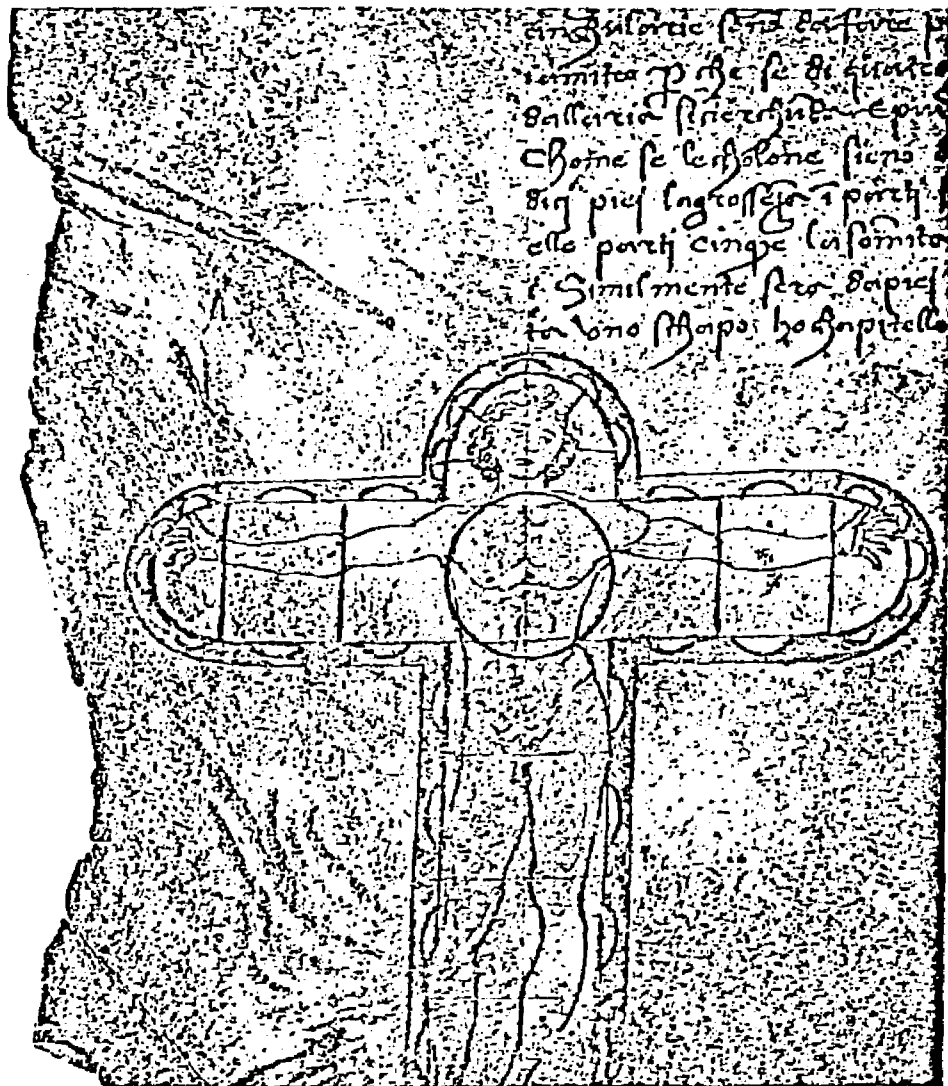


Plate #1 Francesco di Giorgio, Ground plan of a church corresponding to the proportions of a human figure, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence. From Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral.



Plate #2 God with a compass as "Architect of the Universe,"
From The Horizon Book of Great Cathedrals,

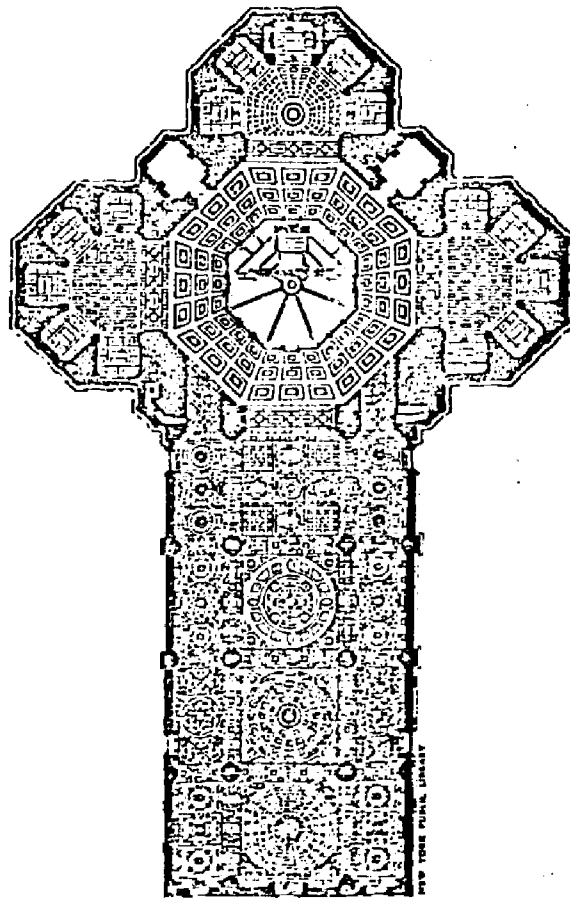


Plate # 3 Ground plan of Florence Cathedral, From The Horizon
Book of Great Cathedrals,



Plate # 4 The Mystical Paradise, German manuscript, 12th century,
 From Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral,

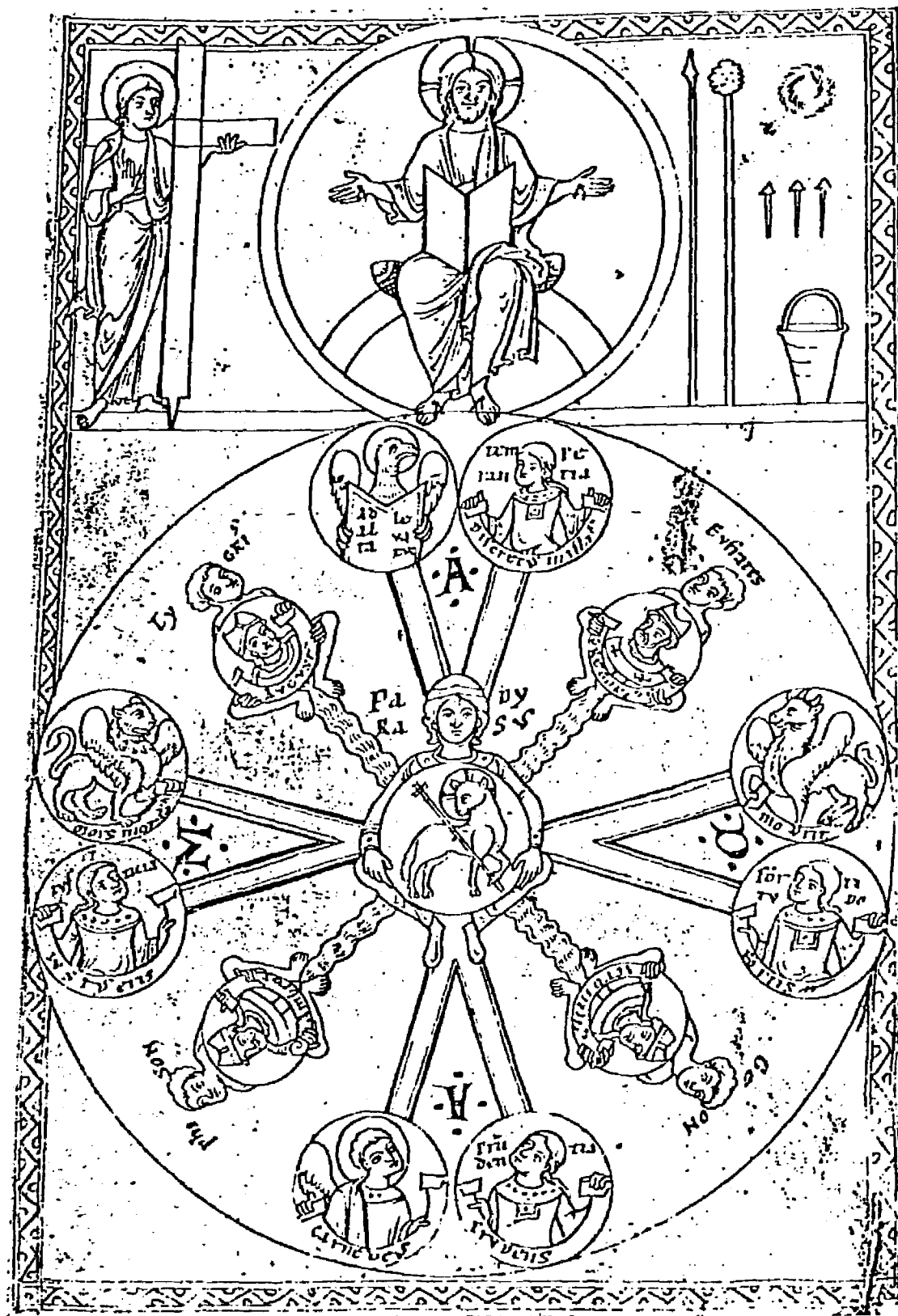


Plate # 5 The Mystical Paradise, German manuscript, 1170-85.
From Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral.

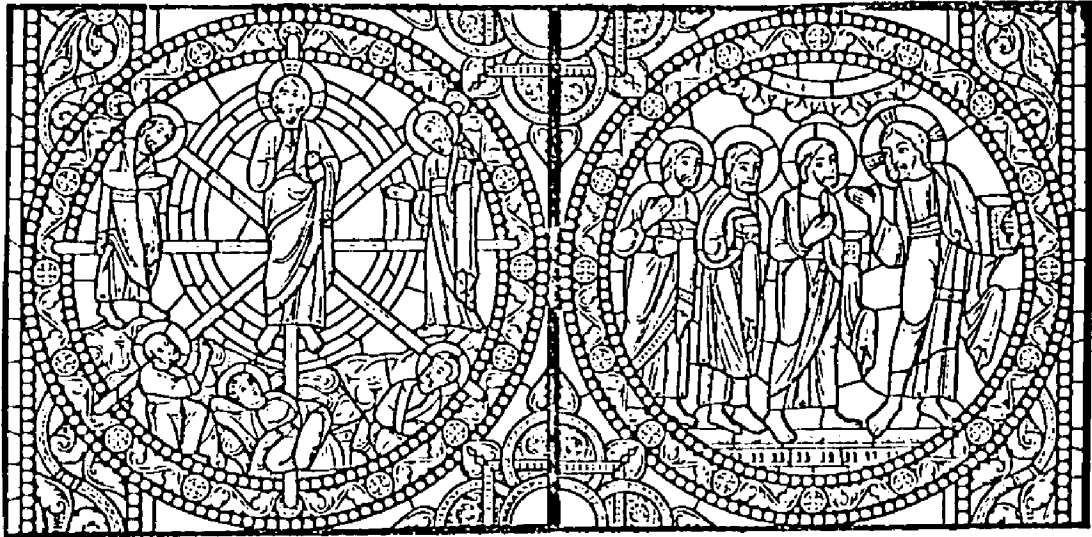


Plate # 6 The Transfiguration. Fragment of a stained-glass window of Chartres. From E. Male, L'art religieux du XII^e siècle.



Plate # 7 Fragment of the southern rose of Amiens. The wheel of fortune. From E. Male, L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle.

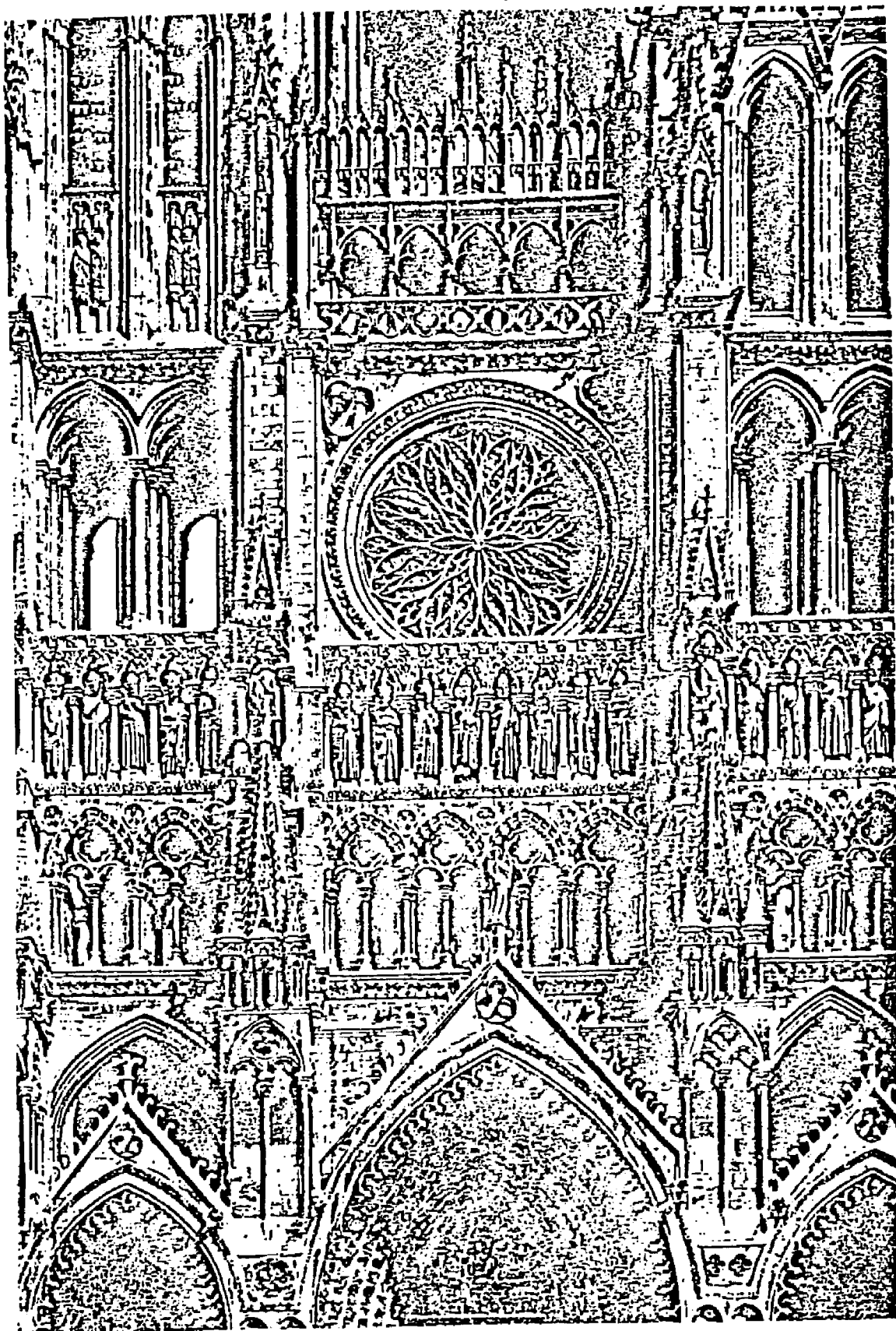


Plate # 8 Rose-window of Amiens Cathedral. From Wim Swaan,
The Gothic Cathedral.

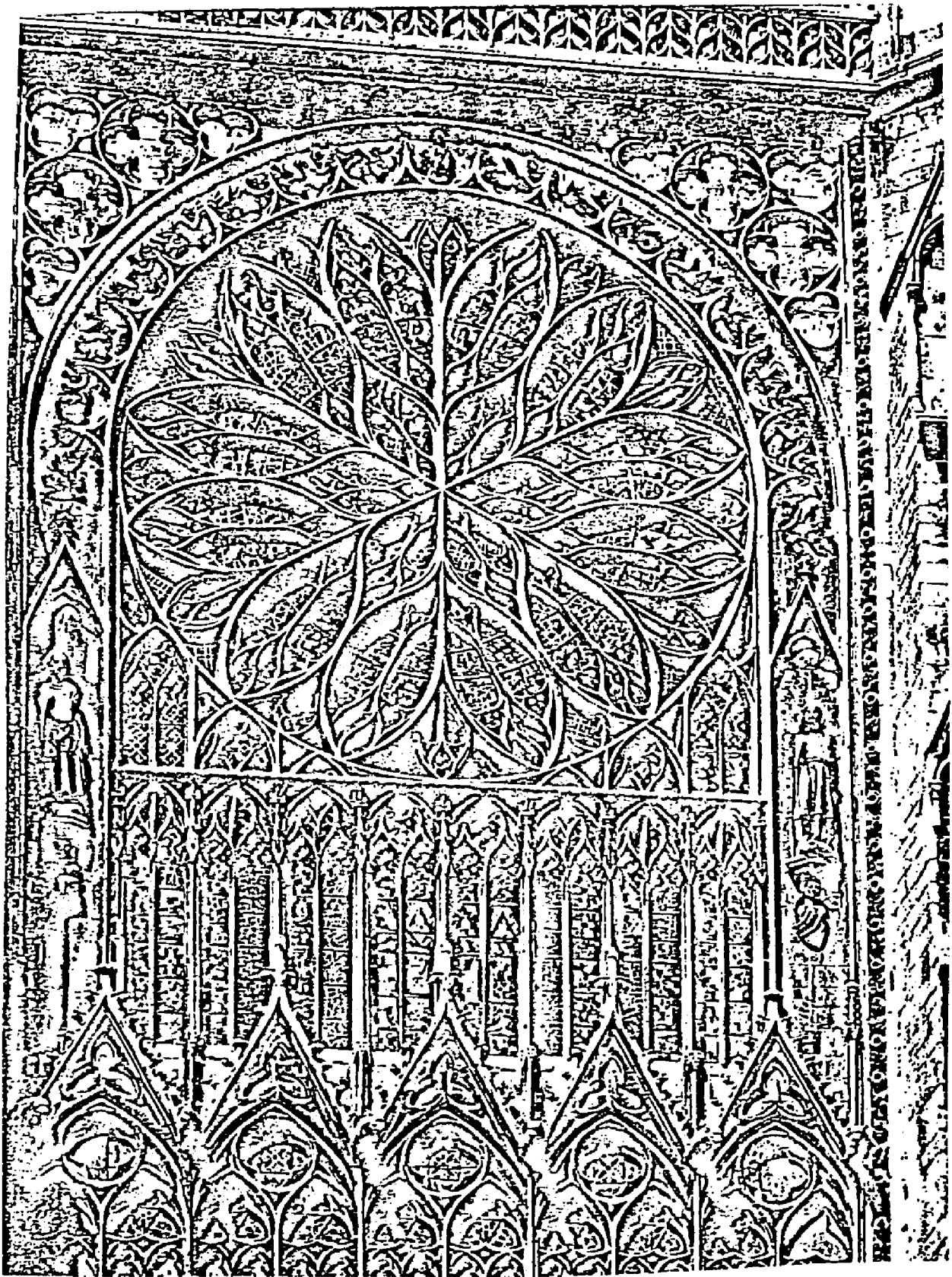


Plate # 9 Amiens Cathedral, the southern rose. From Wim Swaan, The Gothic Cathedral.

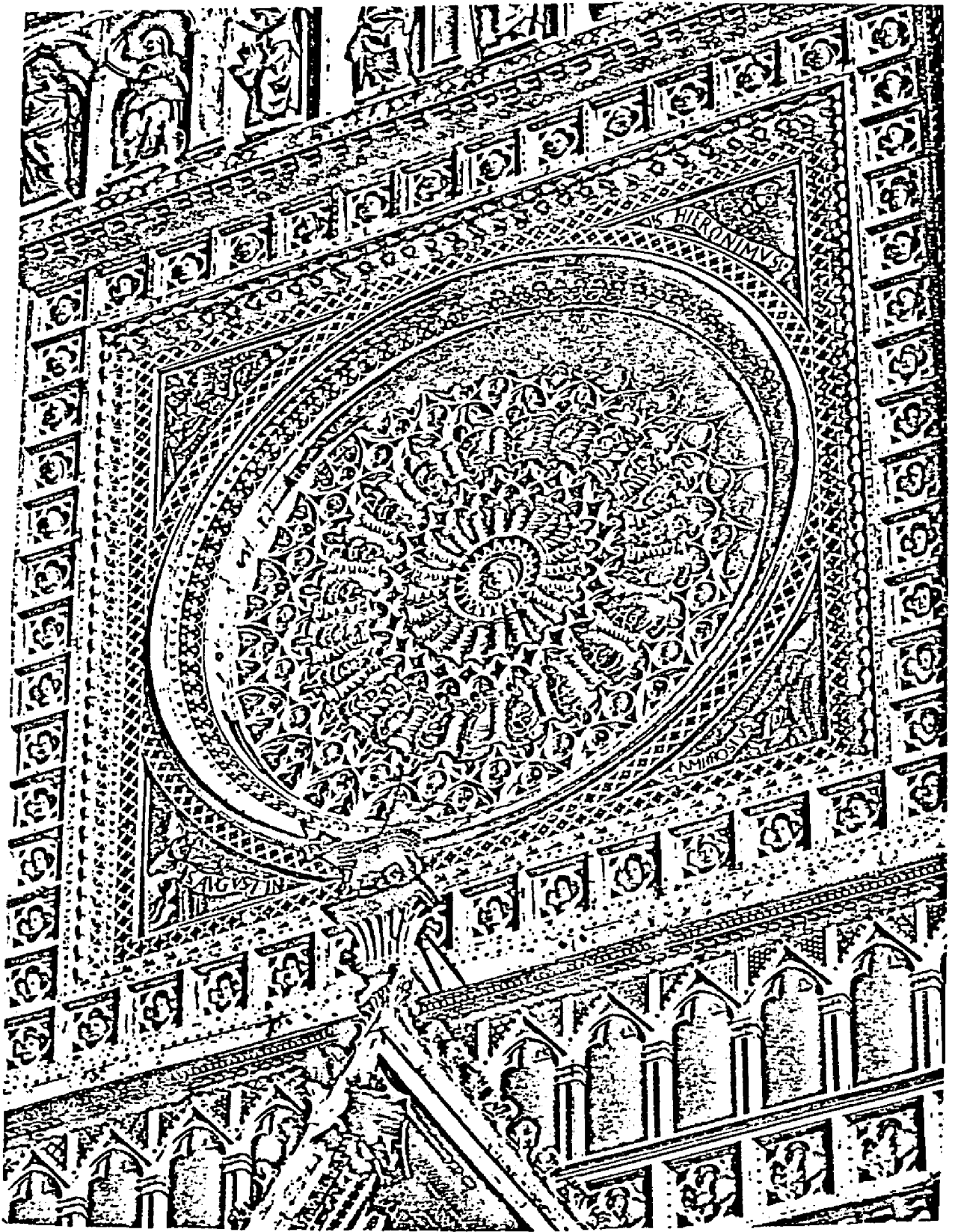


Plate #10 Orvieto, The western rose-window. From Wim Swaan,
The Gothic Cathedral,

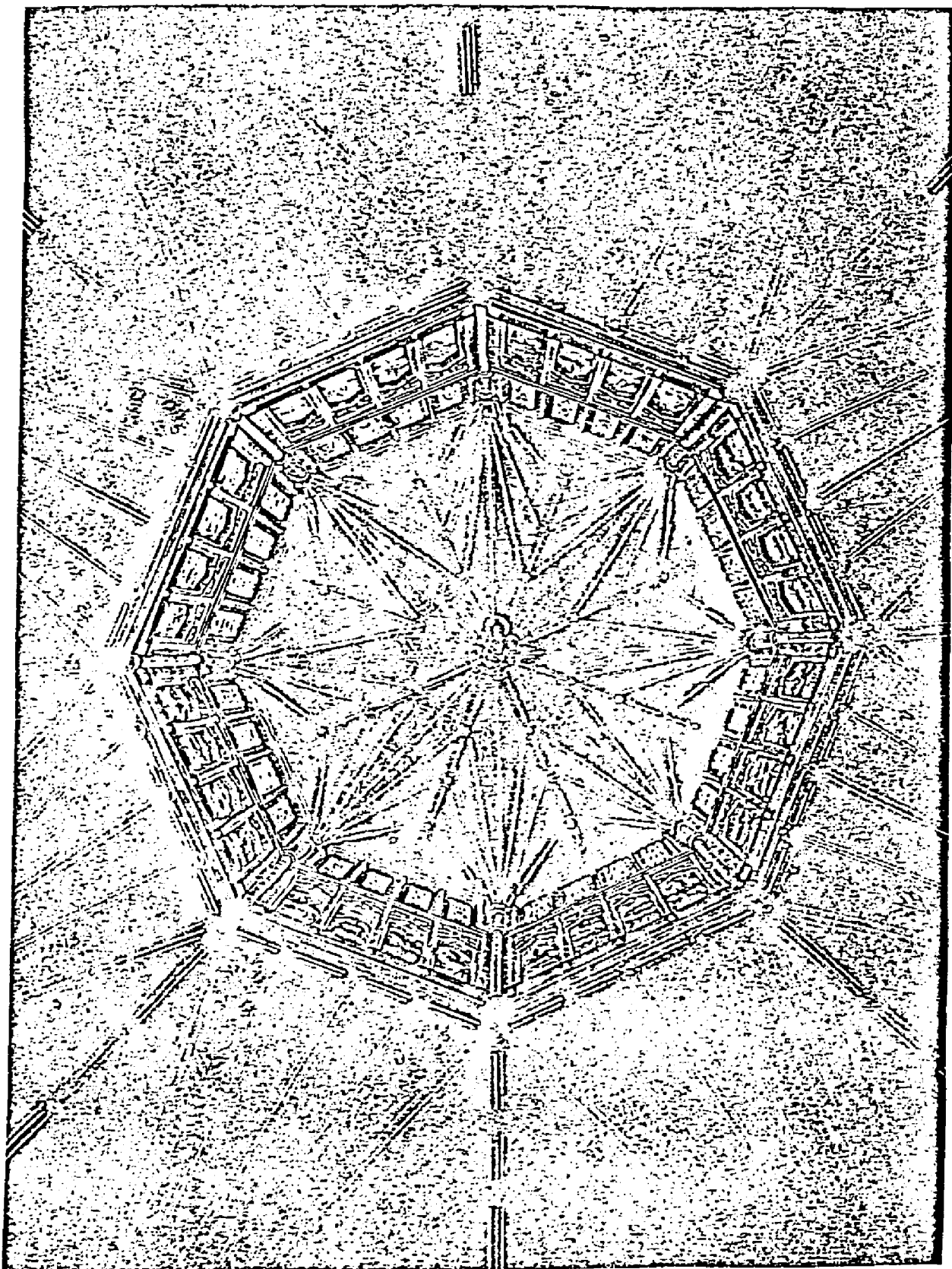


Plate #11 Ely, The octagonal lantern, From Wim Swaan,
The Gothic Cathedral.

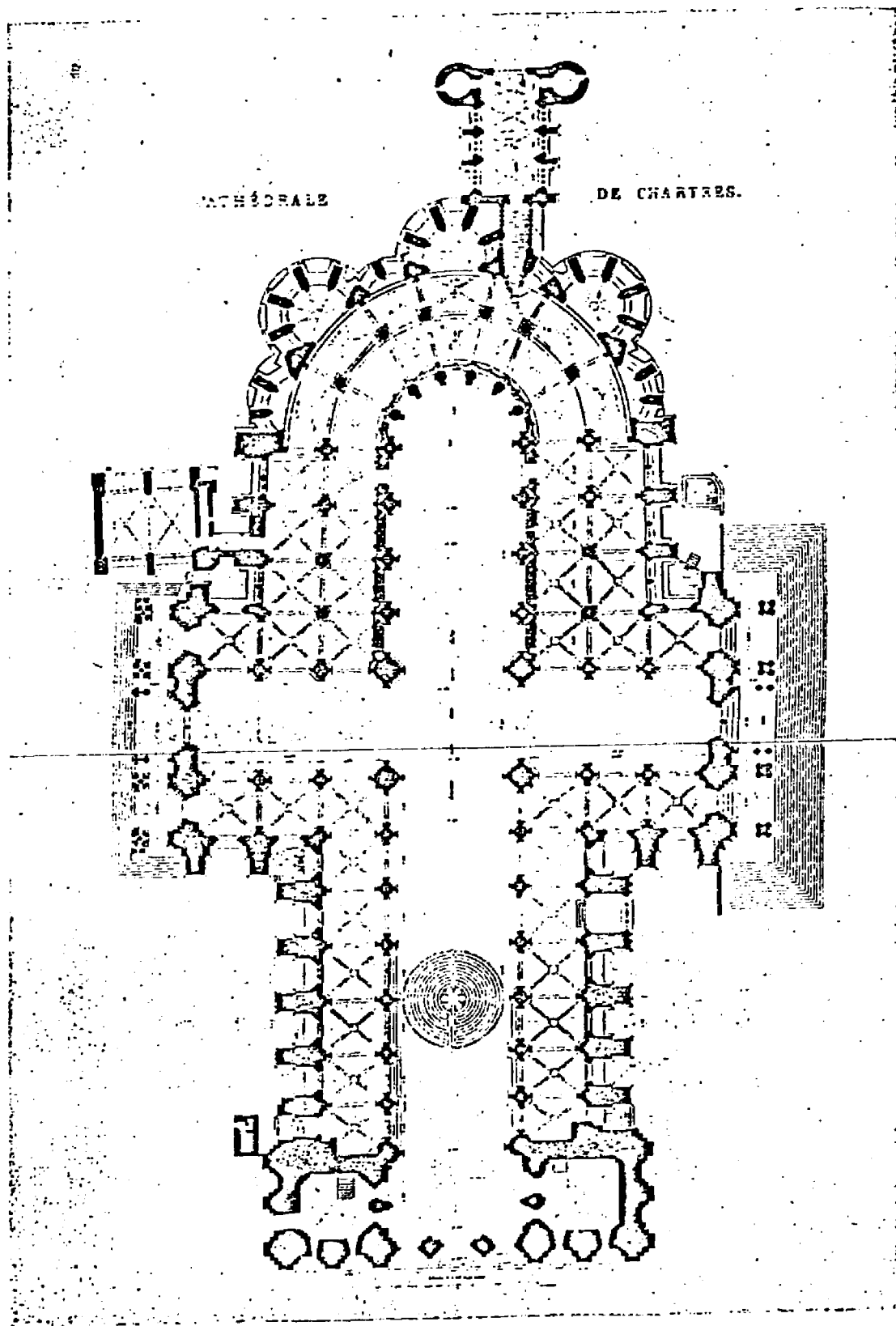


Plate #12 Chartres Cathedral, Ground plan, From Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral.

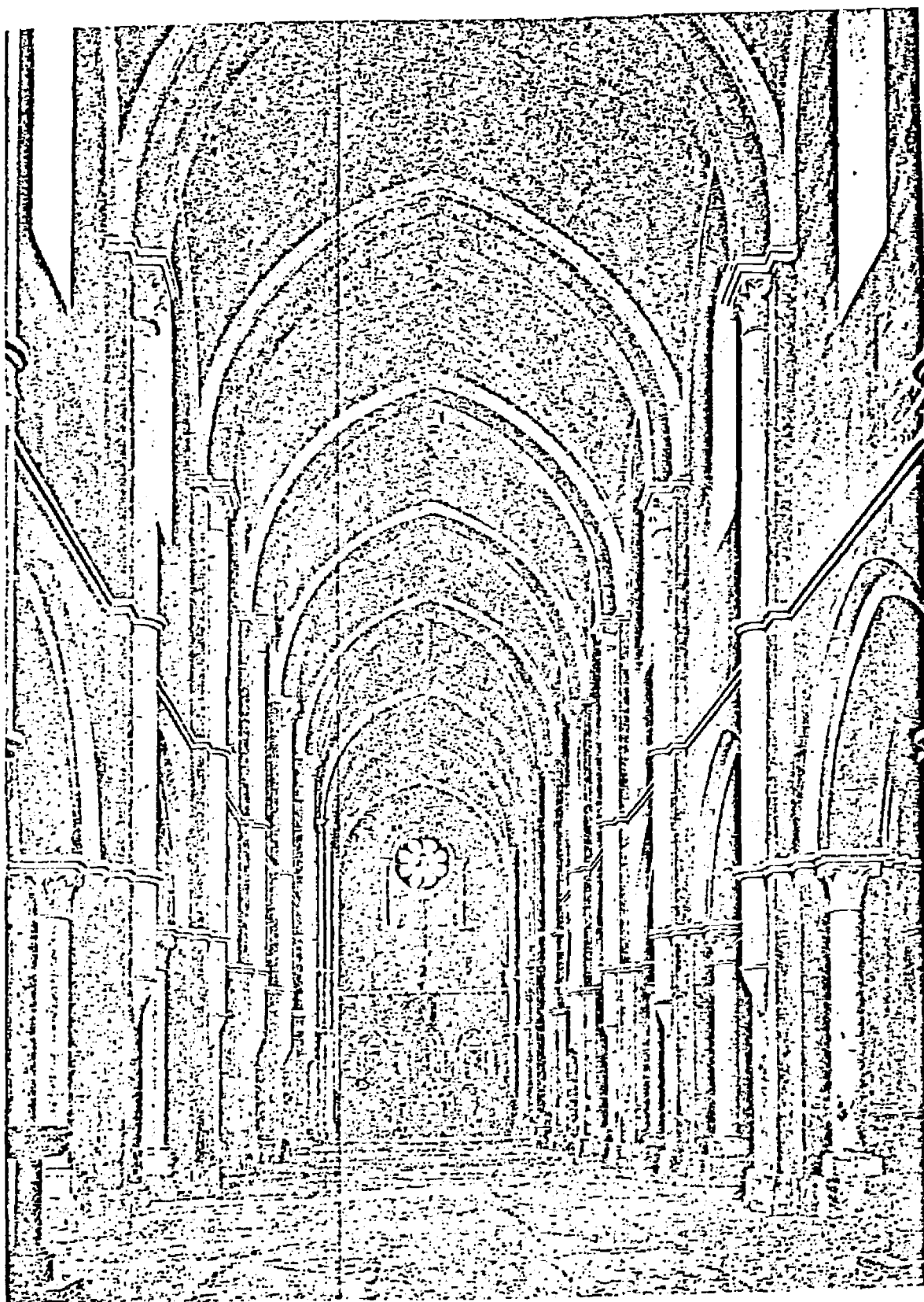


Plate # 13 Fossanova, begun 1187. From Paul Frankl, Gothic Architecture.

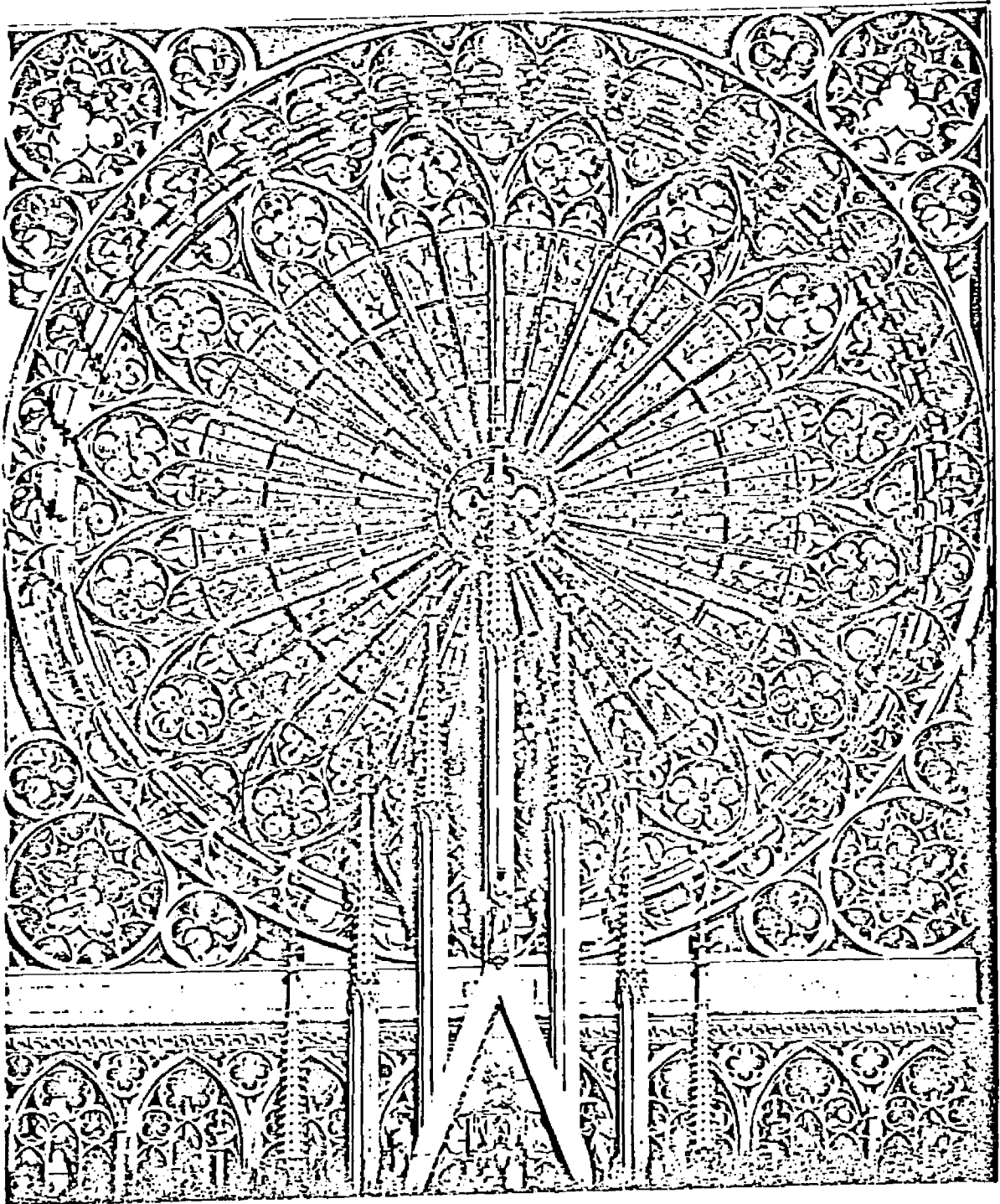


Plate # 14 Strassburg Cathedral, Rose-window, west fron. From Paul Frankl, The Gothic Cathedral.

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