Liturgical Performance and Modes of Knowledge in Dante's *Commedia*

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I show how liturgy can be used as a particularly efficacious hermeneutical key in order to read and interpret Dante's *Commedia*.
Starting from an analysis of the liturgical approach to the concepts of truth and knowledge, always understood as embodied in time and space, I move on to show how Dante's approach to these concepts shares the same features. I first discuss how this *liturgical hermeneutics* is employed by Dante in its most appropriate context – namely when dealing with the truth of Revelation and the interpretation of Scriptures – and then I show how, throughout the poem, Dante is able to graft the different modes of knowledge available to him at the time – theology, philosophy, poetry and science – onto this 'liturgical attitude'.

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List of Editions and Abbreviations

Dante's works are cited from the following editions:

La Divina Commedia. Inferno. ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 2nd edn Oscar Classici (Milan: Mondadori, 2005)

La Divina Commedia. Purgatorio. ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 2nd edn Oscar Classici (Milan: Mondadori, 2005)

La Divina Commedia. Paradiso. ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 2nd edn Oscar Classici (Milan: Mondadori, 2005)

Opere, I. Rime, Vita nova, De vulgari eloquentia, ed. by Claudio Giunta, Guglielmo Gorni and Mirko Tavoni (Milan: Mondadori, 2011).

Opere, II. Convivio, Monarchia, Epistole, Egloghe, ed. by Ginfranco Fioravanti and others (Milan: Mondadori, 2014)

The Bible is quoted in Latin from the Vulgate, ed. Vulgata Clementina:
<http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/00_10_10-_Vulgata_Clementina.html>;
<http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/00_20_05-_Novum_Testamentum.html>.

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited texts and classical works:

Aen.	Virgil, *Aeneis*. Edited by Gian Biagio Conte (Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 2011)
Carm.	Horace, *Carmina*. Edited by Friedrich Klingner (Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, 1959)
Georg.	Virgil, *Georgica*. Edited by Silvia Ottaviano and Gian Biagio Conte (Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, 2013)
Inf.	Dante, *Inferno*
Met.	Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by William S. Anderson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008)
Par.	Dante, *Paradiso*
Purg.	Dante, *Purgatorio*
Teog.	Hesiod, *Theogonia*. Edited by Alois Rzach (Berlin – New York: B. G. Teubner, 1913)

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to argue and provide evidence that liturgy is one of the non-written sources – or at least not-only-written sources – that, among other sources available in the cultural context of the Latin West of the thirteenth-century, best provides us with a broader and deeper understanding of the principles according to which Dante's *Commedia* is built. In order to fulfil this aim, my work is grounded in that strand of the scholarship which argues and shows that liturgy is a fundamental source for Dante's poetic imagery, and thus proves to be pivotal in unfolding new meanings in many different passages of the *Commedia*. Since John Barnes' suggestion about taking more seriously and exploring in greater depth the vestiges of liturgy present in the poem,[1] much has been discovered and debated. Many scholars, in focussing on specific passages of the poem, have shown how liturgy, with its use of symbols and gestures, is particularly helpful in unveiling further meanings present in such passages, by providing some useful keys to interpret words or actions described within the narrative of the poem;[2] others have argued that, on many occasions, liturgical practices are both a source for Dante's theological and spiritual knowledge and a model for his representation of the afterlife.[3] The

[1] John C. Barnes, 'Vestiges of the Liturgy in Dante's Verse', in *Dante and the Middle Ages*, ed. by J. Barnes and C. Ó Cuilleanáin (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995), pp. 231-69.

[2] See, among others: Erminia Ardissino, 'I canti liturgici nel "Purgatorio" dantesco', *Dante Studies. With the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 108 (1990), 39-65; Filippo Zanini, 'Parodie liturgiche nell''Inferno': nota sulla Confessione', in *Preghiera e liturgia nella Commedia, Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi, Ravenna, 12 novembre 2011*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2013), pp. 155-90; Michelangelo Zaccarello, '"*Te lucis ante sì devotamente*...". The depiction of a liturgical space in the Princes' Valley ("Purgatorio" VIII)', in *I luoghi nostri. Dante's natural and cultural spaces*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański, Andreas Kablitz, Ülar Ploom (Tallin: Tallin University Press, 2015), pp. 161-75; Ronald L. Martinez, '"Commendatio animae": Guido da Montefeltro e la liturgia per i moribondi e i defunti', *Italianistica. Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 44.2 (2015), 99-113; Ronald L. Martinez, 'Il Salmo 78 nell'ultimo canto del "Purgatorio"', in *I cantieri dell'Italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo*, ed. by Gabriele Baldassarri and others, (Rome: ADI editore, 2016) [only online: https://www.italianisti.it/pubblicazioni/atti-di-congresso/i-cantieridellitalianistica-ricerca-didattica-e-organizzazione-agli-inizi-del-xxi-secolo-2016]; Pietro Cagni, 'Il messo celeste e la liturgia alle porte di Dite (Inferno IX)', in *Le forme e la storia. Rivista di filologia moderna Dipartimento di Scienze Umanistiche Università degli Studi di Catania, Lecturae Dantis. Dante oggi e letture dell'"Inferno"*, ed. by Sergio Cristaldi (Catania: Rubbettino, 2016), pp. 229-49; Helena Phillips-Robins, 'Singing for Dante in "Purgatorio" 30-31', *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies*, 1, (2018), 1, 127-45.

[3] See, among others: Erminia Ardissino, *Tempo liturgico e tempo storico nella "Commedia" di Dante* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009); Sergio Cristaldi, 'Dante e i Salmi', in *La Bibbia di Dante. Esperienza mistica, profezia e teologia biblica in Dante*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2011), pp. 77-120; Erminia Ardissino, 'Liturgy in Dante and in his Time. Considerations on Durand's "Rationale Divinorum Officiorum" and the "Commedia"', in *Dante and the Christian Imagination*, ed. by Domenico Pietropaolo (Mineola-Ottawa-Toronto: Legas, 2015), pp. 139-63; Nicolò Maldina, 'Tra predicazione e liturgia. Modelli e fortuna del Pater Noster di "Purgatorio" XI, 1-21', in *Le teologie di Dante. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Ravenna 9 Novembre 2013*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2015), pp. 201-33; Ronald L. Martinez, '"Vadam ad portas inferi": la catabasi dantesca e la liturgia', in *Le forme e la storia*, ed. by Sergio Cristaldi, pp. 105-25; Simona Brambilla, 'Le liturgie penitenziali nel "Purgatorio"', in *Peccato, penitenza e santità nella "Commedia"*, ed. by Marco Ballarini and others (Rome-Milan: Bulzoni-Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2016), pp. 151-63; Filippo Zanini, '"Cui non si convenia più dolci salmi". Osservazioni sulla parodia sacra nell'"Inferno" dantesco', in *Natura Società Letteratura. Atti del XXII Congresso dell'ADI – Associazione degli Italianisti (Bologna, 13-15 settembre 2018)*, ed. by Andrea Campana and Fabio Giunta (Rome: ADI editore, 2020), [only online: https://www.italianisti.it/pubblicazioni/atti-di-congresso/natura-societa-letteratura/04_Zanini.pdf]; Helena Phillips-Robins, *Liturgical Song and Practice in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021).

works of Ronald Martinez, for instance, are particularly important in grounding the poem as a whole, and not only isolated passages, in a liturgical framework, precisely because liturgy was a prominent aspect of the cultural environment of the thirteenth-century Latin West, and it is reasonable to expect it to shape significantly a poem like the *Commedia*, so receptive of all the different prompts existing in the culture of the time.[4] Furthermore, the studies of Matthew Treherne have been ground-breaking in suggesting the use of liturgy and its dynamics as a fitting source and model for the very principles according to which the *Commedia* seems to work. In his works, liturgy is treated not only as a repertoire of symbols and gestures helpful in understanding the imagery which Dante employed in describing the afterlife, but also as something capable of shaping ideas, ways of thinking and ways of acting: in other words, here liturgy is seen as capable of shaping a worldview, and therefore is treated as a way to interpret both texts and the world.[5] By sharing his views, and building on his findings, as well as on the evidence provided by others regarding the importance of liturgy for the *Commedia*, with this thesis I aim to show even further the implications of the presence of liturgical imagery in the poem.

In particular, the focus of this research will be on Dante's approach to the different realms of knowledge – theology, philosophy, poetry, and science – as they were accessible to him at the time. I will show how an understanding of the liturgical phenomenon and a familiarity with its dynamics can provide convincing answers to some questions particularly debated within the scholarship, related to Dante's original, unpredictable – sometimes even unsettling – approach to the different modes of knowledge just mentioned. In this analysis, I will start from the premise mentioned above, namely the idea that liturgy is not merely a set of known notions, or a template of images, words and gestures which the poet would have uncritically used to depict the world of his poem, but much more. As an environment which promotes an experience of reality capable of maintaining together transcendence

[4] Ronald L. Martinez, 'Place and times of the liturgy from Dante to Petrarch', in *Petrarch and Dante. Antidantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański, Theodore J. Cachey Jr. and Demetrio S. Yocum (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2009), pp. 320-70; Ronald L. Martinez, 'Dante and the Poem of the Liturgy', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by C. Honess and M. Treherne, 2 vols (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), II, pp. 89-155; Ronald L. Martinez, 'Dante e la tradizione liturgica', in *Dante*, ed. by Roberto Rea and Justin Steinberg (Rome: Carocci, 2020), pp. 287-305.

[5] Matthew Treherne, 'Liturgical Personhood: Creation, Penitence, and Praise in the *Commedia*', in *Dante's Commedia. Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 131-60; Matthew Treherne, 'La "Commedia" di Dante e l'immaginario liturgico', in *Preghiera e liturgia*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda, pp. 11-30; Matthew Treherne, 'Ekphrasis and Eucharist: The poetics of seeing God's art in *Purgatorio* X', *The Italianist*, 26 (2013), 177-96, DOI: 10.1179/026143406X151773; Matthew Treherne, 'Art and Nature Put to Scorn: On the Sacramental in "Purgatorio"', in *Nature and Art in Dante. Literary and Theological Essays*, ed. by Daragh O'Connell and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 187-209; Matthew Treherne, 'Reading Dante's Heaven of the Fixed Stars (*Paradiso* XXII-XVII): Declaration, Pleasure and Praise', in *'Se mai continga…': Exile, Politics and Theology in Dante*, ed. by Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2013), pp. 11-26; Matthew Treherne, 'Reading Time, Text and the World', in *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb, 3 vols (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015-2017), I, pp. 37-56; Matthew Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020).

and immanence, liturgy is more than a ritual with little or no intellectual value, only carried out by clerics within church walls:[6] in Dante's time this was even more true, given that liturgy shaped the whole of society in its temporal and spatial features,[7] therefore facilitating the development of a worldview arising from a sacramental perspective.

The very nature of liturgy is that of being a performance, a lived experience. The person taking part in the ritual is invited to, at once, personally experience the performance and frame it according to the interpretations provided within the liturgical environment itself. In this sense, it can be seen as a performed action and as an intellectual activity altogether. In the way it works, liturgy is able to ground one's experience of the world in a specific understanding of reality and is thus able to engender and enhance a dialogue between performances and texts, between experience and intellectual knowledge. I will explore this dynamic in greater depth when analysing the celebration of Mass, the core of Christian liturgy, where the proclaimed words of Scripture are experienced and encountered as bodily presence through the performance, and in particular through the celebration of the Eucharist. For now, I will just anticipate that, by keeping these two aspects – the experiential and the intellectual – together, liturgy presents itself as a way to engage with reality, and therefore, most importantly for this thesis, as a way of knowing, involving, at once, the understanding of notions and the encounter with and experience of the realities referred to by those very notions. In other words, and still anticipating that which I will duly explore and unpack below, the liturgical environment promotes an embodied, *incarnational*, kind of knowledge. I shall thus demonstrate that liturgy is a most efficacious hermeneutical tool, to the point that I will define my own interpretative method as being a *liturgical hermeneutics*, and I will show that this is also the way in which the approach to the different disciplines of theology, philosophy, poetry and science is represented by Dante in the *Commedia*.

[6] 'Per i lettori moderni, esiste la tentazione di assegnare la liturgia alla categoria del *rituale*: la parola stessa suggerisce obbligo, adesione a formule fisse'. (Treherne, 'La "Commedia" di Dante e l'immaginario liturgico', p. 12).
[7] See John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

1. Principles of a liturgical hermeneutics – within the *Commedia*

1.1 'Pan de li angeli': on knowing the 'taste'

Why liturgy, and not one of the many other rich theological and mystical traditions thriving at the time? Perhaps the concise description given above, suggesting that liturgy might be *a way of knowing* able to keep together personal experience and universal ideas, rather than a set of preconceived notions, introduces the answer to this question. However, the truth is that this research's focus on liturgy is primarily informed by Dante's own suggestion. The real starting point shaping and defining my methodological and intellectual approach to the poem throughout this entire work is a fundamental, textual element taken from *Paradiso* II, from lines which Singleton called 'the most remarkable address to the reader in the whole *Commedia*'.[8]

> Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo
> per tempo al *pan de li angeli*, del quale
> vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,
> metter potete ben per l'alto sale
> vostro navigio, servando mio solco
> dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna equale.
>
> (*Par*. II, 10-15; emphasis mine)

If, as readers, we are required to have some knowledge of the 'pan de li angeli' in order to be able to carry out our own journey through *Paradiso*, the final cantica of the poem, the end goal of Dante's poetic endeavour and therefore that which gives the right perspective on the previous steps of the entire journey,[9] then we must necessarily risk an interpretation of that 'bread'.[10] If, following Dante's own indication, the acknowledgement of this key element is the ground on which the journey is to be carried out, then, I will begin by giving a concise outline of my interpretation of it, which will resonate with that of other scholars, and which will justify my choice of liturgy as a hermeneutical tool.

Commentators have long pointed to the fact that, by the expression 'pan de li angeli', Dante refers to Revelation, and therefore to the knowledge and contemplation of God – a fact on which they all agree unanimously – and have highlighted, on some occasions, a specific aspect of the doctrine of Revelation.[11] For instance, Pietro Alighieri understood it as Scripture itself; Benvenuto da Imola

[8] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. III. Paradiso, Part II. Commentary*, ed. by Charles Singleton (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 37.
[9] Matthew Treherne has also shown how the reader is actually prepared for this all the way along from the very beginning of the poem. See Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 190-92.
[10] Christian Moevs provided a thorough overview of the scholarship on this canto in his 'Paradiso II: Gateway to Paradise', *Le Tre Corone. Rivista internazionale di Studi su Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio*, 3 (2016), 57-73.
[11] All the commentaries quoted have been consulted on https://dante.dartmouth.edu.

identifies it as the divine *scientia*, whereas Francesco da Buti recognises in it divine *sapientia*, which is already particularly significant, given that the two terms, *sapientia* and *scientia*, were generally used to refer to different kinds of knowledge. Augustine discussed the difference and at the same time the interconnection between the two in his *De Trinitate*. He says that *sapientia* relates to contemplation, whereas *scientia* relates to action,[12] and adds later that

> Si ergo haec est sapientiae et scientiae recta distinctio, ut ad sapientiam pertineat aeternarum rerum cognitio intellectualis; ad scientiam vero, temporalium rerum cognitio rationalis, quid cui praeponendum, sive postponendum sit, non est difficile iudicare.[13]

[If therefore the right distinction between wisdom and science lies in this, that the intellectual knowledge of eternal things is proper to wisdom, whereas the rational knowledge of temporal things (is proper) to science, then it is not difficult to evaluate which one is to be preferred and which one is to be postponed. (my translation from the Latin)]

This distinction between two different modes of knowledge, which Augustine calls 'intellectual' and 'rational', and which goes beyond the simpler distinction between contemplation and action, is important: the constant tension between the two is precisely at the core of Dante's investigation, as we shall see throughout this thesis. In the *Convivio*, for instance, he seems to use the two terms in a specific way for different matters, and yet a clear-cut separation between the two seems to be impossible to make. In the treatise, he refers to *sapientia* as the object of love and desire proper to the philosopher, but, at the same time, *scientia* is that which is acquired by the practice of the arts, or 'scienze', that all together constitute the practice of, or search for, 'Filosofia'.[14] In the course of this thesis, I will occasionally make use of the treatise to try to have a stronger idea of Dante's understanding of specific concepts, although I will not entirely rely on that: this is because I believe that the premises from and the principles following which the *Convivio* and the *Commedia* are written – let alone that the former is a philosophical treatise in prose, and the latter a poem – do make a difference in the interpretation of the same terms. This point, and the importance of the fact that the *Commedia* is a poem and not a philosophical treatise, will become clearer throughout this thesis, and in particular through the discussion of Dante's approach to and understanding of poetry, in chapter 3.

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[12] Augustine (354-430), *De Trinitate*, XII, xiv, 22. (in *Documenta Catholica Omnia*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0354-0430,_Augustinus,_De_Trinitate,_MLT.pdf [accessed 28 November, 2022]).
[13] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII, xv, 25.
[14] See, among others, *Convivio* II, xiii, 1-6; III, xi, 4.

Other commentators have provided the biblical references that work as a textual and conceptual source for the expression 'pan de li angeli'. In the Old Testament it is used to refer to the manna given by God to the Israelites during their peregrination in the desert,[15] which was understood as a prefiguration of the coming of Christ: in the Gospel of John,[16] it is Jesus himself who openly builds the connection between the manna and himself as the true, living bread coming from heaven. Among these biblical references, there is one which proves to be particularly helpful in understanding which kind of knowledge of the 'pan de li angeli' Dante requires of his readers; it is the passage taken from the book of Wisdom, and it is related to the episode of the manna:

> Pro quibus angelorum esca nutrivisti populum tuum
> et paratum panem de caelo praestitisti illis sine labore,
> *omne delectamentum in se habentem*
> et *ad omnem gustum aptum*.
> Substantia enim tua dulcedinem tuam in filios ostendebat;
> et deserviens sumentis voluntati,
> *ad quod quisque volebat, convertebatur*.
>
> (Wis 16:20-21 – emphasis mine)

[You nourished your people with food of angels and furnished them bread from heaven, ready to hand, untoiled-for, endowed with all delights and conforming to every taste. For this substance of yours revealed your sweetness toward your children, and serving the desire of him who received it, was blended to whatever flavour each one wished.]

The way in which the manna – the food of the angels, the bread from heaven – is described here shows that it was meant to fulfil the very specific and personal desire of each one of the children of Israel.[17] The specificity of each person's taste and desire becomes, at once, the access to the possibility of knowing the universal truth: God as love, as a loving Father who takes care of the needs and desires of each of his children. In order to be fully known, this one, unchanging truth needs to be found from within the specific and singular experience of the mortal person, it needs to 'prove itself' by meeting and fulfilling the unique *taste* of the individual. An effective knowledge of such a truth must be, as underscored by other commentators, both 'intellectual' and 'rational', but also – and this is my main point – *experiential*, and therefore irreducibly *personal*. It could be argued that the experiential aspect

[15] The episode of the manna is narrated in Exodus 16, and the reference to it as 'bread of the angels' or 'bread from heaven' is found in Psalm 77(78): 24 and Wisdom 16:20-21
[16] See John 6:30-36 and 51.
[17] On the interpretation of the passages related to the taste of the manna, literally and spiritually, see Baldwin of Canterbury, *De sacramento altaris*, ed. by Jean Leclercq (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1963), pp. 561-69. I am not suggesting that Baldwin (1125-1190) is a direct textual source for Dante, but the bishop's exegesis proves that these ideas were indeed discussed among theologians in the Middle Age.

of this knowledge is actually one and the same with that 'intellectual' knowledge described by Augustine, and which in fact grants the acquisition of wisdom, 'sapientia'.[18] This same idea of a knowledge acquired by 'tasting' something is also found in another Psalm verse: 'gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus';[19] the whole Song of Songs is a declination of this dynamic within the imagery of spousal love, but it was also very commonplace in many writings of the Patristic theologians,[20] as well as in liturgical hymns.[21] Far from resolving the tension between the two poles involved in the experience and knowledge of the 'pan de li angeli' – diversity, contingency and finitude *versus* oneness, necessity and eternity –, this way of interpreting the meaning of that 'bread', as we shall see, not only empowers both of them, but places them face-to-face in a constant, continuous dialogue. The earthly world and the heavenly one, human understanding and perception and divine Revelation do not merge indiscriminately into one another, and yet a possibility for their mutual permeation is shown as possible. In this vein, a most interesting suggestion comes from William O'Brien:[22] by pointing to the 'coincidence' between the day in which Dante's journey reaches heaven (the Wednesday after Easter) and the reference to the 'bread of the angels' present in the liturgy of that same day, he builds a strong and interesting argument in which he interprets the formula 'pan de li angeli' as being the Eucharist.[23] What I find particularly important in the account provided by O'Brien is that not only does he show the connection between the 'pan de li angeli' and the lived, liturgical experience of any faithful Christian receiving the Eucharist, but he goes on to characterise such an experience by linking it to Dante's encounter with Beatrice as described in *Purgatorio* XXXI. This is in order to make sense of the fact that the readers truly aware of this experience would be 'pochi', according to Dante's warning, and not simply anyone receiving the Eucharist during Mass. O'Brien describes how Dante's attitude and even bodily gestures before Beatrice recall those performed by the faithful who during the liturgy prepare to receive the Eucharist, and emphasises the impact that the experience of receiving gratuitous, forgiving love has on the soul of a faithful person who is actually aware of this mystery. In Dante's poem, however, the liturgical

[18] It is probably worth pointing to the fact that the Latin verb itself, *săpĕre* – as well as the Italian *săpēre* –, contains among its meanings that of 'feeling the taste': 'sapere' something, therefore, would mean, at once, to know something but also and more specifically to *know the taste* of something.
[19] Psalm 34:9
[20] See, among others, Bernardus Claravallensis Abbas (1090-1153) , *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, in *Documenta Catholica Omnia*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_1090-1153_Bernardus_Claraevallensis_Abbas_Sermones_in_Cantica_Canticorum_LT.pdf.html [accessed 29 November, 2022].
[21] An example can be found in the Gregorian chant 'Jesu dulcis memoria'. (See Edmond Bonin, 'Dulcis Iesu memoria: The Restored Text', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 49.2 (2014), 199-211).
[22] William O'Brien, '"The Bread of Angels" in "Paradiso" II: A Liturgical Note', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of Dante Society*, 97 (1979), 97-106.
[23] On the significance of the presence of the Eucharist, in the poem as a whole and in this canto in particular, see also Matthew Treherne, 'Contingency, Creation, and the Eucharist in the "Commedia"', in *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 145-92, in particular pp. 190-92 and note 70.

imagery as described by O'Brien is used not to talk about the celebration of communion, but the encounter with Beatrice: this very fact is particularly eloquent about the poet's originality, but also sheds a light onto Dante's own understanding of reality, and specifically of his most important experiences. In the same way in which the manna, according to the passage of the book of Wisdom, would take on a different flavour to please and fulfil the taste of different persons, so too for Dante the experience of the self-giving, Eucharistic love of Christ takes on the specific features of his encounter with Beatrice, since the times of the *Vita nova*, where she is described as 'venuta da cielo in terra a miracol mostrare'.[24]

1.2 Dante's own 'pan de li angeli'

I would like to emphasise this last consideration, and I will occasionally do it again in the course of this thesis because it lies at the core of my hermeneutical method. The freedom with which Dante uses sacramental – Eucharistic – categories in order to read and understand the world is precisely that which makes him so unique among his contemporaries. Debates about the reality of the sacraments and about the most fitting theological understanding of them had been particularly heated throughout the twelfth century.[25] The dogma of Transubstantiation, that is, the belief in the real presence of the body and blood of Christ under the species of bread and wine during the Eucharistic celebration, in this formulation, was definitively defined only in the Council of Trent (1545-63).[26] However, this is not to say that the belief in the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist is a more recent belief not already shared in the thirteenth century, nor that Dante's ideas on the topic were unorthodox or in any consistent way divergent from those upheld by the Church in his time: Dante's peculiarity seems to lie precisely in the fact that he employed the categories used to make some sense of the mystery of the sacraments, and of the Eucharist in particular, to read and understand the created world *as well as* the mysteries celebrated in and through the liturgy of the Church.[27] However unusual, this almost-daring attitude is in no way at odds with the type of engagement with the world that liturgy itself encourages: it is, in fact, its most radical actualisation. We shall see this in more depth by

[24] *Vita nova*, XXVI.
[25] See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1971-89) III (1978), pp. 184-214.
[26] A first formulation of the dogma of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, however, had already been given in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The definition of the dogma of Transubstantiation during the Council of Trent clearly had important historical implications, and it was perceived as a necessary action on the part of the Roman Catholic Church in order to counteract the diffusion of the Protestant views on the subject, which did not consider the Eucharist as being the real body and blood of Christ.
[27] On the idea of the created world as a book to be read employing a sacramental lens, see Treherne, *Dante's Commedia and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 171-75. See also Wanda Cizewski, 'Reading the World as Scripture: Hugh of St Victor's *De tribus diebus*', *Florilegium*, 9 (1987), 65-88.

exploring the way in which the Bible and the stories there narrated were proclaimed and received particularly during the celebration of Mass, as well as during other liturgical celebrations.

An experience of the 'pan de li angeli' is essential in order to carry out the textual journey of *Paradiso,* and, retrospectively, to reframe and comprehend the portion of journey already accomplished through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. That of the *Paradiso,* and in general that of the whole *Commedia*, is Dante's own personal journey, and yet it claims to be the journey that leads to the vision of the universal, unchanging truth. As Singleton has pointed out, it is both Dante Alighieri's personal journey as well as the journey that any individual can undertake.[28] In Dante's case, no one but Beatrice could have been the person leading Dante through the heavenly spheres because, as O'Brien has suggested too, she is Dante's own 'pan de li angeli', the pivotal point of his life where he could experience the summit of delight and be persuaded by – or at least invited to consider the possibility of – the radical goodness of reality:

> Mai non t'appresentò natura o arte
> *piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch'io*
> *rinchiusa fui*, e che so' 'n terra sparte;
> e se 'l *sommo piacer* sì ti fallio
> per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale
> dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?
>
> (*Purg*. XXXI, 50-54 – emphasis mine)

The only other thing or person addressed in the whole *Commedia* as 'sommo piacere' is God himself at the very end of the poem,[29] and I believe that this fact is quite significant, especially when we read it in the light of the scriptural passage from the book of Wisdom. With her presence, Beatrice had the ability to fulfil Dante's desire and 'taste', but only for a specific portion of time. She indeed died, leaving the poet with a decision to make regarding how to interpret the meaning of her powerful and yet fleeting presence in his life, a presence able to tie together, mysteriously, immanence and transcendence, contingency and eternity. A paradoxical experience, this of finding tied together transcendence and immanence, which lies at the core of every liturgical celebration too. Beatrice's very finitude and death calls for Dante's hermeneutical journey: that something noteworthy had happened to him in the encounter with her was undeniable, and the whole *Vita nova* stands as a testimony to such an experience; but the fact that she was just and only a mortal human being, however dear to and loved by him, is a problem that needed to be addressed. It meant, therefore, that

[28] See Charles Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*, 3rd edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 3-14.
[29] *Par*. XXXIII, 33.

there was a journey to be undertaken in order to enter into this mystery, know it and understand it – as far as possible. Beatrice's death is the occasion that made the journey of the *Commedia* necessary.

1.3 The journey: truth as *performance*

The very idea of a journey of understanding, which lies at the heart of the *Commedia*'s narrative, and the consequent idea of truth as something 'in the making', something not ownable as a single notion but to be experienced in a relationship both within and without oneself, calls for the essential presence of a traveller: however banal this statement might sound, it is actually one of the elements which will prove to be pivotal in the development of this research, and is obviously faithful to Dante's choice to fashion the poem as the tale of his own journey. The space of the human person, the traveller, and his or her personal action – at once mental and corporeal – is the space where the journey is performed: it is at once the journey of the person towards the truth, and of the truth towards and within the person; it is a 'bi-directional' journey that happens within the space of the human action, as a performance. I shall unpack these ideas in greater depth in section 2.2 of this Introduction, when analysing the liturgical practices accessible to Dante in his time, and in particular the way they shaped the understanding of space.

The reader needs to *know* the 'pan de li angeli', and know it in the specific, unique and contingent declination that it assumed in his or her own life, by virtue of the fact that he or she is a specific, unique and contingent human being, whose journey will assume the features of his or her own specific conditions and performances. Here is where the connection with Singleton's concept of the allegorical journey that can be carried out by whomever, and with the need for a liturgical hermeneutics is found: a traveller carrying out a journey in, through and towards truth, and a truth that at the same time reaches the traveller in and through the journey, are precisely the key elements of the liturgical environment,[30] and do not necessarily require an in-depth knowledge of theological notions – a requirement held as essential by Singleton. The liturgical setting inevitably invites the person to experience and understand reality as twofold, as the mysterious and yet real, tangible union of transcendence and immanence, and it does so by means of experienced, embodied performances more than by means of theological notions. The person is only required to be aware of the presence of a mystery, and not of all the possible aspects of such a mystery. The emphasis on the concept of *performance* over that of intellectual notion is another key point of this thesis: my aim is to show how, for a more effective interpretation of Dante's poem, it is necessary to overturn – or at least rebalance – the hierarchy between a knowledge understood only from a rational (or rationalistic) point

[30] See Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: on the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), in particular chapter 4, pp. 169-219.

of view – which can be defined as *constative* – and an embodied, experiential knowledge – which can be said to be *performative*.

The fundamental ideas of *constative* and *performative* are taken from John Austin's Philosophy of Language, and are at the core of his Speech Act Theory.[31] In his fundamental essay, *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin discusses how the consolidated idea that language is essentially constative can be challenged, meaning that language does not only describe a state of affairs in reality, but it is something able to act upon reality, and to do so with specific intentions. To make his point, and to outline the meaning of the performative nature of language, Austin takes some specific examples in which language clearly makes something happen: making a promise, marrying someone or betting. These are all actions performed by means of an uttered phrase; marriage, for instance, is only brought to existence by means of the linguistic expression of consent on the part of the spouses. Austin goes on arguing that, in fact, every time a sentence is uttered, it is never uttered outside of a specific context, and therefore its meaning is never circumscribed to the content – namely the constative element – of the sentence itself. The meaning of an utterance – and this can apply to written ones too – is given by the 'what' such an utterance is saying, as well as by the 'how' and 'why' the sentence is uttered: in other words, this is to say that language is a fundamentally relational phenomenon, which does not have *real* meaning outside of a network of relationships, embodied in a specific portion of time and space.

Thus, if we grant to speaking and writing the status of proper acts, of actions performed within a relational context and for specific reasons, then we have a broader perspective from which we can look at Dante's texts,[32] by taking into account the value of his own *poetic act* of writing. He does indeed show himself to be very aware of his authorial intentions and responsibilities: the *Vita nova* begins by stating what is Dante's intention in writing it;[33] we read in the Epistle to Cangrande that the goal of the *Commedia* is that of 'removere viventes in hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad

[31] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. by J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); 2nd edn., ed. by James O. Urmeson, Marina Shia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

[32] A first suggestion to consider the *Commedia* as a text for performance came from Peter Armour: he pointed to the suitability of the text to be read out loud and highlighted its strong aural power; he also provided examples from the text showing an intention of the poet to destine the poem for public reading in order to guarantee its circulation. (Peter Armour, 'The *Comedy* as a Text for Performance', in *Dante on View. The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, ed. by Antonella Braida and Luisa Calè (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

[33] 'In quella parte del libro della mia memoria dinanzi alla quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice "Incipit Vita Nova". Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'assemplare in questo libello, e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenzia' (*Vita nova*, I). Manuele Gragnolati has reflected on the *Vita nova* as being Dante's first attempt at 'authorial performance', carried out in order to build his authority and credibility. See Manuele Gragnolati, 'Authorship and performance in Dante's *Vita Nova*', in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 125-41.

statum felicitatis',[34] but also within the *Commedia* itself we can find direct or indirect declarations of its goal: 'Però, in pro del mondo che mal vive, / al carro tieni or li occhi, e quel che vedi, / ritornato di là, fa che tu scrive'.[35] These fundamental themes have been at the core of Teodolinda Barolini's studies,[36] in which she shows how the meta-literary dimension of the *Commedia* is a fundamental aspect that needs to be considered when interpreting the text: she holds that the *Commedia* is written in a way that will progressively lend credibility to its author and build his identity as *scriba Dei*, and shows how the whole poem itself acquires a different meaning when read as the performance of an author who, through the very same performance, is progressively building his identity. If Barolini stresses the need for Dante to be believed as the main purpose behind his masterful poetic act – a reading which results in an accusation of manipulation of the reader –, Denys Turner has instead suggested that one should acknowledge, as the main drive behind Dante's poetic performance and artistic endeavour, a clear commitment to the message that has to be delivered through the poem.[37]

I have underscored above the importance of performances, and of the person's performance of actions as the place of the journey towards and within truth – as well as the journey of truth towards the person. By exploring this idea in greater depth, taken from a liturgical approach to truth and reality, and therefore drawing a connection between it and Dante's *poetic act* or *performance*, my aim is to show that one mirrors the other, and therefore changes our way to understand and interpret the text. For this reason, I will refer to my reading of Dante, as well as to his interpretation and representation of the world, as a *liturgical hermeneutics*. And in particular, as anticipated above, I will look at Dante's engagement with the main disciplines of his time – theology, philosophy, poetry and science – to show that he reads them as journeys or performances too, and thus approaches them using liturgical categories: liturgy is, as we have seen, essentially performative in nature.

I said that the choice of having recourse to the liturgical phenomenon as a hermeneutical key for the poem was informed by textual reasons found within the *Commedia* itself, or by the very features according to which the poem has been shaped by Dante, and I have also referred to the key element

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[34] *Epistola XIII a Cangrande della Scala*, xv. For an overview of the debate regarding the authorship of the Epistle, see Teodolinda Barolini *The Undivine "Comedy". Detheologizing Dante*, (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992) pp. 4-10.

[35] Claire Honess has reflected on the implications, from a political perspective, of Dante's act of writing as being aimed at changing the reader's experience of reality 'in hac vita', and not in an undefined otherworldly future; the scope of the poem would be that of – hopefully – triggering a spiritual change in the readers, which would make them able to live in society by finding their proper place within their community. See Claire Honess, 'The language(s) of Civic Invective in Dante: Rhetoric, Satire, and Politics', *Italian Studies*, 68.2 (2013), 157-74; Claire Honess, 'Politics', *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia'* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 192-207, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/cambridge-companion-to-dantes-commedia/politics/28EA43785D66F71B1375D8E8F1ED9438.

[36] Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Barolini *The Undivine "Comedy"*.

[37] Denys Turner, 'How to Do Things with Words: Poetry as Sacrament in Dante's *Commedia*', in *Dante's Commedia. Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, pp. 286-305.

of the 'pan de li angeli'. Still from a textual perspective, meaning from indications found within the structure of the poem, I have then concisely outlined the principles from and according to which my methodological approach develops. Now, in order to ground these textual elements in Dante's cultural background, and in particular in order to show the striking connection with a liturgical understanding of reality, I shall give an overview of the main liturgical practices as they were carried out in Dante's time, pointing in particular to the way in which they are able to affect the perception of time, space, and the human body. As the ideas of performativity and performance lie at the very core of my hermeneutical approach, I will pay particular attention to the way in which truth is perceived in the essentially performative environment of liturgy, and I will highlight the treatment that liturgical performances reserve for the written word of Scripture.

2. Principles of a liturgical hermeneutics – the liturgical performance

Generally speaking, the term liturgy refers to the formal worship of the Church.[38] This definition, however, can be as all-encompassing as it is evasive: for, if it is true that that liturgy is a fundamental part of the Church as institution – and it is indeed her official communal worship –, it is also true that, by virtue of its very nature, liturgy cannot be confined within the limits of encoded formulas, ownable and merely reproducible by the Church itself. Furthermore, the liturgical phenomenon, understood as the rituality around which a civilisation can be organised, does not uniquely belong to a Christian context: from an anthropological perspective, it can be said that liturgy is an expression of an inherently human dimension, regardless of the specific beliefs behind it and therefore regardless of the particular shape it may assume. A fundamental study for this thesis is Pavel Florenskij's *La filosofia del culto*:[39] in this work, the philosopher/theologian has examined the nature of worship, and has observed that the liturgical phenomenon is present in many cultures, even those extremely distant and different from Christianity. Hence, he has suggested that it be understood as the manifestation of the religious attitude innate in human nature; more specifically, he presents this cultic activity as the embodied, visible form of the lived relationship between humans and the divine. That of liturgy, therefore, is an essentially relational space, in a way which recalls Austin's definition of language. In this sense, the relational environment of liturgy can be further characterised as the space of the dialogue between humanity and divinity, a dialogue in which human desires and needs can be fully

[38] See Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century*. See also *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique*, ed. by James G. Leachman OSB (London: SCM Press, 2008).
[39] Pavel A. Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, ed. by Natalino Valentini (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2006).

expressed and can ask for a response from the divinity.[40] This inevitably takes us back to the idea of the 'pan de li angeli' – of a bread gratuitously offered by God to the faithful in order to fulfil their needs and desires –, and helps us understand more the connection between the textual element indicated by Dante as the hermeneutical key for a successful interpretation of the poem, and the Eucharist celebrated in the Christian liturgy. It is also noteworthy that, in his monograph, Florenskij goes so far to suggest that the Eucharistic bread is the reality unwittingly foreseen and longed for in the rituals and cultic experiences of all non-Christian peoples.

Another fundamental study for the development of this research is Catherine Pickstock's monograph on the philosophical implications brought about by liturgy, in which she has focussed particularly on the Catholic practice of the celebration of Mass.[41] The aim of her essay is to tackle the liturgical phenomenon from a philosophical point of view, to then show that liturgy overcomes philosophy by bringing it to its consummation. In order to do so, first of all she argues that Platonic philosophical categories prove to be the most suitable ones when approaching liturgy, and from this philosophical perspective she shows the potential of liturgy to challenge the philosophical premises of modern and post-modern – nihilistic – philosophies, and to offer a different hermeneutical framework to read and interpret both texts and reality *tout court*. Key in her reflection too is the attention paid to the role that language plays in human relations. For this reason, she provides a thorough analysis of the language used in the context of Mass – analysed in the form of the medieval Roman Rite, namely the form which Dante had familiarity with –, and especially of its performative nature: the prayers recited in that particular context, along with specific gestures performed and symbols employed, do not simply describe the situation, but acquire the power to effect a change both on the subject of the action and on the whole context in which they figure.

These two theologians, Florenskij and Pickstock, drawing respectively on the Christian Orthodox and Catholic traditions, share, in their views of liturgy, the emphasis that they put on the performative aspect of the phenomenon, on the importance of liturgy as a lived experience. Moreover, it is very interesting that both suggest how the dynamics at play in liturgy prove to be fruitful also when employed to read and understand the world as such, outside of the celebration itself: in other words, they both suggest looking at liturgy as a way to engage with the whole of reality, and not only with strictly religious matters.

In order to explore and analyse liturgical practices in the forms in which Dante experienced them, I will draw frequently on the treatise *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, written by William Durand,

[40] 'Il culto prende ogni cosa su di sé e tutto trasfigura, gratificando fino in fondo le emozioni. Nel culto beviamo fino in fondo l'essenza stessa del nostro turbamento. Ci saziamo completamente, senza lasciare neanche minimamente insoddisfatto il desiderio, poiché il culto dà sempre più di quanto chiediamo e addirittura più di quanto potremmo volere – infinitamente tanto – e questa fonte di umanità non si estinguerà mai.' (Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, pp. 209-10).
[41] Pickstock, *After Writing*.

bishop of Mende, between 1292 and 1296 (ca.).[42] Durand's *Rationale* is an invaluable source to ground Dante's poem in the liturgical background of his time. Divided into eight books, the treatise is considered a liturgical *summa*, in which each element comprising the rituals and worship of the Church – from the role of people to objects, to vestments, gestures and buildings – is described in detail, and its symbolic, spiritual meaning thoroughly explained. I am not suggesting that the *Rationale* is a direct, textual source for the poem: indeed, it was addressed to the clergy, therefore it is difficult to assume that Dante had read it; but it is nonetheless a valid source, inasmuch as it contains knowledge very likely to be shared by the people of the time, precisely because liturgy was a widely shared experience by the society of the time as a whole, and not solely by clerics or other religious people. Even Durand thought of himself as a *compilator* rather than as an original *auctor*,[43] and this is because he was aware of his significant debt to a renowned tradition, and in particular to figures such as Isidore of Seville, Hugh of Saint Victor, and Amalarius of Metz.[44]

As I have just mentioned, the society of the Latin West of the thirteenth century was significantly shaped by liturgical practices: for this reason, the gap between the temporal and spiritual dimensions of life was not as clear-cut as it is nowadays. As Catherine Pickstock put it, the medieval city was 'avowedly semiotic. Its lineaments, temporal duration, and spatial extension are entirely and constitutively articulated through the signs of speech, gesture, art, music, figures, vestment, colour, fire, water, smoke, bread, wine and relationality':[45] once more, we see the emphasis that a liturgical shaping of reality places on language and relationality. This liturgical attitude was shown towards every single aspect of life, not only the 'religious' one; every human activity was absorbed and regulated by liturgical practices, because everything was considered as the depositary of a meaning, and liturgy was precisely the main place in which it was possible to enjoy that meaning, be awakened

[42] *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale Divinorum Officiorum I-IV*, in *Corpus Christianorum*, CXL, edited by A. Davril, T.M. Thibodeau, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995); *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale Divinorum Officiorum V-VI*, in *Corpus Christianorum*, CXL(A), edited by A. Davril, T.M. Thibodeau, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998); *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale Divinorum Officiorum VII-VIII. Prefatio. Indices*, in *Corpus Christianorum*, CXL(B), edited by A. Davril, T.M. Thibodeau, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). From now on, when quoting from the treatise, I will give references in the following format: *Rationale*, book, chapter, section (if applicable). Moreover, when quoting the treatise, the translation from the Latin will be that provided by Timothy Thibodeau, unless otherwise stated (Timothy M. Thibodeau, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum of William Durand of Mende. A New Translation of the Prologue and Book One*, trans. by Timothy M. Thibodeau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); William Durand, On the Clergy and Their Vestments. *A New Translation of Books 2-3 of the Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*. *Translated and with an Introduction by Timothy Thibodeau* (Chicago: University of Scranton Press, 2010); William Durand, *Rationale, Book Four. On the Mass and Each Action Pertaining to It. Introduction, translation and notes by Timothy M. Thibodeau* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); William Durand, *Rationale, Book Five. Commentary on the Divine Office. Introduction, translation and notes by Timothy M. Thibodeau* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015)).

[43] 'Hoc enim tam ex diversis aliorum libellis et commentariis, more mellificantis apis, quam ex his quae mihi divina gratia propinavit, fructuose collegi' [Like a honeybee, I have fruitfully gathered this [work] from diverse little booklets and the commentaries of others, as well as from the things which divine grace has furnished me] (*Rationale*, VIII, xiv).

[44] See Timothy M. Thibodeau, 'Introduction', in Thibodeau, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum of William Durand of Mende. A New Translation of the Prologue and Book One*, pp. XVII-XXVII.

[45] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 169.

to its presence and – as far as possible – comprehend it. I do not intend to outline all the ways in which liturgy had shaped the cultural environment of Dante's time, and not only because of the extremely wide variety of such manifestations, sometimes different even from town to town: the focus of this thesis is to show what are the fundamental elements proper to the liturgy that make it a fitting hermeneutical tool to interpret Dante's *Commedia*; therefore what I need to show is how liturgy, through performances, impacts the experience that the embodied person has of time and space, as well as the different understanding it grants when reading and interpreting texts.

In the Late Middle Ages, the idea of the existence of two worlds, one visible and another one invisible on which the former was understood to depend, was quite widespread. Thus, there was an inclination to orient the earthly life in a way that would promote its harmonisation with the heavenly reality, through the participation in, or imitation and repetition of, the latter by the former: rather than a mere exaltation of the invisible reality to the detriment of the earthly one, it is important to recognise in this effort the desire to dignify the present life, conceived as worthy already, even if gradually and never completely, to enter the heavenly order. Liturgy was the most prominent place in which this dynamic was embodied, acknowledged and experienced, and from there it could overflow and shape all other activities. The reason why liturgy could be that place is because it granted the possibility to receive one's own 'pan de li angeli'. In Dante's characterisation of it, we have seen that the of the bread of the angels is an experience radically tied to time, and yet it speaks of eternity. But how are we to read the preposition 'per' in Dante's line: 'Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo / *per tempo* al pan de li angeli…'?[46] Just in time, *not too late*? *Through* time? *In* time? In the very phenomenon of *time itself*? In other words, how do the temporary, we could say *timely*, moments of the experience of enjoying the bread of the angels change the perception and understanding of time?

2.1 Liturgical understanding of time

The first important example in which we can see how liturgy shaped society in Dante's time can be seen in the organization of time, on a daily, weekly, and annual basis.[47] This organisation, functional to the celebrations of the Church, was at the same time extended to the rest of the society: apart from the due differences typical of the various states of life and roles, everyone would orient their daily lives according to the same principles. The liturgical year was regulated by the re-enactment of Christ's life, having at its core the two major events of his birth and resurrection – respectively Christmas and Easter. This narrative was conceived as the main and broadest set of boundaries within

[46] *Par*. II, 10-11; emphasis mine.
[47] See Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*.

which it made sense to read and interpret all the other narratives: as we learn from Durand's *Rationale,*[48] even the natural cycle punctuated by the succession of seasons was seen as an image of the story of salvation by means of Christ's Incarnation. This re-enactment of Jesus' life performed every year was called Temporale, and it was intertwined with another cycle, called Sanctorale, normally dependent on the former and more variable than it, to the extent that it could be different from town to town or even from church to church. The Sanctorale was basically the cycle of feast days, and it depended on the Temporale in the sense that if an overlapping of feasts occurred, the priority was given to the one established by the Temporale. Generally, feast days present in the Sanctorale were dedicated to the celebration of the Virgin Mary or another saint, or of a specific event: this fact is particularly significant, because it sheds some light on the liturgical understanding of time. The celebration of a feast is the celebration and the acknowledgement of time as καιρός (*kairós*), as the event of something qualitatively different from the rest of the everyday life: it is therefore a moment of time in which the interplay between the visible and invisible realities and their coming together becomes clear. In other words, the καιρός of liturgical feasts is an acknowledgement of the mystery of Incarnation, of the eternal God entering time in a specific moment of time. Moreover, each feast, dedicated to a specific individual or event, is absolutely unique and individualised, insofar as each one is the concrete manifestation of the immutable eternity in a particular moment of time, with its peculiarities and distinctiveness:[49] Jesus Christ was the eternal God who came himself, a person, into the story of this world to give testimony to his own eternal truth, whereas all the saints – still persons, obviously – were understood as those who bore witness to God's eternal truth, not merely with a life lived in a morally irreproachable way, but with their own participation, through Christ, in such eternity. The lives of saints were therefore celebrated in their dependence on, and new realization of, the Incarnation of Christ, the embodiment of eternity in time. The narratives of their lives acquired the fullness of meaning when read in the greater narrative of Christ's life, and this is why, even in practice, the Sanctorale depended on the Temporale. Also, the Sanctorale can be seen, in a way, as a continuation of the story narrated in the Temporale, precisely because of the assimilation of the lives of saints with the life of Christ.[50]

The practice which informed the weekly and daily cycles was the Divine Office, an ordered set of prayers (psalms, hymns, and antiphons) which was in turn shaped and regulated by the two annual

[48] *Rationale* VI, i, 1-5.

[49] 'Se vogliamo orientarci nello spazio è necessario ripartirlo nella sua estensione e porre dei limiti fissi, dei confini, delle prode e dei picchetti. […] Lo stesso vale per il tempo: i periodi fissati devono essere qualitativamente peculiari, ciascuno in base alle sue qualità, devono essere – cioè – individualizzati. In caso contrario, se non c'è modo di distinguerli in termini qualitativi dal mezzo temporale e, di conseguenza, di distinguere qualitativamente ciascun periodo dalla massa di tutti gli altri, questi lassi di tempo si confonderanno tra loro e con tutto il mezzo temporale […] e, dunque, non potranno fornire un appoggio al pensiero affinché percepisca il tempo'. (Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, p. 315).

[50] See *Rationale* VII, i.

cycles described above. The most important day, around which the whole week revolved, was Sunday – *dies Dominicus*, consecrated to God –,[51] important because it recalled the resurrection of Christ, and the service of Divine Office was obviously affected by this, in terms of the choice of psalms and prayers recited throughout the day. The daily scheme of prayers established by the Office, called Hours, was made up of eight moments, from the nocturnal service of Vigils to Compline after sunset, including, between them in the following order, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None and Vespers: once more, the rationale behind the practice of praying at certain predetermined hours was that of recalling the narrative of Christ's life.[52] A most important feature of the Divine Office was its dialogic structure: in order to recite the appointed prayers, the community was divided into two choirs who would alternately recite a verse, thus embodying the dialogic, relational essence of the liturgical act.

Together with the Divine Office, as daily practice there was also the celebration of the Mass, the actual core of Christian liturgy. The two main elements of Mass were the proclamation of the Word – meaning the Bible –, and the Eucharist, the consecration of bread and wine, transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ and consumed by the faithful. I shall come back to the Mass for a more thorough analysis: the celebration of the Eucharist and its relationship with the written, proclaimed word of Scripture is vital in order to better understand the functioning of a liturgical hermeneutics. For now, I will just refer to the correspondence between the biggest and smallest portions in which time was liturgically organized: the daily re-enactment of Jesus' sacrifice of self-giving – the Eucharist during Mass – was inserted into the broad annual narrative of his life – the Temporale –, which in turn was understood as full of meaning and ever-present in relation to the sacrament celebrated daily. In other words, the all-embracing presence of Christ, both in macrocosm and microcosm, was presented by liturgy as the meaning of time as such.

Although some of these practices might seem confined to the sacred space of churches – the form of Divine Office provided above is indeed the one typical of monastic use – they were not conceived as the private prayer of clergymen and members of religious orders, nor was this liturgical articulation of time seen as distant from and unrelated to the various activities carried out by the laity. On the contrary, 'il tempo liturgico, con il radicarsi del cristianesimo, diventa il riferimento precipuo per scandire il ritmo della vita dell'uomo, del monaco come di tutti i credenti, e dare senso al succedersi delle ore, dei giorni, dei mesi e degli anni',[53] and this is evident in the use of bells: their ringing, indeed,

[51] The idea of a day entirely consecrated to God, dedicated to prayer and familiar relationships, in which there was no space for the daily routine of works and occupations, was already present in the Jewish tradition, based on Exodus 20:8-11.

[52] *Rationale*, V.

[53] Alessandro Ghisalberti, 'Le campane e il tempo nel medioevo', in *Del fondere campane. Dall'archeologia alla produzione. Quadri regionali per l'Italia settentrionale. Atti del convegno (Milano, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,*

> veniva fatto sulla base della partizione del giorno secondo le ore canoniche, sancite dalla liturgia monastica nell'ora di prima, terza, sesta, nona, vespro e compieta […]. L'elemento che contribuì a dare maggiore rilevanza a certe ore (terza, sesta e nona) provenne dall'esterno, ossia dall'incidenza dell'impegno lavorativo nella campagna durante le stagioni in cui si lavora la terra. Questo venne ad influenzare anche l'uso del suono delle campane, dei monasteri come delle pievi, che manifestando la chiamata alla liturgia delle ore, notificava anche la scansione del lavoro, soprattutto segnalando a chi si trovava nei campi l'opportunità di interruzione del lavoro.[54]

This is a beautiful example of how, in the late Middle Ages, liturgical practices were able to make the distinction between religious and lay activities less clear-cut and more blurred, bonding them together under the category of human activities.

2.2 Liturgical understanding of space

As I have just discussed, through its organization of time, liturgy effectuated a hermeneutical operation capable of influencing the rest of society. The same applied to its approach to space, although in a different and less structured way. Broadly speaking, as Catherine Pickstock extensively explains,[55] in medieval culture – precisely because it was deeply informed by liturgy – space and time were not seen as opposed and therefore completely independent from one another; on the contrary, space was understood as, in a way, dependent upon time, deeply intertwined with it. The time of a liturgical performance, the actual time employed to perform the required gestures and utter the appointed words, was at once perceived as a space. And, more specifically, the space of the journey within God and towards God at once:[56] the people already encountered by God through his Revelation, who know his name, can journey towards him exactly because he has already revealed himself. This account of space as the place of a journey within and towards God inevitably characterises space as a relational environment, altering the conception of geographical definitions. In this sense, in order to be properly understood, space needs to be read in a way 'which is less the

23-25 febbraio 2006), ed. by Silvia Lusuardi Siena and Elisabetta Neri (Florence: All'insegna del giglio, 2007), pp. 53-56, p. 54.

[54] Ghisalberti, 'Le campane e il tempo nel medioevo', p. 54. It is also noteworthy that Ghisalberti quotes Dante (*Par*. XV, 97-99; *Par*. X, 139-48) to furnish proof of this interplay between 'liturgical time' and 'working time', or between the use of both bells and newly invented clocks. I shall look at Dante's use of the image of the mechanical clock in chapter 4.

[55] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 169-252 (and in particular 228-33).

[56] '[T]he worshipper is never outside of God, for any place which claims to be extra to God is a disappearing place. And yet, we are fallen away from God, which means that, although we are never without God, we must nonetheless travel towards Him.' (Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 230).

comprehension of a tableau than the performance of a sequence of movements'.[57] Therefore, this liturgical account of space provided an understanding of it not only from a horizontal, synchronic perspective: the horizontal view of space was embedded into a diachronic and vertical perspective, which means that, being subordinate to time, space was seen as undertaking a constant transformation. This treatment of space works as an example of how medieval culture understood the human dimension, represented here by space, to be assumed by, or dependent on the divine, represented by time, and specifically the time informed by the narrative of Christ's life.

The liturgical practice which best embodied and performed this understanding of space was that of processions. In the *Rationale*, Durand richly describes the procession performed by the officiants at the beginning of Mass:[58] I shall take such a performance as a good example to show how the people were made familiar with this way of conceiving space. First of all, before the beginning of the procession, the officiant had to undertake other actions: pray selected psalms; comb his hair; wash his hands; sprinkle the altar, the church and the people with holy water.[59] All these actions which he was required to perform had two main functions: purifying himself and the other participants, and, as a consequence of such purification, positioning everyone, in order to properly celebrate the ritual, in the right 'place', namely in the narrative of salvation delivered by the Bible. The fact that the 'right place' from which it is appropriate to start the procession is not actually a geographical place but rather the narration of a story already shows us the overlapping of temporal and spatial dimensions. Also, this operation has quite significant implications for the understanding of the *hic et nunc*. The possibility to accomplish the rite/journey reaches the present moment from a past, from an originating moment, as a narrative overflowing from its beginning and thus reaching the present moment. The journey will move forward, both in time and space, but the present moment of this specific beginning – every time in which the ritual is celebrated anew – is actually not the true beginning of the journey: the faithful begin the journey *in medias res*, and only the fact that they are reached by the 'narrative space' of an ongoing story will grant them the possibility to begin their own personal performance of such a rite/journey. According to this liturgical perspective, it is possible to fully dwell in the present moment only if it is recognised as a middle point and not as an end in itself, because it is the intersection of *this* present and fixed portion of time-space with an already ongoing story; it is an understanding of space as something coming from a place set backwards in time. This resonates also with what Catherine Pickstock writes regarding the opening of the proper Office of the Mass – the *Introitus* –, which begins with the formula '*In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen*': in

[57] Peter Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric and Manuduction. Reading the Scripture Together on the Path to God* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 2.
[58] *Rationale* IV, vi.
[59] *Rationale* IV, ii-iv.

order to start the journey, in this case in order to start the procession towards the altar, the place of the celebration and encounter with God, the celebrant needs to already locate himself with respect to the altar, as if somehow and in an indefinite moment of time, he had already been reached by the same God he is journeying towards, because this is the only way in which God's name could be known with certainty.[60] Moreover, it is important to highlight that the procession performed at the beginning of Mass, as Durand describes it, really effects a particular 'spatial' operation. Although the altar is 'geographically' present and clearly fixed in a certain position, the performance of the procession creates a different kind of distance between it and the celebrant – and therefore all the other participants. The complex symbology involved in such a performance invites an entrance into a supra-spatial dimension, in which the altar has to be reached constantly through continuous acts of purification, because it repeatedly recedes backwards, and even when the celebrant has physically – geographically – arrived there, the actions which follow the procession (mainly prayers and further consecrations) will continue the performance of this journey in such a supra-spatial dimension. The presence of candles, the censing and circling of the altar are symbols and movements which allow the threshold open on a sacred space to be crossed;[61] it is the performance of the rite, with its succession of actions and prayers, which gradually isolates that spatiotemporal unit from the rest of the world, a unit which now 'exceeds the distinction between worldly and other-worldly',[62] because it is recognised as the moment and the place in which the transcendent God meets worldly reality.

It might be helpful to highlight the distinction between this liturgical view of space and time – fully expressed through performances –, which informed the medieval world, and modern spatiotemporal categories. Michel De Certeau describes the liturgical understanding of time and space resorting to the 'category of "trajectory"', explaining how it was

> intended to suggest a temporal movement through space, that is, the unity of a diachronic *succession* of points through which it passes, and not the *figure* that these points form on a space that is supposed to be synchronic or achronic. Indeed, this 'representation' is insufficient, precisely because a trajectory is drawn, and time and movement are thus reduced to a line that can be seized as a whole by the eye and read in a single moment […]. However useful this 'flattening out' may be, it transforms the temporal articulation of places into a *spatial* sequence of points. A

[60] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 180-85.
[61] *Rationale* IV, vi-viii.
[62] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 232.

> graph takes the place of an operation. […] It is thus a mark *in place of* acts, a relic in place of performances: it is only their reminder, the sign of their erasure. [63]

This understanding of space as the place of a performance, and as dependent upon time, is a particularly fitting framework within which we can place the *Commedia* and the journey it represents. I shall come back to this point, but for now it is probably enough to mention the striking correspondence between this dynamic, of an ongoing rite/journey joined by the traveller *in medias res*, and the fact that the poem precisely begins 'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita'.[64]

As I have mentioned in section 1.3 above, the idea of time and space as being tied together by means of a performance requires the necessary presence of a subject carrying out such a performance: and, since this is a performance embodied in time and space, the subject must be an embodied subject. This is the perspective from which the understanding of the human person as an indivisible unity of body and soul is engendered and developed; in particular, the emphasis on the importance of the body becomes particularly significant. It is undeniable that Dante himself in the poem keeps stressing, at once, the importance but also the unexpectedness of the embodied nature of his journey through the realms of the afterlife. This, therefore, leads us to explore in more depth the conception of the human body enhanced by liturgical practices in the Latin West of the thirteenth century.

2.3 Liturgical understanding of the body

From what I have just said, it is unavoidable to infer that the body was seen as an integral part of the human person, and liturgy particularly helped in stressing this point: not only did it create a vibrant atmosphere in which all the five senses of participants are involved and stimulated, but, as I discussed above, liturgy altogether exists as an embodied phenomenon. As Joseph Ratzinger put it, 'when someone tries to take worship back into the purely spiritual realm and refuses to give it embodied form, the act of worship evaporates, for what is purely spiritual is inappropriate to the nature of man'.[65] For this reason, it can be argued that the liturgical culture of the thirteenth-century Latin West did not really know – or at least not as extensively as we do nowadays, because it did not theorise it – a clear-cut separation between *what* was *believed* and *how* to *behave*, because a uniquely mental and abstract knowledge process, which did not provide for any role for the body was not particularly promoted, and bodily expressions were widely taken into account when reflecting on human

[63] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 35.
[64] In a way that resonates with these ideas, Teodolinda Barolini has reflected on the narrative strategy employed by Dante as being a narrative of continuous new beginnings. (Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 21-47).
[65] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. by John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), pp. 190-91.

expression – at least in its relationship with the divine. People were immersed in and educated by – even if not in a straightforward way – a liturgical culture whose peculiarity was precisely that of keeping together in a meaningful bond the body and the spirit, as a means to be in a right, meaningful relationship with the divinity. As Cally Hammond wrote, a 'religion that is only about the body is empty of meaning; but then a religion that despises the body and privileges the soul is in danger of gnostic heresy':[66] and Christianity was really far from both these two ends, because for the religion of the Incarnate God it could not be otherwise.

Even when it could seem that some medieval practices did not show a positive attitude towards the body, we should always look at them in their proper context. The 'mortification of the flesh', for example, through practices of fasting and self-denial, was always regulated by the liturgical organization of time. Durand speaks of appointed periods dedicated to fasting, like the one preceding the period of Easter or the Ember Days.[67] The fact that these practices were controlled and embedded into the liturgical understanding of time – always linked with the re-enactment of the story of Christ's Incarnation – prevented them from being used mistakenly, but, most importantly, granted a deeper understanding of them: they were understood as having a fundamental, beneficial effect on the soul too. The purification of the body was at the same time purification of the soul; the bodily sacrifice was seen as the figure of the spiritual one rather than the denial of the former in favour of the latter, and hence a sacrifice which would bear fruit for the person as a whole. Other indications of the essential role of the body are found in the celebration of Mass, in the accuracy with which the priest during the celebration of Mass would perform even the smallest movement, or in the importance of posture for both officiant and other worshippers during the celebration of a rite;[68] but also in the importance of vestments worn by the clergy and other members of religious orders:[69] each of those elements was perceived as the bearer of a meaning, as the embodiment of a specific interaction between heavenly and earthly reality. Thus, for instance, for the priest to kiss the altar was a way to reiterate and strengthen the peace and covenant established by Christ between God and humanity. To use again Austin's category of performativity, in the same way in which the words 'I do take you as my husband or wife' actually bring into existence the conjugal bond between the two spouses, during the celebration of liturgy gestures too were understood as having an effect upon reality. In other

[66] Cally Hammond, *The Sound of the Liturgy. How Words Work in Worship* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2015), p. 18.
[67] *Rationale* VI, vi-vii.
[68] See, for instance, *Rationale* IV, xi, on how and why the priest is to stand at the altar; xvii, on how and why the reader and the people have to show reverence after reading the Epistle; *Rationale* IV, xviii, on how and why the priest has to sit down after the reading of the Epistle; *Rationale* IV, xxviii, on how and why the priest has to wash his hands; *Rationale* IV, xxxii, on how and why the priest has to bow and kiss the altar; *Rationale* IV, lviii, on how and why the priest has to kiss the shoulder of the Pope.
[69] The whole of book III of the *Rationale* is devoted to the description of religious vestments, their use and symbolic meaning.

words, in the liturgical environment, words have the value of performed actions, and gestures are read and interpreted as uttered words: this all with the purpose of embodying and making visible the unfolding of the relationship with God, in the form of a dialogue.

3. Liturgical performances and books: Scripture and the concept of *truth*

What can be observed, in this overview of the liturgical understanding of reality by means of performance, is the undeniable value of the human person, in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation. The centrality of Jesus Christ and the firm belief in both his divinity and humanity shaped the experience of reality altogether and rooted the person's own reality in the reality of God's gratuitous love. According to liturgical categories, rooted in and springing from the person of Christ, the very existence of a human person was understood as a concrete, specific and embodied manifestation of God's loving creative act, and as mysteriously but truly united with Christ by virtue of the same relationship existing between the model or archetype – Christ – and the reproduction or type – any human individual.

Still from this liturgical perspective, profoundly aware of God's creative act inherent to the existence of the world, therefore not limited to the human person, we can say that a distinctive feature of the culture of the western late Middle Ages was its polysemy: all aspects of life could be seen as interconnected and charged with meaning. Perfectly in tune with this liturgical character was one of the most common metaphors used at that time to describe reality: the universe was seen as a *living* book written by God, which human beings had the task of interpreting in order to know him and truthfully engage in a relationship with him and with the whole of creation. The liturgical ordering of time and space was itself an attempt to make sense of the created universe, under the suggestions given by another book, perhaps the most important in medieval culture: the Bible. Liturgical practices were indeed deeply shaped by Holy Scripture: the prayers of Divine Office were almost entirely made up from biblical verses and readings; a fundamental moment of the celebration of Mass was the proclamation of passages taken from the Bible and related to the portion of the history of salvation commemorated in that specific season. The *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* itself is replete with scriptural quotations employed by Durand in order to fully explain the meaning of liturgical symbols and gestures. The interplay between the two, liturgical performance and scriptural words, is so entangled that it seems impossible to discern which one regulates the other. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to the fact that both Scripture and liturgy found their centre in the proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ.

In section 2, above, I referred to liturgy as an expression of an inherently human dimension, as the human yearning for a meaningful relationship with the divine regardless of a specific religious confession, and I therefore mentioned the connections highlighted by Florenskij between Christian liturgy and other forms of religiosity, and in particular the idea that Christian liturgy and its celebration of the Eucharist could be seen as the consummation of any kind of liturgical ritual. The Bible, instead, made up of the Old and New Testaments, represents the Christian text *par excellence*. It tells the story of the people of Israel, chosen by God as the people through which he would operate the salvation of the whole of humanity,[70] by means of his own Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection. The way in which the text was understood within the liturgical context, however, and in general the role played by this most important book in the understanding of those same principles analysed so far deserves particular attention. This is because it allows for a particular conception of truth to come to the fore, which will be of fundamental importance in exploring Dante's way to tackle the intellectual problems posed by the main areas of knowledge of his time.

3.1 Not just a 'book'

It is from this centrality of the Bible that the commonplace of the Middle Ages as the 'age of the book' derives, although this definition needs to be used carefully. If we think that medieval people had the same conception that we have of 'the book' nowadays we are making a mistake which would prevent us from understanding the ways in which the Bible was conceived in medieval culture, and therefore from acknowledging its fundamental inseparability from liturgy. If it is undeniable that the Bible was seen as the truth, inasmuch as it was the Word of God, it is equally fundamental to acknowledge that we need to re-think *the way* in which it was seen as the truth, and therefore experienced as the Word of God.

Therefore, in order to better understand the interplay between Scriptures and liturgical performance, we need to challenge our common idea of 'book'. As Peter Candler has shown,[71] in the Middle Ages, when the technique of moveable type had not yet been invented, there was no idea of the book and even of the Bible itself as a 'container of truth', as a defined and spatialized 'thing' with a fixed meaning 'infinitely transportable and identically repeatable'[72]: we need to wait until the

[70] The New Testament in particular stresses on the universal value of this story, on the opportunity to know God opened for both Jewish and Gentiles, and therefore to everyone. See, for instance, Galatians 3:28-29: 'non est Iudaeus neque Graecus, non est servus neque liber, non est masculus et femina; omnes enim vos unus estis in Christo Iesu. Si autem vos Christi, ergo Abrahae semen estis, secundum promissionem heredes'[There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise].
[71] See Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric and Manuduction*.
[72] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 54.

invention of moveable type and the diffusion of Luther's theology to see the birth of the modern idea of the book, where reification and fixity of meaning, reproducibility and spatialization are key points. Before the outbreak of modernity, 'the "Word of God" is present in the liturgy first as a voice, and only secondarily as a text; or it might perhaps be better to say it is present as a *voiced text*'.[73] The eminently aural character of the Bible defined its well-acknowledged authority as something not ultimately ownable by the hearers: seen as the 'bodily voice' of the transcendent, living God, the written words were therefore understood as alive themselves, as the source of a truth that could nonetheless never be grasped entirely and once for all, and that needed to be bequeathed and received always and anew. As de Certeau put it,

> before the 'modern' period, that is, until the sixteenth or seventeenth century, this writing (Holy Scripture) speaks. The sacred text is a voice, it teaches (the original sense of *documentum*), it is the advent of a 'meaning' (*un 'vouloir-dire'*) on the part of a God who expects the reader (in reality, the listener) to have a 'desire to hear and understand' (*un* '*vouloir-entendre*') on which access to truth depends.[74]

We can detect in the events that occurred after the Reformation, and especially in the measures taken by the Catholic Church during the Council of Trent, one of the main reasons why it can seem daunting to understand the medieval mindset, even within the Church itself. I find it helpful to refer to these events – which occurred with the Reformation – and to outline the main differences between that liturgical conception of reality and modern categories of thought, in order to provide a clearer understanding of the cultural background in which Dante lived.

After the diffusion of Luther's theology, and therefore the conviction that there is no other authority besides the Bible itself,[75] the Roman Catholic Church felt, for the first time, the need to reaffirm the value and the authority of tradition. However, as scholars like Candler and Pickstock have suggested, the means by which the Church tried to do it reveal themselves to be not completely adequate: the very fact that they found it necessary to reassert the authority of tradition through a written document shows how the principle of 'sola scriptura' – in this case referring also to other written texts besides the Bible, considered authoritative – was actually already deep rooted in the mentality.[76] In fighting against Protestantism, the theologians of the Council used the same arms as their opponents, ending up in promoting an understanding of the rich patristic heritage as the work of

[73] Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Manuduction*, p. 80.
[74] Michel de Certeau, 'The Scriptural Economy', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 137.
[75] This is the well-known principle '*scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*' pivotal in Protestant theologies.
[76] See Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction*, pp. 70-89; Pickstock, *After Writing*.

exceptional intellectuals who, over the centuries, were able to speculate about Scripture and bring out impressive interpretations that were ultimately the fruit of their gifted minds. In other words, it can be said that that – even if not completely or irreversibly – the identification of authority shifted from the ever-speaking voice of God himself to the intellect of authoritative people, as if the truth were something simply graspable through the mind, as a notion which did not involve the engagement of the whole person in a lived performance. Therefore, the understanding of truth as something mainly fixed and reproducible, a 'mathematical' kind of truth, prevailed. In this way, the role that liturgy played as the main hermeneutical activity employed for the interpretation of the Bible, involuntarily, seemed to be almost completely discarded, or at least not deservedly encouraged: the endorsed idea of authority as the prerogative of *some* people among others inevitably altered and negatively affected the confidence in the possibility for all the faithful, in so far as they were involved in the liturgy of the Church, to experience and therefore receive the truth personally.[77] This is not to overlook the different ways in which the text was differently received and experienced by different people: certainly, to be able to read the text – only available in Latin at the time – is not tantamount to only receiving it aurally when proclaimed. We shall see, however, that the liturgical use of the Bible made its reception as 'voiced truth' bestowed by God accessible to everyone.

Despite the situation just depicted, the medieval, liturgical experience of the Bible proves to be still valid as a hermeneutical framework, with much to say to the contemporary world. As scholars and theologians have recently been arguing, one of the greatest teachings of the medieval liturgical culture is to keep in mind that if God is true, that which is true is not yet God. Candler, for example, underscores the fact that, since in the medieval period people shared an awareness of the fact that God was a living God, then their way to reach, know and experience truth was that of being in constant dialogue with him, regardless of the activity in which they were engaged.[78] As Paul Verdeyen recently said, 'the Holy Scriptures never mention a possible divorce between theology and spirituality. […] The writings of the first Christian millennium do not know our distinctions between dogmatic and sacramental life'.[79] Yes, the Bible was seen as a truthful source, but not in a static and reproducible sense, as in the case of clear and fixed formulas. To receive the message of the Bible was tantamount to receiving a message from a person, from the living God: for this reason, it was considered one of the privileged places for an open dialogue with him, and therefore it needed to be properly interrogated and listened to. As Florenskij put it,

[77] On the shift in the concept of authority, see also Pickstock, *After Writing*, esp. pp. 47-119.
[78] Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction*. This idea also recalls the evangelical teaching of the need to pray unceasingly, see Luke 18:1-8, and Jesus own's words in John 18:37: 'omnis, qui est ex veritate, audit meam vocem' [All those who belong to the truth listen to my voice].
[79] Paul Verdeyen quoted by Laurence Paul Hemming 'The Liturgical Subject: Introductory Essay' in *The Liturgical Subject*, p. 3.

> il santo Vangelo e le sante lettere apostoliche non sono 'libri', bensì *momenti dell'azione liturgica*, parti della liturgia, dove non hanno un significato semplicemente narrativo o meramente edificante, ma uno ancora più importante. E precisamente, un *significato fattivo, sacramentale*. Alla stessa maniera anche i 'libri' dell'Antico Testamento, che *vanno letti solo in preghiera, ovvero in maniera attiva, liturgica, e non passiva, mentale, teorica*'.[80]

It is important to remember that clergymen and theologians also studied the Bible, but the fact that Scripture was also always – or at least almost always – read or heard in a liturgical context tells us that liturgy was recognised as the place in which it was appropriate to engage in dialogue with the Word of God. The performative environment of the liturgy was precisely the environment in which it was possible to experience the meaning of the written words *as* the performance of the ritual. The performance of the rite was the real enactment of the written words; the written words would make sense of the performed rite, along with providing the right words to address God. By means of the liturgical performance, therefore, the meaning of the proclaimed words was experienced as present and embodied, coterminous with the performance itself, rather than as a distant, abstract notion or idea to be held in the mind. In focussing on the centrality of the human person and his or her agency, the liturgical context would enable the faithful to *personally* encounter God. In this way, the faithful were able to grow in the knowledge of God in a twofold way, which would necessarily keep together the two types of knowledge outlined at the beginning of this Introduction, the rational – *scientia* – and the experiential – *sapientia*. The Word of God could speak not only to the wise or educated people, but to all those open to receive it.[81] As the very existence of the Sanctorale suggests, the saints, celebrated as the people who truly knew God, were understood to have known him and to bear witness to the Incarnate truth through their own personal participation in, and relationship with such a truth, offered and accepted always and anew.

3.2 A performed book

The Bible certainly played a pivotal role in the shaping of liturgical practices, and particularly in the two main expressions of Christian worship: the celebration of Mass and the Divine Office. The varied use of the Bible in the liturgical context, which I shall illustrate now, works as further evidence to the

[80] Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, p. 147 (emphasis mine).
[81] See Matthew 11:25 'Confiteor tibi, Pater, Domine caeli et terrae, quia abscondisti heac ab sapientibus et prudentibus et revelasti ae parvulis' [I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you hid these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the childlike].

fact that Scripture was something more than a text to be read and processed privately and uniquely in the mind: it was something to be performed, lived out, and personally encountered.

The biblical words were taken and adapted to many occasions or functions. Selected passages from the Old and New Testaments – known as *Lectiones* –, and from the Gospels in particular were always read and meditated upon with the intention of instructing the people, and thus of teaching them the story of the people of Israel and of the life of Jesus, shedding some light on the mystery celebrated on that particular day of the liturgical year. Other sections of the Bible, and in this we can recognise the preeminent role of the book of Psalms, were used to articulate the prayer of the community in all its forms – supplication, expression of sorrow, request for forgiveness, thanksgiving, exultation, and praise. Moreover, the sacred text was used as the main repertoire for elaborate chants, in order to give lyric expression to prayer and instruction.[82]

The biblical stories were read throughout the liturgical year, and each period or feast day had specific *Lectiones* related to it, selected with the purpose of unfolding the meaning of the event that the Church – and therefore the faithful taking part in the liturgy – was celebrating or commemorating. This is one of the dynamics that contributed to giving the sense of the Bible as something present and 'alive', because it presented the sacred book as a text which tells the story of the people who tell it, and therefore each and every Christian, and all as a community, could find their own place in it.[83] Durand, in the Proem of book VI of the *Rationale*,[84] as he explains how the *Lectiones* were spread throughout the liturgical year, draws a suggestive link between the biblical story of salvation, the story of salvation within the life of an individual and the sempiternal recurring of the four seasons. The liturgical year, as is the case with the seasons, repeated itself equally and yet non-identically every year, enacting the story of Jesus, and therefore the same portion of Jesus' life was commemorated always in the same season: in this way, the life of Jesus was presented as the real meaning and antitype of the natural cycle of seasons, which would punctuate the passing of time of human life. This is a powerful example of how, by means of liturgical practices, the message of the Bible and the main dimensions of human life were organically kept together in a meaningful and fruitful dialogue. Moreover, this coming together of narratives – like the divine and the natural in the example just mentioned –, which mutually interpret each other, is already present within the Bible itself: here is where the preeminent position of the Gospel – or, which is ultimately the same, the story told by the Gospels – comes to the fore. The same biblical stories were in fact read in the same

[82] Stephen J. P. Van Dijk, 'The Bible in Liturgical Use', in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. by G.W.H. Lampe, II, *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp. 220-52.
[83] Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story. Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[84] *Rationale* VI, i.

season, because linked with that particular episode of the life of Jesus commemorated in that season: through this organisation of the readings, the Church promoted an understanding of Jesus and the story of his life as the fullness of meaning of the whole scriptural text; therefore, all the stories of biblical characters acquired a new and more complete meaning if linked to Christ. This hermeneutical operation applied within the Bible, where the Gospels function as the key to read all that comes before and after them, is not merely a literary operation, as the example given by Durand might have already suggested. Through the liturgical mediation, in fact, the faithful are invited into the same hermeneutical process, into a *personal* encounter with the text.[85] For this reason, however identical it might seem, the enacted story is nonetheless always a new one, because the people encountering it are different. The reason which explains the newness of this seemingly identical story lies precisely in the overlapping of the two dimensions, the scriptural and the personal: the faithful are now invited to link their own lives with the story of Jesus in the same way that the lives of biblical characters are linked with it; they are asked to see in the story narrated by the Gospel – the story of the life of Jesus Christ – the cornerstone and antitype of their own lives, and at the same time to acknowledge that such a story, since it is not yet ended, needs in turn their lives to move forward, towards its consummation. To use Austin's categories of 'constative' and 'performative' once more, we can say that the performance of the written words, now embodied in and through the bodily enactment of the faithful, gave new life to those same, unchanging words: the constative aspect of the scriptural words does not change, but the performance of those same words has an altogether new effect on reality every time, because the spatiotemporal unit in which they are performed, and the person performing them are different. In this way, the hermeneutical role of liturgy becomes even more evident. The Sanctorale proves again to be a helpful example in order to better understand the dynamic of a liturgical hermeneutics and the impact that it had on the lives of the faithful. The feasts of saints were in fact an integral part of the celebrations of the liturgical year, together with the commemoration of stories from the Old Testament: as people coming after Christ, they were presented as living their life in constant dialogue with the Word of God and in particular with the Gospel, the story of Jesus' life, in which they would find the fullness of meaning of their own identities. In this way, they became part of the same unfolding story, which can happen and move forward precisely through them.

This aspect of 'encounter with the text' that has come to light in this analysis proves to be even more powerful when linked to the sacramental aspect of liturgy. The context in which the Bible was more accessible with no tremendous differences between educated and non-learned people, or between clergy and laity was that of Mass, in which the celebration of the Eucharist – the

[85] In Catholic theology, this is still held as a fundamental element of the celebration of Mass: 'In the liturgy, we are all given the freedom to appropriate, *in our own personal way*, the mystery which addresses us.' (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith*, trans. by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 67, emphasis mine).

transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ –, the real presence of Christ, was understood as the consummation of the encounter with the proclaimed text. In other words, the celebration of the sacrament would make the encounter with the Word of God, Christ, a bodily reality, through the eating of his body and drinking of his blood.

3.3 Words *as* bodies

As I have just mentioned, Mass was equally attended by clerics and laypeople, rich and poor, educated and non-learned people, and therefore there is less room for uncertainty as to whether the knowledge passed down by the Bible was actually accessible only to a particular portion of society or to anyone who was simply open to it. This is not to deny the difference that the knowledge of the Latin language could have made, nor to assume that to read a text is perfectly tantamount to hearing that text; nevertheless, as I shall show below, the way in which the Bible was treated during the celebration of Mass might suggest that it was experienced primarily as a physical presence with which both celebrant and attendants were asked to engage in a relationship, rather than a text to absorb and process only mentally: once more, it is the experience of the personal encounter that really matters. The bodily aspect of the experience of the Bible, and in particular of the Gospel, is not only what makes it accessible – albeit to different extents – to all the people taking part in the liturgy, but also what guarantees its sacramental reality: according to Catholic theology, both now and then, in order to exist and be effective, a sacrament always must have a material, physical dimension. We learn from book IV of Durand's *Rationale* that it is particularly the Gospel which was experienced as physically present during Mass, and this is evident from the way it was treated.[86] As it is easy to imagine, it was present in the form of a *codex*, a volume meaningfully distinct from the others which are also part of the Bible. During the procession at the beginning of Mass, the Gospel book was usually carried closed by the subdeacon, preceded by two candle bearers and a thurifer; once the altar was reached, the bishop (or the main priest) recited the *Confiteor* and finally opened and kissed the book.[87] In this tableau, every single element has an impressive but not rigid or fixed meaningful charge, whose explanatory key is Christ himself. This can be seen in the interpretation that Durand gives of this procession, particularly of the opening and kissing of the book by the bishop (or priest):

> Potest etiam dici quod subdiaconus librum Evangelii, qui clausus portabatur, offert Eposcopo, vel sacerdoti; ille vero ad altare perveniens, illum aperit, ad insinuandum illud

[86] Using the word 'Gospel' I mean the unique, singular story of Jesus, even if narrated in four different books, namely the four canonical Gospels.
[87] *Rationale* IV, vi, 2.

> quod in Apocalypsi describitur, quod nemo dignus inventus est aperire librum, qui intus erat scriptus et foris sigillis septem signatus, nisi Leo de tribu Juda, radix David, qui librum aperuit, et septem eius signacula solvit. […] Liber ergo aperitur cum episcopus ad altare pervenit, quoniam ubi Christus primitivam apostolorum congregavit Ecclesiam, docens et praedicans Scripturae misteria revelavit dicens: *Vobis datum est nosse misterium regni Dei; ceteris autem in parabolis*; unde post resurrectionem aperuit illis sensum, ut intelligerent Scripturas. Rectius igitur facit Episcopus, cum ipsemet aperit librum Evangeliorum, licet et Christus per ministros suos patefecerit mysteria Scripturarum.[88]

[It can also be said that the subdeacon offers the Gospel book, which he carries closed, to the bishop or the priest; the bishop or priest, when coming to the altar, opens it to bring to mind what is described in Apocalypse: that no one was found worthy to open the book, which had writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals, except the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, who opened the book and undid it seven seals […]. The book is open when the bishop arrives at the altar because this is where Christ gathered the early Church with His Apostles, teaching and preaching the mysteries of Scripture, which He revealed, saying: To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to the rest in parables (Lk 8:10); thus, after the Resurrection, He opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures (cf. Lk 24:45). It is therefore more fitting that the bishop himself open the Gospel book, so that through his ministries, Christ reveals the mysteries of the Scriptures.]

The identity of the bishop (or priest) as figure of Christ was built during the performance of the procession,[89] even though we always need to keep in mind that in this 'sacramental performance' the identity of the performers is never conceived as a fixed equation: the continuous play of cross-references makes a certain interchangeability of identities possible, so that the same person or object can symbolize different things, or two different persons or objects can symbolize the same thing. And in fact, in the same context of the Mass the celebrant is not the only one who signifies Christ. The physical presence of the Gospel book, which delivers the story of Christ through written and proclaimed words is charged with this symbolic value too: by means of the words proclaimed – which, as repeatedly stated, are to be received directly from a person – the book becomes another symbol of Christ being present during the celebration, which is precisely what guarantees the impossibility of a rigidity in the interpretation. As Durand will clarify later,

[88] *Rationale* IV, ix, 2.
[89] 'Episcopus vel sacerdos inter duos existens significat Christum inter duo Testamenta' [The bishop or the priest standing between the two other ministers signifies Christ between the two Testaments] (*Rationale* IV, vi, 3.).

> episcopus Christum figurat cui clausus liber presentantur, ad designandum quod solus Christus potuit aperire librum, et solver signacula eius, in quo et ipse Christus, et eius misteria clausa erant, donec cepit ab ipso Christo per predicationem evangelii aperiri.[90]

[the bishop represents Christ, to whom the closed book is presented, to denote that only Christ can open the book and break its seals (cf. Rev 5:2), in which book Christ Himself and His mysteries were enclosed, until it began to be opened by Christ through the preaching of the Gospel.]

As in the given explanation, Christ himself is the only one who can unfold the meaning of Scriptures, being also himself, with his specific story and identity, the all-encompassing meaning of the scriptural text. This means that to listen to the Gospel and properly receive it is tantamount to meeting a person, Jesus Christ.

The reading of the Gospel was preceded by the reading of the Epistle, which is not to be identified with the epistles of Paul or of other Apostles: as Durand explains, it was so called precisely because of its role of 'preparing the way' for what comes next – hence it was seen as performing the same role as St John the Baptist – and it could be a reading from either the Old or the New Testament.[91] It was read in a lower place than the one from which the Gospel was read and by a minister of a lower grade to the one who read the Gospel; also, the person who read the Epistle had to face the altar – another figure of Christ. It is not surprising that Durand seems to mix up many different levels for his interpretation of the liturgical symbols: this last detail, the reading of the Epistles facing the Christ-figure altar, helps us to understand why. Durand says that the Epistle is a figure to signify the Prophets, but it is a figure of the Apostles too, and the reason why the two interpretations given by Durand are equally valid and not mutually exclusive (the same thing, the Epistle, is both and at the same time a figure for Prophets and Apostles) is that they both have their focus in the person of Jesus: if the Prophets were before Christ temporally speaking, the Apostles were so spatially speaking; 'quia lex finem accepit in Christo, sed evangelium originem sumpsit ab ipso' [because the Law found its end point in Christ, but the Gospel marks its beginning from Him].[92] The liturgical understanding of time and space – as outlined in sections 2.1 and 2.2 above – becomes even clearer now: the person of Christ, his word and his body, is the perspectival point from which the world is observed and meaningfully understood.

[90] *Rationale* IV, xvii, 2.
[91] *Rationale* IV, xvi. Only in very few exceptional situations were there more readings before the Gospel, as in the Vigil Mass of Easter where many readings from both Old and New Testaments were proclaimed. (*Rationale* VI, lxxxi.)
[92] *Rationale* IV, xvii, 3.

The whole framework into which the reading of the Epistle was integrated shows again how everything in the performance of the Mass worked as the continual invitation to take part, with soul and body, in the unfolding of an ongoing story – that of a personal encounter and relationship with Christ –, and thus every celebration can be perceived as a step towards the consummation of such a story. In this Christ-centric view, in which the focus is the person and story of Jesus of Nazareth rather than any common notion of linear time and space, it really was not simply a matter of 'literary interpretation' of Scriptures: the liturgy provided the real situation in which it was possible to experience the world from within that different perspective, in which orientation in space and time depended upon Christ, and therefore could help the faithful to read and make sense of their own lives from that perspective. The whole society was in fact radically influenced by this, because, as a community, they really believed themselves to be the realisation of the ongoing story of the Gospel.

The Epistle was read from a physically low place in the Church; conversely, the Gospel was proclaimed from the highest place because, as Durand reiterates,

> sicut caput preeminet ceteris corporis membris, et illi cetera membra serviunt, sic et evangelium principale est omnium, que ad officium missae dicuntur, et toti preeminet officio misse, et quaecumque ibi cantantur, et leguntur, illi consentiunt in intellectuali ratione.[93]

[just as the head has preeminence over other members of the body, and that all those other members serve the head, so too the Gospel stands in the first order over everything else that is said in the Mass liturgy, and has preeminence in the whole Mass liturgy, and whatever is sung or read at Mass is in agreement with the Gospel.]

In order to reach the pulpit (*ambo*),[94] the deacon processed from the altar holding the Gospel volume, an action which, once more, served the purpose of creating the fitting framework for the proclamation of the Gospel. He was preceded first of all by the cross, the symbol that more than any other symbolizes Christ as part of his own identity as the crucified saviour, by two candle-bearers, a thurifer, and the subdeacon. Again, these people and symbols are the overlapping performance of many different stories and identities which have the common task of announcing the coming of Christ: figures from both the Old and New Testament, and even the deeds that Jesus himself accomplished in the Gospel stories. In order to worthily proclaim the Gospel, the deacon needed to borrow Jesus' identity – that is exactly what is proclaimed in the Gospel's words –, and this is why

[93] *Rationale* IV, xxiv, 3.
[94] *Rationale* IV, xxiv, 17.

he would receive a blessing and mark himself with the sign of the cross before reading. The attention with which the deacon treated the volume is what most clearly showed that, although allowed to borrow Christ's identity, he is not yet Jesus Christ: he is, indeed, made worthy of proclaiming the words of the Gospel by the very same words proclaimed. After the reading was ended, the deacon made the sign of cross over himself again, to defend himself against the assaults of the devil, and kissed the book, in sign of love: through these apparently disconnected gestures, the deacon would exorcise the danger of somehow pridefully believing himself to *be* and not just *impersonate* Christ, and therefore show his devotion to him.

What I have described so far concerns the proclamation of the Gospel, and therefore its reading, but it is also important to highlight the way in which the Gospel was heard by the rest of the faithful: everything in fact would cooperate in enhancing the personal reception of the text. Also, to participate in the celebration where it is possible to encounter God by listening to His words and eating His body meant to become an integral part of that same body: for this reason, every detail was treated with supreme care, and the worshippers were carried along by the rite into the experience of encounter with and participation in the heavenly reality. First of all, the deacon would greet the people invoking the presence of God among and within them (*Dominus vobiscum*), a greeting to which they would respond with the same invocation (*et cum spiritu tuo*): this shows how to borrow Christ's identity was pivotal not only in order to worthily proclaim His word, but also to properly hear, and therefore understand – interpret – it. Moreover, in the same way as the deacon, the faithful marked themselves three times with the sign of cross, on the forehead, on the mouth and on the chest, and they heard the proclamation standing, with uncovered head and no staff in their hands. When the proclamation was ended, the deacon and subdeacon would go back to the altar and return the Gospel book to the bishop, again a figure of Christ, who would kiss it: what came from him was then going back to him, 'Deus enim nichil accipit nisi quod efficit, nec remunerat nisi quod donat, quia sicut cuncta que fecit bona sunt, sic nulla sunt bona, nisi que fecit' [God accepts nothing unless He effects it; does not receive it unless He gives it; and because everything that He makes is good, no things are good except for what He made].[95]

The proclamation of the Scriptures, known as Liturgy of the Word, was one of the two fundamental parts of the celebration of Mass. As I have already mentioned, the other pivotal component of Mass was the Eucharist: the words of the Gospel would move the faithful to recognise Christ present not only through his words and deeds, but also *truly* and *really* with his body and blood in the Eucharistic offering. Without the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the words of the Gospel would remain the simple narration of a past story, and the proclamation a constative act, rather than a performative

[95] *Rationale* IV, xxiv, 32.

one. Conversely, without the story conveyed by the Bible, it would be impossible to know the name of God and recognise the presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine. The tension and interplay between the Gospel and the Eucharist – the two main modes of presence of Christ – permeates the whole celebration, where words and gestures, symbols and objects can only be known and understood in relation to one another. This appears very clearly in the *Rationale*: Durand constantly uses verses from Scriptures to unfold the meaning of objects, symbols, gestures and rituals, which in turn serve to make those words active, effective.[96]

4. Summary

The aim of this Introduction was to provide the reasons for choosing liturgy as my hermeneutical approach to Dante's *Commedia*, as well as grounding my choice in both the context of the scholarship on the poem and Dante's cultural background. I have shown the ways in which liturgical practices fashioned the Latin Western society in the thirteenth century, with their organisation of time and space, and consideration of the human person, and most importantly, I have outlined the main principles of a liturgical understanding of reality, showing how they prove to be particularly appropriate in reading and interpreting a poem like the *Commedia*, which claims to be built around the notion and experience of the 'pan de li angeli'. I discussed how in this very formula two different aspects of knowledge are kept inextricably together, to the point that it allows for words to be also received as bodies, and for bodies to be also read as words. To look at reality from a liturgical perspective means to be able to recognise the crumbs of that 'bread' freely given from heaven, for the sustenance of human needs and fulfilment of human desires, crumbs which are scattered throughout the created world. In fact, to look at reality with a liturgical eye means to be able to receive every aspect of the created world itself as a message that can be read and interpreted, and to which it is possible to respond by means of actions, of performances that require the involvement of one's rational mind as well as one's affective body. And even when such a response is only provided through speech, speech itself is considered as an action, in the same way in which Austin discusses in his Speech Act Theory. This perspective, moreover, frames the very act of knowing as a performance, and precisely as the performance of a journey/dialogue, of a relationship between the person and his or her Creator in and through the very existence of time and space. The *way of knowing* of liturgy is *a way to be in a relationship*: it is not about gathering abstract notions in one's mind, but being in a relationship with that which one wishes to know.

[96] On Durand's exegetical method and on the connection between scriptural exegesis and liturgical expositions, see Timothy M. Thibodeau, 'Enigmata Figurarum. Biblical Exegesis and Liturgical Exposition in Durand's "Rationale"', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 86.1 (1993), 65-79.

Starting from the perspective of the 'pan de li angeli', therefore, or from a liturgical perspective – which is the same, as I have discussed – it is easy to infer that the performance of knowledge will necessarily assume different characteristics depending on the specific portion of reality in which such a performance is carried out, which is a more comprehensive – indeed 'liturgical' – way to say that the approach and development of the methodologies of knowledge vary according to the object of the knowledge. A specific portion of time and space – the very features of the created world – with the specific, intelligible message it carries, needs to be interpreted with the language that is most appropriate to it: this is the point from which this present research arises and will be developed in the following chapters. As I have already mentioned, I will make use of the principles and methodologies outlined in this Introduction to explore Dante's approach to different realms of knowledge as they were available to him at the time, such as theology, philosophy, poetry and science.

Before doing that, however, I will devote a chapter to showing Dante's deliberate use of liturgical principles in his engagement with Scripture, in order to ground his poetic praxis – or, in fact, performance – in a liturgical understanding of reality even further. In particular, I will highlight Dante's liturgical approach to the concept of truth, even in the case of the truth of Revelation: this will be particularly helpful in order to then engage with Dante's way to tackle theological, philosophical, poetic and scientific truths. And in order to do so, I will take, as a case study, *Paradiso* XXIV and its staging of Dante's dialogue with St Peter on the matter of faith.

Chapter 1.
Approaching the truth of Revelation:
Dante and the performance of faith

The main focus of this research is to explore Dante's approach to the different realms of knowledge in the form in which they were organised at the time: theology, philosophy, poetry and science. To engage with any of these disciplines, and in general to undertake a journey of knowledge, inevitably means having to deal with the concept of truth: without a truth, even a partial, 'inessential' or simple one, there would be no need for a journey of knowledge, for what is it that we would know in the end?

In the Introduction of this thesis, I have discussed the specific understanding of and engagement with the truth promoted by liturgy: from what I have said there, it has emerged that the liturgical concept of truth is radically different from a modern one, where truth is seen as something ownable, reifiable and reproducible. I have thus shown the way in which the truth *par excellence* in Dante's time, Revelation, conveyed by the word of Scripture, is received and addressed in the liturgical environment, with a particular focus on the celebration of Mass: during the celebration, the text was encountered as present, and its words received as words from a person, ultimately from the living God himself. The mutual, hermeneutical interplay between written words and performances was pivotal in the task of discerning and understanding the message God was delivering to the faithful: here, words are received as bodies, and bodies known through words, and both were received as one's own 'pan de li angeli' – as the personal, specific response from God to the person's specific needs and desires. For this reason, it was difficult to think of the Bible as a text which merely needed to be processed mentally and privately: it was rather seen as the means by which the faithful could enhance and develop their relationship with God, as individuals and as a community, through their interactions. Hence, in the inherently performative environment of liturgy, words and experience appear to be so intertwined that it becomes impossible to understand the one without the other. In this way, those involved in the interpretative process will find themselves to be part of an ongoing dialogue: the liturgical performance provides the fitting context in which it is possible to approach and receive the message contained in the Bible, which in turn shapes the liturgical context by means of its words, stories and symbols. In this dynamic, Revelation is not perceived as a superimposition of an impersonal and abstract truth from without, utterly disconnected from the normal perception that the person has of reality, it is rather experienced as an organic response to the necessities and demands of human life, from within life itself: once more, Revelation is known as the 'pan de li angeli', according to the interpretation discussed in the Introduction of this thesis.

Before moving on to analysing how the approach to theological, philosophical, poetical and scientific truths is staged by Dante in the *Commedia*, I will show that his approach to truth, and in particular to that which, for Dante too, was considered as the truth *par excellence*, was indeed liturgical. In doing so, I will show that Dante's own liturgical hermeneutics is in fact first and foremost displayed in its most proper context, that of the reading and interpretation of Scripture. Eloquently, this liturgical reading of Scripture happens to be thoroughly displayed precisely in *Paradiso* XXIV, the canto which stages a dialogue with St Peter – the person that, more than anyone else, stands as a figure for the whole tradition of the Church and as the guarantor of her faith – and focusses on faith, on its nature and on its being indissolubly tied to the words of Revelation. For these reasons, *Paradiso* XXIV is generally acknowledged as the canto of faith, and more specifically as the canto in which Dante takes his 'examination on faith':[97] however, uniting my voice with that of other scholars like Marco Ariani,[98] Zygmunt Barański,[99] Matthew Treherne,[100] and Marco Giani,[101] I would like to challenge the common understanding of the episode, arguing that Dante is not taking an exam, but rather performing an *act of faith*, radically intertwined or identified with a specific act of knowledge. In this statement we can already acknowledge an application of the idea that knowledge is a performance, and that truth is something to be encountered and known in and through the performance of a journey of knowledge. But let us proceed one step at a time. First of all, it is worth looking at the particular context that Dante creates as the fitting environment to perform his act of faith: the frame into which the dialogue with St Peter is staged has markedly liturgical and scriptural elements, which, as I will show, give the reader the coordinates to orient himself or herself and therefore interpret the passage more efficaciously.

1.1 A liturgical environment

The episode of the meeting with St Peter takes place in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, which is a particularly liminal space: it was believed to be the last heaven visible to human sight, thus at the border between visible and invisible, and, following Dante's journey, after this sphere we will enter

[97] Adolfo Jenni, 'Il canto XXIV del "Paradiso"', in *Letture dantesche*, ed. by G. Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1961), pp. 1821-33; Bortolo Martinelli, 'Dante baccelliere: l'esame e la sua professione di fede (Par. XXIV)', in Bortolo Martinelli, *Dante. Genesi della 'Commedia'* (Rome: Aracne, 2016), pp. 211-84; 'Gabriella Di Paola Dollorenzo, 'Dante e San Pietro (*Par*. XXIV)', in *Chi dite che io sia? Dante e la fede*, ed. by Lia Fava Guzzetta and Paolo Martino (Florence: Cesati Editore, 2014), pp. 137-49.

[98] Marco Ariani, 'Mistica degli affetti e intelletto d'amore', in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni. III. Paradiso. 2. Canti XVIII-XXXIII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2015), pp. 698-722.

[99] Zygmunt Barański, '"Io credo…": "Professing" faith in "Paradiso" 24', *Forum Italicum*, 55 (2021), 1-28.

[100] Treherne, 'Reading Dante's Heaven of the Fixed Stars'.

[101] Marco Giani, 'Holding the Coin, Possessing the Coin: Faith, from Theoretical to True Possession', in *'Se mai contingа…'*, ed. by Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne, pp. 27-43.

into a purely spiritual dimension – represented by the Crystalline and Empyrean heavens.[102] The complex, liminal situation of this sphere makes it ideal for the task of representing the interplay between human and divine: this is therefore the fitting place in which the story of the encounter between humanity and divinity with its historical, universal features is 'contained' and represented by the poet; this is the fitting place to stage the pilgrim's encounter with the Apostles. Interestingly, the whole of canto XXIII is dedicated to describing the overwhelming vision that occurs when the pilgrim first enters this eighth sphere, the vision of Christ in glory with Mary and the Church Triumphant, which is in fact the historical unfolding of that encounter between humanity and divinity by means of the Incarnation. Moreover, the Heaven of the Fixed Stars is the context in which Dante will mark his poem as sacred: in canto XXIII, we read 'e così, figurando il paradiso, / convien saltar lo sacrato poema…' (ll. 61-2), whereas in canto XXV we read: '[…] 'l poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra' (ll. 1-2), where the statement that both heaven and earth cooperated in its realisation is particularly eloquent. As Vittorio Montemaggi has argued, this eighth sphere of heaven is indeed the place which, more than any other in the poem, is able to shed some light on the importance that the reality of the encounter and interplay between humanity and divinity has in the *Commedia*, and shapes the whole theology proposed by poem.[103] As emerged from my previous analysis of liturgical practices, the dialogue between humanity and divinity, with their encounter and integration was at the core of liturgy too, as well as the emphasis given to thresholds and liminal places – be they actual geographical places or moments of the performed ritual. The presence of liminal spaces and thresholds to be crossed is actually a constant in the whole *Commedia*, not only in this specific section of *Paradiso*: the idea of gradually approaching a destination through a series of transitions, intrinsic in the journey-structure of the poem, has been extensively analysed by Teodolinda Barolini.[104] She has highlighted how the creation of continuous 'new beginnings' within the same story is a narrative strategy Dante uses throughout the whole poem – a poem which itself begins 'nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita'. Such a narrative strategy is in harmony with the passing of time in human life, although it is only perceived clearly when something unusual, unsettling or unforeseen wades into the usual flow of events. Poetry is engendered by the experience and recognition of this exceptionality, both within nature and events, and the poet is the one who is particularly receptive to these episodes.[105] However, as discussed in the Introduction of this thesis,

[102] Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 'Introduzione al canto XXIII', in Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia. Paradiso*. ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 2nd edn Oscar Classici (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), pp. 625-29.
[103] Vittorio Montemaggi, 'The Theology of Dante's "Commedia" as seen in the light of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars', in *'Se mai contingа…'*, ed. by Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne, pp. 45-61.
[104] Barolini, *The Undivine "Comedy*, pp. 21-47.
[105] Domenico Burzo, *Appello e decisione. Arte, linguaggio e poesia tra Martin Heidegger, Romano Guardini e Walter F. Otto* (Rome: Aracne, 2018), in particular chapters 3, 'L'essenza del linguaggio', and 4 'La poesia e il poeta'. I shall come back to this point later in the thesis, when discussing Dante's approach to poetry in chapter 3.

the place in which the passing of time is always perceived as punctuated by significant actions or events is liturgy: here the extraordinary is the norm, which can be experienced by everyone who takes part in the ritual, and each action or event is experienced as a step towards God, who is at the same time recognised as entering the world. During Mass, in particular, each action or prayer seems to always be a sort of preparation for what comes next, and even if we look at that which we could call the starting moment of the ritual we will find that there is always another action, or word, or event that prepares for that seemingly initial one, and from which this latter can spring.[106] Catherine Pickstock has reflected on this peculiar aspect of the liturgy of Mass, referring in particular to the altar as a 'receding place': the liturgy offered in this world is always a preparation for and a journey towards the true, heavenly liturgy; therefore, the altar, as the place of perfect sacrifice and praise, is never fully reached, but constantly cherished as the true end point of the journey.[107] In this sense, I suggest that the narrative strategy which Dante adopts in his poem – as outlined by Barolini – is inherently liturgical in nature, and that the journey of the poem, in order to move forward, needs liturgical actions to take place, as we shall see in the case of Dante's performance of his *act of faith* in *Paradiso* XXIV.

Besides the liminal character of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, which already enables us to build a connection with the liturgical environment, there are other important 'liturgical' elements worth taking into account, which will characterise my reading of the dialogue between Dante and St Peter. The very beginning of canto XXIV is a direct speech of Beatrice, addressed to the souls of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars introduced in the previous canto, which may well be considered a prayer of intercession:

> «O sodalizio eletto a la gran cena
> del benedetto Agnello, il qual vi ciba
> sì, che la vostra voglia è sempre piena,
> se per grazia di Dio questi preliba
> di quel che cade de la vostra mensa,
> prima che morte tempo li prescriba,
> ponete mente a l'affezione immensa
> e roratelo alquanto: voi bevete
> sempre del fonte onde vien quel ch'ei pensa».
>
> (*Par*. XXIV, 1-9)

[106] Cfr. *Rationale* IV, i-vi, where Durand describes the preparation that the minister undertakes before Mass and the beginning of the celebration.
[107] Pickstock, *After Writing*, in particular pp. 176-92 (p. 183).

First of all, it is important to recall the fact that Beatrice's words are uttered in a context of praise: at the end of canto XXIII, we read that, in this place where the triumph of Christ and his Church is celebrated, the souls were singing the *Regina Coeli*. The presence of this particular hymn is another element which adds to the liturgical tone of the environment: as Durand explains in his *Rationale*, the *Regina Coeli* was used during the Easter period – the most important in the life of the Church – and it was thought to be not composed by a human author, but rather taken from the choir of the angels themselves by Pope Gregory the Great, who heard them singing it, and who only added to it the response 'ora pro nobis Deum, alleluja'.[108] Another striking example, this, of the cooperation of heaven and earth in writing a text. In the case of the poem, we could say that in the place of Gregory it is Dante who is now delighted at the singing of that hymn by the blessed.

Most important, in Beatrice's prayer at the opening of the canto, is the image she chooses in order to, at once, address the Apostles and describe Dante's condition in respect to them. Here, the fundamental expression 'pan de li angeli' is clearly evoked by the text, meaning that a not-only-textual – we could say *not-only-constative*, recalling Austin's Theory of Language – interpretation is required in order to fully receive the message of the text. As already discussed in the interpretation of the 'pan de li angeli' formula, here too the image of the banquet must be read as having both liturgical and scriptural undertones; moreover, it is easy to acknowledge here the reference to Dante's own *Convivio*.[109] I will not explore all the possible implications of the presence of this reference to the *Convivio*, because they open the way to considerations on Dante's specific philosophical and theological beliefs and their development, as well as the possible theoretical dissimilarities with which Dante treats them in the the *Convivio* and in the *Commedia*: that problem would require an entirely different thesis altogether in order to be addressed.[110] However, it can still be helpful to point to the different approach that the *Convivio* and the *Commedia* seem to display in respect to the idea of truth – which is the main focus of this chapter – and which I argue should be found in the emphasis that the poem puts on the performative aspect of such an approach, an aspect that cannot be found, or at least is not sufficiently highlighted to be considered as central, in Dante's philosophical treatise.[111]

As anticipated, the image of the banquet of the Lamb, of which it is possible to have a foretaste thanks to some falling crumbs, is at once liturgical and scriptural. In the Introduction to this thesis, I have discussed how the liturgical celebration grants the faithful the partaking in the Last Supper, re-

[108] *Rationale* VI, lxxxix, 3.

[109] 'Oh beati quelli pochi che seggiono a quella mensa dove lo pane de li angeli si manuca! e miseri quelli che con le pecore hanno comune cibo! […] E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ma, fuggito de la pastura del vulgo, a' piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade…' (*Convivio*, I, i, 7 and 10).

[110] See, on this, Gianfranco Fioravanti, 'Introduzione al "Convivio"', in Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, *II. Convivio, Monarchia, Epistole, Egloghe*, ed. by G. Fioravanti and others (Milan: Mondadori, 2014), pp. 5-88.

[111] More on this will be said also in chapter 2, when exploring the approach Dante reserves, in the *Commedia*, for theology and philosophy.

actualised thanks to the celebration of the Eucharist. However, liturgy is never an event fully completed in itself: humans celebrate it in order to be able to offer their – always imperfect – liturgies to God; humans celebrate liturgy with the hope that there might be a liturgy.[112] Every celebration is a temporary sharing in the eternal, ongoing joy of Paradise. The only truly and fully accomplished liturgy is the one celebrated in the transcendent, eternal present of heaven, 'colà dove gioir s'insempra',[113] whereas the earthly liturgies celebrated are only like the crumbs falling from the table of that eternal celebration – to use Dante's image.[114] It is noteworthy that Dante, even at this point of his journey where he did enter Paradise and can therefore foretaste its delights, still points to the gap between his condition and that of the blessed, yet underscoring – through the simile of the crumbs falling from the table – that the 'food' enjoyed is the same. By means of this image we can see highlighted again the *in fieri* character of the journey, as well as the contingent, time-bound nature of the poem itself. To highlight this, means, for Dante, to acknowledge that the status of his poem, his sacred poem even, is that of being one of the possible timely and temporal performances of the journey towards the truth, and not the truth itself; a crumb of the 'pan de li angeli' and not the bread itself – precisely in the way liturgy suggests.

Our understanding of the beginning of canto XXIV, and in general of the environment in which the dialogue between Dante and St Peter happens – fundamental for a more comprehensive understanding of the passage – can be deepened if we also look at the biblical sources here evoked. In his analysis of this canto, Barański provides many scriptural references related to the metaphor of the crumbs,[115] but he does not mention the episode described in Matthew 15:21-28, which, I argue, proves to be very important to have in mind as part of the background of canto XXIV.[116] In this episode, a Canaanite woman approaches Jesus asking him to heal her daughter, but Jesus will fulfil her prayer only after a very interesting conversation, in which, after being unexpectedly compared to a dog by Jesus, the woman states that even dogs can eat the crumbs falling from the table of their masters: at this point Jesus will praise the woman's great faith and grant her the fulfilment of her desire, therefore healing her daughter. Key in the understanding of this striking passage of the Gospel is the willingness of the woman to recognise, before Jesus, the limitations of her pagan background

[112] 'Our liturgy in time can only be the liturgy we render in order to be able to render liturgy' (Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 183).
[113] *Par*. X, 148. I will come back to this specific point and Dante's treatment of time by means of the image of the mechanical clock in chapter 4.
[114] See Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp.169-219.
[115] Barański, '"Io credo…". The biblical references he mentions are Ruth 2:2; Matthew 14:13-21; Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:10-17; Luke 16:21; John 6:5-15.
[116] Other commentators, for instance Chiavacci Leonardi and Fosca, have pointed to this episode too. The similarity between the phrase pronounced by the Canaanite woman of the episode ('Etiam, Domine, nam et catelli edunt de micis, quae cadunt de mensa dominorum suorum' [Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the table of their masters]) and Dante's verse (questi preliba / di quel che cade de la vostra mensa) is indeed very strong.

in granting her salvation, and therefore her complete surrender to Christ, standing in front of her, and acknowledgement of him as the one and only God.[117] In doing so, the Canaanite not only expresses the purity of her faith – very much appreciated by Jesus: her prompt answer needs to be considered as an action altogether, not just as a description of her interior, humble disposition; it needs to be understood not only as a statement but as an act of faith, which will in fact grant her the fulfilment of her desire.[118] I suggest that this back-and-forth between Jesus and the woman, even if considerably more concise, can be seen as a model for that which is going to take place on the scene of the poem between St Peter and Dante, where, I argue, the Apostle is able to open a space – that of a dialogue – , for the pilgrim to be able to perform his act of faith, and thus proceed with his journey through the heavenly spheres and be more united with the heavenly community, and, ultimately, with God himself.

1.2 The space of the dialogue

What I am trying to suggest, in focussing on the context in which the dialogue between St Peter and Dante happens, as well as the emphasis I am placing on the fact that it is indeed a dialogue, is that in order to receive more fully the message of this canto we need to look at the story it tells, and not just at the themes here discussed. Thus, that Dante chose to talk about faith in the form of a dialogue is already a suggestion of the fact that he was not simply interested in the rightful statement of doctrines. As we shall see, in this canto faith comes across as something exceeding the constative knowledge of doctrines, and the performance of the dialogue is the element that, more than any other, helps us to see this point.

An important detail to highlight is that on almost every occasion when the Apostle talks in this canto, Dante compares his act of speaking to that of breathing: 'a la mia donna dirizzò lo spiro' (l. 32), or, for instance, later: 'Così spirò di quello amore acceso' (l. 82). This is an important indication, because it reveals the main quality of the interplay between the characters that will be unfolded on the scene: more than a 'cold', intellectual interrogation, it is a dialogue which involves the whole of

[117] The Canaanite culture was indeed seen as radically foreign to the one of the people of Israel, in particular for matters concerning the worshipping of idols rather than the true, living God of Israel. See Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea in Matthaeum*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Biblica._Catena_Aurea_in_Matthaeum,_LT.pdf [accessed 10 December, 2022] pp. 194-96.

[118] When discussing the Creed and its meaning within the celebration of Mass, Durand too refers to this episode as an example of confession of faith (see *Rationale* IV, xxv, 14). I would like to thank my friend and colleague Rosemary Williams for pointing out this reference to me.

the persons who maintain it,[119] and in particular their affectivity, as Barański has also pointed out.[120] The act of 'spirare', in the third cantica, is in fact quite often related to love, and specifically to the Holy Spirit, in particular to his place within the mutual, loving relationship of the Father and the Son: «che l'uno e l'altro etternalmente spira» (*Par*. X, 2), «che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri» (*Par*. XXXIII, 120);[121] the same image also recalls the episode described in the Gospel where Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on His disciples.[122] The idea of a dialogue carried out as an exchange of mutual love, and a love that is, at once, in and towards God, is another pivotal aspect of liturgy. The practice that best embodies this dynamic is that of the Divine Office, whose structure is indeed dialogic. Prayer was carried out through the reading of Lessons – passages from the Old and New Testament – and the alternate reciting of Psalms, and Antiphons and Responsories, always taken from Bible verses: the community would be divided into two choirs, engaging in this prayerful back-and-forth meant to imitate the choir of the angels.[123] When discussing the meaning of Antiphons in particular, Durand also explains that this alternating way of prayer serves to represent the bond of mutual charity that unites the two choirs in the work of praise, as also happens between two persons[124] – a dynamic that mirrors the interplay between St Peter and Dante in our scene: as we shall see, the aim of Dante and St Peter's dialogue is that of 'glorïar*e*' (l. 44), of glorifying the theological virtue of faith.

Another fundamental detail of the exchange between the pilgrim and the Apostle is the way in which St Peter formulates the very first question: 'Di', buon Cristiano, fatti manifesto: / fede che è?' (ll. 52-3). The Apostle is in fact asking Dante to 'make himself manifest',[125] not just to talk about something of which he has the intellectual notion: he is asking him to reveal himself, the person he is, and not just his knowledge of the Church's doctrines. This fact is also reiterated by Beatrice, who encourages Dante, as he tells us: 'perch'ïo spandessi / l'acqua di fuor del mio interno fonte' (ll. 56-7), and is repeated again by the pilgrim himself, who starts responding by acknowledging: 'la Grazia che mi dà ch'io mi confessi' (l. 58). The space of this dialogue is, thus, an open space in which the pilgrim can act out his belief, embodying it by means of his own performance.

[119] Martinelli also noticed that 'il canto rappresenta il coinvolgimento diretto del poeta-personaggio', highlighting how the involvement of the whole person of Dante serves to dissolve, or at least minimize the distinction between the poet and the pilgrim. He also points to the interesting fact that this is the longest dialogue of the whole poem. (Martinelli, 'Dante baccelliere', p. 217).
[120] Barański, '"Io credo…".
[121] A very important passage can be also recalled, interestingly, from *Purgatorio* XXIV: 'I' mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando' (ll.52-4).
[122] John 20:22-23. Also, and very interestingly, both the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* mean, interchangeably, 'wind', or 'breath' and 'spirit': see, for instance, the account of the creation in Genesis 1:1-2, and the episode of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1-8.
[123] *Rationale* V, ii, 26.
[124] *Rationale* V, ii, 29-30.
[125] See Barański, '"Io credo…", p. 16; Treherne, 'Reading Dante's Heaven of the Fixed Stars', p. 22-23.

1.3 Talking about faith in order to praise the faith

In response to Beatrice's prayer at the opening of the canto, St Peter promptly leaves the dancing circle of the blessed to reach her. At this point, she makes a more explicit request:

> Ed ella: «O luce etterna del gran viro
> a cui Nostro Segnor lasciò le chiavi,
> ch'ei portò giù, di questo gaudio miro,
> tenta costui di punti lievi e gravi,
> come ti piace, intorno de la fede,
> per la qual tu su per lo mare andavi.
> S'elli ama bene e bene spera e crede,
> non t'è occulto, perché 'l viso hai quivi
> dov'ogne cosa dipinta si vede;
> ma perché questo regno ha fatto civi
> per la verace fede, a glorïarla,
> di lei parlare è ben ch'a lui arrivi».
>
> (*Par*. XXIV, 34-45)

Beatrice asks St Peter to 'test' Dante's faith, even though he already knows all he needs to know about it: the Apostle's knowledge of the present, and thus of the pilgrim's situation is indeed perfect, inasmuch as it comes directly from his access to the vision of God. In his analysis of the canto, Barański has highlighted the apparent redundancy of Dante's profession of faith at that point of the journey, and suggests that it is the poet – more than the pilgrim – who needs to linger over this celebration of the first theological virtue. This necessity is in turn oriented toward the poet's mission of restoring the true faith on earth, and therefore he needs to both instruct the reader and mark himself as a trustworthy *scriba Dei*. I agree that such a profession of faith is needed by the poet for the reasons given by Barański, but I shall also argue that it is necessary for the pilgrim as much as it is necessary for the poet. As we learn from Beatrice, the one who will benefit from this 'examination' is first and foremost the pilgrim: 'ma perché questo regno ha fatto civi / per la verace fede, a glorïarla, / di lei parlare è ben ch'a lui arrivi'. Paradise is the dwelling place of many 'citizens' thanks to the 'verace fede'; also, it is good for Dante to talk about this 'verace fede' so that he can glorify it.[126] The very fact that it is faith which grants access to heaven, and that Beatrice judges the action of talking about faith to glorify it as being good for the pilgrim adds a new layer of meaning in understanding the dialogue between Dante and St Peter. The emphasis that Beatrice puts on the fact that their dialogue on faith will glorify it, by using the verb 'glorïare', suggests that that of responding to St Peter's questions will be seen as a proper action, and that, in this sense, Dante will be invited to perform an

[126] On the importance and significance of praise in the canti of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, and in the dialogue between St Peter and Dante, see the aforementioned essay: Treherne, 'Reading Dante's Heaven of the Fixed Stars'.

act of faith, as I shall demonstrate below. Moreover, as Durand too explains in the *Rationale*, when in a liturgical celebration faith is praised, this is understood as a way to give glory to God,[127] and to give glory to God cannot be anything but receiving his glory and give it back to him in an act of praise and thanksgiving.[128]

I have anticipated above that I do not tend towards a reading of the dialogue between Dante and St Peter (solely) as an examination: besides the reasons I have outlined so far, there is also the fact that the topic of the conversation itself exceeds the limit of what might constitute an ordinary 'exam'. Interestingly, the focus of the dialogue is not primarily on the 'content' of faith: the dialogue between Dante and St Peter is indeed more concerned about the nature and origin of faith; it is primarily concerned about the way in which faith is acquired, which involves the kind of relationship one builds with Scripture, and therefore the way in which one interprets the sacred text. As it should be clearer by now, in suggesting that there might be a right or wrong interpretation of the Bible, I am not referring to the disqualification of a specific explanation of a given passage over another supposedly more fitting one, with the risk of being caught into intricate theological impasses. I am instead referring to the difference between the two different ways in which it is possible to approach the scriptural text: that in which the Bible is understood as the 'container' of a fixed truth – which would represent here the wrong way to read it –, and the other one where the Bible is rather experienced as a voiced text, to be received as the speaking voice of the living God, and therefore proclaimed in an environment that would promote and enhance such an experience.

The elements outlined so far, which characterise *Paradiso* XXIV and its treatment of faith – the environment, the fact that faith is discussed in the form of a dialogue, and that the dialogue is ultimately meant to praise faith – all have clear links with the main principles of liturgy. I shall now show in which way these elements help us understand more comprehensively the nature of the 'verace fede', and therefore how this episode sheds some light on Dante's approach to truth and knowledge.

1.4 'Fede che è?': Dante's speech act of faith

I said before that I believe that, even in a seemingly redundant way – given that St Peter already knows Dante's faith –, the dialogue staged in this canto is a fundamental step of the journey itself, and not only something useful for the poet. If we recall that the aim of the *Commedia* is not that of merely 'teaching' the truth, but rather that of inviting the reader into a new experience of life,[129] we

[127] *Rationale* V, iii, 28.
[128] See Treherne, 'Liturgical Personhood in the "Commedia"'. This dynamic is analysed by Catherine Pickstock. In discussing the nature of the Eucharist as a gift, linked to the need for worshippers to offer gifts to God, she writes: 'it is only because of, and within God's gift to us, that we are able […] to offer gifts' (*After Writing*, p. 242).
[129] In the Epistle to Cangrande we read that the aim of the poem, and of *Paradiso* in particular is that of 'removere viventes in hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitatis' (*Epistola XIII a Cangrande della Scala*, xv). This idea of

can begin to see that the act itself of truly praising the faith is indeed the action by means of which the entry into that new experience of life is performed. In the story of the poem, since it is the union with God that the pilgrim is pursuing, the ability to receive his presence and move towards him is at the core of the whole journey, indeed the force that makes it possible. Hence, at this point of the journey, before crossing the threshold of the human dimension to enter the place where God himself dwells with his angels and saints – the Crystalline and Empyrean heavens –, Dante needs to perform an *act* of faith, or, more precisely, a *speech act* of faith.

It is only after Beatrice's request to St Peter – to ask questions to Dante about the faith so that they can glorify it – that Dante introduces the simile of the 'baccialier'. I do believe that it has a particular function, also connected to the implicit reference to the *Convivio* at the beginning of the canto: to bring a worldly element, in this case the academic universe, into this liturgical-scriptural context is already a statement of the possibility to engage with academic – theological and philosophical, or even scientific – knowledge in a 'liturgical' way. I will develop this idea in the following chapters, with a particular focus on Dante's engagement with theological and philosophical knowledge in chapter 2. Here, I shall focus on Dante's use of a liturgical hermeneutics in its most appropriate context, that of the interpretation of Scripture and its connection with faith in the truth of Revelation. As anticipated above, at the beginning of this extraordinary academic discussion, Dante is invited to reveal himself as a 'buon Cristiano'. This operation can be compared to that discussed in the Introduction of this thesis in regard to the ways in which biblical stories and characters were known and interpreted during Mass: thanks to the liturgical organisation of time, the truest identity of biblical characters was revealed through the hermeneutic process of positioning them with respect to Christ. In the present of the poem, we can say that it is Dante who is now called to engage in the same operation, and in so doing to manifest himself, his truest identity: we are not in the realm of abstract definitions, because the 'verace fede' – as the fundamental hermeneutical key of the 'pan de li angeli' reminds us – is at once something to be known in the mind and experienced with the body as present, therefore requiring the involvement of the whole person. If we recall again the structure and dynamics of Mass – the place where faith is celebrated, lived and passed on – we can see that faith is indeed framed as the recognition of the truth announced through the proclamation of Scripture as truly present and encounterable in the Eucharist, in turn recognised as the real body and blood of Christ, under the species of bread and wine, precisely thanks to the announcement received by the proclaimed words. Therefore, faith is effective – indeed 'verace' – when it leads to the recognition of the incarnate

writing theological books not only with the aim of teaching abstract truths but rather with the intent of leading people towards the experience of truth and a personal relationship with it was more common at the time. This idea is thoroughly discussed by Peter Candler in his monograph (*Theology, Rhetoric and Manuduction*), in which he shows how this aim of introducing the readers to a lived experience of the truth can be recognised also in particularly important theological texts of the time, such as Augustine's writings, the *Glossa Ordinaria* and Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

presence of Christ. For this very reason, faith cannot be thought of as a mere statement, descriptive of some abstract truths, it has instead an inherently performative nature: it does effect a change upon reality, moves the hearts of persons and, ultimately, has an impact on human history.[130] These ideas are very much present in Dante's way of staging his dialogue on faith with St Peter. After the first, main question, 'fede che è?', the pilgrim turns his gaze towards Beatrice and then promptly responds:

> poi mi volsi a Beatrice, ed essa pronte
> sembianze femmi perch'io spandessi
> l'acqua di fuor del mio interno fonte.
> «La Grazia che mi dà ch'io mi confessi»,
> comincia' io, «da l'alto primipilo,
> faccia li miei concetti bene espressi».
> E seguitai: «Come 'l verace stilo
> ne scrisse, padre, del tuo caro frate
> che mise teco Roma nel buon filo,
> fede è sustanza di cose sperate
> e argomento de le non parventi;
> e questa pare a me sua quiditate».
>
> (*Par*. XXIV, 55-66)

The fact that Dante turns towards Beatrice before responding to the question, and that she encourages him to 'reveal himself, I believe, is consistent with the reading of Beatrice as Dante's own 'pan de li angeli' proposed in the Introduction, and therefore indicative of the dynamic that initiated the faith in Dante's life – as it is described in the *Commedia* –, and that will be unfolded through the dialogue. If she is acknowledged as that specific piece – or 'crumb', to use the same simile used in this canto – of reality where the mystery of Incarnation became experiential for Dante, then it is reasonable to say that his relationship with her is the first place where faith became something personal and 'verace' for him, and that to look at her with her encouraging attitude in the moment in which he is asked to talk about faith is a way to poetically represent this whole dynamic. It is only after receiving Beatrice's hint that Dante appeals to the scriptural authority of St Paul as the – almost – verbatim source of his answer. It is noteworthy that, when referring to Scripture here, Dante does so by openly invoking the author who wrote the piece he is quoting. I argue that this is another way to emphasize the incarnate, personal nature of faith: it is always something received as a person from a person, a relationship, and it cannot therefore be achieved by merely reading and intellectually processing a text. This idea, again, clearly points towards that liturgical hermeneutics which constitutes the main focus of this research: to read a text 'liturgically' is to receive it as the speaking voice of a personal author, and therefore to engage in a relationship – albeit a mediated one – with him or her.

[130] This recalls what Jesus himself said to the Apostles regarding the effective power of faith, capable of moving mountains and uprooting trees (Mark 11:23; Matthew 17:20; Matthew 21:21; Luke 17:6).

After the first answer, Dante and St Peter go on discussing the meaning of what St Paul wrote in Hebrews 11:1 about faith and its nature; then St Peter asks Dante if he indeed possesses that faith, and Dante boldly responds that yes, he surely does. Then St Peter goes on to ask what was, for the pilgrim, the source of this 'cara gioia / sopra la quale ogne virtù si fonda' (ll.89-90). From this point on, the back-and-forth becomes even more concise, and it might be striking to see St Peter so eager for Dante's answers that he even seems to question the authority of Scripture:

> [...] E io: «La larga ploia
> de lo Spirito Santo, ch'è diffusa
> in su le vecchie e 'n su le nuove cuoia,
> è silogismo che la m'ha conchiusa
> acutamente sì, che 'nverso d'ella
> ogne dimostrazion mi pare ottusa».
> Io udi' poi: «L'antica e la novella
> proposizion che così ti conchiude,
> perché l'hai tu per divina favella?».
> E io: «La prova che 'l ver mi dischiude,
> son l'opere seguite, a che natura
> non scalda ferro mai né batte incude».
> Risposto fummi: «Di', chi t'assicura
> che quell'opere fosser? Quel medesmo
> che vuol provarsi, non altri, il ti giura».
>
> (*Par*. XXIV, 91-105)

All the answers given by Dante are perfectly orthodox, and the fact that the Apostle is not already content with the first one, in which Dante ultimately claims that the Holy Spirit himself is the author of Scripture and the source of his belief, could appear inappropriate. The use of the word 'silogismo' is here particularly important: as Barański pointed out, 'silogismo' and 'silogizzar' immediately call to mind the academic world and its use of logic and rationalism as its proper ways of knowledge, and, he argues, this context highlights their unsuitability for describing the nature of faith, insofar as it is the antithesis of rationalism.[131] However, I want to point out the fact that, if rational knowledge cannot exhaustively represent and coincide with faith, it is a fundamental aspect of the knowledge of faith nonetheless.[132] The first use of 'silogizar', in the lines: 'e da questa credenza ci convene / silogizar, sanz'avere altra vista' (ll. 76-77) is a positive one, and it outlines a 'successful' way – as the verb 'convene' suggests – to use human reason, and which will be reiterated in the second part of the dialogue, when Dante will state that his belief in God is sustained by both the truth of Scripture and

[131] Barański, '"Io credo…", p. 18.
[132] This idea also recalls Augustine's distinction between 'rational' and 'intellectual' kinds of knowledge, discussed in the Introduction of this thesis.

'prove / fisice e metafisice' (ll. 133-34) It is the second use of 'silogismo', in line 94, that is more problematic: here, I argue, is where the focus of the dialogue more clearly shifts from an interest in the content or constative aspect of the scriptural text to its performative one. If, in the light of a liturgical hermeneutics, we assume that, in his perfect charity, what St Peter is more concerned about is that Dante might be able to perform an *act of faith* – that is precisely what will enable him to proceed further in his journey of union with God, sharing in the joy of the heavenly community –, rather than just giving the right definitions, then his behaviour will perfectly make sense. If we recall the Gospel episode mentioned above, of the dialogue between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, we will now begin to see the connection between the two episodes, and we can see that Peter is acting in the same way Jesus did in the dialogue with the woman. By the same token, and remembering that, in the liturgical perspective here adopted, faith is 'verace' only when it is effective and moves towards the recognition of the truth as presence, it becomes clear that the performance of an *act of faith* is precisely that which will grant truthfulness to the definitions just reported by the pilgrim. The Apostle wants to know why Dante believes that Scripture truly is the word of God, and he promptly responds that it is thanks to the miracles that the word carried out, works that nature would not be able to realize. In this last answer, the pilgrim is already stating the performative power of the word of God, and therefore its presence and effects upon reality, but the effects he is talking about are still 'not present' to the pilgrim himself. For this reason, St Peter challenges Dante once more, asking him how he can be sure that such miracles did actually happen. After all, it is the Bible that talks about those miracles, in order for the readers to believe in the Bible itself. But Dante's answer breaks the circularity of the argument:

> «Se 'l mondo si rivolse al cristianesmo»,
> diss'io, «sanza miracoli, quest'uno
> è tal, che li altri non sono il centesmo:
> ché tu intrasti povero e digiuno
> in campo, a seminar la buona pianta
> che fu già vite e ora è fatta pruno».
>
> (*Par*. XXIV, 106-111)

From the past of the book, now Dante turns his face towards the present of his reality: it is there that he can see the effects – indeed the presence – of the words of the Scripture incarnated in the Christian community; he can see the same plant that St Peter planted, which *was* a vine and is *now* a blackthorn.

The existence of the Christian community, which keeps celebrating the faith,[133] is one with the advent of faith itself, insofar as the celebration of the Eucharist transforms the faithful into the body of Christ, who in turn is present among the community of those who celebrate his presence.[134] Through this answer, thus, Dante is stating that he was able to have experience of the Revelation announced through the Scriptures thanks to the active presence of him whom Scriptures announce, among the Christian community. To recognise this presence and to express it out loud: this is the *act of faith* St Peter was awaiting from Dante. It is in fact extremely meaningful that, right after this answer, the dialogue is momentarily interrupted and the souls of the blessed joyfully sing the *Te Deum*: once more, we are reminded of the liturgical context in which the dialogue happens.

Dante's choice to describe the souls of this heaven bursting into the singing of this precise hymn, the *Te Deum*, becomes particularly significant if we look at its use in the liturgical context. What Durand writes about this hymn is in fact very interesting:

> Nocturni finitis campanae pulsantur, et *Te Deum laudamus* alta voce cantatur,
> ad notandum quod manifeste et mirifice Ecclesia tempore gratiae laudat Deum,
> et ad signandum quod si bonis operibus doctrinae sanctae bene responderimus,
> ad coelestem laudem cum Angelis perveniemus.[135]

[When the nocturns are finished, the bells are rung and "You are God, we praise You" is sung with an elevated voice, to note that in the time of grace, the Church praises God openly and with wonderment, and to signify that if we respond well to sacred doctrine with good works, we will attain heavenly praise with the Angels.]

I said before that the act of faith performed by Dante is at the same time an act of praise,[136] as Beatrice's use of 'gloriare', and now the singing of the *Te Deum* suggest. Durand says that the hymn is meant to show that the Church *manifestly* praises God – which reminds us of St Peter's request to Dante to 'make himself manifest' –, and, even more tellingly, it also represents the fact that, in responding well with actions to the sacred doctrine, the faithful will reach the heavenly praise of the angels: this can instead recall the same idea evoked at the very beginning of the canto by the metaphor of the crumbs, an image of liturgy itself which strives to join the angelic, eternal liturgy celebrated in

[133] Following the command given by Jesus himself: 'Hoc facite in meam commemorationem' [do this in memory of me] (Luke 22:19).
[134] 'Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum' [where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them] (Matthew 18:20). On the theological understanding of the community of the faithful as the body of Christ, in patristic theology and modern one, see: Henri Cardinal de Lubac SJ, *Corpus Mysticum. The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, tr. Gemma Simmonds CJ, ed. by Laurence P. Hemming and Susan F. Parson (London: SCM Press, 2006).
[135] *Rationale* V, iii, 30.
[136] See Treherne, 'Reading Dante's Heaven of the Fixed Stars'.

heaven. The situation in which the *Te Deum* was generally sung, too, has something to add to our understanding of the dialogue maintained by St Peter and Dante. As we read in the *Rationale*, it was used at the end of Matins, the first of the Hours of the Divine Office, and the main purpose of the Divine Office was exactly that of praising God.[137]

It is worth noting that the dialogue seems to be divided into two parts, with the *intermezzo* of the liturgical hymn: this fact, I suggest, mirrors the involvement and the emphasis that is respectively placed on one of the two elements constituting the nature of faith – the constative and the performative.

After the last response, which caused the singing of the *Te Deum* by the choir of the blessed, and before the new question is asked, opening the second part of the dialogue, Dante describes St Peter, ready to continue with his questioning, as a 'baron che sì di ramo in ramo, / essaminando, già tratto m'avea, / che a l'ultime fronde appressavamo' (ll.115-17): I believe that the plant Dante is talking about here in this metaphor, which he is 'climbing' under the guidance of the Apostle, is the same mentioned before, the 'buona pianta' of faith sowed in the past of evangelical history and still growing in the present of Dante's narration. The 'ultime fronde' to explore, and which will make the pilgrim's act of faith more complete, and indeed more of an act of praise, are an explicit and clear acknowledgement of the *identity* of that truth recognised as present through the persons of the Christian community. The truth itself is in fact a *person*, the *living* God now recognised as the creator, Trinitarian God:

> […] Io credo in uno Dio,
> solo ed etterno, che tutto 'l ciel move,
> non moto, con amore e con disio;
> […]
> e credo in tre persone etterne, e queste
> credo una essenza sì una e sì trina,
> che soffera congiunto 'sono' ed 'este'.
>
> (*Par*. XXIV, 130-132 and 139-141)

It might appear odd that St Peter asks the same question twice – namely the one about the source for Dante's belief: 'ma or convien espremer quel che credi / e onde a la credenza tua s'offerse' (ll. 122-123) –, and that this time the Apostle will not question the fact that, once more, Dante points towards Scripture as the source for his 'credenza'. However, in the perspective of the liturgical hermeneutics here employed, we can understand how that seemingly single question has actually two meanings, which correspond to the two dimensions kept together by this kind of knowledge that is faith, and

[137] *Rationale* V, i, 1-2.

explored in the two parts of the dialogue – before and after the *Te Deum*. The first meaning was about acknowledging the source that makes that *act* of believing possible – therefore the lived experience of encounter with the truth as a presence, as happens in the Eucharist during Mass –, hence the emphasis on the *affectus* of the pilgrim: 'dirittamente senti / se bene intendi…' (ll. 67-8). Whereas the second one is about acknowledging *the name* of that presence, which only comes from the story of God's own Revelation as bequeathed through the very words of Scriptures; here the emphasis is on the intellectual understanding of that which had been before acknowledged through the affection: 'De la profonda condizion divina / ch'io tocco mo, la mente mi sigilla / più volte l'evangelica dottrina' (ll. 142-44). Hence, this time the authority ascribed to the Bible does not happen to be problematic. The one meaning without the other would make the faith incomplete, and therefore not 'verace': it is only in the interplay between words and experience that the truth announced can be known; it is in experiencing, knowing and confessing the name of God that true praise can be given to him,[138] and therefore unity with him achieved and deepened.

In the end, I believe it is worth recognising that, through the two sections into which the dialogue between Dante and St Peter can be divided, with the two different focuses on the fundamental performative aspect of the faith, which allows truth to be experienced, and the need to acknowledge the right name of that experience, more explicitly related to the rational understanding of such a truth, that which ultimately comes to the fore is that indeed faith is the real protagonist of this canto: the experiential aspect of faith is grounded in the mystery of Incarnation, whereas the knowledge of the name of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the acknowledgement of the Holy Trinity. Thus, this canto XXIV is not just a poetic transposition of abstract doctrines, but the embodiment, through the performance of the dialogue, of the two mysteries which are substance and conceptual core of that Christian faith which is here so beautifully 'glorï*ata*'.

1.5 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to explore Dante's approach to the truth of Revelation. In this way, I have shown how, for Dante too, as it happens in liturgy, faith is understood as a way of knowledge where human rationality can find its place and becomes integrated with a more experiential – performative – kind of knowledge. The fact that an intellectual enquiry on the matter of faith happens within a dialogic relationship is the image that perfectly embodies this dynamic. Here I did not focus on the specific role played by rationality in the acquisition of knowledge; I have just shown that, for Dante, even when approaching a discussion on faith, rationality does have a role to play and does not give

[138] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp.180-83.

way to mere credulity nor to a solely ‘sentimental’ understanding of the heavenly realities. I shall now develop this idea, by exploring the interplay between *scientia* and *sapientia*, rational knowledge and experiential knowledge. I will focus in particular on the role that rationality, in its different possible manifestations such as theology, philosophy, poetry and science, plays in a journey of knowledge that walks in and towards the truth: a journey such as the *Commedia* claims to be.

Chapter 2.

‘Lì si cantò…tre persone in divina natura / e in una persona essa e l’umana’: The liturgy of theology and philosophy in the Heaven of the Sun

In the previous chapter I have analysed how, in the context of the dialogue with St Peter, Dante discusses the nature of faith precisely by staging the performance of his own *speech act of faith*, and I have highlighted how this is shown to be strictly related to the kind of relationship he builds with Scripture and with the life of the Christian community.[139] This was particularly helpful in demonstrating how Dante’s approach to truth, and to *the* truth *par excellence* in his time – that of Revelation –, can be better understood when compared to the principles according to which liturgy too approaches truth. I have also stressed the importance of the performative aspect of faith: in order to be truthful, it has to be embodied and acted out by a person, and it must be related to the present of the person, to the specific portion of time and space in which he or she is situated. In fact, more than a notion possessed in the mind, faith is shown to be an *act*, and in particular the act of the acknowledgement of the truth about the reality in which the person is embodied: to have recourse once more to the key expression of this thesis, we can say that faith is that act of human reason which is able to connect one’s own experience of fulfilment with the knowledge of God as a loving Father, therefore acknowledging one’s own reality as one’s own ‘pan de li angeli’. The personal experience of fulfilment would constitute the sapiential knowledge of that one truth which can be also known, rationally, through the *scientia* of the message conveyed by the words of Scripture: one aspect of this knowledge without the other – that is, both the experience and its interpretation by means of the scriptural word – would be incomplete. From this perspective, faith appears to be inextricably tied to human reason, and therefore an integral *act of knowledge*, which is, simultaneously, an *act of love*: it is the result of the interplay between the performance, or lived experience – God is experienced as loving presence through the fulfilment of one’s own desire – and the knowledge bequeathed by Revelation – through the reading of the Bible, God is known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the interplay in which resides the essence of what I have called *liturgical hermeneutics*.

However, in the first chapter I have only shown that this liturgical hermeneutics is present in the *Commedia* in the context in which it would be most predictably found, namely when Dante deals with the concept of faith, and with the interpretation of the Bible and its claims of authority and truthfulness. *Paradiso* XXIV, therefore, shows us that Dante was aware of that liturgical

[139] On the life of the Church – made by the two fundamental elements of knowledge of Scripture and love for Christ – as a form of hermeneutics, Paola Nasti, ‘Dante and Ecclesiology’, in *Reviewing Dante’s Theology*, ed. by C. Honess and M. Treherne, II, pp. 43-88.

hermeneutics which is born, learnt and developed in the context of Mass and that of scriptural exegesis, within the Christian community: the words of Scripture are confirmed by the real presence of the body of Christ in the Eucharist and – which is one with this – by the existence of the Christian community, the mystical body of Christ too.[140] From a Christian point of view, the fullness of truth was to be found in God, in his living word, and it goes without saying that the Mass, with the reading of the Bible – and of the Gospel in particular – and the celebration of the Eucharist, would provide all that was needed in order to know and experience that truth. The trouble arises when the Christian is confronted with the claims of theology, philosophy, poetry, and science, and of human reason in general, still able to look for *truths* and find them outside Revelation and outside the Bible, in the created world, and many times in open contradiction with the words of Scripture. In Dante's case, a huge question was that regarding the presence of Beatrice in his life, which thus led him to problematise the relationship between the revealed Truth and the experience of human life *outside* the walls of the Church altogether. Certainly, the questions about the role played by human reason and human experience within the context of Christian faith are as ancient as Christianity itself, and, as we shall see below, in Dante's time – with the development of a formalised education – they were discussed with particular emphasis and not without problems. Here, once more, the hermeneutics of the 'pan de li angeli', and the way in which the *Commedia* is built in general, ask us to take a step further.

At this point, it is perhaps worth recalling the metaphor I mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, common in Dante's time, according to which the universe was perceived as a living book written by God: every existing thing was seen and understood as a word uttered by him,[141] and therefore needed to be carefully known in order to know more of God himself. In this sense, it is particularly meaningful that in the very last canto of the *Commedia*, Dante describes the universe seen from within God as a book: 'Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna / legato con amore in un volume / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna' (*Par*. XXXIII, 85-87). In these lines we find expressed the belief that creation too, and not only Revelation, speaks of a God who is love and does everything out of love. However, through the image of a book that from the earthly perspective looks messy and scattered, whereas from the heavenly perspective looks meaningfully ordered, Dante is highlighting the persistence of an element of paradox, and also of difficulty, to be considered when undertaking the endeavour of its interpretation. This paradox and this difficulty, I suggest, are precisely what is needed in order for human freedom and choice to exist, and therefore for a hermeneutical endeavour

[140] See de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*.
[141] This can be clearly seen in the very first pages of the Bible, where God creates the world out of His words: 'Dixitque Deus: "fiat lux". Et facta est lux' [God said 'let there be light", and there was light]. (Gen 1:3). See also Romano Guardini, *Etica*, trans. by Silvano Zucal and Michele Nicoletti (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001), p. 715.

to be undertaken. As we have begun to see in the close reading of Dante's dialogue with St Peter, it is through this interpretative act, which combines both the intellectual and affective dimensions, that the person can make himself or herself manifest. In the liturgical environment, truth is not something that can be owned by the person, it can only be experienced as something that infinitely exceeds the person, given to him or her as a gift and in which he or she acknowledges himself or herself to be ultimately rooted. The very spatiotemporal unit in which the liturgical performance happens is acknowledged as the event of the truth that makes itself present and therefore knowable to the person. The liturgical understanding of time and space that Dante seems to share, with its linguistic and relational emphasis – from which the belief that the created world is indeed another 'word of God' derives –, as well as the hermeneutical key of the 'pan de li angeli' and Dante's emphasis on his own experience – in particular on his relationship with Beatrice – are all elements which make it entirely reasonable to think that, through the writing of the poem, Dante is looking for the truth manifested through creation, through the reality existing outside Scripture and outside the celebration of Mass, and is therefore attempting to read and interpret his world, in its historical and natural features, employing the same dynamics used when reading and interpreting Scripture during Mass – as we have seen he does in *Paradiso* XXIV. In the following chapters of this thesis, I wish to show that that liturgical hermeneutics proper to the context of Mass becomes for the poet a sort of mindset,[142] which is useful to examine and inhabit all realms of thought and being,[143] besides Scripture and nevertheless always with an open comparison with Scripture itself; a mindset which enables him to propose original and fruitful answers, even if often paradoxical ones, to different problems. I have shown how, in his dialogue with St Peter, Dante affirms his belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture, and argues that the Christian community – the body of Christ –, which is constitutive of his present reality, is the place in which the real effects of God's word can be acknowledged and experienced. The experience – either of the consuming of the Eucharist or of the encounter with the Christian community – without the words of Scripture would remain 'unnamed',[144] whereas the words of Scripture without the experience of the present moment would be ineffective and, to have again recourse to Austin's theory of language, *unhappy*.[145]

[142] In this sense, we can see an echo of St Paul's invitation to the new Christian faithful to renew their mind: 'Obsecro itaque vos, fratres, per misericordiam Dei, ut exhibeatis corpora vestra hostiam viventem, sanctam, Deo placentem, rationabile obsequium vestrum; et nolite conformari huic saeculo, sed transformamini renovatione mentis, ut probetis quid sit voluntas Dei, quid bonum et bene placens et perfectum'[I therefore urge you, brothers, by the mercy of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship; do not conform yourselves to this age, but transform yourselves with a renewal of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect] (Romans 12:1-2).

[143] See Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, p. 111.

[144] One of the main aspects brought about by Revelation is precisely that of knowing the name of God. See Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 180-83; Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, pp. 547-48.

[145] In his discussion of truthfulness and falsehood of utterances, Austin also introduces the concepts of *happiness* and *unhappiness* of the utterance. Certain sentences can in fact have a meaning within themselves in terms of the internal

I shall now proceed to discuss the ways in which Dante draws earthly or human knowledge into this interplay, enabling a dialogue between the truth bequeathed by Revelation and the truths found in and through creation by means of theological, philosophical, poetic and scientific discourses. The first step will be that of exploring the context in which the rift between the two elements – Revelation and creation, divine *sapientia* and human *scientia*,[146] divine knowledge and human experience – made itself felt with the greatest intensity in Dante's time: that of the definition of theology as an academic discipline and its relationship with philosophy in the intellectual environment of the universities.

Starting from these premises, then, in this chapter I will explore the way in which Dante employs a liturgical hermeneutics in order to take his place in the open dialogues concerning questions related to theological and philosophical enquiries and knowledge, questions raised by the various controversies that animated the cultural context of the Latin West in the thirteenth century. To fulfil this purpose, I will focus on the episode of the Heaven of the Sun, narrated in canti X-XIV of *Paradiso*. Obviously, this set of canti is not the only one in which Dante deals with theological and philosophical issues: it is throughout the whole poem that the poet takes a position regarding many of the thorniest questions of the time or of Christianity in general, but what is peculiar to the Heaven of the Sun is that Dante does not address the philosophical and theological matters directly, nor does he try to 'solve' specific problems by means of an intellectual discourse, as he seems to do elsewhere.[147] Rather, he stages an encounter with the main exponents of the different schools of thought – often true rivals on earth –, while presenting them as individual but important parts of a whole, where difference and specificity are subsumed into the higher unity of a symphony. The fact that the poet reflects on the problem of the coexistence of sameness and difference when addressing theological and philosophical matters is anything but surprising: as I have discussed since the Introduction of this thesis, this is probably one of the most important themes of the poem as a whole and of *Paradiso* in particular, as the very first lines of the third cantica already suggest: 'La gloria di colui che tutto move / per l'universo penetra, e risplende / *in una parte più e meno altrove*' (*Par*. I,

logic of their content (the constative element), and yet not being able to have a successful effect on reality, thus fulfilling the aim for which they were uttered in the first place. In other words, *unhappy* utterances, even when logically sound, lack of a meaningful connection with reality and are unable to make an impact on it. (See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 14-15 and 53). An example of this idea within the *Commedia* can be seen in Francesca's words, 'se fosse amico il re dell'universo, / noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace' (*Inf.* V, 91-2): her prayers, even if meaningful in their content, would not be effective because of her reality as a damned soul, detached from God and therefore outside of a meaningful relationship with him.

[146] I am consciously using these words here, *sapientia* and *scientia*, in contraposition to highlight the presence of two different and yet affine elements, and even though here I chose to characterise *sapientia* as divine and *scientia* as human, I by no means intend to suggest that *sapientia* only pertains to 'religious' matters or to the realm of 'revealed truths', and *scientia* to more 'secular' matters. As I shall discuss below, theology itself, as well as the knowledge of Scriptures, were often referred to, at the time, as *divina scientia*.

[147] Among the best known examples, we can recall the discourse on the moon spots, in *Paradiso* II – which I will explore in chapter 4 as an important example of how Dante approaches scientific matters –, or the discussion on the correct order of the angelic hierarchies in *Paradiso* XVIII.

1-3; emphasis mine). Teodolinda Barolini has extensively discussed this theme, and she has also analysed Dante's poetic choices in the Heaven of the Sun. She argues that representation and narrative are two key points of these canti – in which, in fact, we see Aquinas and Bonaventure telling the stories of St Francis and St Dominic –, fundamental in order to understand Dante's poetics of the *Paradiso* altogether, and she then points to the fact that the very nature of narrative and representation is that of producing and embodying difference and division: therefore, she holds that, in writing these canti in particular and the whole *Paradiso* in general, Dante needs to create the *illusion* of unity by means of what is said and represented.[148] However, I believe that things can be seen also from a different perspective: if we employ a liturgical hermeneutics, we will see how the unity that Dante is representing is not a mere illusion, but is somehow present, it is described as *happening* by means of the very performances described in these canti, as I will discuss in greater depth below. In fact, that which is enlightening, in the episode of the Heaven of the Sun, is that Dante is able to stage the paradox of the coexistence of heavenly and earthly, of unity and multiplicity, in the declination it embodies within the relationship between theological and philosophical ideas precisely by means of the encounter with theologians and philosophers, and not through an abstract discourse. In other words, we can say that he is able to picture theology and philosophy as embodied, personal performances of single persons, who are simultaneously seen as part of a whole, of a community. This is the idea I intend to unpack and develop throughout this chapter. Far from claiming to give a final definition of Dante's view of theology, philosophy and human knowledge in general, I will argue that the liturgical dynamics, at play in these episodes too, can shed some light on our understanding of Dante's approach to these realms of thought and knowledge, and help us deepen our understanding of his poetic choices. When discussing Dante's approach to the realm of knowledge as such, it is always important to recall the intense and energetic eclecticism that characterises his views, and which prevents us from labelling the poet's personal and original thought with a single, oversimplified definition. In this sense, it is helpful to look at his choice not to engage directly with the specificities of the approaches of each of the souls encountered in the Heaven of the Sun – which, however, he does acknowledge: this tells us that, here, Dante is looking at intellectual activity not in terms of its contents, or at least not only in this terms, but in terms of its performances, in the same way in which St Peter – as I have shown in the previous chapter – was concerned about Dante's performance of his *act of faith* and not only about the intellectual content of his answers.

[148] Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 194-217.

Now, in order to give a less blurred picture of the ideas with which Dante had to deal when he staged the encounter with the souls of the theologians and philosophers in the Heaven of the Sun,[149] and also in order to better understand the poetic and intellectual operation he was able to perform through his representation, I consider it appropriate to provide a general overview of that contentious cultural context that, from a heavenly perspective, the poet is able to represent as reconciled.

2.1 What is theology? A problem of definition

In the twelfth century, a remarkable development in the study of theology took place, which resulted in its establishment as one of the academic disciplines alongside arts and sciences.[150] The main difficulty that we face, when we try to look at the trajectory of this development, is the same issue that the scholars of the time had to deal with: the difficulty of defining theology itself. In fact, if the other academic disciplines – such as rhetoric or grammar, for instance – were clearly defined by their specific subject-matter and method, the situation was not so clear with the new-born theological discipline: was it about the study of the Scriptures – and therefore a synonym for exegetical activity –, or was it theoretical speculation? This question already shows how the problem was about understanding which of the two kinds of knowledge – *scientia* and *sapientia* – was to be practiced in this discipline. In fact, it was not clear if the study of theology was to be specifically about the mysteries announced by Revelation, or also about other mysteries concerning human life in general. It is perhaps worth highlighting that, actually, these different approaches to theology and questions regarding the pursuit of theological speculation existed already long before the twelfth century: for Boethius (c. 475 – c. 526), for instance, theology was limited to the study of the Trinity and Divine Nature, but there had been also others – not least among them St Augustine – for whom theology also included the study of the natural world, insofar as it was part of divine creation. To include nature, the created world and its phenomena in the realm of theological enquiry was perhaps more common in non-Christian contexts, but thinkers such as Augustine and Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 230) did not seem uncomfortable with this seemingly primitive idea of theology,[151] which is also concerned with myths and is widely the province of poets. Often, we neglect to acknowledge that, at least in the early stages of the Christian history of ideas, myths still had a place within theological discourses – and in

[149] It is difficult to define with precision to which extent Dante knew the details and specificities of all the controversies of the academic environment, but many passages of the *Commedia* stand as witnesses of the fact that he did have an awareness of them, also taking a position in the debates.
[150] Gillian Rosemary Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).
[151] 'Tertullian describes the three branches of theology like this (after Varro): "One branch is physics, with which the philosophers deal, another myth, which is the concern of poets, the third rational which each people chooses for itself".' (Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology,* p. 33)

fact they are part of the Bible itself:[152] this possibility for myths to play a role also in the context of Christian theology becomes particularly important when considering Dante's role and self-awareness as a Christian poet. I will discuss this too in more depth in chapter 3, showing how the liturgical hermeneutics enables Dante to build a bridge between poetry and theology, between the pagan and the Christian world. However, it was in the twelfth century that such a question about the appropriate object of theological enquiry became more problematic, precisely because of the need to define an organised, clear academic curriculum, and the question arising from within the cultural context of the time, regarding this issue, can be articulated in this way: 'if theology too is concerned with speculation, abstract thought and human experiences, in what ways, exactly, is it different from philosophy?'.[153] But also, and conversely, another question arose: 'to what extent is it acceptable to borrow the methods of the other arts, in a discipline concerned with reading and interpreting the Bible?' In this scenario, every scholar attempted to give his personal answer to such thorny questions, and therefore built his practice of the discipline accordingly – as well as his academic curriculum, as a *magister*. Thus, as might have been predicted, the uncertainty and lack of unitary approach gave rise to numerous controversies.[154]

Another perspective on this issue came to the fore when comparing theology to the other *artes* taught in schools. For the people of the time, it was clear that the art itself was something quite different from the discipline which taught the art's own functioning: to *perform the art*, in fact, was not tantamount to *teaching the rules* – indeed the discipline – of that art. The same concepts were to be applied to theology too, and not without difficulties.

In the *Convivio*, Dante defines Theology as 'scienza divina',[155] and goes on saying that this *scienza*

> piena è di tutta pace: la quale non soffera lite alcuna d'oppinioni o di sofistici argomenti, per la eccellentissima certezza del suo subietto, lo quale è Dio. E di questa dice esso alli suoi discepoli: 'la pace mia do a voi, la pace mia lascio a voi', dando e lasciando loro la sua dottrina, che è questa scienza di cu'io parlo.[156]

[152] The book of Genesis for instance, with its aetiological nature, can be seen as an example of this.
[153] On the problem of the relationship between philosophy, theology and the dogma of the Trinity see also Sergij Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy (Philosophy and Dogma)*, trans. by Stephen Churchyard (New York: Angelico Press, 2020).
[154] On the difficulty of defining theology and its difference or identification with the concept of doctrine, and therefore on Dante's approach to the matter, see Zygmunt Barański, 'Dante and Doctrine (and Theology)', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by C. Honess and M. Treherne, I, pp. 9-63.
[155] *Convivio*, II, xiii, 8: 'al quinto cielo risponde la scienza divina, che è Teologia appellata'.
[156] *Convivio*, II, xiv, 19.

It is eloquent that, in order to explain the essence of theology more comprehensively, Dante cannot avoid quoting Scripture and in particular Jesus' own words. Also, particularly important for the present discussion is the fact that he defines God himself as the subject of such a discipline, and that, for this reason, there is no space for disagreement between different opinions in theology – which is a statement in open contradiction with the actual historical context I described above. Thus, if we keep in mind that, as we read in Dante's definition, the main concern of theology – be it abstract thought or exegesis of Scripture – is faith, the *sacra doctrina* given by Jesus himself, and therefore, broadly speaking, the knowledge of God, we can see how the previous questions regarding the status of theology as an academic discipline, when faced with this twofold aspect of the subject – discipline and performance – acquire a different level of signification. Was it possible to *teach* faith, detaching its 'discipline', its rules and notions from the *practice* of it? In a discipline having God as its subject, was it possible to detach the knowledge *about* him from the knowledge *of* him? Or, to put it differently and perhaps more clearly, was it possible to detach truth about him, from love for him? From this point of view, we can also understand better the concern regarding the place that Scripture – always believed to be the ever-speaking word of a personal, living God – had to occupy within the study of theology. In fact, if we look once more at the dichotomy between abstract knowledge and embodied experience – the most important focus of this research – we can see how the problem of the presence of the Bible among the textbooks of theology classes still subsists, in terms of *the way* it had to be read and interpreted. In the light of what I have discussed so far, it should be clear that the problem is about how to approach the truth of Scripture: is the *constative truth*, or rational content, of the scriptural text enough to guide the person in an intellectual – be it theological or philosophical – endeavour, or will it still be incomplete and misleading, even if taken verbatim but without its experiential, performative aspect? In this scenario, once more the question arises in these terms: can one be said to know God if one is not in a relationship with him; if the person does not let him speak to him or her in the present of his or her own reality? But also, following on from that, what is the peace with which theology is replete, which, according to Dante's words, Jesus himself bestowed on the faithful,[157] and which ideally should preserve this realm of knowledge from any controversy and quarrel?

These are all questions which, of course, take us back to the liturgical knowledge of the 'pan de li angeli', as well as to the discussion on the 'verace fede' carried out in the previous chapter of this thesis. But then – starting from the answer provided by the perspective of the 'pan de li angeli' –, if God can be fully known only within a personal relationship with him, how is it ever possible to avoid

[157] Having in mind the same words quoted by Dante from the Gospel (John 14:27), Catherine Pickstock beautifully reflects on peace as the essence of the gift received, exchanged and offered during the celebration of liturgy (See *After Writing*, pp. 233-38).

the necessary differences that the *personal* aspect of such a knowledge will engender? This is the difficult problem that Dante addresses in relation to theology and philosophy in the Heaven of the Sun, and he does so by means of his poetic representation, in the same way in which we have seen him discussing faith and the issue of scriptural interpretation in *Paradiso* XXIV. The very fact that Dante is able to show a possible answer to these most difficult questions by means of poetry is in itself very significant: it stands already as an indirect, positive answer to the question regarding whether or not it is acceptable to employ the methods and 'languages' of the arts when discussing matters related to truth and Revelation, and therefore when reading and interpreting Scriptures. I will dedicate the whole of chapter 3 to the issue of the relationship between Scripture and specifically poetic modes of knowledge, interpretation and representation; here it is important to stress the high importance that Dante acknowledges to the role played by human reason and experience when the person is engaged in the knowledge of truth, even when this is the truth bestowed by Revelation.

In the previous chapter I showed how, for Dante, faith is 'verace', true, when it is an *action*, even if in the basic form of a *speech act*: I will argue in this chapter that the same category applies when theoretical speculation – and therefore human reason with its limitations and necessary diversities – is involved in the practice of interpreting either Scripture or the created world. My aim is that of building a parallel between Dante's *speech act* of faith, staged in *Paradiso* XXIV, and the performances of theologians and philosophers as they are depicted in these canti. This is in order to see more clearly that they are represented by Dante according to the same, liturgical principles – albeit taking different forms and addressing different problems – and that, therefore, it is from a liturgical perspective – that of the 'pan de li angeli' – that we can glimpse the source of unification Dante is able to acknowledge as possible and existent between God and creation, between the practice and performances of theology and philosophy.

2.2 Entering the Trinity: action and performance *from within* the mystery

The Heaven of the Sun is characterised by repeated references to the Trinitarian God: in fact, Dante builds the entire episode in such a way that it seems to happen *within* the Trinity. The opening of canto X, describing the vision of the whole of creation as being part of the loving embrace between the Father and the Son, whose mutual love is a third person, the Holy Spirit, poetically stages this entry:

> Guardando nel suo Figlio con l'Amore
> che l'uno e l'altro etternalmente spira,
> lo primo e ineffabile Valore
> quanto per mente e per loco si gira

con tant'ordine fé, ch'esser non puote
sanza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira.
Leva dunque, lettore, a l'alte rote
meco la vista, dritto a quella parte
dove l'un moto e l'altro si percuote;
e lì comincia a vagheggiar ne l'arte
di quel maestro che dentro a sé l'ama,
tanto che mai da lei l'occhio non parte. […]
Or ti riman, lettor, sovra 'l tuo banco,
dietro pensando a ciò che si preliba,
s'esser vuoi lieto assai prima che stanco.
Messo t'ho innanzi: omai per te ti ciba;
ché a sé torce tutta la mia cura
quella materia ond'io son fatto scriba.

(*Par*. X, 1-12 and 22-27)

The image here described can be seen as a 'variation on the theme' of the image I mentioned before, in which Dante, at the end of his journey, is able to see the scattered book of creation as finally harmonised, in love, within God. However, specific to this image opening canto X is that, thanks to it, Dante is able to poetically thematise the mystery of the paradoxical unity between God and his creation, as well as laying the theoretical foundation for a possible reconciliation between the two – precisely the problem at the core of the debate regarding the relationship between theology and philosophy, between *divina scienza* and human reason. The fact that the heaven which hosts the souls of theologians and philosophers is emphatically characterised by an imagery recalling and depicting the mystery of the Trinity, and which places creation within this mystery – in a somewhat ambiguous way, but nonetheless within the trinitarian God –, is of course quite significant, and suggests that, from within such an environment, we could say from within the boundaries of this image, speculation is not carried out in vain. In these first lines, Dante is in fact able to state something extremely bold and orthodox at the same time: if and when one acknowledges that God the Father creates the world as an act of love, an act continuous with and indissoluble from the mutual exchange of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, then it logically follows that those who contemplate the wonderful order of creation cannot but 'taste God': 'esser non puote / sanza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira' (ll. 5-6). The idea of being able to delightfully 'taste God' is also reiterated a few lines later, when Dante suggests that the very reading of his poem should function as a contemplative activity: 'Messo t'ho innanzi: ormai per te ti ciba' (l. 25), clearly recalling the idea of eating a fulfilling food, another crumb of the 'pan de li angeli'. Also, Dante's invitation to the reader to look into this mystery, in which the truth of God's love for the world discloses itself through the image of the embrace, is at the same time, paradoxically, the invitation to acknowledge God's perpetual gazing at the world, and therefore an encouragement to let oneself be looked at by God: 'comincia a vagheggiar ne l'arte / di

quel maestro che dentro a sé l'ama, / tanto che mai da lei l'occhio non parte' (ll. 10-12). Not only do these lines affirm that to know and love creation is not, in itself and by necessity, something *outside* the action of knowing and loving God himself, they also talk about the ambiguous relationship – in terms of agency and definition of the subject of the action – between God and creation in a way that clearly displays liturgical undertones.[158] The human, free action of turning towards God is depicted as the space of the possible encounter between the human and the divine. Hence, if on the one hand this image of the presence of creation within the mystery of the Trinity can help us build a link with that 'primitive' view of theology mentioned before, sustained by Augustine and Tertullian and concerned also with an interest in creation, also opening the way for poetry and mythology to have a say in theological and philosophical discussions, on the other hand the performative aspect of entering into this mystery in order to become aware of the ongoing exchange of gazes – as the invitation to the reader emphasises – opens the way for a link with liturgy and its understanding and experience of reality.

First of all, to enter into a place, an environment marked by the name and presence of the Trinitarian God, and to invite others to follow is, meaningfully, what happens to the faithful who celebrate Mass, and, in a different form and to a different extent, to those engaging in the prayer of the Divine Office. In the *Rationale*, Durand gives some very interesting explanations of the gestures performed and prayers recited in these particular 'threshold moments':

> Verum, in diebus profestis bis introitus cantatur in laudem divine et humane nature que in persona Filii sunt unite. In quibusdam vero ecclesiis, in precipuis festivitatibus triplicatur in laudem et honorem Trinitatis, quasi ei tripudiemus in cuius memoriam missa cantamus, et dicitur semel cum 'Gloria Patri', ad laudem incarnationis.[159]

[On ordinary days, the Introits is sung twice in praise of both the Divine and human nature that were united in the person of God the Son. Still, in some churches, on principal feast days, the Introit is sung three times in praise and honor of the Trinity, as if we are, so to speak, performing a religious dance for the One in whose memory we sing the Mass; and it is said with the "Glory to the Father" in praise of the Incarnation]

[158] 'The manner in which the worshipper's journey [towards praise and union with God] is undertaken, and the details of God's reciprocal movement toward him are not physically described, and remain only implicit within the prayers and petitions of the Rite' (Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 203): in the liturgical setting, the action performed by the person is always understood as, simultaneously, belonging to the person and to God's own agency.
[159] *Rationale* IV, v, 3.

> Verum, quia non sufficit Deum laudare, nisi etiam ad laudandum alios invitemus, […] ideo sequitur Invitatorium et invitatorius Psalmus: Venite exultemus, ubi multiplex causa redditur, quare Deo exultare et jubilare debemus […]. Adhuc, quia non sufficit Deum ore laudare, nisi et mente laudetur, ideo post Invitatorium subjicitur hymnus Laus Dei.[160]

[But since it does not suffice to praise God unless we invite others to His praise […] therefore, the invitatory follows, and the invitatory Psalm: *Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord* (Ps 94), where many reasons are given why we must exult and sing joyfully to God […]. Yet, since it does not suffice to praise God with the mouth unless He is praised with the spirit, that is why a hymn is added after the invitatory; that is, a praise of God.]

Once more, we can have recourse to liturgical practices as a useful pattern to read and interpret Dante's poetic choices. The two quotations reported above are respectively about the Introitus and the Invitatory: the former is recited during the procession performed at the beginning of Mass, and the latter at the beginning of Vigils – the first of the Hours of the Divine Office. They both invite the faithful to 'enter' a space characterised by the acknowledged presence of God, and, as a consequence of this, encourage the faithful to respond to the acknowledgement of God's presence by uttering joyful words of praise. The emphasis placed by Durand on the need for such praise to be uttered not only with the lips, but wholeheartedly and also with one's mind is also important: this reminds us of St Peter's request to Dante to 'make himself manifest' in order to properly glorify the faith. As I discussed in the Introduction to my thesis, the space into which the faithful are invited, in God's presence, is more a narrative place than a geographical one, a narrative which proceeds from God the Trinity ('*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti*') and has the pivotal events of the life of Christ as its main coordinates. In this 'spiritual place', ambiguous and not spatially definable, the faithful both journey towards God and implore God that they might be already reached by him at that point of the journey/ritual, in order for them to be able to proceed further.[161] Hence, looking at the way in which Dante stages his entry into the Heaven of the Sun, and looking at the similarities it has with the entry into the liturgical environment, we have enough elements to argue that such is also the environment entered in canto X, and that the poet found it the appropriate place for him to poetically unfold ideas and views about theological and philosophical matters. But there is more: we can in fact recognise liturgical nuances also in the very description of the action by means of which the trinitarian God creates the world. If, in Dante's lines, it might seem clear that the agency of the creative act belongs primarily to the Father – the grammatical subject of the first five lines is in fact 'lo primo e

[160] *Rationale* V, iii, 10 and 13.
[161] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 180-83.

ineffabile Valore', generally understood as the first trinitarian hypostasis – it is actually not so clear who is the subject of the love in, with and through which the act is performed, which is in fact a subject himself – the Holy Spirit –, and which embraces the creation appearing as contained in God. Also, it is not entirely clear if the 'lui' of line 6, in the phrase 'gustar di lui', is referred to God the Trinity or to God the Father only. As Catherine Pickstock has extensively discussed, this textual ambiguity – that is also an ambiguity in identification – is precisely that which is found in the performative, liturgical text of the Creed, which professes and performs the belief in God as one-and-three.[162] The stress on the mutual love of the Father and the Son, which is another hypostasis of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is fundamental in order to understand the development of these canti, and therefore Dante's depiction of theological and philosophical activities. The intra-trinitarian relationship, represented at the very beginning of this set of canti, can be considered the archetype of any liturgical action and relationship, especially when liturgical actions and relationships are understood as the pouring outward of God in the performative act which creates the world,[163] continuous with the 'return' of creation towards him – as the exchange of gazes depicts.

I have said, in the opening of this chapter, that what is unusual about Dante's treatment of theology and philosophy in the Heaven of the Sun is that he does not engage in abstract discourses trying to find an abstract rationale that would keep together and reconcile all the possible ideas and approaches to these matters. To look for a solely rational, abstract answer would in fact be tantamount to falling from the perspective of the 'pan de li angeli'. In this heaven he will *encounter* theologians and philosophers, and, instead of discussing theological or philosophical issues with them, he will see them engaging in rather liturgical performances and will hear from two of the main theologians/philosophers of his time – St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) and St Bonaventure (1221-74) – the stories of the lives of St Francis and St Dominic. I shall show that the telling of the stories of these two saints' lives, embedded with liturgical elements and imagery, is profoundly connected to the way in which the souls of theologians and philosophers are presented in this sphere of heaven, to the point that, with their clear connection to the experience of the 'pan de li angeli', the stories of the lives of Francis and Dominic prove to be, taken together, the hermeneutical key in order to better understand Dante's approach to the realms of theological and philosophical knowledge. As soon as Dante is able to distinguish the lights representing the blessed souls inhabiting this sphere of Paradise, he highlights the profound connection between them and the Trinity: 'Tal era quivi la quarta *famiglia* / de l'alto Padre, che sempre la sazia, / mostrando come spira e come figlia' (*Par*. X, 49-51; emphasis mine). By referring to them as the 'fourth family' met in *Paradiso*, Dante already introduces the

[162] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 205-8. See also Durand's exegesis of the Creed prayed during Mass: *Rationale* IV, xxv.
[163] God's performative act of creation, of course, needs to be considered in its absolute primacy inasmuch as it is an act which creates *ex nihilo*. (See John 1:1-3).

theme of the particular unity experienced by these blessed souls, and by marrying this family into the trinitarian family he is, at once, reiterating the idea introduced with the very first image presented at the opening of the canto, that of creation contained in and loved by God, as well as introducing the idea that the theologians and philosophers inhabiting the Heaven of the Sun have a very particular relationship with the mystery of the Trinity, a relationship which I will explore and characterise below – as far as it is possible to do so.

At this point, when this new sphere of heaven has been reached, Beatrice asks Dante to give thanks to God for granting him the grace to proceed further in his journey through *Paradiso*. I shall come back to their interplay below in section 2.6, and particularly to Dante's response to her suggestion, but for now I should like to point to the fact that, at this point too, we can acknowledge the presence of a liturgical resonance: during the celebration of Mass too, in fact, after reaching the altar and praying for further purifications (through the reciting or singing of the *Kyrie eleison*),[164] the officiants and the faithful would sing together the *Gloria in excelsis*, which is both an act of praise and thanksgiving.[165] In the same way in which, in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, it was good for Dante – and needed for the continuation of his journey – to praise the faith, here, at the threshold of the Heaven of the Sun, it is good for him – and needed – to acknowledge and praise God's action, which granted the realisation of this other step of the journey.

After this moment of easing into the newly approached sphere, one of the souls dwelling in it comes closer to the poet in order to speak to him and introduce both himself and his fellows. That soul is the soul of St Thomas Aquinas, who performs a very simple and yet eloquent operation – which will be mirrored by St Bonaventure later on: in naming the first group of the souls inhabiting the Heaven of the Sun with him, St Thomas also defines most of them by the main work or intellectual activity carried out by each of them on earth. This decision to identify these souls through their main works seems already to suggest, besides Dante's acknowledgment of their different approaches to intellectual activity, a mingling of life and intellectual activity, and allows us to believe that Dante is stressing the individual, specific role that each of these souls played in their cultural context, or, to put it differently and more eloquently, in their community. This emphasis on the overlapping and mingling between 'life' and intellectual activity is, I argue, the element which deserves to be looked at with greater care. In fact, it is Dante himself who suggests this: after having identified them, he first portrays these souls of theologians and philosophers as engaging in a liturgical performance, and then he chooses to have Aquinas tell the story of the life of St Francis and St Bonaventure that of St Dominic. Furthermore, it is only towards the end of his stay in this sphere of *Paradiso* that the poet

[164] *Rationale* IV, xii.
[165] *Rationale* IV, xiii.

represents St Thomas as delivering a more 'scholastic' speech, a speech which is still carefully embedded in a liturgical situation, as I will show below. My point is that, through these specific poetic choices, Dante is at once acknowledging and representing a very original perspective, in which theology and philosophy are first and foremost seen as 'lived out' activities: and it is precisely from this perspective that the poet is able to see a source of reconciliation for all the different and contrasting positions taken by different theologians and philosophers. Obviously, when I refer to theology and philosophy as 'lived out' activities I do not simply refer to the idea of theology and philosophy as pragmatic sciences, whose goal – still theoretically speaking – would be that of 'turning into better persons' those engaging in them: this would exclude the possibility for a more speculative theology or philosophy to fit into this view. I am referring once more to that specific *way* to engage with knowledge that is able to keep together intellectual notions and lived experience, the way of the 'pan de li angeli', which, paradoxically, is at once one and multiple – one bread, with many different flavours. In order to better understand how Dante is able to frame this theme of unity and difference in the context of theology, philosophy, and of their enquiries in regards to the trinitarian God and the created world, I will look at the main elements which come to the fore in the narratives of the lives of St Francis and St Dominic, and I will show in which way these two stories, taken together, become the hermeneutical key which will disclose further the message contained in Dante's representation of the Heaven of the Sun.

2.3 '*com'elli ad una militaro, / così la gloria loro insieme luca*': marriages and embodied knowledge of God

One of the things that the scholarship has often stressed is the narrative chiasmus built by Dante throughout the canti dedicated to the Heaven of the Sun. However banal this might seem, it is perhaps worth pointing to the fact that the graphic shape of a chiasmus is indeed a cross, probably the most important Christian symbol: as part of the very identity of Christ himself, it is understood as archetypical image of love, as well as of paradox, and also, very importantly for my reading of these canti, 'immagine della Santissima Trinità'.[166] In delineating the main characteristics of this cross-shaped narration, I hope to show in which sense it can be used as the hermeneutical key that helps us unfold even more the meanings of the episode of the Heaven of the Sun. In the same way in which the cross of Christ is the visible, embodied image of the love existing both within and without God the Trinity, so too the cross Dante builds with the narratives of St Francis' and St Dominic's stories

[166] See Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, pp. 71-89, p. 89.

can be understood as the human counterpart of the divine image depicted at the beginning of canto X, by means of which the lives of the theologians and philosophers of this heaven are interpreted too.

After introducing the souls of his circle, the Dominican St Thomas tells the story of St Francis; then the story of St Dominic is told by the Franciscan Bonaventure, who, after his narration, introduces the souls of his circle too. Even though both Aquinas and Bonaventure will address harsh words of rebuke towards their own religious order, their presence and their 'criss-crossed' stories have been generally read as an expression of both Dante's admiration for the two mendicant orders and his political desire for reconciliation, in secular society as well as in the religious realm, and rightly so. A different aspect of this cross-shaped narration which I should like to emphasise here is its connection to lived-out experiences of life, and therefore its function of showing a radical unity possible – paradoxically – in radical difference. The imagery that will help us see the link between the stories of the lives of Francis and Dominic, and between these stories and the souls of the Heaven of the Sun is the imagery by means of which the lives of the two saints are mostly described: that taken from the sacrament of matrimony.[167] Dante had already introduced the imagery of spousal love, between a man and a woman as well as between God and humanity, at the end of canto X, in describing the performance of the wise – a passage which I shall analyse in greater depth below –, and then developed it through canti XI and XII, describing the marriage of St Francis with Lady Poverty and of St Dominic with Faith. Clearly, the stories of the lives of the two saints are different, and Dante seems to point, on purpose, to the ways in which they mirror each other, highlighting even more the differences and specificities of those lives: 'l'un fu tutto serafico in ardore; / l'altro per sapienza in terra fue / di cherubica luce uno splendore' (*Par*. XI, 37-9); Francis was born in the East, Dominic in the West, and so on.[168] The element that, while safeguarding the difference, equates them is, as mentioned above, that of matrimony. In his reading of canto XI, Erich Auerbach pointed out the fact that, in the description of the life of Francis as well as in that of Dominic, the mission of the two saints becomes the prominent element: 'in ambedue le vite la persona è subordinata all'ufficio, o meglio alla missione, a cui erano chiamati'.[169] The unity between the two should be therefore found, as Aquinas suggests too when he begins his narration, in the harmony of their missions, both aimed at guiding the bride – the Church – back towards 'lo suo diletto' (*Par*. XI, 31) – Christ. However, the fact that Dante chooses to compare those missions to the sacrament of marriage, I suggest, says more about the nature of such missions, and also helps us understand more broadly in which sense they are

[167] See also Erich Auerbach, 'Il canto XI del Paradiso', in *Letture dantesche*, ed. by Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1962), pp. 1555-73.
[168] Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, pp.194-217.
[169] Auerbach, 'Il canto XI del Paradiso', p. 1568.

equal as well as unfold the connection with the experience and representation of the souls of this heaven.

The dispute about the nature, definition and number of the sacraments had been very heated during the twelfth century – with a particular focus on the Eucharist and the meaning of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ concealed under the appearances of bread and wine –,[170] but the idea of marriage as a sacrament, even without a developed and coherent theology regarding the topic,[171] had always been present among communities in Christian tradition.[172] Moreover, the first written documents attesting the presence of a proper celebration of the marriage during Mass, with a blessing of the couple, dates back to the early sixth century,[173] and in a form of this same ritual found in the *Sacramentarium Gregorianum*, from the eighth century, marriage is expressly referred to as sacrament, and the indissolubility of the conjugal relationship is maintained as concurrent with the expression of God's will. Also, and very much in tune with the themes already discussed above, regarding the acknowledgement of God's action within creation itself as a sort of 'first revelation', the spousal union of man and woman – a unity coming from a radical difference – and its holiness is traced back to God's act of creation at the very beginning of time, and it is said to have survived the corruption of original sin as well as the great flood:

> Deus qui potestate virtutis tuae de nihilo cuncta fecisti, qui dispositis universitatis exordiis homini ad imaginem dei facto ideo *inseparabile mulieris adiutorium condidisti*, ut femineo corpori e virili dares carne principium, docens quod *ex uno placuisset institui numquam licere disiungi*: deus qui tam excellenti *mysterio coniugalem copulam consecrasti ut Christi et ecclesiae sacramentum presignares in foedere nuptiarum*: deus per quem mulier iungitur viro, et societas principaliter ordinata ea benedictione donatur, *quae sola nec per originalis peccati poenam nec per diluvii est ablata sententiam*…[174]

[O God, who have made all things out of nothing by the strength of your power, who, having ordered all things from the beginning and having made man in your image, created woman as his inseparable helper, you brought

[170] Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, pp. 184-214.
[171] Joseph Ratzinger, *Per una teologia del matrimonio* (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2018); Jacqueline Murray, *Love, Marriage, and Family in the Middle Ages: a Reader* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001).
[172] Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, pp. 268-81; see also Ephesians 5:21-33, where, in the original Greek, Paul uses the word μυστήριον (mysterion), '*sacramentum*.'
[173] Mark Searle and Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 40-44. On the history and development of the liturgical celebration of marriages, see also Kenneth Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing. A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).
[174] *Das Sacramentarium Gregorianum nach dem Aachener Urexemplar*, ed. by Hans Lietzmann (Münster: Aschendorff, 1921), pp. 110-12 (emphasis mine).

forth the female body from the male flesh, thus teaching us that what pleased (you, God) to be established from that unity, must never be separated: O God, who consecrated the conjugal bond as so excellent a mystery, so that the sacrament of Christ and the Church might be prefigured in the nuptial covenant: O God, through whom the woman is united to the man, and (through whom) an ordered society is principally given (to us) in that blessing, which alone was not effaced either by the punishment of original sin or by the judgement of the flood… (my translation from the Latin)]

Thus, the already sacramental nature of matrimony, together with the connections that, as I will show, Dante draws between this reality and that of liturgical activity, authorizes us once more to have recourse to a liturgical hermeneutics for the reading of these stories. St Francis and St Dominic, in fact, not only share *the aim* of 're-marrying' the Church back to Christ: more interestingly, they share *the very experience* of 'being married'. The details Dante gives about the stories of these two marriages have some very specific liturgical undertones: the actions performed by St Francis in marrying Lady Poverty and by St Dominic in marrying Faith are in fact characterised by the same liturgical principles which I outlined as the fundamental methodological pattern of this research. Both Francis' and Dominic's choices to marry Lady Poverty and Faith are clearly characterised as being *personal* and *relational* acts, involving therefore the whole of their persons in their engagement in a relationship of mutual love:

ché per tal donna, giovinetto, in guerra
del padre corse, a cui, come a la morte,
la porta del piacer nessun diserra;
e dinanzi a la sua spirital corte
et coram patre le si fece unito;
poscia di dì in dì l'amò più forte.

(*Par*. XI, 58-63)

And:

dentro vi nacque l'amoroso drudo
de la fede cristiana, il santo atleta
benigno a' suoi e a' nemici crudo; […]
Poi che le sponsalizie fuor compiute
al sacro fonte intra lui e la Fede,
u' si dotar di mutüa salute,

(*Par*. XII, 55-77 and 61-63)

In the light of what I discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, I find it particularly eloquent that Dante stresses how Francis 'opened the door of pleasure' to Lady Poverty, therefore building once more a connection with the idea of the 'pan de li angeli', the experience of a portion of reality which

is able to fulfil one's own desire in its specificity. The stress on the mutual 'salute' which Dominic and Faith are able to provide to one another on the day of their marriage celebration is also interesting, mirroring the mutual exchange of breath and love in the trinitarian relationship. Another aspect introduced in particular by the lines from canto XI is that of the *communal* valence of the matrimonial act: 'dinanzi a la sua spirital corte / et *coram patre* le si fece unito'. In the same way in which the mutual, loving relationship between the Father and the Son becomes objective in the presence of the Holy Spirit – their mutual love is in fact the third person of the godhead –, so too Francis' marriage with Lady Poverty is 'celebrated' before the whole community, which can therefore acknowledge the coming into existence of the spousal bond.[175] The implications of St Francis' and St Dominic's marriages for the community, and therefore the stress on the *performative* power of those actions, which effect a change upon reality, can be seen emphasised in these other lines:

> La provedenza, […]
> 　　però che andasse ver' lo suo diletto
> la sposa di colui ch'ad alte grida
> disposò lei col sangue benedetto
> 　　in sé sicura e anche a lui più fida,
> due principi ordinò in suo favore…
>
> (*Par*. XI, 28 and 31-35)

> 　La lor concordia e i lor lieti sembianti,
> amore e maraviglia e dolce sguardo
> facieno esser cagion di pensier santi…
>
> (*Par*. XI, 76-78)

> 　　quando lo 'mperador che sempre regna […]
> 　　come è detto, a sua sposa soccorse
> con due campioni, al cui fare, al cui dire
> lo popol disvïato si raccorse…
>
> (*Par*. XII, 40 and 43-45)

Thus, the 'love stories' of St Francis and St Dominic, by means of the imagery of marriage, are characterised as liturgical acts: they are *personal*, *relational*, *performative* and with a clear *communal dimension*. As in the case of sacramental matrimony, the person exclusively marries another unique person, in an indissoluble bond which is also fully acknowledged by the community around the two

[175] 'La bi-unità di Io e Tu non è mai chiusura, ma si apre come *bellezza* alla contemplazione di un terzo, che nel suo sguardo conferma la bellezza ontologica della diade entrando con essa in un rapporto nuovo: Io, Tu, Lui. La diade diviene allora triade, immagine e somiglianza dell'omousia trinitaria. Il rapporto duale si compie nella relazione ternaria poiché nel Terzo è reso possibile l'autentico riconoscimento del soggetto'. (Domenico Burzo, '"Finis amoris, ut duo unum fiant": la sfida dell'amicizia', *Logoi.ph – Journal of Philosophy*, 6.16 (2020), 180-95, p. 193).

spouses, and which is paradoxically meant to seal the freedom of each of the two persons. It is paradoxical because it expresses the realisation of a freedom yet within boundaries, and therefore a freedom which unavoidably creates and highlights difference and division. Ideally, to marry a person – as happens with the embracing of any vocation, and so even when marrying Lady Poverty or Faith – means to renounce everyone else, in a preferential choice which is meant to empower the capacity, for the individual, to choose the person whom he or she loves the most. In other words, it could be read as the acknowledgement, through a free choice, of one's own 'pan de li angeli'. This choice, of course, is a choice that involves the whole of the person, intellect and affection, mind and body, consecrating him or her to one specific mission – or relationship.[176] In this sense, Auerbach's idea according to which the person is subordinated to his or her mission can be re-elaborated, and we can say that, instead of losing value in front of a task – however 'holy' this task might be –, it is precisely the person that, in the undertaking of such a mission, is most fully empowered, realised or made manifest.[177] This is because the accomplishment of his or her very own mission, which is always a call to love,[178] always has the features, and ultimately the value of a personal relationship unfolded in freedom. And what is also specific about this call to love, within the boundaries of human experience, is that it is an invitation to share in and become the visible image of the Trinitarian relationship,[179] as the shape of the cross that these two stories together create within the poem has already suggested. The marriages of St Francis and St Dominic, therefore, embody and make visible the act of entering into the mystery of trinitarian love in order to experience it and know it, as liturgy invites the faithful to do and precisely as Dante had already suggested at the very beginning of canto X. The liturgical element implied in the depiction of an exclusive, preferential relationship – of which spousal love can be seen as the paradigm – is underscored even more if we think that some liturgical

[176] For a more thorough discussion on the sacrament of marriage see Ratzinger, *Per una teologia del matrimonio*. I am aware of the discrepancy between my concise outline of some of the principles of a sacramental matrimony and the historical, social reality of Dante's time, in which, more often than not, marriage was used as a political or even economical means to tie together families or other political bodies, taking little to no account of the real free choice of the spouses involved. However, the focus of this whole thesis is on the liturgical practices of the time and how Dante might have benefitted from their shaping of reality; I therefore believe that the interest on the sacramental aspect of matrimony, rather than the implications possibly brought by Canon Law or social history, is in tune with the scope of this research, and to overlook the historical implications of the institution of marriage does not interfere with the interpretation of the poem I am providing here. Also, on the sacramentality of marriage, and its importance for the establishment of bonds of charity in the wider society in the medieval period, see Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp.140-42.

[177] Once more a link with the dialogue between St Peter and Dante and the saint's request for the pilgrim to 'make himself manifest' through his *speech act of faith*.

[178] See Matthew 22:37-40: 'Diliges Dominum Deum tuum in toto corde tuo et in tota anima tua et in tota mente tua: hoc est magnum et primum mandatum. Secundum autem simile est huic: Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum. In his duobus mandatis universa Lex pendet et Prophetae' [Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your souls, and all your mind: this is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is similar to this: love your neighbour as yourself. The whole Law and the Prophets depend upon these two commandments].

[179] The idea of a symbolic connection between the relationships between spouses, and between parents and their children, and the trinitarian relationships was somehow present in the collective imagination of the time: see, on this topic, Isabel Davis, '"The Trinite is our everlasting lover": Marriage and Trinitarian Love in the Later Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 4.86 (2011), 914-36.

rituals existed which were meant to seal a special, brotherly relationship,[180] and also if we recall the fact that spiritual friendship was, on some occasions, pointed to as a privileged way to know and love God, being a spiritual friendship characterised by the same principles according to which liturgy works.[181] Therefore, what comes to the fore through the representation of the personal and unique vocation of each of the two saints in question as marriages, which pinpoints the declination and realisation of their freedom, is that they are 'one' in the *experience of love*: in loving respectively Lady Poverty and Faith, Francis and Dominic found their own specific and unique way to experience and mirror the loving relationship between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, in other words, they found their own *personal* way to know and love God the Trinity, and, in this way, to make his mystery known and visible – embodied – on earth, for the good of the wider community. Even though Lady Poverty and Faith are not actual human beings, the fully human experience lived in the relationship with these mystical realities by both saints still allows for the parallel with the image at the opening of canto X to be made: the love towards a specific aspect of creation – either visible or invisible –,[182] inasmuch as it is acknowledged as something *within* God, inevitably leads to love and knowledge of God the Trinity, 'esser non puote /sanza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira' (ll. 5-6).

Barolini argued that 'by making Thomas and Bonaventure into narrators, Dante highlights narrative itself as an issue, and also throws into silhouette his own narrative problems as artificer of this text',[183] referring to the problems faced by Dante in trying to show how 'two are one', how it is possible that to praise St Francis is tantamount to paying homage to St Dominic and vice versa, and, even more, how it is possible to show the two saints' sameness by means of two necessarily different narratives. If we take her suggestion and put it in the perspective of a liturgical hermeneutics, and also in the light of the elements discussed in the previous chapter, we can see how actually Dante might have taken the idea of using narrative, with its stress on differentiation, temporality and specificity, from God himself who first created the world by means of a discourse,[184] and then revealed himself by means of a story, that of Jesus Christ, a story that cannot be detached from the image of the cross. This consideration of narrative is particularly evident during the celebration of Mass: every day, a different story from Scripture is proclaimed, but the consummation of each,

[180] Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003). This book also outlines the development of the social dimension of friendship throughout history.
[181] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, ed. by Marsha L. Dutton, trad. by Lawrence C. Braceland, SJ (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010). On friendship as privileged way to experience God see also: Pavel Florenskij, 'L'amicizia', in *La colonna e il fondamento della verità* (Milan: Rusconi Editore, 1974), pp. 457-528; Luigi Giussani, *Tu o dell'amicizia* (Milan: BUR, 1997); Burzo, '"Finis amoris […]"'.
[182] This idea is very much present in the Creed, where God is acknowledged as creator of all things visible and invisible.
[183] Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, p. 195.
[184] See again the already mentioned Genesis 1, where God is described as creating the world through the utterance of words; but also Dante's own characterisation of God's act of creation as a speech act: 'Né prima quasi torpente si giacque; / ché né prima né poscia procedette / *lo discorrer di Dio* sovra quest'acque' (*Par*. XXIX, 19-21; emphasis mine).

different and unique story is always found in the celebration of the Eucharist. At the same time, the repetition of the same story, through the ritual, is not just and always the same identical 'thing': the very fact that such a story is re-enacted in time, permeating a specific and different portion of space and time, makes it entirely new, and alive. The same 'pan de li angeli' takes on different flavours according to the specificity of the person's own desire. Therefore, in the same way in which narrative – or poetry – was for Dante a way to make himself manifest – as shown through the dialogue with St Peter –, he might also have chosen the means of narrative for both St Thomas and St Bonaventure to indirectly talk about their own experiences as theologians and philosophers, unfolding, in this way, the reality behind their theological ideas and approaches. It is quite well-acknowledged that Aquinas and Bonaventure are usually appointed to designate two opposite and complementary ways to understand and approach theology. To delineate all the aspects of their theologies, with analogies and differences, is something I do not have the space to do in this thesis, and perhaps it would also lead the reader astray from the main topic of this research; I will therefore just mention the few main aspects in which their differences are crystallized,[185] and which can be seen as forming together another chiasmus, another 'cross' like the one formed by the lives of St Francis and St Dominic. If for St Thomas theology was predominantly a speculative matter, for Bonaventure, instead, it was more a pragmatic one: from this perspective, it is usually said that, in the hierarchy of values, for the Dominican theologian the category of '*verum*' was the highest, whereas for the Franciscan theologian the highest category was that of '*bonum*'.[186] It is also said that Thomas, the *Doctor Angelicus*, was more a philosopher, and that Bonaventure, the *Doctor Seraphicus*, was rather a theologian: the reality is actually that St Bonaventure was a philosopher as much as St Thomas was a theologian, and I believe that Dante was trying to depict this nuanced and complex reality as well. Their presence in the Heaven of the Sun, and their narrations of St Francis' and St Dominic's stories are an integral part of the narrative chiasmus, and therefore of that cross which is meant to make embodied and visible in the human world and history the mystery of God the Trinity. In the poet's representation, in fact, they are able to recount in a very powerful and evocative way the story of a saint who is not even the founder of their own religious order, which means that it was not someone they were particularly close to, in terms of spirituality and approach to life. To depict them in an unpredictable way –

[185] *Saint Bonaventure's De Reductione Artium as Theologiam. A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation*, ed. by Sr. Emma T. Healy (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1955); Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Angela G. Meekins, 'The study of Dante, Bonaventure, and mysticism: Notes on some problems of method', *The Italianist*, 17 (1997), 83-99; Aidan Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas: an introduction to his life, work and influence* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002); Philip H. Wicksteed, *Dante and Aquinas* (London-New York: Dent, 1913); Kenelm Foster, 'St Thomas and Dante', in id. *The Two Dantes* (London: Dent, 1977), pp. 56-65; Simon A. Gilson, 'Dante and Christian Aristotelianism', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by C. Honess and M. Treherne, I, pp. 65-109.

[186] Benedetto XVI, *Udienza generale del mercoledì 17 marzo 2010*, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100317.html [accessed 12 December, 2021].

recounting stories rather than engaging in intellectual discourses, and stories that do not directly relate do their own religious order – is a choice which serves the purpose of making things more blurred, freeing the two saints from the labels that had been put onto them, and it is also a way to reflect on their intellectual activities from a different point of view. As I have shown, it is precisely by putting the emphasis on the lived-out experience of radical freedom and difference that – paradoxically – Dante is able to bring about unity, in the same way in which this happens during a liturgical performance. In the liturgical environment, in fact, every participant is appointed to play a specific, single role and nothing else,[187] and precisely by means of that specific role each person can take part and share in the same ritual: radical unity – or, more precisely, *communion* – is experienced by the participants because they all take part in the experience of the same God, even though that experience takes on different forms, according to the task performed by each participant.

At this point, we can turn back towards the way in which the theologians and philosophers of the Heaven of the Sun are identified and then to the way in which they are represented as engaging in a liturgical performance, using the embodied, cross-shaped image of the knowledge of God provided by the marriages of St Francis and St Dominic as our hermeneutical key.

2.4 The liturgical performances of theologians and philosophers

The way in which both St Thomas and St Bonaventure identify the fellow souls inhabiting the Heaven of the Sun (respectively in canti X and XII), especially when read in the light of the two 'love stories' of St Francis and St Dominic, proves to be particularly significant. Most of these men are in fact identified by their names and/or by the main outcome of their intellectual endeavour. Moreover, the way in which their intellectual activities are depicted presents, in a more concise form, the same characteristics we have seen extensively unfolded through the stories of Francis and Dominic. Here are five examples:

> quel Pietro fu che con la poverella
> offerse a Santa Chiesa suo tesoro
>
> (*Par*. X, 107-108)

> l'anima santa che 'l mondo fallace
> fa manifesto a chi di lei ben ode
>
> (*Par*. X, 125-126)

[187] The whole book II of Durand's *Rationale*, for instance, is devoted to the description of the main roles within the liturgical environment with their precise tasks and significance. But, of course, book IV is also interesting in this sense, with the description of Mass and the duties of each of those ministers during the celebration.

essa è la luce etterna di Sigieri,
che, leggendo nel Vico de li Strami,
silogizzò invidïosi veri

(*Par*. X, 136-38)

[…] Pietro Spano,
lo qual giù luce in dodici libelli

(*Par*. XII, 134-135)

[…] quel Donato
ch'a la prim' arte degnò porre mano

(*Par*. XII, 137-138)

By means of his poetic language, Dante is able to represent the intellectual activity of these souls as something embodied in the context in which they lived, and therefore as *personal*, *relational* and *performative* actions having also an important *communal* valence. In his writing the *Sententiarum libri quattuor*, for instance, Peter Lombard offered all of himself in the same way in which the poor old woman of the Gospel episode gave everything she possessed as an offering for the temple of Jerusalem;[188] whereas Boethius is described as being able to unveil the passing nature of the created world, stressing the performative power of his knowledge of reality. Peter of Spain is said to shine in the twelve books of his *Summulae logicales*, underscoring, in this way, the fact that his intellectual activity is a means by which his identity is shown, and shown *sub specie aeternitatis*, recalling one more time the idea of 'making oneself manifest'. The reading that Giuseppe Mazzotta gave of the way in which Dante chose to represent Siger of Brabant's philosophical activity is particularly interesting: the scholar emphasises the idea of philosophy as a journey, a journey that Siger was conducting following a specific 'road' – that of philosophy – literally symbolised by the 'Vico de li Strami', which, at once geographically, historically and spiritually, locates him in time and space within his social context.[189] The philosophical journey of knowledge and interaction with Revelation of Siger, not without dramatic undertones – ''n pensieri / gravi a morir li parve venir tardo' (*Par*. X, 134-35) – is that which ultimately, according to Dante's representation, granted him salvation, therefore leading him to enjoy the vision of God in heaven. In other words, Siger represents here one of the many possible ways in which it is possible to know and experience truth, still within the unresolved paradox of the existing, rational discrepancies between the findings of human reason and the claims of divine Revelation.

[188] See Luke 21:1-4
[189] Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'The Heaven of the Sun: Dante between Aquinas and Bonaventure', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 152-68.

At the end of both rounds of presentations, the souls are described as engaging in joyful movements, expressing praise and love for God. The performance at the end of canto X – on which I will focus in a moment – draws explicitly on liturgical imagery, whereas the one at the beginning of canto XIII is compared to the movement of the stars – which is still not something too foreign to liturgy and its being profoundly connected to the passing of time and to astronomical movements, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. The way in which Dante characterises the first of these two performances, especially seen in the light of what I discussed regarding the marriages of Francis and Dominic, makes more explicit and brings to consummation the ideas introduced through the presentations of the theologians and philosophers by means of their intellectual activities:

> Indi, come orologio che ne chiami
> ne l'ora che la sposa di Dio surge
> a mattinar lo sposo perché l'ami,
> che l'una parte e l'altra tira e urge,
> tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota,
> che 'l ben disposto spirto d'amor turge;
> così vid'io la gloriosa rota
> muoversi e render voce a voce in tempra
> e in dolcezza ch'esser non pò nota
> se non colà dove gioir s'insempra.
>
> (*Par*. X, 139-48)

The encompassing image to which the souls are compared is that of a clock, and more specifically of its mechanism and the sound it produces. I shall come back, in chapter 4 of this thesis, to the image of the mechanical clock used for liturgical purposes, because of its implications in considering the treatment of scientific modes of knowledge and temporality. Embedded into this image there are two other intertwined images: that of the members of a religious order praying the Divine Office and that of loving spouses. The image of conjugal love to refer to and describe the activity of the Church – carried out by religious orders specifically, but also generally by the Church as a whole as 'the bride of Christ' – was very widely used and was highly significant.[190] St Bernard of Clairvaux is probably the most authoritative voice in this respect,[191] and we have seen how confident Dante is in using this imagery in describing the vocations of St Francis and St Dominic. It should now become clearer why

[190] For the significance of the bridal imagery in these canti, and its connection with the Song of Songs, see Paola Nasti, '*Caritas* and Ecclesiology in Dante's Heaven of the Sun', in *Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, pp. 210-44.

[191] Bernardus Claravallensis Abbas, *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_1090-1153__Bernardus_Claraevallensis_Abbas__Sermones_in_Cantica_Canticorum__LT.pdf.html [accessed 9 December, 2021].

these two stories and the way in which they are described are a fundamental key in order to better understand these canti and Dante's approach to theology and philosophy.

Implied in lines 140-41, is the reference to the prayer of either Vigils or Matins. I have previously shown the extent to which this imagery was already present at the beginning of the canto, and it appears again right at the end of it suggesting a sense of repetition, besides, perhaps, mimicking the image of the embrace within which God the Trinity holds and loves his creation. Above all, this confirms the choice of reading the environment of the Heaven of the Sun as one which works according to liturgical principles. I consider it important to stress in particular the sense of repetition evoked here because it is another aspect proper to liturgy, which, I argue, Dante's poetry might be seen to share. Although the rituals performed in the liturgical environment might always appear identical, the very fact that they are *performances carried out in time* actually makes them non-identical: they do not claim to fully 'presentify' an owned truth, as if such a truth were identically reproducible and, ultimately, dead. Those liturgical actions are more like each of the steps of a journey, or the repeated, loving – Catherine Pickstock even says 'erotic' – recognition of something that is happening always and anew.[192] This aspect of 'erotic dispossession' is the one I believe Dante's poetry shares with liturgy, as well as his way of representing here theological and philosophical activities.[193] Rather than possessing the truth he communicates through his poem, Dante follows its event as a lover 'follows' the unfolding of the identity of his or her beloved (the idea of Dante following Beatrice though the spheres of *Paradiso* can in fact be understood as the poetic representation of such a dynamic), leaving behind himself the traces of the journey, through the written page.[194] In order to understand this idea even more broadly, it is helpful to note that, in his description of these first hours of the Divine Office, and most especially in the description of the prayer of Vigils, Durand constantly links the structure and the performance of this liturgical activity to the acknowledgment and praise of, and thanksgiving to the Trinity.[195] First of all, God's help is invoked at the very beginning of the prayer, so that with the help of his grace true praise may occur;[196] also, very interestingly for my argument here, Durand specifies – referring to Scripture too[197] – that the prayer is structured in that particular way in order to denote that 'non sufficit laus oris et cordis,

[192] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 25-27, 216-19 and 220-23.
[193] For two very different positions regarding the possibility for *eros* to play a role, and a positive one, in Dante's *Paradiso*, see: Lino Pertile, 'Does the Stilnovo Go to Heaven?', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey, pp. 104-14; F. Regina Psaki, 'Love for Beatrice: Transcending Contradiction in the "Paradiso"', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey, pp. 115-30.
[194] On the idea of the written poem as the visible trace of the spiritual journey of Dante, see John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), in particular chapter 13, 'Manfred's Wounds and the Poetics of the "Purgatorio"', pp. 195-208.
[195] *Rationale* V, iii.
[196] *Rationale* V, iii, 9. See also, on the ways in which this idea is present and developed in Dante's thought: Treherne, *Dante's Commedia and Liturgical imagination*, in particular chapters 1, 3, and 4.
[197] Precisely to James 2:14-26.

nisi et opus sequitur, quia fides sine operibus non prodest, imo morta est' [it does not suffice to have praise in one's mouth and heart unless works follow, because faith without works accomplishes nothing and is indeed dead].[198] By engaging in liturgical activity, the faithful are invited to recognise the presence of God and therefore, as a consequence of that loving recognition, to praise him. As discussed in the previous chapter, to recognise the presence of God and to confess his name is to perform an *act of faith*, which means that the 'verace fede' is always an action: faith without 'works', without a real action, is indeed dead. Thus, Dante represents the souls of theologians and philosophers as engaging in this liturgical performance, a performance which is charged with erotic significance, and then has Aquinas and Bonaventure describe as marriages the vocations of St Francis and St Dominic, who together and yet with difference, pursue the same goal and become the embodied image of that possible, radical unity in radical difference. It is therefore reasonable to argue that Dante is representing theological and philosophical activities as being particular declinations of that *act of faith* we have seen him performing in the previous chapter: at once *acts of knowledge* and *acts of love*, always in tune with the fundamental experience of the 'pan de li angeli', and even when the discrepancies between the constative aspects of Revelation and philosophical truths are – mysteriously and paradoxically – rationally not resolved.

To understand even more the unity experienced by these souls in the Heaven of the Sun, it might be helpful to go back to Durand's description of the first Hours of the Divine Office, where he keeps highlighting the communal aspect of this activity performed in order to praise the Trinity: 'est enim vere harmonia, ut sit credentium cor unum et anima una, et in tali unitate Deus laudatur' [for true concord is when the multitude of believers have one heart and one spirit, and God is praised in such unity],[199] 'non sufficit Deum laudare, nisi etiam ad laudandum alios invitemus' [it does not suffice to praise God unless we invite others to His praise],[200] 'ad quamlibet psalmum dicunt "Gloria Patri", […] quia quilibet tenetur ex suo dono reddere laudes Trinitati ex hac dilectione, quam habet in cognitione Trinitatis' [some also say "Glory to the Father" for each Psalm […] because each one shall be found to render praise to the Trinity from his own gifts, and from the love that he has from his knowledge of the Trinity].[201] The personal, unique performance of each person involved in the liturgical activity, of his or her personal – erotic – acknowledgement of God's loving presence, is radically one in the acknowledgement and praise of his name. Another point, already discussed in the previous chapter and that I find important to recall here, is the fact that, when he describes and explains the symbolism and meaning behind some practices common to all the Hours of the Divine

[198] *Rationale* V, iii, 13.
[199] *Rationale* V, iii, 9.
[200] *Rationale* V, iii, 10.
[201] *Rationale* V, iii, 19.

Office, Durand points to the fact that the dialogic structure of this liturgical prayer, pinpointed in particular by the presence of antiphons and responsories, is meant to, at once, embody and enhance the bonds of mutual charity binding together the faithful involved in the prayer,[202] while imitating – in the hope of eventually being admitted to join them – the choirs of the angels in Heaven.[203] To love and to desire to know a specific portion of reality, different from anyone else's interest – be it a line from the Scriptures or an element of the created world – can be and it is shown to be in these canti a way to follow one's own 'pan de li angeli', a way to love and know God the Trinity and a way to make him manifest every time in a unique, different embodied form, which constitutes, at the same time, only one note of the whole symphony.[204] That is why it is possible, in Dante's representation of this heaven, for Siger of Brabant to stand right next to St Thomas,[205] and for Joachim of Fiore to stand beside St Bonaventure.[206] It is in fact well acknowledged that the approaches taken by these scholars in regard to theology and philosophy were, intellectually speaking, quite at odds with one another: for instance, suffice it to know that on earth Joachim's ideas had been deemed heretical by Bonaventure.[207] Thus, however unresolvable the differences between these specific approaches might appear – from a solely rational perspective –, and far from enhancing or justifying heterodoxy, these different and even contrasting theological and philosophical beliefs, from the liturgical perspective of the 'pan de li angeli' according to which Dante builds his *Paradiso*, are understood in their nature of performances, and therefore as truths necessarily different from the Truth they still acknowledge and love. But, in their historical reality, they constitute all the little pieces which, taken together, make manifest the image of God the Trinity in the realm of human, speculative thought. Inasmuch as performances, each of these single *theological* or *philosophical acts* is necessarily tied to time and space, and therefore necessarily limited in respect to the fullness of the Truth they praise through their very performances. As Mazzotta put it, the *coincidentia oppositorum* of their different approaches is made possible by the inner life of the Trinity, in which one is three and three is one, and in which

[202] *Rationale* V, ii, 27.
[203] *Rationale* V, ii, 36.
[204] On the imagery for the representation and understanding of the paradox of unity and diversity provided by music, see Treherne, 'Liturgy, Time and the Music of Incarnation in the "Commedia"', in *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 49-111.
[205] See Francesco Bausi, *Dante fra scienza e sapienza. Esegesi del canto XII del 'Paradiso'* (Florence: Olschki, 2009), pp. 215-27; Zygmunt Barański, '(Un)orthodox Dante', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by C. Honess and M. Treherne, II, pp. 253-330; Luca Bianchi, 'A "Heterodox" in Paradise? Notes on the Relationship between Dante and Siger of Brabant', in *Dante and Heterodoxy: The Temptations of 13th Century Radical Thought*, ed. by Maria Luisa Ardizzone (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 78-105.
[206] Carmelo Ciccia, *Dante e Gioacchino da Fiore* (Cosenza: Pellegrini editore, 1997).
[207] It is perhaps worth underscoring the fact that by including on the scene potentially controversial figures such as Siger and Joachim, Dante is in no way trying to find a place for heterodoxy within his poem, also because we have no certainty regarding Dante's first-hand knowledge of Siger and Joachim's writings. Moreover, the way in which Dante's Bonaventure identifies Joachim is even taken – almost verbatim – from the liturgy celebrated on the day of his commemoration. On this, see Barański, '(Un)orthodox Dante', pp. 306-30.

knowledge *is* love:[208] recalling here once more the image of the 'pan de li angeli', of a single bread with many different flavours, made as such in order to *make manifest* God's love for his people, we can see, precisely in the existence of such a paradoxical difference, the manifestation of God's love for different, unique, human beings that are nonetheless inextricably part of a community. Looking back at the image of the wise souls of this Heaven engaging in liturgical activity, described as one by means of the image of the mechanical clock, it should be clear now how it is far more than just a poetic flourish. Not only do these souls experience a particular degree of unity here in Paradise (they are the 'quarta famiglia / de l'alto Padre') because on earth they all experienced God the Trinity through the pursuit of knowledge, but their unity in difference, as an expression of personal, spousal – or erotic, to recall Pickstock's argument – love, taken together as the stories of St Francis and St Dominic are, is precisely the embodied, visible version of that same image with which the Heaven of the Sun begins, a human, temporal and embodied image of the Trinity. Thus, the personal, different and unique 'love stories' of each of these souls is a crumb of the same 'pan de li angeli', and all together they work for the good of everyone else, both within and without that community: the one benefitting from the contemplation of this goodness is, in the first place, Dante, and, thanks to the very existence of his poem, the reader 'Messo t'ho innanzi: ormai per te ti ciba' (*Par*. X, 25).

Another passage of the Heaven of the Sun which I should now like to explore is taken from canto XII, where we finally see St Thomas delivering a more 'scholastic' kind of speech. I want to show how Dante's poetic choices in crafting this speech not only comply with all the themes discussed so far, but help us build a stronger connection between the intellectual experiences of the theologians and philosophers encountered in this heaven and Dante's own poetic endeavour and experience with Beatrice. This will therefore open the way to chapter 3, in which I shall discuss Dante's engagement with poetic modes of knowledge when approaching Scripture, the truth of Revelation and the truths revealed through the created world.

2.5 A scholastic discourse within the liturgical context

In canto XIII, St Thomas is shown as engaging with more doctrinal matters in order to solve a doubt he engendered in the pilgrim. In canto X, when introducing the souls of his circle, he had said that nobody ever was nor ever will be greater than Solomon in regard to wisdom, and he needs now to clarify what he truly meant by that, because his statement is at odds with the fact that the greatest degree of wisdom was thought and believed to be possessed by Adam before the Fall and, of course, by Jesus Christ. St Thomas' speech is carefully built by Dante following the model of scholastic

[208] Mazzotta, 'The Heaven of the Sun', pp. 159-60.

argumentation – with question, antithesis, answer and solution of the difficulties – as we can in fact find it in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. In this way, St Thomas is able to solve the pilgrim's doubt, clarifying that *no king* has been or will ever be as wise as Solomon, and not *any man* in general, because Solomon's specific vocation was to be a king. Once more, we see a clear reference to the specific role that a person is appointed to take on within a community. Not so long before, in the Heaven of Venus, Dante had discussed this idea with Charles Martel, and what is interesting in their dialogue is the particular emphasis placed on the personal, natural inclinations of the person: they are recognised and valued as providentially predisposed by God, mediated by the intervention of the angelic powers, and should therefore be acknowledged, respected, followed and nurtured (*Par*. VIII, 115-26 and 139-48). To emphasise the importance of the person's inclinations and therefore his or her particular role within the human community – notably, Dante refers to the whole of human society, and not just to the religious world –[209] is, at the same time, a way to highlight once more the fact that nobody can be said to own the full picture, and even power itself – embodied in those who are called to perform the duties of rulers – is thus relativised because its source is always outside of itself, and it is given from without. We see here another declination of the concept of the 'pan de li angeli', which exalts and empowers the unicity of each person, and at the same time places the person into his or her clear, specific place within the community, therefore working for both the individual and communal good, with no contradiction between the two. My aim here is to show that Dante built St Thomas' speech too according to this principle, emphasising once more the importance of specificity – also dependent upon personal dispositions – in the context of his broad reflection on human knowledge and the relationship between theology and philosophy. Not surprisingly, in the context of *Paradiso*, this speech is embedded in a seemingly liturgical setting, and it seems to flow directly from the seemingly liturgical performance in which the wise souls are again engaged:

Lì si cantò non Bacco, non Peana,
ma tre persone in divina natura,
e in una persona essa e l'umana.
Compié 'l cantare e 'l volger sua misura;
e attesersi a noi quei santi lumi,
felicitando sé di cura in cura.
Ruppe il silenzio ne' concordi numi
poscia la luce in che mirabil vita
del poverel di Dio narrata fumi,
e disse: «Quando l'una paglia è trita,

[209] On the political implications of Dante's theology, in particular on the significance of difference and individuality in the context of human communities, see Claire E. Honess, 'Dante and the Theology of Politics', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by C. Honess and M. Treherne, II, pp. 157-85.

quando la sua semenza è già riposta,
a batter l'altra dolce amor m'invita.»

(*Par*. XIII, 25-36)

I chose to refer twice to the performance here described as being only *seemingly* liturgical because there is no explicit reference or comparison to a specific – Christian – liturgical activity, and I will come back to this in the next section. However, it can be easily shown how the same elements evoked by Dante's description of the liturgical performance of these souls at the end of canto X are present here as well: they are in fact united in the praise of the Trinity and of the mystery of Incarnation, and the fundamental aspect of their communion is highlighted by the expression 'concordi numi'. The other pivotal element of a proper liturgical act, that of love, as discussed above, is also emphasised by the fact that these souls rejoice both in the care – 'cura' – used for their praise and in their 'cura' shown towards the pilgrim and his guide.

St Thomas' intervention is thus described as a disruption, and yet a disruption that is still contained within a context of harmony: 'Ruppe il silenzio ne' concordi numi'. Also, he will clarify that it is precisely love – 'dolce amor mi invita' – which moves him to solve Dante's doubt, and therefore to engage in a more doctrinal discourse. As I have shown before, even in the diversity of the actions performed, these souls are still able to experience their unity in the experience of knowing God and his love, happening precisely through the performance of those actions. The fact that St Thomas clarifies how his speech is in fact an act of love serves the purpose of reading it not as something uniquely 'intellectual'; more precisely, he says that he is *invited* by 'dolce amor' to take the floor with his scholastic explanation. The aspect of 'erotic dispossession' or 'erotic recognition' discussed in the previous sections of this chapter comes back here and is fully represented through St Thomas' personal action – personal in the broadest, liturgical sense of the term. It can be said, in fact, that his action – which will be the delivery of an intellectual, 'scholastic' discourse – belongs, at once, completely to him and completely to God:[210] he will engage in one of the activities that most expressed his personality during his life, and at the same time he states that, in engaging in that activity, he is actually invited – guided, led, called – by love.[211] This stress on the fact that he is invited to break the silence of the 'concordi numi' by love establishes difference and specificity as

[210] As Catherine Pickstock put it, this is, in a liturgical perspective, 'the sense that we are able to receive God in the middle voice, since, in Christ, God is ineffably both divine and human, active and passive'. (*After Writing*, p.157). The term 'middle voice' here recalls the grammatical category of verbs, typical of ancient Greek, in which the action described by the verb is neither entirely active nor entirely passive. In other words, by means of this grammatical reflection, Pickstock is pointing to the mysterious dynamic in which human freedom and divine will encounter one another, becoming one and yet remaining two separate entities.

[211] Another example of this dynamic, expressed in a more straightforward way, can be seen in Beatrice's word when she descends into Hell to ask for Virgil's help in order to lead Dante to salvation: 'amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare' (*Inf*. II, 72).

something not only permitted by God, but actually willed and even used by him, in this case, to fulfil the pilgrim's desire to understand.[212] Moreover, if we recall what St Thomas had said the first time he spoke, in canto X, we will recognise even more the paradox of freedom experienced in the obedience to such an invitation: 'qual ti negasse il vin de la sua fiala / per la tua sete, in libertà non fora / se non com'acqua ch'al mar non si cala' (*Par*. X, 88-90).

In his response to the pilgrim, St Thomas does not fail to mention the mystery of the Trinity, reiterating once more the idea of creation contained in God, understood as a reflection of the Son:[213] the saint is here expressing the same image that the poet had expressed poetically at the moment of entering the Heaven of the Sun, and uses it as the foundation of his discourse, a discourse for which he uses a tone that, while still poetry – of course –, is more similar to his signature linguistic register. Through the choice of having him tell the story of St Francis and his marriage with Lady Poverty before, and in representing him as engaging in this intellectual discourse now Dante is, one might say, giving St Thomas the chance to 'make himself manifest' and affirming that a person – as Mazzotta put it – 'is what he loves and what he does'.[214] In this sense, we can read St Thomas' intellectual discourse too as a liturgical action: it is a personal act of love directed to a specific individual, in a specific situation, responding to God's invitation and in communion with the other souls of this heaven. This is thus another example of how Dante, in the Heaven of the Sun, provides us with a broader understanding of his way of looking at the intellectual activity. I shall now show how the representation of St Thomas' speech, embedded into this context of communal praise, and characterised as a liturgical action, can help us understand more Dante's poetic action, by following the similarities existing between the theologian's speech and Dante's interaction with Beatrice when first entering the Heaven of the Sun.

2.6 'Lì si cantò non…ma': the 'via' of poetry

The first similarity between Dante's interaction with Beatrice described in the first *terzine* of canto X and the way in which St Thomas' speech is built is the emphasis on the sense of disruption perceived in both situations. As soon as they enter the Heaven of the Sun, Beatrice invites Dante to give thanks to God for the grace that has just been granted to him, and he promptly acts as she asked:

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[212] I would like the suggest how the ideas I expressed here can recall – and maybe Dante had it in mind too – a very popular saying of St Augustine: 'Dilige, et quod vis fac' (Augustinus, *In Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos Tractatus Decem*, VII, 8, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0354-0430_Augustinus_In_Epistolam_Ioannis_ad_Parthos_Tractatus_Decem_LT.doc.html [accessed 13 December, 2021]); an idea that seems to be present in Virgil's words of furlough too, at the end of the purgatorial journey: 'lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce […] libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio / e fallo fora non fare a suo senno' (*Purg*. XVII, 131 and 140-41).

[213] *Par*. XIII, 52-60.

[214] Mazzotta, 'The Heaven of the Sun', p. 162.

Cor di mortal non fu mai sì digesto
a divozione e a rendersi a Dio
con tutto ‘l suo gradir cotanto presto,
come a quelle parole mi fec’io;
e sì tutto ‘l mio amore in lui si mise,
che Beatrice eclissò ne l’oblio.
Non le dispiacque; ma sì se ne rise,
che lo splendor de li occhi suoi ridenti
mia mente unita in più cose divise.

(*Par*. X, 55-63)

At this point, Dante says that his mind is divided between two loves: that for God and that for Beatrice. However, if we consider the meaning that *division* has acquired in this heaven, comparing Dante’s love for Beatrice to that of St Francis for Lady Poverty and of St Dominic for Faith, or that shown collectively by these souls as ‘la sposa di Dio’ (*Par*. X, 140), but also having recourse once more to the idea of the ‘pan de li angeli’, then we will be able to acknowledge the paradoxical unity that this difference or division is capable of bringing forth. Since the time of the *Vita nova*, to love Beatrice had meant, for Dante, to sing her praises,[215] to write poetry inspired by her.[216] She was, somehow, the one calling him on this ‘via’ of poetry, she, a creature of God, a specific point of the created reality who could nonetheless be, for Dante, a preferential point of contact with him: in other words, as discussed in the Introduction, she was Dante’s own ‘pan de li angeli’. The sense of disruption that she creates with her ‘occhi ridenti’ can be compared to that caused by St Thomas when he is about to deliver his doctrinal speech. Dante’s erotic acknowledgement of Beatrice’s wondrous presence and beauty is coterminous with his singing her praise, in the same way in which, during liturgy too, to praise God is an act dependent on the acknowledgement of his presence.[217] In the same way in which, St Thomas says, it is ‘dolce amore’ which invites him to speak, so too we can say that Beatrice, and the ‘dolce amore’ her presence carries for Dante, was the cause of Dante’s personal, poetic action.

The mingling between the poetic action of singing the praise of an element of the world, and the liturgical action of singing the praise of God can be seen in the passage of the Heaven of the Sun quoted above, in which theologians and philosophers are described as engaging in what I have called a *seemingly* liturgical performance: ‘Lì si cantò non Bacco, non Peana / ma tre persone in divina natura / e in una persona essa e l’umana’ (*Par*. XIII, 25-27). I have said that my choice to refer to this image as only seemingly liturgical was due to the fact that there is no specific reference to a liturgical activity, and I stressed the fact that there is no reference to any *Christian* liturgy. Indeed, to sing the

[215] See *Vita nova* XIX.
[216] See *Vita nova* XLII.
[217] See again *Rationale* IV, v, 3; V, iii, 10 and 13.

praises of 'Bacco' or 'Peana' was a liturgical activity in a non-Christian context. Most likely, Dante knew this from Virgil,[218] who recounts how hymns dedicated to Bacchus and Apollo – the divinity behind the epithet Peana – were sung during rituals celebrated in their honour.[219] The first element I would like to point to is that Dante is describing the souls of philosophers and theologians as engaging, again, in a liturgical ritual, but this time in a ritual which was originally non-Christian, and which is nonetheless devoted, here in Dante's heaven, to singing the praises of the two foundational mysteries of Christianity, the Trinity and the Incarnation. The very choice to specify that they *were not* singing to Bacchus or to Apollo is meant to emphasise the fact that they are indeed singing: and in fact, in a Christian Heaven, why should we expect its inhabitant to sing the praises of pagan gods? In *Paradiso*, the one invoking pagan deities is always Dante himself,[220] and not his characters. By evoking the singing of pagan hymns on the scene, Dante is building a bridge between the poetical-liturgical *experience* of the pagans and that of the souls in this sphere of Heaven. I shall develop this idea in the following chapter. Also, perhaps, Dante's choice to name precisely Bacchus and Apollo was meant to refer to the two main forces operating in classical religiosity and artistic expression (both Latin and Greek): the rational, logical Apollonian and the irrational, vital Dionysian,[221] which – albeit with the due differences – also happen to be symbols of the two aspects kept together by the liturgical hermeneutics of the 'pan de li angeli'. In this sense, the invocation to Apollo at the beginning of this third cantica would make more sense, precisely if in the figure of Apollo we understand the symbol of the rational knowledge bestowed by the words of the Revelation sought as the completion for the understanding of the personal, vital and erotic experience of the presence of the divine – in turn symbolised by Bacchus. This point, and all its implications regarding Dante's relationship with the classical tradition exceeds the purpose of this thesis, but what is important for my argument here, first of all, is that by referring to classical myths and divinities, and replacing them with the true God of Christianity, Dante is making, or actually re-making space for mythology in the realm of knowledge, besides theology and philosophy. As I discussed in section 2.1 of this chapter, in fact, in the early stages of the development of Christianity, mythology, and therefore a certain view of the created world, were considered as belonging to the realm of theology. St Augustine and Tertullian held this view, which is a view interestingly close to that of classical religiosity, in which poets played a fundamental role.[222] This is extremely important for Dante, because to allow mythology a place

[218] *Aen*. VI, 657; *Georg*. II, 2 and 393-4.
[219] See Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia. Paradiso*. ed by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 2nd edn Oscar Classici (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), p. 366, note *ad locum*.
[220] See, for instance, *Par*. I, 13; *Par*. II, 8-9.
[221] Friedrich Nietzsche, *La nascita della tragedia: ovvero grecità e pessimismo*, ed. by Paolo Chiarini and Roberto Venuti (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995).
[222] Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology*, pp. 27-46; Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*.

within theological discourses also means to grant a certain 'theological authority' to poets, and to open the possibility for a fruitful dialogue with the pagan mythologies, as I will more extensively discuss in the following chapter. The very fact that Dante chose to represent the souls of the wise men in the act of singing hymns most likely written by poets and that were originally non-Christian, but are now renewed in their content – Lì si cantò *non… ma…* – can be read as an attempt to show again, through a performance, a possible unity, this time between himself and these souls, and therefore between theological, philosophical and poetic modes of knowledge. The act of singing is in fact proper to the poet: Dante constantly refers to his poetry as 'canto',[223] and the very structure of the *Commedia*, divided into 'cantiche' and 'canti' clearly suggests this idea.[224] Therefore, by showing the souls of theologians and philosophers as engaging in the performance of singing these hymns of poets, Dante is building a connection between the theological and philosophical acts performed by these men in their lives, 'travelling the ways of theology and philosophy' – according to Mazzotta's way of putting it – and his own poetic performance. They are indeed one in the very, simultaneous, liturgical act of knowing, loving and praising 'tre persone in divina natura / e in una persona essa e l'umana'. When the St Thomas of the *Commedia* speaks, he does so in a way that is more in tune with a full sense of his personhood, 'making him manifest' as a great philosopher and theologian; when Dante speaks, he 'makes himself manifest' as a poet. The same invitation – that of love, the finding of one's own 'pan de li angeli' – produces two different and diverse responses, which do nonetheless find their unity in the oneness of the truth experienced through the very performance of those responses. Moreover, the performance itself is always possible because of the very *event* of such a truth and the personal, erotic acknowledgement of its happening.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have begun to discuss how Dante is able to show a reconciliation between the two aspects of knowledge, *scientia* and *sapientia*, and I have done so starting from the point that could be, at once, the most predictable and the most tricky one: the practice of theology, and its relationship with philosophy. Given that the very subject of theology is God, and the mysteries of the godhead, it could be easy to lose sight of the fact that a solely rational understanding of those mysteries, as much

[223] For instance, among many others, see *Inf*. XVI, 127-8; *Purg*. I, 9-10; *Par*. I, 10-2.

[224] Barański has discussed some of the reasons behind Dante's choice of words when referring to the structure of the *Commedia*. Some of the most important points that the scholar has highlighted are: the connections that, in this way, Dante is able to build between his poem and music, in particular the importance of order and variation which in music – as well as in the poem – are kept together; and the connections that such terms are able to build with both the literary tradition and the scriptural one. (Zygmunt Barański, 'The Poetics of Meter: Terza rima, "Canto," "Canzon," "Cantica"', in *Dante Now. Current Trends in Dante Studies*, ed. by Theodore J. Cachey, Jr (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 3-41).

as accurate and logically sound, is still *not* a real knowledge of the Truth. When focussing on Dante's account of his entry in the Heaven of the Sun, I said that it makes sense to undertake a speculative journey regarding the mysteries of the Trinity and of the created world from within the boundaries of the image representing the Trinity embracing the created world. This is another way to say that God can be fully known from within himself and his free revealing of himself, and this applies to theology too. Such a claim is actually even more urgent for a theology whose very foundation is the belief in the resurrected Christ: an Incarnate God, who died on a cross and rose again letting his close friends encounter him again, alive. In these canti, Dante has shown the theological activity – as well as the philosophical one – first and foremost as a performance, as the action of persons engaged in a relationship with a truth that, first and foremost, is erotically acknowledged and experienced as present. The intellectual activity is thus framed, here, as coterminous with the loving pursuit of one's own 'pan de li angeli'. In this sense, Dante was also able to root in God the Trinity and in his act of creation the foundation for a possible unity between theology and philosophy. Although different in their main subjects and sometimes in their languages, they both need to be rooted in the lived experience of the truth, in order to be truthful themselves, that is, able to lead towards the beatific vision of God – as in the case of Siger.

The stress on the personal experience of the truth as an *event*, and therefore as present in its happening, has also opened the way to find a connection between the theological and philosophical activities, and the poetic one. I will dedicate the following chapter to the discussion of this connection, and in particular to Dante's understanding of the poetic experience. As already anticipated in the last section of this chapter, I will also show how Dante is able to engage in a fruitful, original dialogue with the myths and symbols proper to the classical tradition, problematising once more, from a different perspective, the relationship between 'Bacchus' and 'Apollo', between *scientia* and *sapientia*.

Chapter 3.
That thirst: Statius, and the 'transubstantiation' of poetry

Following the main research question of this thesis, aiming at exploring Dante's understanding and use, in the *Commedia*, of the knowledge deriving from the different realms of thought available to him at the time – theology, philosophy, poetry and science –, I have been discussing the similarities between Dante's intellectual approach to the concepts of truth and knowledge and the conception of these ideas promoted by liturgy. In the previous chapter, I have explored the ways in which Dante is able to graft theological and philosophical modes of knowledge onto liturgical principles with their understanding of truth. In this way, I have pointed to the emphasis which Dante places on the understanding of both theology and philosophy as performances, as actions performed in response to the acknowledgement of the *event of the truth*. This has provided us with a broader understanding of the poet's reflection on the interplay and relationship between the two disciplines; it has also given us a perspective from which it is possible to better understand the paradoxical unity experienced in the Heaven of the Sun by theologians and philosophers from so many different 'schools of thought'. In section 2.6, in particular, I have highlighted the connection that Dante builds between his own experience of and relationship with the truth as a poet, and the experiences of and relationships with the truth that the theologians and philosophers met in this sphere of Heaven had in their lives: this connection, I have suggested, is to be found in the very act of singing praises in which the wise men of the Heaven of the Sun are represented as engaging, and in which Dante himself is engaged through the writing of his poem. I have said that the act of singing can be considered as the act proper to the poet, and I have also referred to Dante's choice of identifying his poetry with the idea of 'canto'. At this point, it is probably worth recalling the image of the two 'books' written by God – the Bible and creation – the relationship between the two, and that idea of theology – shared also by Augustine and Tertullian – as an enquiry which investigates the mysteries of the godhead as well as those of the created world, and accepts a mythological elaboration of the truths 'revealed' in and through it.[225] Generally speaking, and most commonly in the classical world, poets were the ones concerned with the narration of myths – born from an attentive observation of the created world and the human experience of it – as a means to convey truths, as well as those who would sing the praises of the beauty existing in nature and reality altogether. Poets such as Horace or Virgil, for instance, would be addressed with the epithet of *vates*, which – as I shall discuss below – denotes the high role that poets were seen to play in society, precisely as those who, being divinely inspired, were able to point to the truth and be a guide for the people.

[225] Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology*, pp. 27-46.

Here, however, a question could arise for the modern thinker, wondering which kind of truths can be conveyed through myths or through the praises of the marvels and mysteries of creation, especially when the words of the poets dissent so significantly from more rational or scientific explanations of natural processes. Poems and poetic expressions are often perceived as the daydreams of particularly sensitive people, which can talk of the power of emotions and subjective perceptions, but cannot add anything to one's understanding of reality and of the outside, 'concrete' world. On the other hand, a question could also arise for the thinkers of Dante's time too, used to looking at reality from a Christian perspective: how could the words of ancient poets, who had not known Jesus Christ, speak any truth whatsoever? Among all the possible answers given at the time to these thorny questions,[226] I think that the hermeneutics of the 'pan de li angeli' proves to be once more particularly helpful, capable of providing interesting answers to both the sets of questions just expressed above, as well as providing a theoretical pattern against which it is fruitful to compare Dante's poetics. First of all, to have a taste of the 'pan de li angeli' is something that happens within the boundaries of the created world, and it is therefore accessible to any person and not just to someone belonging to a specific category or even religious group. That of the 'pan de li angeli' is an experience tied to corporeity, time and space, and it is not something simply known in and through the mind, in the same way in which it is not solely related to the perception and affection of the individual person: the affective reaction is in fact caused by an element existing in the reality *outside* of the person, with which the person engages in a relationship. This relationship is essentially a dialogue between the person and his or her 'pan de li angeli', which obviously involves the intellective faculty of the person, as well as the affective one. Also, the experience of being struck, or even enamoured by a fragment of the created world – and the relationship between Dante and Beatrice obviously fits into this dynamic – can result in the act of *erotically* praising it,[227] meaning praising it with the involvement of all the affection of the person. This act of praise generally takes the form of a linguistic act – in a way that is similar to what we have seen in chapter 1, where Dante's act of faith is indeed in the form of a *speech act of faith* –, and the more crafted such a linguistic act is, the more it can be reasonably defined as a poetic act.

[226] I am aware of the difficult problem of the reception of the Classics in medieval, Christian culture, of the often moralistic and allegorising readings that were proposed as the most acceptable interpretations of the classical poems, on some occasions at the expenses of a philological precision, which will be claimed later by the humanists of the fifteenth- and sixteenth century. However, I will not directly address this issue, because it would lead me astray from the main focus of this thesis, in which I wish to suggest that Dante's way to read and interpret poetry shares the same principles as a liturgical reading of reality, and therefore differs – sometimes quite significantly – from the interpretative solutions most commonly shared in his cultural context.

[227] See Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 25-27, 216-219 and 220-223. On the significance of praise within Dante's text, see also: Treherne, 'Reading Dante's Heaven of the Fixed Stars'; Treherne, 'Liturgical Personhood in the "Commedia"'.

Given these premises, the aim of this chapter will be, first of all, that of showing how Dante's understanding and use of the dynamics proper to the poetic act itself are particularly similar to the liturgical dynamics, and how, therefore, his approach to truth and knowledge proves to be particularly close to the approach that liturgy has towards truth precisely by virtue of its *poetic* nature. I shall thus explore in greater depth Dante's understanding of poetry and of the poetic act, and then show also how this 'liturgical' understanding of poetry is that which enables him to relate, in a very original and unpredictable way, to the poetic experience, elaboration of truths and understanding of reality of non-Christian poets – exemplified by the figure of Virgil. As I have done in the previous two chapters, I will not analyse one of those passages in which Dante reflects on the issue I want to address in the form of an abstract discourse. For a deeper understanding of Dante's ideas regarding the theological and philosophical disciplines I have chosen to look at the way he interacts with theologians and philosophers; here, in order to deepen our understanding of Dante's conception of poetry, I will look at one of the most important and best known passages of the *Commedia* in which an interplay between poets is staged on the scene: the episode narrated in *Purgatorio* XXI-XXII, in which Dante and his guide Virgil meet the soul of the Latin poet Statius, purified and ready to ascend into Heaven. For all its implications regarding Dante's conception of poetry, as well as his relationship with the classical world, this episode has been particularly frequented by the scholarship.[228] However, amongst all the different, possible readings of the relationship between Virgil, Statius and Dante, a comparison between the dynamics displayed in their interplay and those of liturgy has not been explored as a hermeneutical possibility. In making this comparison, I shall highlight the ways in which Dante seems to consciously employ those same liturgical principles that we have seen at play in the passages I have explored so far, and I will therefore show how this operation adds to our understanding of this interplay between poets – and by extension between the poetic traditions and experiences represented by them – happening on the scene. As was the case in the previous chapters, here too I shall begin my reading of these canti by focussing on the – liturgically charged – environment in which the action takes place.

[228] Among the numerous studies on this particularly important passage of Dante's poem, see: Teodolinda Barolini, 'Epic Resolutions', in *Dante's Poets*, pp.188-286; Clive S. Lewis, 'Dante's Statius', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. by W. Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 94-102; Janet Levarie Smarr, 'Greeting Statius', in *Lectura Dantis. Purgatorio*, ed. by A. Mandelbaum, A. Oldcorn, C. Ross (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 222-35; Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Virgil and Statius Discourse', in *Lectura Dantis. Purgatorio*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 236-51; Ronald Martinez, 'Statius's Marvelous Connection of Things', in *Lectura Dantis. Purgatorio*, ed. by A. Mandelbaum, A. Oldcorn, C. Ross (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 277-87; Marco Andreacchio, 'Dante's Statius and Christianity: a Reading of "Purgatorio" XXI and XXII in Their Poetic Context', *Interpretation: a Journal of Political Philosophy*, 39.1 (2011), 55-82; William Franke, 'Resurrected Tradition and Revealed Truth', in *Dante's Interpretive Journey* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 191-232; George Corbett, *Dante's Christian Ethics: Purgatory and its Moral Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), in particular chapters 6 and 7, pp. 133-65 and 166-203.

3.1 The liturgical environment of *Purgatorio*

Purgatorio XXI opens with an *ex abrupto* introduction, in which something unexpected bursts into the scene after only six lines. Dante is troubled with doubts and questions engendered by some events he has witnessed – an earthquake followed by the singing of the *Gloria*, described in canto XX –, but instead of finding an immediate answer to those, or having the time to ask for clarifications, his attention is caught by a new, unpredicted event:

> La sete natural che mai non sazia
> se non con l'acqua onde la femminetta
> samaritana domandò la grazia,
> mi travagliava, e pungeami la fretta
> per la 'mpacciata via dietro al mio duca,
> e condoleami a la giusta vendetta.
> Ed ecco, sì come ne scrive Luca
> che Cristo apparve a' due ch'erano in via,
> già surto fuor de la sepulcral buca,
> ci apparve un'ombra, e dietro a noi venìa…
>
> (*Purg*. XXI, 1-10)

This is not something unusual in the *Commedia*: as I have already mentioned in chapter 1, Teodolinda Barolini has discussed how the creation of continuous 'new beginnings' within the same story is a narrative strategy that Dante uses throughout the whole poem – a poem which itself begins '[n]el mezzo del cammin di nostra vita'.[229] Although such a narrative strategy is in harmony with the natural passing of time in human life, this passing of time is generally not perceived clearly except when something unusual, unsettling or unforeseen wades into the usual flow of events. This point is where we can already see an overlapping between a poetic perception of reality and a liturgical one. Poetry, in the way Dante presents it, is engendered by the experience and recognition of an exceptionality, of something able to stand as 'particular' in respect to the rest of the environment, both within nature and events, and the poet is the one who is particularly receptive to these episodes.[230] I shall come back again to this point later, addressing the problem of the relationship between Virgil, Statius and Dante. That Dante shared this idea of poetry can be seen from the very beginning of the *Vita nova*,[231] in which he states:

[229] Barolini, *The Undivine "Comedy*, pp. 21-47 and 259-65.
[230] See Burzo, *Appello e decisione*, in particular pp. 75-103 (chapter 3), and pp. 105-35 (chapter 4).
[231] I am aware of the many differences existing between the ideas professed by Dante about poetry at the time of the *Vita nova*, and the later developments. The idea expressed here, however, seems to remain at the core of Dante's poetic practice, as I will show throughout this chapter.

> In quella parte del libro della mia memoria dinanzi alla quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice 'Incipit Vita Nova'. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'assemplare in questo libello, e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenzia.[232]

His poetic adventure begins under the sign of this exceptionality, and his intention is not that of writing about *any* event of his life, but rather about *that* exceptional event, treasured in his memory under a specific 'heading', which brought newness and restoration to his life. The same statement can be found at the beginning of the *Commedia*, when he explains the reasons for describing to us the 'selva oscura' as well as for telling the story of the whole journey: 'ma *per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai*, / dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte' (*Inf.* I, 8-9; emphasis mine). As I have discussed in the Introduction, and as I shall discuss in greater depth in chapter 4, liturgy too is characterised by a similar understanding of reality, and of time in particular. During the celebration of a ritual, both words and actions are always fully meaningful, punctuating the passing of time and reading into it the unfolding of a meaningful story. Each action or word, in liturgy, is understood as a step in the journey of the relationship towards and within God, who is, at the same time, recognised as entering the world and reaching the faithful: in this sense, time itself, in liturgy, is seen altogether as the happening and unfolding of that exceptional event that is the Incarnation of Christ. During Mass, for instance, each action or prayer seems to always be a sort of preparation for what comes next, and even if we look at that which we could call the starting moment of the ritual we will find that there is always another action, or word, or event that prepares for that seemingly initial one, and from which this latter can spring.[233] This is fundamental in shaping a particular relationship with truth, because it is never perceived as something fully known and given as a circumscribed and therefore ownable 'thing', but is cherished as something that keeps revealing itself by the very event of its happening. Catherine Pickstock has reflected on this peculiar aspect of the liturgy of Mass, referring in particular to the altar as a 'receding place': the liturgy offered in this world is always a preparation for and a journey towards the true, heavenly liturgy; therefore, the altar, as the place of perfect sacrifice and praise, where truth is encountered and acknowledged, is never fully reached but only constantly approached by means of new words uttered or new actions performed.[234]

The beginning of *Purgatorio* XXI offers an excellent example of the mingling of the poetical and the liturgical, and, by extension, of the earthly and the heavenly, which takes place in the poem. Dante

[232] *Vita nova*, I.
[233] See *Rationale* IV, i-vi, where Durand describes the preparation that the minister undertakes before Mass and the beginning of the celebration.
[234] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 176-92, p. 183.

opens the canto by referring to his own desire for truth as a 'sete natural', to which an unpredicted event – presenting very peculiar characteristics which I shall highlight below – will provide satisfaction. These two elements are both poetically described using imagery taken from Scripture: Dante's thirst for truth is associated with the thirst of the Samaritan woman at the well,[235] whereas the new event happening on the scene, that of the arrival of the Latin poet Statius – whose identity we will discover only after quite a few lines, and not without reason, as I shall discuss – is described as happening in the same way in which Luke describes the action of Jesus reaching the two disciples walking on the way to Emmaus.[236] The scriptural atmosphere evoked here is undeniable, and yet Dante has been able to embed it within the narration in a way which does not make it seem 'odd', nor something detached from the normal development of the events or human interactions between the characters. Through his poetic description, Dante shows that he is able to read in his 'natural thirst' for truth, and in the coming of the new soul on the scene, the same messages that are conveyed through the words of Scripture, and of the Gospel in particular.[237] In other words, he is already showing here how 'the book of creation' and the book of the Bible, in sharing the same Author, speak the same Word.

Above, I have defined the beginning of this canto as a sort of *ex abrupto* introduction: however, if we look at what came immediately before, and in general at the environment in which this new action takes place, this beginning with such a clear scriptural emphasis will prove to be even more meaningful. At the end of canto XX, Dante and Virgil were shaken by an unexpected earthquake, followed by the singing – or rather shouting – of the *Gloria* by the penitent souls:[238]

> Noi eravam partiti già da esso,
> e brigavam di soverchiar la strada
> tanto quanto al poder n'era permesso,
> quand' io senti', come cosa che cada,
> tremar lo monte; onde mi prese un gelo
> qual prender suol colui ch'a morte vada.
> […]
> Poi cominciò da tutte parti un grido
> tal, che 'l maestro inverso me si feo,
> dicendo: «Non dubbiar, mentr' io ti guido».
> *'Glorïa in excelsis*' tutti *'Deo'*
> dicean, per quel ch'io da' vicin compresi,
> onde intender lo grido si poteo.

[235] John 4:1-30.
[236] Luke 24:13-35.
[237] The theme of 'thirst for God' is also present in the Psalms (see, for instance, Psalm 42:2-3), and in the Gospel episode of the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus presents himself precisely as the answer to that thirst.
[238] On the meaning of the *Gloria* being shouted rather than sung, see Treherne, 'Liturgy, Time and the Music of Incarnation in the "Commedia"', in *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 49-111.

No' istavamo immobili e sospesi
come i pastor che prima udir quel canto,
fin che 'l tremar cessò ed el compiési.
Poi ripigliammo nostro cammin santo…

(*Purg*. XX, 124-142)

The very nature of the events happening here, together with Dante's choice to describe them, again, having recourse to scriptural imagery, constitute the fitting ground from which the action of canto XXI will spring. The earthquake has a clear link with the death of Jesus, as we learn from the Gospel of Matthew,[239] whereas the *Gloria*, together with Dante's description of his and Virgil's reaction to it, recall the birth of Jesus. Here again, I argue, in describing himself and his guide as standing in marvel before what is happening, in the same way in which the shepherds did at the announcement and singing of the angels in the Gospel account of the story,[240] Dante is suggesting that the same story is happening again, and yet with a difference: once more, the place in which the poet might have learnt to look at the events of life as the *non-identical repetition* of the story of the life of Jesus Christ is liturgy.[241] This is a key idea which I hope to unfold through the reading of these chosen passages, showing how it can add to our understanding of the poem. In order to better comprehend how the environment of *Purgatorio* – and the specific portion of it in which the meeting with Statius happens – can shape our way to read and interpret the scriptural references used by Dante, and therefore add to our understanding of the whole interaction happening between the three poets, I believe it is helpful to briefly outline some of the characteristics that the purgatorial environment shares with the liturgical one, focussing in particular on the explanation that Statius himself – while still unnamed – will give in response to Virgil's question, and which will satiate Dante's thirst for truth:

Quei cominciò: «Cosa non è che sanza
ordine senta la religïone
de la montagna, o che sia fuor d'usanza.
Libero è qui da ogne alterazione:
di quel che 'l ciel da sé in sé riceve
esser ci puote, e non d'altro, cagione.
Per che non pioggia, non grando, non neve,
non rugiada, non brina più sù cade
che la scaletta di tre gradi breve;
nuvole spesse non paion né rade,
né coruscar, né figlia di Taumante,
che di là cangia sovente contrade;

[239] Matthew 27:51. For a more detailed account of biblical sources relating the events of earthquakes to God's action or presence, see the note to lines 139-41 of Nicola Fosca's commentary on: http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader.
[240] Luke 2:8-15
[241] I shall come back again to the idea of 'non-identical repetition' also in chapter 4, when exploring in greater depth Dante's consideration of time related to scientific modes of knowledge.

secco vapor non surge più avante
ch'al sommo d'i tre gradi ch'io parlai,
dov' ha 'l vicario di Pietro le piante.
Trema forse più giù poco o assai;
ma per vento che 'n terra si nasconda,
non so come, qua sù non tremò mai.
Tremaci quando alcuna anima monda
sentesi, sì che surga o che si mova
per salir sù; e tal grido seconda.»

(*Purg*. XXI, 40-60)

Statius describes the purgatorial realm as radically different from the natural world, even when their outlook might seem similar, and highlights its separation from the terrestrial region referring twice to the three steps that precede the entrance to Purgatory proper.[242] The presence of those three steps can be compared with the same physical distinction that exists in a church between the place where the altar is located and the rest of the space.[243] Those steps, in a church, are always three or a multiple of three, to symbolise the Trinity, and when processing at the beginning of Mass the priest would climb them while reciting the '*Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*',[244] to mark the crossing of a threshold and therefore the entry into a 'different', sacred environment.[245] The reaching of the altar during the celebration of Mass, like the entering of Purgatory in Dante's text, means entering a different dimension – in the Introduction I have called it a supra-spatial dimension, which is radically tied to time –,[246] a dimension organised according to different principles from the solely physical, earthly ones, and which are heavenly instead – precisely as Statius says in the lines quoted above. The cause of all the events happening in such a place, therefore, is no longer physical, but spiritual, even if it has physical effects – such as an earthquake. The idea of spiritual realities having a defined, physical manifestation is, again, essentially liturgical, and is at the very core of the mystery of Incarnation.[247] The liturgical performance is the environment *par excellence* which provides the occasion – in time and space – for the encounter between humankind and God, or, to put it differently, it is the environment in which this interplay is acknowledged with no space for ambiguity. Here, the physical and the visible are fully shaped by the heavenly and invisible, till the smallest detail, and in this way the divine can in turn be made manifest in the earthly world, precisely by means of the human counterpart. I argue that Dante is intentionally evoking this same dynamic throughout the whole

[242] See *Purg*. IX, 73-145.
[243] *Rationale* I, ii, 13.
[244] On the significance of entering a place 'in the name of God' see Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 180-83.
[245] On the liturgical significance of climbing the steps, see Romano Guardini, *Lo spirito della liturgia. I santi segni* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), pp. 143-45.
[246] See section 2.2 of the Introduction.
[247] I shall explore this idea in greater depth in chapter 4, when discussing the biological aspects of Dante's consideration of the human body.

cantica, displaying it on the scene and even choosing it as his own poetic practice, as we can see from the very first lines of *Purgatorio*:

> Ma qui la morta poesì resurga,
> o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono;
> e qui Caliopè alquanto surga,
> seguitando il mio canto con quel suono
> di cui le Piche misere sentiro
> lo colpo tal, che disperar perdono.
>
> (*Purg*. I, 7-12)

In this second invocation to the Muses – pagan figures and yet eloquently addressed as 'sante', to whom Dante says he belongs –[248] Dante is asking in particular for the help of Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry, by praying that she may unite her divine voice to his singing. He is not asking the Muse to sing in his place, but rather to join her singing with his own, to sing along with him with '*quel* suono', with *that* divine singing that can be recognised as such by its own specific quality, as the myth mentioned in the following two lines is meant to clarify.[249] In Dante's very concise account of this myth, in fact, the nine daughters of Pierus – turned into magpies as a punishment for their presumption in assuming that their singing voice was better than Calliope's – are able to recognise their fault in the very moment in which they can finally hear the voice of the Muse. They are so astonished by 'quel suono', that they even despair of being forgiven for their pride, which made them foolishly believe that they could sing better than the divine singer. The nine girls do not need to be told that they deserve a punishment, they acknowledge it by themselves because of the very experience of 'being struck' by the reality of Calliope's divine voice. But the way Dante chooses to refer to Calliope's divine voice is more than just a constative description. What is, precisely, the sound to which Dante is referring? The fact that he addresses it as '*quel* suono' implies that it must be a sound somehow already familiar to him, to the author of the myth, and ultimately to the reader as well. Here too, if we have recourse to the hermeneutical key of the 'pan de li angeli', we can infer what is the qualification of *that* divine singing of Calliope, whose help Dante is imploring at the beginning of the cantica in which 'l'umano spirito si purga / e di salire al ciel diventa degno' (*Purg*. I, 5-6). The divine with which Dante wants his singing to be joined is that divine that takes on a *beautiful* form – the beauty sung by poets –[250] and can be encountered in the real, human world, in

[248] From the very beginning of this cantica, Dante expresses his wish to unite himself with the classical poetic tradition. As Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia. Purgatorio*. ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 2nd edn Oscar Classici (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), p. 10, note *ad locum*) has noted, for instance, a similar 'consecration' of the poet to the Muses is to be found in Horace (*Carm.* III, iv, 21-2).
[249] The myth is originally told by Ovid, *Met.* V, 294-678.
[250] On the concept of Beauty shared both by artists and liturgy, and therefore the connection between art and liturgy, see Guardini, *Lo spirito della liturgia*, pp. 83-97.

an experience which meets and fulfils human desires and needs; it is therefore a divine known primarily through a real experience, through one's heart and then also through one's mind – in the case in which the mind is informed by the knowledge of his name and is therefore made able to utter it.[251] Dante's *Purgatorio,* therefore, is a poetic environment in which poetry and liturgy become more and more assimilated, in which the Muses can rightly be called 'sante', and in which natural events and human interactions are more and more discovered and read as telling the same story of the Gospel. From this perspective, we can say that the environment of Purgatory, as well as the narrative environment of *Purgatorio,* in and through which Dante and Virgil are travelling, are such that the passing of time is punctuated by the performing of actions and the uttering of words which are all considered meaningful – in the way in which poetry considers the events it sings meaningful or 'exceptional'. In this process, the usual, 'earthly' spatiotemporal categories – according to which such gestures and words are normally interpreted – are progressively shattered by a new, different view and understanding of reality.[252] This new understanding of reality, however, does not erase the concrete existence and perception of time and space, with all the human interactions happening within their boundaries: 'human' time and space are in fact progressively restored and shown as being essentially rooted in and coterminous with the person of Jesus Christ and the story of his life. The action happening on the scene, therefore, is an entirely 'human' action – happening in time and space and performed by persons –, which is progressively seen as integrated and made one with God's own action *par excellence,* the Incarnation. I hope to show how this becomes even more clear in and through the interaction of Virgil and Dante with Statius.

3.2 Reading the Gospel into time, space and human interactions

Going back to the beginning of canto XXI and its scriptural references from this perspective, we can thus see how they are used by Dante in a way which is very much consistent and in tune with the dynamics already at play in the environment of *Purgatorio* – shaped by the presence of Christ and built according to liturgical principles: such references are meant to reframe the very action happening on the scene, enabling us to see in them a very specific meaning and, at the same time, the same

[251] In this sense we can also read the lines of *Par.* XIX, 103-111 when Dante discusses with the Eagle the problem of true knowledge of Christ and the salvation which depends on this alone: 'a questo regno / non salì mai chi non credette 'n Cristo, / né pria né poi ch'el si chiavasse al legno. / Ma vedi: molti gridan "Cristo, Cristo!", / che saranno in giudicio assai men *prope* / a lui, che tal che non conosce Cristo; / e tai Cristian dannerà l'Etiòpe, / quando si partiranno i due collegi, / l'uno in etterno ricco e l'altro inòpe'. This idea can as well be found in the Gospel (Mt 7:21-23), when Jesus states that those who do the will of the Father will be saved, and not those who meaninglessly utter his name, not actually knowing him. On this, see also Treherne, *Dante's Commedia and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 239-43.

[252] See Treherne, 'Liturgy, Time and the Music of Incarnation'. Building on this and on Treherne's discussion of time in the *Commedia*, I shall discuss Dante's treatment of temporality in greater depth in the following chapter, from a more 'scientific' perspective.

scriptural stories are recognised as happening *again* and *anew*, albeit taking on a new form, in and through those events located in time and space. This is the same dynamic we see at play during the celebration of Mass, allowing for the creation of a 'narrative environment' for the proclamation of the Gospel to take place. As I have discussed in the Introduction,[253] one of the ways in which liturgy performs this narrative operation is through the performing of processions. Immediately before the proclamation of the Gospel, the deacon, who was the one appointed to proclaim it from the pulpit, would process towards the pulpit carrying the Gospel book with reverence, preceded by an acolyte carrying the cross, two candle-bearers, a thurifer and the subdeacon. All the ministers and objects involved in this procession are there to symbolise characters or events of the story of salvation narrated in the Bible, which is in this way perceived as present and ongoing,[254] precisely by means of the concrete portion of reality – of time and space – invested by that meaning. The proclamation of the Gospel, therefore, happening in that moment, is presented as an integral part of the story it tells and a continuation of it; God speaks directly to the faithful, inviting them into a relationship with him through his word. Hence, the proclamation of the Gospel can be seen as a performative action and not just as a constative one, intended to act upon reality and not only describe it.[255]

Both the Gospel episodes referred to at the beginning of canto XXI are related to the problematic recognition of Jesus, in terms of his true identity: the Samaritan woman at the well does not know who Jesus is, nor that he is the Messiah; the two disciples journeying towards Emmaus are not able to recognise that the stranger walking with them is Jesus, until they see him blessing and breaking the bread. This problem of acknowledging identities, underscored by the two Gospel episodes, is pivotal in the canti I analyse here, as well as in the whole *Purgatorio*: the example quoted above already showed it, with the use of '*quel* suono' to identify the divine voice of Calliope, as well as the epithet 'sante' used to address the Muses. The choice of calling the pagan divinities of poetry, and of art in general, 'sante' could have been particularly unsettling for the Christian reader of the time, and it would have probably required a convincing answer to the question of what or who was to be recognised, in Dante's understanding, under the name of Muses, and therefore in the poetic experience of the poets belonging to the classical tradition. In comparing himself to the Samaritan woman, and therefore in embodying *that* thirst, *that* 'sete natural' on the scene, Dante is creating an expectation for which the unpredicted event happening immediately after and described using the

[253] See section 2.2 of the Introduction.
[254] See *Rationale* IV, xxiv.
[255] See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. Also, in more recent theology, and especially after the prompts of the Second Vatican Council, the performative and sacramental characters of the Gospel and the Bible, as the living word of God, have been strongly highlighted in catholic contexts. On this, see in particular the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html), and the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html).

other Gospel episode, that of the road to Emmaus, is a response, in the same way in which the presence of Jesus at the well responds to the woman's thirst. The second Gospel episode, I shall show, works as a sort of background throughout canti XXI and XXII, in which the unfolding of the encounter between the three poets, with the acknowledgement of their identities, takes place. The road to Emmaus is a very particular episode because the main elements characterising the episode and its story are the same, pivotal ones as in the celebration of Mass. Jesus, joining the two pilgrims on the way, explains to them the true meaning of the scriptural prophecies in the light of his Passion; later on, when invited to stay for supper, he blesses and breaks the bread, and that is when the two disciples finally recognise him and know him as the Resurrected Christ. Notably, we can see prefigured in this episode both the Liturgy of the Word, with the proclamation of Scriptures and its hermeneutical operation of acknowledging Christ as the centre and meaning of all the stories narrated, and the Eucharistic Liturgy, celebrating the bodily presence of Christ: these two elements together constitute the very essence of Mass. The reaction of the two disciples too, running back to Jerusalem in order to witness their encounter with the Resurrected Christ, recalls the invite to the faithful at the end of Mass – 'Ite, missa est' – to go in the world and be witness of the presence of Christ. The reference to this particular episode, therefore, can work as a very strong link between Scriptures, liturgy, and Dante's text, and will prove to be extremely helpful in understanding the reading of Virgil that Dante will provide through the action of Statius.

Dante's reference to this episode, I have said above, not only describes a situation in the past, but also gives meaning to an action that is happening in the present of the narration: 'ed ecco', something is happening *now* on the scene as it happened in the Gospel story, when Christ was 'già surto fuor de la sepulcral buca'. The soul who is reaching the two poets is not simply described as looking like Jesus in the Gospel story, with no real connection between the two episodes: the environment in which this scriptural story is referred to, already shaped by other scriptural elements *liturgically embodied* on the scene, allows us to read it in a performative way. Moreover, the fact that the one appearing on the scene acting *in persona Christi*, is – as we will learn later on – a poet, at the end of his purification process and therefore identified with the Resurrected Christ, could work as well as the embodiment of the line quoted above, the plea to the Muses at the beginning of *Purgatorio*: 'ma qui la morta poesì resurga'. I shall come back to this below.

The liturgical mediation happening in this environment, which allows for the scriptural stories to happen again and to be embodied in and through human interactions, is also the element which gives us a new perspective from which we can explore Dante's treatment of the interaction between poetic truths and scriptural truth, and ultimately between poetry and Revelation, adding something new to our understanding of the poem. I shall now explore the way in which Statius' identity is progressively

revealed on the scene: I will highlight again the similarities between this process and liturgical dynamics, and I will therefore suggest new ways to understand the meta-poetical reflections involved in this passage, regarding issues related to the possibility for poetry to approach and convey the truth of Revelation, and therefore to the problematic relationship between the classical tradition and the Christian one.

3.3 Statius: unnamed 'priest', acting *in persona Christi*

As the majority of scholars have noticed, the first line that Statius pronounces to greet the two pilgrims, when arriving on the scene, is taken from the Gospels, and precisely from two episodes in which Christ, after his resurrection, meets his disciples again:[256]

> ci apparve un'ombra, e dietro a noi venìa,
> dal piè guardando la turba che giace;
> né ci addemmo di lei, sì parlò pria,
> dicendo: «O frati miei, Dio vi dea pace».
> Noi ci volgemmo sùbiti, e Virgilio
> rendéli 'l cenno ch'a ciò si conface.
> Poi cominciò: «Nel beato concilio
> ti ponga in pace la verace corte
> che me rilega ne l'etterno essilio»
>
> (*Purg*. XXI, 10-18)

However, this same greeting, '*Pax vobis*', has a markedly liturgical connotation besides the scriptural one, and I believe that Virgil's response to such a greeting is meant to underscore it. The first part of Virgil's response is not openly made explicit, all Dante says about it is in fact that his guide 'rendéli 'l cenno ch'a ciò si conface'. The fact that Dante refers to such a response mentioning its suitability to the context, but without the need of explicating it further, could be seen as another hint of the liturgical nature of this interaction: if there is a fitting answer to the '*Pax vobis*', that would be '*et cum spiritu tuo*',[257] an answer that would be known precisely for its liturgical usage – the Gospels, in fact, do not mention it at all, nor talk of a 'cenno' suitable to respond to Jesus' greeting. During the celebration of Mass, the '*Pax vobis*' is always and only uttered by the officiant – the one who, more than anyone else during the celebration, acts *in persona Christi* – and never by the faithful. Even more notably, as Durand explains in his *Rationale,* such a greeting was used precisely after the singing of the *Gloria,* and only by the bishop – a priest would use '*Dominus vobiscum*' instead. Regarding

[256] Luke 24:36; John 20:19-21 and 26.
[257] See *Rationale* IV, xiv, 5. The early commentator Jacopo della Lana too states without hesitation that such is the suitable answer for that greeting. (https://dante.dartmouth.edu/search_view.php?doc=132472210070&cmd=gotoresult&arg1=1) [accessed 5 March, 2023].

the moment in which such a greeting was uttered, Durand says that it is only used after the *Gloria* because it corresponds to what is sung in that hymn – 'and on earth peace to men of good will'. In this way, he adds, the peace that Christ established between God and humankind is signified referring to the two most important moments of Jesus' life, his birth and his death and resurrection,[258] which, in Dante's text too, had been recalled with the description of the earthquake. The reason why only the bishop (or the pontiff) can use such a formula is also very interesting:

> Episcopus vero, vel eius superior, *qui perfectus esse debet et expressam Christi similitudinem gerit, ut se Christi vicarium ostendat*, oraturus prima vice utitur verbo Domini dicentis Io. xx: Pax vobis que fuit prima vox Domini ad discipulos quando eis post resurrectionem apparuit.[259]

[But the bishop, or his superior, who ought to be perfected and outwardly manifest the image of Christ – so that he might show himself to be the vicar of Christ – when he is about to pray the first prayer, uses the word of the Lord, who said: Peace be with you (Jn 20:20), which was the first thing the Lord spoke to the disciples when He appeared to them after the Resurrection.]

The bishop is the minister who *more perfectly* and *outwardly* is appointed to manifest Christ, and therefore the one who can rightly speak his words in this situation. The new character on the scene, as we will learn a few lines later, is a purified soul, now ready to ascend into Heaven, and it will be made clear as well how such a process of purification consists in a gradual assimilation with Christ's life and will:[260] thus, it makes even more sense for this soul, which bears a meaning that goes beyond its own personal identity, and that will make the interaction with Virgil and Dante particularly significant, to act *in persona Christi* in the same way in which the bishop does during Mass. However, I wish to clarify that I am not suggesting here that Dante wanted his readers to look for precise correspondences of roles in his poem and, in this situation, I do not think that he wanted us to see Statius as unequivocally performing the role of a bishop. I am rather arguing that the similarities with the liturgical dynamics are meant to help us understand in greater depth Statius' identity and action as presented on the scene, as well as suggesting a specific hermeneutical approach to the poem

[258] See *Rationale* IV, xiv, 7.
[259] *Rationale* IV, xiv, 7 (emphasis mine).
[260] In this canto (ll. 61-66) Statius will explain how the process of purification happens in the will, finally unified in the desire for Heaven, but the clear parallel with Christ and his life will be made by Forese in canto XXIII, ll.73-75: 'ché quella voglia a li alberi ci mena / che menò Cristo lieto a dire 'Elì' / quando ne liberò con la sua vena'. For an in depth reading of these lines from canto XXIII, and the concept of purification which they imply, see Treherne, *Dante's Commedia and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 157-69 and 202-07.

altogether. The markedly 'sacerdotal' function that Statius will perform in the first part of his interaction with Dante and Virgil – which, notably, corresponds with the portion of canto in which he is still unnamed, and therefore not yet known as the Latin poet Statius – is meant to underscore his authority and his ability to act *in persona Christi*, an authority and an ability which, of course, come precisely from the fact that he is now a purified, free soul. This is indeed the reason that made the earthquake happen and the other souls shout with joy the words of the *Gloria*. This very fact recalls another liturgical situation too.[261] The main period of purification within the liturgical year was surely Lent, seen as the appropriate preparation in view of Easter, and an important characteristic of this period is that the *Gloria* was not sung, until the celebration of Easter's Vigil Mass. The singing of the *Gloria* in that moment, therefore, after the silence of the period of purification, becomes even more significant than it normally is in other periods of the liturgical year: it happens after the blessing of the baptismal font and the baptism of the neophytes – performed immediately before the beginning of the Vigil Mass –, and together with recalling the singing of the angels at Christ's birth, it expresses the joy for the renewal of the lives of the baptized – both the newly baptized and the others – who have died to sin and been resurrected with Christ:

> Sequitur *Gloria in excelsis*, quod ideo cantatur, primo, quia pax data est renatis, quae ab angelis nuntiata est in nocte nativitatis; cum ergo ipsi sint renovati gratia Dei, possunt cantare cum angelis. Secundo, ideo quoniam angeli qui primo illud nato Domino cantaverunt, pro renatis in baptismo gloriantur. […] Mortui enim esits peccato, et mortui estis vobis, ut iam non vobis, sed Domino vivatis, sicut dicit Apostolus: *vivo autem, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*. Vita autem vestra abscondita est in Deo, ideo quia nondum apparet quod futuri estis, sed cum apparuerit Christus vita vestra, apparebitis cum Christo in gloria […].[262]

[Then the *Gloria in excelsis* follows, which is sung, first, because peace is given to those who have been reborn, the peace which was announced by the angels in the night of the Nativity; since they have indeed been renewed by the grace of God, they can sing with the angels. Secondly, because the angels that firstly sang (the *Gloria*) at the birth of the Lord, now crow for those who have been reborn through baptism. […] You are indeed dead to sin and to yourselves, so that you might live not for yourselves, but for the Lord, as the Apostle said: I live, but not I, rather Christ lives in me. Your life is hidden in God, so that it does not yet appear what you will be

[261] On the significance of the presence of the *Gloria* in *Purgatorio* XX, and in particular on its communal value, see Phillip-Robins, *Liturgical Song and Practice in Dante's Commedia*, pp. 29-60.
[262] *Rationale* VI, lxxxv, 3.

in the future, but when Christ will be manifested in your life, you will appear with Christ in glory (my translation).]

Statius, therefore, who borrows the liturgical greeting of the bishop, is also and at the same time the expression of that which every baptized soul is called to be. If it is true that, during the celebration of Mass, the only one who can use the greeting '*Pax vobis*' is the bishop, because with his role he most perfectly and outwardly manifests Christ, it is also true that every baptized Christian is called to assimilate themselves with Jesus and therefore manifest his presence: 'mortui estis vobis, ut iam non vobis, sed Domino vivatis' [You are dead to yourselves, so that you might live not for yourselves, but for the Lord], as Durand put it paraphrasing St Paul.[263] In Dante's text, Statius fulfills this sacerdotal, authoritative role precisely by virtue of the fact that he is now a purified soul, his personal identity and history is marked by his assimilation with Christ, and can thus bear the same meaning which the role of a bishop bears during the liturgical performance.[264] In the economy of the poem, the authoritative role played by Statius makes sense insofar as it is performed by a poet among poets: I shall explore this in greater depth below.

What are the actions that Statius performs *in persona Christi*, and that add to our understanding of this interaction, which, it is worth reiterating, is still an interaction among poets? First of all, while he is still unnamed, Statius and his account of his experience of Purgatory will be for Dante the water able to satisfy his 'sete natural': 'e però ch'el si gode / tanto del ber quant'è grande la sete, / non saprei dir quant'el mi fece prode' (*Purg*. XXI, 73-5). It is Virgil who asks for clarifications about the event of the earthquake followed by the *Gloria*, in an act which might be seen as a plea for intercession, and his action is thus described by Dante: 'Sì mi diè, dimandando, per la cruna / del mio disio, che pur con la speranza / si fece la mia sete men digiuna' (ll. 37-39). The mention of the word 'cruna', in Dante's lines related to the idea of desire, immediately calls to mind another well-known Gospel reference,[265] in which Jesus declares that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.[266] Statius' explanation of the reasons behind the happening of the earthquake includes a pivotal clarification regarding the process of purification itself, which involves precisely desire:

[263] Galatians 2:20
[264] We can also read in this sense Virgil's words of furlough, when, to state that Dante is now free and master of himself, says: 'te sovra te corono e mitrio' (*Purg*. XXVII, 142), using the image of episcopal authority, the mitre, together with that of imperial one, the crown.
[265] Nicola Fosca has noticed the reference too (see https://dante.dartmouth.edu, note *ad locum*). On the use of the word 'cruna' in the language of the time, and its relationship with the Gospel episode, I consulted the online Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini (TLIO), at the entry 'cruna': http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/ [accessed 5 March, 2023].
[266] See Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25.

De la mondizia sol voler fa prova,
che, tutto libero a mutar convento,
l'alma sorprende, e di voler le giova.
Prima vuol ben, ma non lascia il talento
che divina giustizia contra voglia,
come fu al peccar, pone al tormento.
E io, che son giaciuto a questa doglia
cinquecent' anni e più, pur mo sentii
libera volontà di miglior soglia:
però sentisti il tremoto e li pii
spiriti per lo monte render lode
a quel Segnor, che tosto sù li 'nvii.

(*Purg*. XXI, 64-72)

In appearing on the scene *in persona Christi*, Statius is able to satisfy Dante's thirst not only by means of an abstract discourse: it is his very own presence, with the experience he is bearing, that he offers to the pilgrim as a means to satisfy his thirst for truth, in the same way in which Jesus did with both the Samaritan woman at the well and the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. The emphasis on desire seems to be here particularly prominent: the canto begins precisely under the sign of desire, a desire which is characterised as entirely human – 'sete natural' –, and at the same time is framed into a scriptural understanding of it. Moreover, in this heavily liturgically and scripturally charged environment, in which Statius explains that desire plays a fundamental role in that journey of purification which leads the souls to Heaven, Dante also chose to refer to it as a 'cruna', as a needle eye, therefore building another link with yet another passage from the Gospel. As I have already mentioned, the scriptural reference in question refers precisely to the difficulty encountered by people in entering the Kingdom of God – which could be understood as a synonym for Heaven. Once more, the hermeneutics of the 'pan de li angeli' could provide some clarification for what is happening on the scene at this point. In the Gospels, we find Jesus' statement that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God;[267] to this, the disciples react by saying that it is therefore impossible for anyone to be saved, and Jesus replies by saying that it is indeed impossible for humans, but nothing is impossible for God. The fact that Statius appears and acts on the scene *in persona Christi*, and that his presence and response to Virgil's 'intercession' for Dante's question is able to enter the eye of the needle of Dante's desire, satisfying it, can be seen

[267] On the interpretation of this passage, and in particular on how the idea of wealth and richness discussed by Jesus in this episode – narrated in the three synoptic Gospels – was understood at the time and connected to spiritual meanings, see: Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea in Lucam*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274, Thomas Aquinas, Biblica. Catena Aurea in Lucam, LT.pdf [accessed 6 March, 2023], pp. 190-91; Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea in Marcum*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274, Thomas Aquinas, Biblica. Catena Aurea in Marcum [2], EN.pdf [accessed 6 March, 2023], pp. 154-58; Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea in* Matthaeum, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Biblica._Catena_Aurea_in_Matthaeum,_EN.pdf [accessed 6 March, 2023], pp. 484-86.

as another declination of the dynamic of the 'pan de li angeli'. Dante's personal, specific desire is encountered by a reality which is entirely human – happening in time and space and in a bodily dimension – and yet is able, in its happening, to bring forth something divine. Only God can satisfy human thirst – the 'sete natural', indeed, 'mai non sazia / se non con l'acqua onde la femminetta / samaritana domandò la grazia' – and therefore only for God it is possible to save humans, freeing their wills and leading them to Heaven through the 'cruna' of their desire,[268] as Statius explains in the account of his experience of purification, and as Dante is depicting through the very unfolding of his journey. With his sacerdotal presence, Statius is truly bringing the peace he signifies and wishes onto the two pilgrims in the very moment in which he greets them. This peace he is bestowing on them, moreover – as I will discuss in section 3.5 –, is a peace able to restore the relationship between the classical, ancient poetry of Virgil and Dante's present 'liturgical' poetry.

In this first part of the interaction between Statius, Virgil and Dante, in which Statius is still unnamed, the emphasis is still not on the fact that these three characters are poets. The situation will change when the identity of the unnamed soul acting in a 'priestly' way, *in persona Christi*, will be finally revealed. After quenching Dante's thirst, Virgil asks Statius to reveal himself:

> «Nel tempo che 'l buon Tito, con l'aiuto
> del sommo rege, vendicò le fóra
> ond' uscì 'l sangue per Giuda venduto,
> col nome che più dura e più onora
> era io di là», rispuose quello spirto,
> «famoso assai, ma non con fede ancora.
> Tanto fu dolce mio vocale spirto,
> che, tolosano, a sé mi trasse Roma,
> dove mertai le tempie ornar di mirto.
> Stazio la gente ancor di là mi noma:
> cantai di Tebe, e poi del grande Achille;
> ma caddi in via con la seconda soma.
> Al mio ardor fuor seme le faville,
> che mi scaldar, de la divina fiamma
> onde sono allumati più di mille;
> de l'Eneïda dico, la qual mamma
> fummi, e fummi nutrice, poetando:
> sanz' essa non fermai peso di dramma.
> E per esser vivuto di là quando
> visse Virgilio, assentirei un sole
> più che non deggio al mio uscir di bando»
>
> (*Purg*. XXI, 82-102)

[268] '[…] quia fecisti nos ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.' [because you made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in you (my translation)] (Augustine, *Confessiones*, I,i,1) (<http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0354-0430,_Augustinus,_Confessionum_Libri_Tredecim,_LT.pdf> [accessed 6 March, 2023]).

The fact that Statius reveals his name only after three *terzine* is particularly significant. In those lines preceding his own name, Statius describes the context in which his identity is rooted: he locates himself in time and space, and stresses the fact that he was honoured to bear the most durable name of all, that of poet.[269] As I discussed in the Introduction,[270] the hermeneutical operation of reading and understanding people's identity in relation to the time and space in which they lived their life is typical of liturgy, which always refers time and space to the person of Christ and reads them, together with the human interactions happening within these boundaries, as the concrete way in which his divine presence is manifested. And Statius too, in fact, links the time and space in which he lived, more or less explicitly, to the person of Christ, in this way making his own identity dependent on, or completed by that of Jesus: the time in which he lived is openly linked with the event of the Crucifixion; the place where he moved – Rome – was also a space that at that time was related to Christianity – even though Statius does not mention it explicitly here. The only element which seems not to be related to the person of Christ, in Statius characterisation of his identity, is that of being a poet. And yet, his being a poet and his love for Virgil's poetry in particular will be shown as the deciding factors which actually granted him salvation. It is probably worth underlining the fact that the story of Statius' life we read in the poem is Dante's own creation and it is not documented elsewhere, at least not in the terms in which Dante recounts it. Statius' love for Virgil and his poem was known thanks to his own words in the *Thebaid*: 'vive, precor; nec tu divina Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora',[271] but nothing else is said of the actual impact that Virgil's lines had on the life of Statius, in terms of religious experiences. Whether or not it is true that Statius converted to Christianity,[272] however, it is the use that Dante makes of this story of conversion that is pivotal in these passages, in terms of its meta-poetical – as well as theological – implications. The first layer to be considered is Dante's own hermeneutical operation of reading Statius' identity according to liturgical principles, as I have just shown in relation to his location in time and space.[273]

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[269] William Franke too has discussed the hermeneutical importance of Statius' operation of placing his own life and identity in a specific portion of time and space, and has provided a particularly insightful reading of this episode of the encounter between Virgil, Statius and Dante. See Franke, *Dante's Interpretive Journey*, in particular chapter 5, 'Resurrected Tradition and Revealed Truth', pp. 191-232.

[270] See section 3.2 of the Introduction in particular.

[271] See also, on this, Richard Lansing, 'Statius's Homage to Vergil', *MLN* 127, Supplement (2012), 91-98; Andrew Hui, 'Dante's Book of Shadows: "Ombra" in the "Divine Comedy"', *Dante Studies*, 134 (2016), 195-224, https://doi.org/10.1353/das.2016.0006; Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio, https://dante.dartmouth.edu, note *ad locum* [accessed 10 March, 2023].

[272] See Barolini's overview of the problem: Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, 256-69.

[273] Freccero has reflected on Dante's hermeneutical endeavour, and has shown how, in other passages, Dante presents himself as able to read and interpret people's lives and destiny and therefore 'God's book correctly'. See John Freccero, 'Manfred's Wound and the Poetics of the "Purgatorio"', in *Dante. The Poetics of Conversion*, pp. 195-208, p. 198. Moreover, we can recall once more the very last canto of the *Commedia*, in which Dante, granted the beatific vision of

I shall now discuss how Dante is able to integrate Statius' identity as a poet with liturgical principles too.

Scholars have often pointed to the fact that, precisely because of the way in which he is presented on the scene – a poet who harbours feelings of love and profound admiration for Virgil, and who also is, course, a Christian – Statius can be considered as a sort of *alter ego* for Dante, a way for him to highlight, and at the same time veil his own love and admiration for Virgil.[274] My argument is that, through Statius' reading and reframing of Virgil's poetry according to liturgical principles, Dante too – in a sort of matryoshka effect – is reframing Statius' line quoted above from the *Thebaid*, by clearly integrating the adjective 'divina', referred to the *Aeneid*, into an openly Christian context. First of all, I believe that it is worth acknowledging how the very reference to Virgil's poem as 'divina fiamma', 'mamma' and 'nutrice' is particularly significant:[275] there is in fact a person who, in the *Commedia*, is characterised by having recourse to these same images. At the very end of the poem, in *Paradiso* XXXIII, the Virgin Mary is addressed as *the* mother, and she is also described as 'meridiana face / di caritate' (ll. 10-11) and 'di speranza fontana vivace' (l. 12). Or before that moment, when she appears in *Paradiso* XXIII (ll. 118-29), she is described as the 'mamma' – eloquently in rhyme with 'coronata fiamma', still referred to her – towards which all the blessed stretch out with desire and affection, before bursting into the joyful praise of the *Regina Coeli*. The whole of *Purgatorio* is full of references to the figure of Mary as the perfect model of humanity with which the purging souls hope to become identified, and her role as *mediatrix* between God and humanity is as present in the poem as it was in the life of the Church of Dante's time.[276] Together with this already remarkable choice to refer to Virgil and his poetry with the same imagery that in the poem is reserved for the Virgin Mary, 'mother of the Church', the way in which Dante frames Statius' reading of Virgil also presents other striking similarities with liturgical dynamics. At the point in which Statius takes on the role of a poet, and is finally identified as the Latin poet Statius, who lived in a very specific portion of time and

God, describes the universe as a book in which he can now discern a mysterious order: 'nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna / legato con amore in un volume, / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna' (*Par*. XXXIII, 85-87).

[274] Giorgio Brugnoli, 'Stazio in Dante', *Cultura neolatina*, XXIX, 1969, pp. 117-25; Christopher Kleinhenz, 'The Celebration of Poetry: A Reading of Purgatory XXII', *Dante Studies*, 106 (1988), 21-41; Lansing, 'Statius's Homage to Vergil'; David M. Black, 'Dante's "Two Suns": Reflection on the psychological sources of the *Divine Comedy*', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 98.6 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-8315.12665; George Corbett, 'The terrace of Sloth and the Sin of Scholars', in *Dante's Christian Ethics*, pp. 133-65.

[275] On Dante's use of a language related to babytalk in this passage and in the *Commedia* in general, see: Robert Hollander, 'Babytalk in Dante's Commedia', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 8.4 (1975), 73-84.

[276] On the role of Mary in the Church at the time see Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, pp. 160-74. Also, on the role of Mary within the poem, see: Domenico Franchetti, *Maria nel pensiero di Dante* (Turin: Edizioni Torino Grafica, 1958); Vincenzo Ferrara, 'Maria e la Chiesa in Dante e in Gioacchino da Fiore', *Divinitas. Pontificiae academiae theologicae romanae commentarii (Roma)*, 9.2 (1965), 259-343; Vittorio Montemaggi, 'Encountering Mercy. Dante, Mary and Us', in *Dante, Mercy and the Beauty of the Human Person*, ed. by Leonard J. DeLorenzo and Vittorio Montemaggi (Eugene: Cascade Book – Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), pp. 10-25.

space, he will still be depicted as performing a sacerdotal function *in persona Christi*, even if in a less obvious and more complex way.

Still following on the theme of desire – connected to one's own identity and so pivotal in these passages –, after revealing himself, Statius expresses his own desire – which could be seen as a hopeless, or unrealistic one – to meet and know his beloved Virgil. As some scholars have pointed out,[277] it is surprising that the now purified and ready for Heaven Statius should linger in such a human longing, which, apparently, still keeps him somehow away from God: he even says to be willing to wait to enter Heaven, if only he could meet his beloved poet. In the previous chapter, however,[278] I have discussed how such a sense of disruption, of something which seems to intrude into the divine order and hierarchy of things, seemingly distracting a person from his or her love for God, when seen from the perspective of the 'pan de li angeli' is paradoxically shown as being integral part of that divine order, and actually a way – if not *the* way –, for humans, to encounter God. It is the way of the Incarnation. Here too Dante presents us with a situation capable of subsuming and restoring human desire and human interactions: Statius' longing – or thirst, to use the same metaphor used by Dante before – is in fact going to be satisfied by the fact that the person he is talking to is precisely Virgil. Their interaction, in the moment of recognition, is staged in a quite problematic way:

> Già s'inchinava ad abbracciar li piedi
> al mio dottor, ma el li disse: «Frate,
> non far, ché tu se' ombra e ombra vedi».
> Ed ei surgendo: «Or puoi la quantitate
> comprender de l'amor ch'a te mi scalda,
> quand'io dismento nostra vanitate,
> trattando l'ombre come cosa salda».
>
> (*Purg*. XXI, 130-136)

Early commentators of the poem generally recognise in Virgil's reaction a simple reminder of the aerial nature of their bodies, and therefore of the impossibility to touch one another;[279] but more recent commentators have noticed the incongruity between this episode and the meeting between Virgil and Sordello (*Purg*. VI, 74-5), where the embrace was actually possible:[280] for this reason, some have promoted the idea that the meaning of Virgil's reaction is to be found in the parallel with a similar episode, namely the meeting with pope Adrian described in *Purgatorio* XIX.[281] While I believe that all these solutions do say something implied in the interaction, I also suggest looking at the reaction

[277] See Giovanni Cecchetti, 'The Statius Episode: Observations on Dante's Conception of Poetry', *Lectura Dantis: A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation*, 7 (1990), 96-114; Franke, *Dante's Interpretive Journey*, pp. 206-09.
[278] See in particular sections 2.5 and 2.6 of chapter 2.
[279] Della Lana, Ottimo, Buti, Benvenuto, Daniello and others (Dartmouth Dante Project).
[280] Carroll, Torraca, Mestica, Trucchi and others (Dartmouth Dante Project).
[281] Grabher, Porena, Sapegno, Bosco-Reggio and others (Dartmouth Dante Project).

Virgil had to Statius' first greeting at the beginning of the canto. I have discussed above the liturgical nature of that interaction, when Virgil responds to the '*Pax vobis*' with a 'cenno ch'a ciò si conface', but I have not considered that which follows immediately after that. This exchange that the two characters perform, in liturgy, signifies the communion which bonds the bishop and the rest of the faithful in the desire to rightly pray to God and be heard by him. It is very interesting that, immediately after this first response, Virgil has the need to clarify his situation, which was not expressed by that first exchange; he indeed acknowledges himself as excluded from that communion: '*ti* ponga in pace la verace corte / che *me* rilega ne l'etterno essilio'. This will obviously raise the astonishment of Statius because the presence of a damned soul in Purgatory is unacceptable, but Virgil provides the explanation of their extraordinary journey. Multiple layers of signification can be recognised in the complex interplay between the two Latin poets, mainly concerning the potentialities of language, in poetry and liturgy. Virgil, whose poetry has the prophetic power to lead towards the recognition of the truth, still tragically places himself outside of the community where such a truth is both revealed and recognised, received as word and as body. Statius seems to be oblivious of this reality, because his gratitude for the role Virgil played in his life makes him handle 'l'ombre come cosa salda'. I believe that what happens in this moment of recognition between the two poets is a dramatization of their different ways to frame and understand their own poetic language. I will come back to the understanding of the word 'ombra' in these lines, but first I shall explore in a greater depth what is the different background in which Virgil's and Statius' poetic languages are framed, always highlighting the connections that exist between such frameworks and the liturgical one.

3.4 Statius: named poet, acting *in persona Christi*

One of the most striking features of the relationship between Virgil and Statius, from a theological point of view, is, of course, the fact that thanks to his reading of Virgil's poetry, Statius was led towards repentance, conversion and, ultimately, salvation. As he makes plain, it is thanks to the reading of the *Aeneid* that he repented of his sin of prodigality:

> Or sappi ch'avarizia fu partita
> troppo da me, e questa dismisura
> migliaia di lunari hanno punita.
> E se non fosse ch'io drizzai mia cura,
> quand'io intesi là dove tu chiame,
> crucciato quasi a l'umana natura:
> 'Per che non reggi tu, o sacra fame
> de l'oro, l'appetito de' mortali?',
> voltando sentirei le giostre grame.
> Allor m'accorsi che troppo aprir l'ali

potean le mani a spendere, e pente'mi
così di quel come de li altri mali.

(*Purg*. XXII, 34-45)

Also, it is thanks to Virgil's poetry that he became a poet, and it is thanks to the reading of the fourth *Eclogue* that he converted to Christianity:

[…] «Tu prima m'inviasti
verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte,
e prima appresso Dio m'alluminasti.
Facesti come quei che va di notte,
che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova,
ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte,
quando dicesti: 'Secol si rinova;
torna giustizia e primo tempo umano,
e progenie scende da ciel nova'.
Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano…»

(*Purg*. XXII, 64-73)

Statius' narration of his hermeneutical relationship with Virgil's text is an unfolding and transposition, in the specific context of his life, of the liturgical action we had seen him performing when appeared on the scene of the poem and was still unnamed. In the first part of canto XXI, Statius joins the two wayfarers in the same way in which Jesus did in the Gospel episode of the road to Emmaus, in a way that already seems to make that story happen again; he greets them using the liturgical formula that a bishop uses to greet the faithful during the celebration of Mass, after the singing of the *Gloria*; is able to satisfy Dante's thirst to know the truth about the earthquake. In this second part of the interaction between him and the two pilgrims, Statius is not described as performing a specific or an openly liturgical action, but as recounting the story of his conversion. However, the very characteristics of this story still present the same liturgical features as the actions I have just recalled. Let us read further Statius' account of his conversion:

«Già era 'l mondo tutto quanto pregno
de la vera credenza, seminata
per li messaggi de l'etterno regno;
e la parola tua sopra toccata
si consonava a' nuovi predicanti;
ond'io a visitarli presi usata.
Vennermi poi parendo tanto santi,
che, quando Domizian li perseguette,
sanza mio lagrimar non fur lor pianti;
e mentre che di là per me si stette,

io li sovvenni, e i lor dritti costumi
fer dispregiare a me tutte altre sette.
E pria ch'io conducessi i Greci a' fiumi
di Tebe poetando, ebb'io battesmo…»

(*Purg*. XXII, 76-89)

Statius was led towards poetry and then towards God by Virgil because he read Virgil's texts in the same way Scriptures are read during Mass, meaning from a 'pan de li angeli' perspective. Virgil's 'parola ornata', which fulfilled the role of mother and nurse for Statius, is able to touch him in a way that speaks to his present life and to his needs, already triggering a process of change of his condition – moving him to repent from prodigality –, and also inclining him towards a full recognition of the truth present in his reality in and through the Christian community. The breaking of the bread of the road to Emmaus episode, as well as the communion between Christians, are both sacramental signs of the Eucharist: the bread is the sacramental body of Christ, and signifies, prefiguring it, the mystical body – the unity of all Christians as members of the same body, which will be manifested through the resurrection of the dead at the end of time.[282] When, at the beginning of canto XXI, the Christ-like, unnamed Statius reaches Virgil who asks him the reasons for the earthquake, he makes of the older poet a disciple, by presenting himself as the very cause of the earthquake; here we are told the story of the Latin poet Statius who is able to unfold the true meaning of Virgil's poetry by means of his own life and conversion. In the road to Emmaus episode, the disciples were moved by Jesus' revelation of the meaning of Scriptures, but they can fully embrace the meaning of Scriptures only when they recognise him in the breaking of the bread; Statius was moved by the prophetic tone of Virgil text, and fully embraced the Christian faith when he encountered the Christian community, in whom Virgil's words fully 'became flesh':[283] 'la parola tua sopra toccata / si consonava a' nuovi predicanti', whose 'dritti costumi' appear to him 'tanto santi' that they persuade him of their truth and credibility. Statius can fully acknowledge the 'good news' announced by Virgil – 'Secol si rinova; / torna giustizia e primo tempo umano, / e progenie scende da ciel nova' – because those poetic words are embodied in the reality of the Christian community. Hence now, on the scene of the poem, Dante's Statius, the purified soul who is therefore ready to ascend into Heaven, becomes the very key to unlock the meaning of Virgil's poetry to Virgil himself, acting again *in persona Christi*: this time not with the 'authority of a bishop', but with the authority of a baptized poet whose identity is now fully assimilated with Christ's – as discussed above, in section 3.3. This dynamic is precisely the dynamic that is displayed during the celebration of Mass, in relation to the treatment reserved for

[282] *Rationale* IV, xlii, 20-21.

[283] See the parallel between this dynamic and the one coming to the fore in the dialogue between Dante and St Peter analysed in chapter 1. William Franke too, from a different perspective, has noticed this same parallel (Franke, *Dante's Interpretive Journey*, pp. 212-13).

the physical book of the Gospel. As we learn from Durand's *Rationale,* the Gospel was carried closed by the subdeacon, and then offered to the bishop (or the priest) celebrating the ritual, who was the only one who could open it, insofar as he was the one acting sacramentally *in persona Christi*:

> quod nemo dignus inventus est aperire librum, qui intus erat scriptus et foris sigillis septem signatus, nisi Leo de tribu Juda, radix David, qui librum aperuit, et septem eius signacula solvit. […] Liber ergo aperitur cum episcopus ad altare pervenit, quoniam ubi Christus primitivam apostolorum congregavit Ecclesiam, docens et praedicans Scripturae misteria revelavit dicens: *Vobis datum est nosse misterium regni Dei; ceteris autem in parabolis*; unde post resurrectionem aperuit illis sensum, ut intelligerent Scripturas.[284]

[no one was found worthy to open the book, which had writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals, except the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, who opened the book and undid it seven seals […]. The book is open when the bishop arrives at the altar because this is where Christ gathered the early Church with His Apostles, teaching and preaching the mysteries of Scripture, which He revealed, saying: To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to the rest in parables (Lk 8:10); thus, after the Resurrection, He opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures (cf. Lk 24:45).]

> Episcopus Christum figurat cui clausus liber presentantur, ad designandum quod solus Christus potuit aperire librum, et solver signacula eius, in quo et ipse Christus, et eius misteria clausa erant, donec cepit ab ipso Christo per predicationem evangelii aperiri.[285]

[the bishop represents Christ, to whom the closed book is presented, to denote that only Christ can open the book and break its seals (cf. Rev 5:2), in which book Christ Himself and His mysteries were enclosed, until it began to be opened by Christ through the preaching of the Gospel.]

Christ himself is the only one who can unfold the meaning of Scriptures, because such a meaning is nothing less than his person, his real living presence capable of fulfilling the person's desires and needs,[286] his identity as the Resurrected one, who gives himself in the Eucharistic breaking of the bread and can be fully known only as *present*. But, by extension, and still as liturgy suggests, Christ is the only one who can unfold the meaning of the book of creation too. The presence of Statius on the scene, the 'resurrected', purified and converted Statius, whose identity is rooted in Christ through

[284] *Rationale* IV, ix, 2.
[285] *Rationale* IV, xvii, 2.
[286] 'Nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis, dum loqueretur nobis in via et aperiret nobis Scripturas?' [Were not our hearts burning within us, while he was talking to us along the way and opened the Scriptures to us?] (Luke 24:32).

time, space and human, bodily interactions, is thus the Christ-like presence and key which alone can unveil the truth conveyed by Virgil's poetry. Virgil did speak the truth, his words – which are poetic words, and therefore rooted into a lived experience and relationship with the created world, rather than in abstract thought –[287] were talking about a truth which he could not fully know because he did not have the possibility to root himself and his own words in a reality known as shaped by the presence of Christ. Virgil does not know time, space and human interactions *as* Jesus Christ, in the way a liturgical understanding of reality would have taught him to do;[288] he frames his life according to a different understanding. In fact, as soon as he appears on the scene, at the very beginning of the poem, Virgil says he lived 'al tempo de li dei falsi e bugiardi' (*Inf.* I, 72): he does acknowledge reality as being a manifestation of the divine – and this is also what truly makes of him a poet, in a theological sense –,[289] but a divine that is not loving to the point of providing everyone with their own 'pan de li angeli'; the existence of reality is not understood, by Virgil, as an act of love from a loving Father. The fact that Dante chose nonetheless to apply this liturgical hermeneutics to Virgil's pagan poetry, certainly makes the situation problematic, but it is also revealing of the very audacious world view professed by Dante, as well as revealing of his understanding of poetry. To say that the person of Christ is the hermeneutical key to read and understand poetry – even non-Christian poetry – inevitably takes us back to that idea of the created world seen and believed to be also written by God, and therefore speaking of Christ no less than Scripture. At this point, I would like to come back to the moment of the failed embrace between Virgil and Statius depicted at the end of canto XXI, in order to discuss in which way it helps us understand more of Dante's idea of poetry and its relationship with the truth of Revelation.

3.5 'Ombra': the transubstantiation of language

In section 3.3, I said that I believe that the failed embrace between the two Latin poets, as well as the words they use in the moment of that interaction – I think also slightly misunderstanding each other –, is a dramatization of their different ways to frame and understand their own poetic language and poetic activity. Virgil says to Statius 'tu se' ombra e ombra vedi', and Statius in turn responds that he loves Virgil so much that he is moved to handle 'l'ombre come cosa salda'. 'Ombra' is a very

[287] See Romano Guardini, *Linguaggio poesia interpretazione* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2000).
[288] This also recalls St Paul's statement: 'In ipso enim vivimus et movemur et sumus, sicut et quidam vestrum poetarum dixerunt: "Ipsius enim et genus sumus"' [In him indeed we live, move and have our being, as even some of your poets said: 'for we too are his offspring'] (Acts 17:28). I believe that St Paul's mention of the fact that the poets were able to have a glimpse of this truth is particularly important when considering Dante's conception of poetry.
[289] This recalls the vision of theology held by Augustine and Tertullian which I mentioned in chapter 2, in which myths and poets have an important role regarding the investigation of the mysteries of the created world. (See Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology*, pp. 27-46).

ambiguous word within the *Commedia*: it can mean shade or shadow, with a slightly negative connotation which, from a Virgilian legacy, preserves the memory and the sense of the invincibility of death;[290] it can refer to the intermediate body of the souls in the afterlife, but, and this is from a scriptural legacy, it can also stand for the elements which prefigure something that has yet to be manifested.[291] Moreover, in Dante's time, the word '*umbra*' could also be used to refer to a sign, although a non-clear one, of God himself.[292] When Virgil refers to himself and Statius as merely 'ombre', he could seem to indirectly quote passages from the New Testament where people are admonished not to praise anyone but God alone – like pope Adrian did with Dante in canto XIX.[293] However, even when he could be seen as indirectly quoting the New Testament, Virgil cannot admit the possibility for a positive, forward-looking understanding of the word 'ombra' and therefore of his own experience of the afterlife, because, as discussed above, he does not know the 'good news' of the Resurrected Christ. Virgil understands himself as an 'ombra' not only insofar as he does not have a fleshy body, but also because he does not know himself – and his poetry – as rooted in Christ. It is much to his surprise that Statius was converted thanks to his poetry. Virgil is very clear about his understanding of his condition from the very beginning of his interaction with Statius – we have seen him saying '*ti* ponga in pace la verace corte / che *me* rilega ne l'etterno essilio': he does not understand his condition as an intermediate one, which leads towards an assimilation with the identity of the Resurrected Christ and eventually towards the resurrection of the body. This is the knowledge and understanding of 'ombra' which Statius can have instead, by means of his own experience: he knows himself as an 'ombra' because he does not have his real body *yet*, but, by means of his belief in and identification with the Resurrection, he knows that death has *already* been overcome, and that his body too will be resurrected. This different use and understanding of this word, moreover, could be seen to reflect their use of poetry too, as seen from Dante's perspective: Virgil can only sing the inevitability of death, whereas Statius, though knowing the Resurrection, did not use his poetry to sing the Good News of Resurrection. His state truly is an intermediate one, pointing towards a resurrection not yet accomplished to the point of renewing the body, as well as the letter of his poetry: he had been, in fact, 'per paura chiuso cristian', whereas the people of the Christian community that had a decisive role in his conversion are characterised by their 'dritti costumi', emphasising, in a

[290] On the classical idea of the afterlife, and in particular on the meaning of the representation of the dead as 'ombre', see Charles Moeller, *Saggezza greca e paradosso cristiano* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2008), in particular pp. 207-35.
[291] See Hui, 'Dante's Book of Shadows'; Freccero, 'Manfred's Wounds'.
[292] Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum*, I, iii, 1 http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/20vs/221_Bonaventura/1221-1274,_Bonaventura,_Doctoris_Seraphici_Opera_Omnia_(Quaracchi)_Vol_01_(1),_LT.pdf. On this, see also Zygmunt Barański, *Dante e i segni. Saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2000), pp. 70-75.
[293] See the passages from Acts 10:26, and Revelation 19:10 and 22:9.

liturgical sense besides a moral one, the role of their bodies and actions in knowing, experiencing and making manifest through bodily performances the truth of Revelation. The one telling us the story of this failed embrace between 'ombre', however, claims to be there in *Purgatorio*, going through that process by means of which 'l'umano spirito si purga / e di salire al ciel diventa degno', present with his living body, and very often recognised as still alive precisely by means of the 'ombra' produced by his body; he is indeed using his poetic language to bear witness to these events, making himself manifest – as discussed in chapter 1 – and reframing once more the poetic language of the two Latin poets. Dante himself is the poet whose poetry will be fully enlightened by the light of Resurrection, becoming, with its full 'body', an 'ombra', a sign and foreshadowing of the manifestation of the truth – according to St Paul's use and understanding of the word. The whole of *Paradiso*, which is not by chance referred to as the written account of 'l'ombra del beato regno' (*Par*. I, 23), stands as a witness to this poetic process and endeavour undertaken by Dante. The second chapter of St Paul's Epistle to the Colossians is very helpful for the understanding of the dynamic embodied in the interaction between the three poets, but two verses in particular are extremely significant for this present discussion on the connection between 'ombre' and bodies:

> Nemo ergo vos iudicet in cibo aut in potu aut ex parte diei festi aut neomeniae aut sabbatorum, quae sunt umbra futurorum, corpus autem Christi.[294]

[Let no one judge you regarding food, or drink, or festive day or new moon or sabbath, because these are shadows of things to come, whereas the body is Christ.]

The fact that St Paul uses the word 'body' to refer to reality and ultimately to the identity of the person, and that he also says that this reality – or body – belongs to Christ, clarifies even more Virgil's situation and his failed embrace with Statius. Also, it proves to be very much in tune with the liturgical understanding of reality which I have been discussing throughout this thesis. From this liturgical perspective, shared by St Paul, the body – or reality intended in its features of time, space and human interactions – is an 'ombra' which can foreshadow the truth of the things to come, at once unveiling and veiling its light; but a body that is not fully identified with the Resurrection of Christ, acknowledged as part of Christ's own identity, cannot be seen as anything but an 'ombra' of inconsistency, where death irremediably takes something of the person away, and there is no light to be veiled and unveiled by the body, irremediably lost and, ultimately, considered without bearing a

[294] Colossians 2:16-17. See also the passage from Hebrew 8:5, 9:9 and 10:1, where the word 'umbra' is also used in relation to the Law or to the celebration of rituals as being an anticipation for the manifestation of the full truth.

clear, valuable meaning. Dante, however, is able to mingle poetry with liturgy, not discarding poetic language, nor having to deprive it of its own reality – or body, or letter –, and of the experience of reality it brings about, but renewing it from within:[295] *Purgatorio* is indeed the place where 'la morta poesì resurg*e*', and this is the place in which peace is being bestowed on the two pilgrim poets, embodying classical, ancient poetry and modern, 'liturgical' poetry,[296] by the 'bishop' Statius who liturgically greets them with the words of the Resurrected Christ, embodying the restoration between the two traditions.

It is worth underscoring that it is still the poetic word of Virgil that, in Dante's account of Statius conversion, was able to lead him to salvation: in this sense, the Eucharistic resonances found in Statius' description of his relationship with Virgil – discussed above – call into question the use of language, and specifically poetic language. This liturgical reading of Virgil's texts happens among poets; the destiny of other poets and poetry in general is all they talk about once the troubling questions about identities and events in Purgatory have been answered.[297] The poetical and the liturgical are conflated in the letter of Dante's text, showing a concrete possibility of restoration of the letter of Virgil's text too. When Dante's Statius reads and interprets Virgil's texts, he does so by relating his words to a context known *as* the manifestation of Christ, and he is thus able to see something that Virgil himself did not see: 'Facesti come quei che va di notte / che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova, / ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte' (*Purg*. XXII, 67-69). By now, it should not be too surprising if the image used by Statius to describe Virgil's paradoxical condition is a powerfully liturgical one: the candles in the liturgical performance always signify the prophets, and they are indeed used during processions to accompany, preceding and 'announcing' it, the Gospel book.[298] But there is more: the minister appointed to carry the candles, the acolyte, was also seen as a figure of the classical poet,[299] and when discussing the different roles and ministries at play in the liturgical context, Durand also refers to the classical figure of the *vates* – which I have mentioned at the

[295] Yet another parallel with St Paul can be seen here: 'Obsecro itaque vos, fratres, per misericordiam Dei, ut exhibeatis corpora vestra hostiam viventem, sanctam, Deo placentem, rationabile obsequium vestrum; et nolite conformari huic saeculo, sed transformamini renovatione mentis, ut probetis quid sit voluntas Dei, quid bonum et bene placens et perfectum.'[I therefore urge you, brothers, by the mercy of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship; do not conform yourselves to this age, but transform yourselves with a renewal of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect] (Romans 12:1-2).
[296] This definition of Dante's language as liturgical, and his identification as a 'liturgical poet', is somehow foreshadowed in the parallels that have been drawn between Dante and David. See Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, pp. 275-79; Theresa Federici, 'Dante's Davidic Journey: From Sinner to God's Scribe', in *Dante's Commedia. Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, pp. 180-209; Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Conclusioni', in *Preghiera e liturgia nella Commedia.* ed. by Giuseppe Ledda, pp. 221-28; Giuseppe Ledda, 'La danza e il canto dell'"umile salmista": David nella "Commedia" di Dante', in *Les figures de David à la Renaissance*, ed. by Élise Boillet, Sonia Cavicchioli and Paul-Alexis Mellet (Geneva: Droz, 2015), pp. 225-46.
[297] 'Elli givan dinanzi, e io soletto / di retro, e ascoltava i lor sermoni, / ch'a poetar mi davano intelletto' (*Purg*. XXII, 127-29).
[298] *Rationale* IV, vi and IV, xxiv.
[299] *Rationale* II, vii, esp. 3.

beginning of this chapter – as one that subsumes the different figures of priest, prophet and poet.[300] It is helpful here to have recourse to the metaphor of the 'book of creation' once more: from a liturgical perspective, nature itself was a book written by God in the act of creation, with the things called into existence being his words,[301] and for this reason it was possible to interpret it, inasmuch as it was full of meaning; the words of the Bible, written by means of inspired writers, were instead the direct voice of God speaking to his people and engaging in an open dialogue with them. If, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, we recognise as possible that in the poetic utterance there is more than just the personal expression of the poet and his or her subjectivity, but also an *erotic* acknowledgement of the outside reality, we can admit that poetic inspiration depends upon an *encounter* with the created world, which 'reveals' itself and its mystery to the poet: in this way, the written words engendered by that experience become a testimony of such a revelation, and poetry is understood first of all as an act performed in response to this encounter. As a result of this encounter, the poet is the one who loves the created world – or a specific element of it – and is therefore able to read more carefully and more deeply into the mysteries of the 'book of creation', communicating and interpreting them by means of their poetic, symbolic language.

The main argument of this thesis is that liturgy and its ways to interpret both reality and scriptural texts is a fundamental place where Dante might have learnt to read and interpret the world as well as poetic texts. However, as I have been showing and discussing throughout this chapter, the understanding of poetry coming from the classical tradition, which undoubtedly was a fundamental part of Dante's poetic formation,[302] already contains itself some of the same principles employed by liturgy: this means that liturgy, therefore, might have constituted for Dante the perfect synthesis between his poetic approach to reality and the Christian truth of the Revelation. The figure of Statius has in fact worked as the manifestation of such a synthesis, in his being presented as acting *in persona Christi*, like a priest and as a poet, also embodying the figure of the *vates* as it was understood at the time. Virgil's poetry, insofar as it acknowledges the mystery of creation and therefore the expression of a *vates*, does sing and announce the truth of Revelation, because it *erotically* acknowledges its presence,[303] although it is not able to utter the true name of this present truth: he does not know Jesus Christ, nor reality as a 'pan de li angeli' given from a loving Father, because the gods he knows are 'falsi e bugiardi'. I believe that the choice to highlight Virgil's paradoxical and tragic condition is a way, for Dante, to underscore his awareness regarding the 'danger' of poetry, which can still be

[300] 'Vates autem, qui a vi mentis dictus est, modo sacerdotem, modo prophetam, modo poetam significat secundum Ysidorum' [According to Isidore, "seer", which comes from "force of the mind", at one time can signify the priest, at another, the prophet, and at another the poet] (*Rationale* II, i, 3).
[301] On the idea of the existing, concrete things of the world as being God's words, see Guardini, *Etica*, p. 715.
[302] See Erich Auerbach, 'La poesia giovanile di Dante' in *Studi su Dante* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), pp. 23-62.
[303] See Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 25-27, 216-19 and 220-23.

mendacious in its expressions. The theme of truth in relation to falsehood in poetry is as ancient as poetry itself: the Greek poet Hesiod, in the proem of his *Theogony*, tells the story of his poetic investiture by the Muses, who explain to him how they can 'tell many lies similar to the truth',[304] and Dante too discusses this theme in the *Convivio*.[305] However, in highlighting Virgil's paradoxical situation – as well as the dangers of a poetic engagement with the *experience* of truth – Dante is also showing a different possibility for the reading and interpretation of his poetry. The choice of using the mediation of Statius' liturgical action and reading of Virgil to describe the relationship between the classical tradition and Dante's own poetry goes beyond a merely allegorical approach to classical poetry. In the same way in which the liturgical reading of the Bible, having Christ as key, shows the figural relationship of mainly historical events and people between the Old and New Testaments, so too the liturgical reading of Virgil's poetry, still having Christ as key, shows the figural relationship between his poetic language and Dante's: I think that Dante is building with the classical tradition the same kind of relationship existing between the two Testaments, where the Old Testament is the foreshadowing of the New, which in turn unfolds the truth already contained in the Old. As I have discussed in this chapter, Dante is able to show how the book of the Bible and that of creation speak the same truth. If the Bible is more and mostly concerned with real events concerning the historical people of Israel where God manifests himself intervening directly in history and revealing himself in the historical person of Jesus Christ – hence it is the realm of figurative language proper, as well as the occasion in which truth is both experienced and 'called by name' –, the book of creation speaks of the presence of Christ as the mysterious way in which God created everything that exists, and in which everything that exists is rooted.[306] Again, as St Paul said, the body is Christ's, or, from a liturgical perspective, reality in its features of time, space and bodily presence is Christ. Moreover, St Paul is also the one who stated that poets are the ones who had a glimpse and intuition of this truth: 'In ipso enim vivimus et movemur et sumus, sicut et quidam vestrum poetarum dixerunt: "Ipsius enim et genus sumus"'[In him indeed we live, we move and have our being, as some of your poets said: 'for we too are his offspring].[307] Dante does use figurative language in the poem,[308] and when he applies this dynamic to the relationship between his poetry and Virgil's – with the mediation of Statius' liturgical action – he shows that the poetic language of Virgil and his own are witnesses of the same reality, although with a different understanding of it: the created world as manifestation of the divine, and more specifically of the Incarnate divine, whose name is Jesus Christ. Statius'

[304] Hesiod, *Teog.*, 27.
[305] *Convivio* II, i, 3.
[306] '"[D]ietro la figura del *vate* compare quella del profeta dell'Antico Testamento" e dietro la dinamica della rivelazione religioso-naturale fa intravedere la sua luce la Rivelazione biblica'. (Burzo, *Appello e decisione*, p. 155).
[307] Acts 17:28.
[308] Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', in *Studi su Dante*, pp. 176-226.

liturgical reading of Virgil unveils the relationship existing between Virgil's *tragedìa* and Dante's *comedìa*, and characterises it as the same kind of relationship existing between the Old and the New Testaments, although applied to poetry, and therefore to an interpretation of nature, creation and reality by means of myths and symbols rather than to historical events. As Auerbach put it,

> Le forme simboliche o mitiche hanno molti punti di contatto con l'interpretazione figurale; al pari di questa esse pretendono di interpretare e ordinare la vita nel suo complesso, e sono pensabili soltanto nell'ambito di sfere religiose o affini; ma appaiono subito evidenti anche le differenze. Nel simbolo è necessariamente implicata una forza magica, nella 'figura' no; questa a sua volta deve essere sempre storica, il simbolo no. Ovviamente anche il cristianesimo ha simboli magici; ma la 'figura' come tale non appartiene ad essi. In realtà le due forme sono quanto mai diverse in quanto la profezia reale si riporta all'interpretazione storica, ed è essenzialmente interpretazione di un testo, mentre il simbolo è un'interpretazione immediata della vita e, all'origine, soprattutto della natura.[309]

In the same way in which the liturgical reading of the Bible shows the figural relationship of mainly historical events and people between the two Testaments, so too the liturgical reading of Virgil's poetry shows the figural relationship between his poetic experience and language and Dante's. This operation is far more audacious than a simple 'allegorisation', which would deprive Virgil's poetic experience of its reality and, ultimately, of its poetic nature altogether. Dante still grants a layer of truth and consistency to the poetic expression of classical poets, because of its performative understanding of poetry: poetic language is the language of the 'pan de li angeli', is the language born from that experience of erotic acknowledgement of a presence in and through time, space and human interactions. A language which speaks of the experience of a present, encounterable divine, even when it does not know his name, bears witness to Jesus Christ, because he is the Incarnated, Resurrected God, whose presence fulfils one's own desire. Really Dante reads Virgil – and classical poetry in general – liturgically, daring to call the Muses 'sante': in his understanding, those words, those poetic acts are the expression of an experience of the 'pan de li angeli', of Christ himself even though his historical identity was not known by the poets performing those acts. Interestingly, Romano Guardini has reflected on the different aspects of Christ's identity revealed and emphasized through the liturgy and through the Gospels: in Scripture, he is mostly seen and known in his precise individuality, his historical identity as Jesus of Nazareth, whereas in the liturgy his identity as the

[309] Auerbach, 'Figura' in *Studi su Dante*, p. 212.

supreme mediator between God and humanity, and as transcending time and space while permeating them, is the aspect that comes to the fore with greater strength.[310] My argument is that the 'liturgical' identity of Christ is the one which Virgil could know and of which his poetry is a witness, although in an incomplete way, and that it is on the basis of this shared experience of the same truth that Dante builds his relationship with classical poetry. In other words, I think that Dante is saying that, paradoxically and not without difficulties, but truly nonetheless, Christ is the most proper object of poetry.

Dante insists on outlining his identity as a poet, and not as a prophet, because the kind of prophecy he deals with is not of the biblical type, and therefore properly historical, but poetic, whose symbolic expressions and manifestations still exist in the historical reality of the poem and the poet, and bear witness to the Beauty and the Truth in and through which God created the world. Virgil did not announce the coming of Christ in his historical contingency, because he simply could not: Statius was able to recognise in his poetry a prophecy of the coming of Christ because of the poetic nature of that prophecy, and therefore to recognise in the liturgical reality of the Christian community the real presence of the announced Christ, transcending time and space and yet permeating them. Liturgy comes across again as the place in which these two realities are kept together, the historical and the symbolic, and the existence of the Eucharist is what actually grants symbols their status of realities, no less than historical ones.[311]

By openly referring to the Gospel as the starting point of this whole process, at the beginning of canto XXI, Dante somehow positions himself within that vein of writers and exegetes who have their forefather in the Gospel, like the other authors of the New Testament, meaning that his poetic words are grounded in a specific, historical event, more than just in an idea. At the same time, in constantly emphasising the poetic nature of his language, Dante is also claiming that it is grounded in the experience of personal encounter with Christ in a 'supra-historical' – and therefore transcendent – dimension: in this way, the two aspects of Christ's identity outlined above are harmonically kept together. Dante takes poetic language, with its forms and features, its myths and symbols, and makes it proclaim the Gospel: he lends his body – as a pilgrim – and his poetry – as a poet – to the event of the truth, acknowledged and praised as Jesus Christ. In this way, the matter of language, can be 'transubstantiated' into the lived testimony and witness of the Gospel, of the resurrection of Christ. Dante's poetry does not simply describe events, it makes God's story happen and move forward,[312] exactly as the celebration of Mass, with the reading of the Gospel and the celebration of the Eucharist,

[310] Guardini, *Lo spirito della liturgia*, pp. 53-56.
[311] 'Ci sono molte forme intermedie, che sono tanto figura che simbolo; in particolare l'eucaristia con la presenza reale di Cristo, e anche la Croce come albero della vita, "arbor vitae crucifixae," di cui è nota l'importanza' (Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 212 note 39).
[312] See Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*.

does and demands the faithful to do. Insofar as it is poetic, his language erotically acknowledges and praises the divine as present, as Incarnated and able to satisfy human desire; insofar as 'evangelical', his language is able to utter the historical, true name of that divine, fully knowing his identity as the Resurrected Christ who defeated death. And indeed, in *Paradiso* this language is granted the grace to 'trasumanar' and thus become an 'ombra', a crumb of the 'pan de li angeli' which – precisely like the Eucharist – both veils and unveils the light of Heaven, of the truth to come. Dante's is therefore a poetic, liturgical language which, by shedding light on what he perceives to be the true roots of poetry, is able to transubstantiate it into the real presence of the good news revealed in the Gospel.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the links existing between a poetic approach to truth and the liturgical one. Engendered by a meaningful encounter with reality, poetic language is perhaps that which, with a lesser degree of mediation, is able to convey lived experiences. Here too, I have shown how Dante problematises the relationship between the lived experiences symbolised by poetic language and the rational re-elaboration or understanding of such experiences. In this sense, I have explored how Dante is able to mingle poetic expressions with scriptural ones, therefore reading texts belonging to the classical tradition in a liturgical way. I have grounded the possibility for Dante to do so in a liturgical understanding of reality, in which time, space and human interactions are understood as conveying the same message conveyed by the words of Scripture: they are both understood and experienced as the place for a possible, personal encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. From this perspective, I have shown how the relationship that Dante builds between his own poetry and that of the poets belonging to the classical tradition acquires new levels of signification, in which their myths, that is, their poetic, symbolic re-elaborations of their experiences of encounter with the created world, can be read as prophecies of Christ not just in an allegorical way, but in a rather more 'substantial' one, inasmuch as they are understood as being, already, experiences of the encounter with him, even without the possibility of fully recognising his identity. I have also underscored the emphasis placed by Dante on the effect that this failed or successful acknowledgement has on language, and on poetry in particular. In the first case, when the acknowledgement does not take place, poetry can only sing the inevitability of death, as well as expressing that thirst of the human soul for life, meaning and fullness, a fullness which it is still possible to experience in some portions of time and space, although with no real hope for a definite, everlasting fulfilment; in the case of a full acknowledgement of the

divine present as Christ, and precisely as the Resurrected Christ, poetry becomes praise, a positive sign and witness for a future, complete fulfilment, which is nonetheless already accomplished.[313]

Therefore, in poetry too rationality has an important role to play, besides the sapiential kind of knowledge that is more proper to it. The vital, personal experience needs to be understood and evaluated also from a rational perspective: in this resides the profound cognitive value of the poetic experience, conveying the possibility for a knowledge of transcendence manifested in and through immanence. Moving from here, I will devote the following chapter to the study of Dante's approach to more scientific modes of knowledge, having therefore their stronger focus in the understanding of the immanent component of the world, which, as we shall see, is still an element of fundamental importance in the *Commedia*.

[313] On the idea of salvation as present, but not yet fully manifested, exemplified by the formula 'already, and not yet' see, among other examples, Romans 5:9 and 8:18-30, or 1John 3:2. See also Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964).

Chapter 4.
‘Esperïenza […] fonte ai rivi di vostr'arti’:
Dante’s scientific method

The aim of this final chapter of my thesis will be that of exploring Dante’s approach to scientific modes of knowledge in the *Commedia*. However unexpected it might seem to find a chapter on science following a chapter dedicated to poetry, my intention is precisely to show that truly it is the demands of a liturgical understanding of reality which unavoidably led Dante to engage with science, and to do it still from a poetic-liturgical perspective, stretching and expanding the possibilities of human reason. An understanding of the physical world, with the laws and principles proper to it and explaining its functioning, which is still able to look at those physical principles from a ‘pan de li angeli’ perspective seems to be an ultimate, compelling issue with which human reason is called to deal. This is a call which Dante does take seriously: scientific discourses do find their place in the poem, and Dante seems to handle these matters with at least as much confidence as he handles theological or philosophical considerations.[314] It is fascinating to think that science, and therefore a particular understanding of the physical world, could actually be the realm of knowledge which shows, perhaps even more than those explored in the previous chapters of this thesis – theology, philosophy, poetry –, the potential of that which I have been calling *liturgical hermeneutics*.

As we can infer from reading the *Commedia*, for Dante to be a Christian meant to have a firm faith in the goodness and value of the body, both of the person and of the whole world: as I have been showing so far, his faith is the faith of the ‘pan de li angeli’, a faith that knows God as a loving Father because he provides, for his children, the food that is able to nourish them and fulfil their hunger, their needs and desires. His identity as a poet too – as I have discussed in particular in the previous chapter – is for Dante rooted in the same experience of the ‘pan de li angeli’, and, in the circumstances of his life, that experience bore the name of Beatrice. And, I argue, it is precisely his love for Beatrice that will demand from him a serious engagement with questions regarding the physical world, its laws and the principles according to which it works. When Dante meets her again in *Purgatorio*, she states that:

> Mai non t’appresentò natura o arte
> piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch’io
> rinchiusa fui, e che so’ ’n terra sparte;

[314] On Dante’s familiarity with issues of more ‘scientific’ nature, commonly debated at the time, see Bruno Nardi, *Dal ‘Convivio’ alla ‘Commedia’ (Sei saggi danteschi)* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1960).

e se 'l sommo piacer sì ti fallio
per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale
dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?

(*Purg*. XXXI, 50-54)

In the Introduction of this thesis, I have referred to this same passage as evidence of the fact that truly encountering Beatrice was, for Dante, to have a taste of the 'pan de li angeli'; here, I want to stress one specific aspect of that encounter which is emphasised by Beatrice herself. Her discourse is very clear in pointing that it was her *bodily* presence in Dante's life which was able to renew it.[315] It is Beatrice's body, her 'belle membra' which incarnated for him the possibility to experience true delight and beatitude. The starting point of this research has been the acknowledgement of the centrality of the experience of the 'pan de li angeli' in Dante's life, and therefore in his intellectual endeavour and journey of knowledge as a poet. In other words, this research has been moved by a desire to engage seriously with Dante's own statement, when he wrote that he would not speak of his blessed Beatrice again, not until he would be more worthy of doing it, and in order to do so, he said '*io studio quanto posso*, sì com'ella sae veracemente'.[316] In this chapter, therefore, I would like to discuss how this same experience, and its physical reality in particular, is the root from which Dante's approach to science too springs. In other word, I will argue that it is the love for a real, concrete being – an experience highlighted and discussed in the previous chapter as *poetic* – that makes it possible to undertake a journey of knowledge that is aimed at discovering, at once, the truth about that specific being and the greater reality it makes manifest. If we consider science to be the discipline concerned with the functioning of the concrete, physical world, then the connection will be clearer.

I shall begin my discussion of Dante's approach to science by focusing on the passage which I highlighted at the very beginning of this thesis, taken from *Paradiso* II. I find it extremely meaningful that the canto in which Dante openly warns us about the need for a knowledge and experience of the 'pan de li angeli', is also one of the canti in which we find one of the most interesting – and complex – discourses on scientific problems. I believe that truly in this canto Dante is providing us with the hermeneutical key for the whole poem, and therefore for his rational, 'scientific' thinking as well.[317] Thus, I will use this canto and the discussion between Dante and Beatrice on the problem of the moon-spots as the ground in which Dante's idea of science is rooted, and then I will proceed to examine other instances in which he has recourse to scientific – or 'technological' – imagery, showing

[315] The encounter to which Beatrice refers is, obviously, the one witnessed in the *Vita nova*. It is not by chance, I believe, that in canto XXX she uses the exact expression 'vita nova' (l. 115) to refer to Dante's experiences in his youth, therefore creating a clear link with the story narrated in the *libello*. Also, on the centrality of Beatrice's body in the *Vita nova*, see Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
[316] *Vita nova*, XLII, emphasis mine.
[317] See also Moevs, 'Paradiso II: Gateway to Paradise'.

how his approach is consistent throughout the whole poem. I will take a closer look at the way in which Dante describes and makes use of the mechanical clock to address, in a more focussed way, the problem of Dante's understanding of time. Finally, I will consider the fundamental passage from *Purgatorio* XXV, Statius' embryology and account of the aerial body, and compare it with the description of Mohammed's body in *Inferno* XXVIII: this will be in order to explore Dante's use of biological notions and language in his representation of the mystery of the human body.

However, before proceeding with my analysis, a further, although brief, clarification will be necessary regarding the meaning we give nowadays to the term 'science', compared to the meaning that the word *scientia* actually had in Dante's time, and which, undoubtedly, facilitated Dante's liturgical approach to this discipline.

4.1 Science in Dante's time

As I have discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, the word *scientia* was used, in Dante's time, as a synonym for knowledge, and more precisely, for a more openly rational kind of knowledge, as distinct from a sapiential one, or, as I have characterised it linking it to the concept of the 'pan de li angeli', *experiential*.[318] Often, *scientia* was used to refer to the totality of the disciplines also known as the liberal arts – namely grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, geometry and astrology – , or to physics, metaphysics and even to theology itself, defined as 'divine science'.[319]

That which we nowadays call 'science' developed, still in an embryonic stage, as an integral part of a philosophical enquiry of reality. The study of the created world in its more natural and physical aspects was basically a declination of philosophy, often falling under the umbrella of 'Fisica' or 'natural philosophy'. This is the cradle from which modern disciplines such as mechanics, optics, geology, chemistry and others developed, whereas arithmetic and geometry – fundamental to the modern practice of science – as well as astronomy, at the time called 'astrologia',[320] were already disciplines in their own right. In Dante's time, Aristotle's *Libri naturales*, namely *Physica*, *De caelo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *Meteorologica* and *De anima*, were seen as the main authoritative texts in the field of natural philosophy,[321] even though they were not always known directly but rather through the many medieval commentaries on them – as was probably also the case for Dante. The

[318] See section 1.1 of the Introduction, and the reference to Augustine's distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*.
[319] See *Convivio* II, xiii.
[320] In the same discipline both the study of the movements of the celestial bodies (what we would call astronomy) and the study of their influence on the terrestrial region (what we would call astrology) merged. See Simon Gilson, 'Medieval Science in Dante's *Commedia*: Past Approaches and Future Directions', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 27 (2001), 39-77 (pp. 42-43); see also Monica Aimone, 'Astronomia nella *Commedia*', in *Leggere e rileggere la Commedia*, ed. by Barbara Peroni (Milan: Unicopli, 2009), pp. 141-74.
[321] Ruggiero Pergola, 'Aristotele e sapere scientifico nel mondo latino', *Studi di Glottodidattica*, 1 (2011), 15-24 (p. 21).

poet was trained in these disciplines, even if we do not know the precise source of such training nor to what extent he completed it. We know from the *Convivio* that for some time he used to go 'nelle scuole delli religiosi e alle disputazioni delli filosofanti' in order to follow his new love for Philosophy, and therefore these two environments are those from which, most likely, he might have acquired this knowledge.[322]

We have to wait until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, namely until the Scientific Revolution, to see science becoming a field in its own right, interested in the functioning of the natural world and gradually more and more separated from the other branches of philosophy. This revolution came with a high degree of innovation in terms of both methods and tools, and it is conventionally recognised as that which marks the watershed between the ancient idea of science and the modern one – now considered to be the only one for which the denomination is used appropriately – although seeds of this new concept of science can be actually traced back to the Middle Ages, and even to classical antiquity.[323] We know how much this attitude to knowledge has taken over the whole practice of research, but this is precisely the point where Dante's approach to it proves to be meaningful. Certainly, the notions and methods available to the poet at the time have often been proven inaccurate or altogether wrong, but it is nonetheless important not to discard medieval scientific knowledge simply because of its ways that, in the eye of the twenty-first-century reader, might seem old-fashioned or even bizarre. That which nowadays we call 'scientific accuracy' is not the same thing as 'meaningfulness': Dante's scientific discourses in the poem, as we shall see, even if not particularly accurate – when compared with our contemporary scientific knowledge – are still meaningful *today*,[324] because they still have something to say about the world – if we look at the created world remembering that it is the place in which one can find one's own 'pan de li angeli'.

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[322] On the cultural context of Dante's Florence, and his possible readings of and on Aristotle see, among others: Simon A. Gilson, 'Dante and Christian Aristotelianism'; Leonardo Cappelletti, *Ne le scuole de li religiosi… Le dispute scolastiche sull'anima nella "Commedia" di Dante* (San Donato a Livizzano: Aleph, 2015); Edward Moore, 'Sulle traduzioni di Aristotele utilizzate da Dante', in Edward Moore, *Studi su Dante*, ed. by Bruno Basile, 2 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2015), I, 448-60; Concetto Martello, 'Fonti filosofiche medievali in Dante', in *I cantieri dell'Italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo*, ed. by Gabriele Baldassarri and others (Rome: ADI editore, 2016), https://www.italianisti.it/pubblicazioni/atti-di-congresso/i-cantieri-dellitalianistica-ricerca-didattica-e-organizzazione-agli-inizi-del-xxi-secolo-2016/Martello.pdf; Lorenzo Mainini, *Gli anni della tradizione: testi, codici e culture (secc. XII ex. -XIV in.)* (Rome: Viella, 2017); Gianfranco Fioravanti, '"Come dice il filosofo": Dante e la "littera" di Aristotele', *Italianistica. Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 48.1 (2019), 11-50; *The Dominicans and the Making of Florentine Cultural Identity (13th-14th centuries) / I domenicani e la costruzione dell'identità culturale di Firenze (XIII-XIV secolo)*, ed. by Delphine Carron, Elisa Brilli, Johannes Bartuschat (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2020); Sonia Gentili and Irene Gualdo, 'Per la "forma" delle fonti dantesche: tipologie librarie e percorsi esegetici in Santa Croce', in *Dante e il suo tempo nelle biblioteche fiorentine*, ed. by Gabriella Albanese and others (Florence: Mandragora, 2022), pp. 401-06; Lorenzo dell'Oso, 'Dante, Peter of Trabibus and the "Schools of the Religious Orders" in Florence', *Italian Studies*, 2022, 1-19.

[323] See Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alistair C. Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo. The History of Science A.D. 400-1650* (London: Falcon Press, 1952), pp. 1-18.

[324] In this vein, some particularly interesting contributions come from Pavel Florenskij and Marco Bersanelli. Florenskij dedicated the last chapter of his book on the geometrical interpretation of the imaginary numbers to Dante and his

The reason why I referred above to science – therefore to the understanding of the physical world – as the realm of knowledge in which nowadays, perhaps, the liturgical hermeneutics can show its potential to the fullest is that the dichotomy between *scientia* and *sapientia*, concreteness and transcendence, faith and reason, can be perceived to the highest degree, whereas in Dante's time it was mostly seen in the contraposition between Revelation-theology and reason-philosophy, as discussed in chapter 2.

4.2 'Esperïenza' and experiments

The relationship Dante has with scientific matters, in the poem, is two-sided. When the poet engages with science, it is either because he has something to add to the scientific debates of his time, or because he has something to take from the way in which science reads and explains the world to him: it seems fair to say that this exchange happens throughout the *Commedia*, and it is difficult to say when Dante is doing one thing or the other. There have been scholars who have considered the presence of science within the *Commedia* as a topic in its own right, and studied the specific mathematical, astronomical, physical, epistemological notions held by Dante and developed in the poem.[325] Caution is often suggested when approaching scientific matters in Dante's text, precisely because of the perceived difference between the medieval practice of the discipline and the modern one. A difficulty that often arises is precisely the need to keep the realm of rational objectivity separate from that of experienced, religious transcendence: science should only be concerned with universal, law-like statements and theories which can be verified by experiments; theology is the discipline which deals with moral problems and the enquiries regarding religious mysteries. As soon as science steps into the realm of transcendence, it is no longer 'science', but becomes a different discipline altogether, with different parameters and ways to read reality. Put in this way, it could seem that, from the perspective of a twenty-first-century scholar, the tension between these two poles is an unresolvable one: in other words, modern science does not and cannot have anything to do with our 'pan de li angeli'. However, to challenge such an assumption has been the attempt of this whole

representation of the cosmos, showing that Dante's way to describe space, even if not from a rational, theoretical perspective, but from an 'intellectual' and 'imaginative' one, is coherent with the discoveries of non-Euclidean geometry, and, ultimately, with Einstein's hypothesis regarding the structure of the universe (Pavel A. Florenskij, *Gli immaginari in geometria. Estensione del dominio delle immagini bidimensionali nella geometria*, ed. by Andrea Oppo and Massimiliano Spano (Milan: Mimesis, 2021); see also Natalino Valentini, *Il Dante di Florenskij. Tra poesia e scienza* (Turin: Lindau, 2021). Bersanelli showed how, by reading Dante's descriptions of the cosmos as the description of a curved space, precisely as a hypersphere, the lines of *Paradiso* describing the order of the heavens and their relationship with the Empyrean make more sense (Marco Bersanelli, *Il grande spettacolo del cielo. Otto visioni dell'universo dall'antichità ai nostri giorni* (Segrate: Sperlink e Kupfer, 2016), in particular the section 4 of chapter 3, 'L'ipersfera di Dante', pp. 206-21 Epub ebook.)

[325] For an overview of the topic, see *Dante e la scienza*, ed. by Patrick Boyde and Vittorio Russo (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1995); Gilson, 'Medieval Science in Dante's *Commedia*: Past Approaches and Future Directions'.

thesis, and I want to show how Dante is able to deliver a 'scientific method' capable of maintaining the two realities together, the concrete and the transcendent. As anticipated above, I believe that *Paradiso* II is the canto in which Dante provides us with the hermeneutical key for the reading of his poem, and therefore the canto in which he suggests how to 'make use' of our rational minds when interpreting his poem, and, by reflection, the created world. The focus of my analysis here will be the complex discussion happening between Dante and Beatrice about the nature of the moon-spots, because it provides a good overview of the general approach which Dante shows toward science, regardless of any specific school of thought he might or might not embrace. As I have done in the previous chapters, I will not engage with the problem of the origin of the moon-spots directly, meaning that I will not look at Beatrice's discourse from the perspective of the philosophical or theological ideas involved, and which might have shaped a certain understanding of science. I will rather focus on how Dante stages this scientific discourse – therefore on his emphasis on the *performance* of science itself –, and, once more, on the fact that what is happening on the scene is a dialogue, the unfolding of a journey of understanding happening within a relationship.

As I outlined in the previous section, to carry out a scientific enquiry, in Dante's time, was something integral with a philosophical enquiry regarding that same portion of reality. In this canto in which Dante and Beatrice reach the Heaven of the Moon, in fact, the discussion on the cause of the moon-spots is the pretext for dealing with a considerably bigger question. It is a question that lies at the core of the whole *Commedia*, and that is also made more compelling in this place in which Dante experiences that two identities, or two bodies, can be present at once together and yet separately, while occupying the same portion of time and space: what causes the existence of so many different and lovable beings, and what is their relationship to the One Being that should be loved 'with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the mind'?[326] This debate was particularly popular among scholars at the time, and it proves, once more, that the intellectual environment of the Late Middle Ages was far more complex and nuanced than we are generally used to think, with our clear-cut divisions and labelling.[327] I have just reiterated the fact that the study of the natural and physical aspects of the world was integrated with metaphysical reflections, but to interpret the answer that Beatrice will offer to Dante's question as taken solely from a specific metaphysical position rather than another means to miss the point, in my opinion. If the question is about the co-existence of two identities in the same portion of time and space, and, ultimately, about the co-existence of transcendence and concreteness, then the answer cannot come from one of these two poles alone.

[326] See Matthew 22:37

[327] For a thorough and in-depth study on the different philosophical answers to the problem of the moon-spots, see Bruno Nardi, 'La dottrina delle macchie lunari nel II canto del *Paradiso*', in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1967), pp. 3-39.

Philosophy (or science) alone cannot be the answer; but, at the same time, an answer coming from the words of Revelation, without taking on a rational shape too, would not be enough either: if that were the case, and only rationality or only the words of Revelation could provide the answer, either contingency or transcendence should surrender to the other, and renounce its existence as a reality in its own right. We might be drawn to believe that, in the Christian medieval context, people would be keener to accept the victory of transcendence over contingency: the existence of God and the radical dependence of creation upon him was something rarely truly questioned. But, again, this is where the experience of the 'pan de li angeli' becomes pivotal, together with Dante's way to deal with it: how could he accept that his beloved Beatrice was just one of the possible manifestations of God's being, and her 'belle membra' just an empty, meaningless shell?[328] In the previous chapter I have discussed how the reality of the Incarnation, and therefore the person of Jesus Christ is understood by Dante as the hermeneutical key not only to read and interpret Scriptures, but Virgil's poetry too, as well as the created world as such: as I shall show in this chapter, this is the case not only when he deals with a poetic reading of the world, but also with a scientific one.

Before asking the specific question about the moon-spots, Dante describes the space he has just entered, and he is startled by the fact that his body and the body of the Moon interpenetrate one another: this indicates that Dante's bodily experience of space is now different from the usual, earthly one. There have been scholars who have suggested that it is possible to read Dante's experience of heavenly space also from a rational, scientific point of view, having recourse to those sets of scientific theories – now available to us – regarding non-Euclidean geometry and the theory of relativity:[329] this does not mean, of course, that Dante had access to those theoretical formulations in the same way we do nowadays, and it would be a glaring error to indistinctly merge the two things – Dante's poetic representation and modern, scientific theories about space. However, it is fundamental to acknowledge that in Dante's time there was a place – both physical and narrative – where it was already possible to experience space in a way that recalls the poet's description, and that, even without

[328] Romano Guardini too discussed the question of the coexistence and subsistence of contingency and transcendence from the personal perspective of Dante and his love for Beatrice: 'come può Dio essere tutto in tutto, e Beatrice rimanere se stessa? […] È la domanda circa il senso del finito, e non un senso nonostante Dio, soltanto tollerato accanto a Lui, ma un senso davanti a Lui, nella Sua luce'. (Romano Guardini, *Dante* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1967), pp. 200-05 (p. 202).)

[329] Florenskij hypothesises that in reaching the Empyrean, throughout the heavenly spheres, Dante's speed is approaching that of light, and that he actually surpasses the speed of light once he enters the Empyrean. According to the theory of relativity, nothing, in the known world, can reach a speed superior to that of light, which is therefore acknowledged as the maximum speed possible. Florenskij, however, goes on suggesting that a speed superior to that of light is not altogether impossible, but just inconceivable for the particular conditions of our earthly life, and would therefore require a *qualitatively different experience* of reality, which he calls 'heavenly', and which can actually be conceivable, mathematically speaking, in the setting of imaginary numbers – as he demonstrates. His mathematical formulae demonstrate that in such conditions the body loses its extension, becomes eternal and acquires absolute stability, all concepts Dante described with the language of Empyrean. (Florenskij, *Gli immaginari in geometria*, pp. 58-63). See also Andrea Oppo, 'Se la misura di un corpo è un numero immaginario. Florenskij e il concetto di spazio in Dante', *Theologica e Historica. Annali della Pontificia Facoltà Teologica della Sardegna*, 25 (2015), 171-84.

the modern, scientific theoretical explanations, provided nonetheless an understanding and an experience of space radically different from the usual, earthly one, in which bodies did merge into one, single Body, without losing their specificity.[330] That place was, once again, liturgy. I have shown in section 2.2 of the Introduction how, in a liturgical setting, space was understood as dependent upon time, part of an ongoing narrative, and not unambiguously definable from a geographical perspective. As I have repeatedly pointed out throughout this thesis, the environment in which Dante stages the action is always very significant, and pivotal for a more comprehensive understanding of the message conveyed by his text. In this case, the fact that the environment in which this scientific conversation happens is characterised by a very particular experience of space, will prove to be particularly meaningful.

Another pivotal aspect of this scientific enquiry is that it is evidently embedded into a dialogue. Dante asks his question, but Beatrice asks him to respond with his own hypothesis first. Thus, Dante says he thinks that the physical reason of the existence of the moon-spots is that the body of the moon is made up of parts of different density which cause the different luminosity of its surface. To refute this explanation, Beatrice first explains that, were the moon patched with dense and thin parts, this would be visible during an eclipse, in which the sun would not be fully obscured by the presence of the moon in front of it. Then she adds that not even if Dante were to suggest that those parts of different density were distributed in different layers, therefore reflecting the light of the sun from different levels of depth, would this be the truth about the body of the moon. In order to help him understand her argumentation, she suggests that he set up an experiment, involving three mirrors placed at two different distances and a light – to check the functioning of the reflection of the light from different distances –, and then anticipates its outcome, proving Dante's idea wrong. It is interesting that, at the beginning of this dialogue, when asking Dante to express his idea regarding the cause of the moon-spots, Beatrice emphasises that he reaches such a conclusion *on his own*:

> Ella sorrise alquanto, e poi «S'elli erra
> l'oppinion», mi disse, «d'i mortali
> dove chiave di senso non diserra,
> certo non ti dovrien punger li strali
> d'ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi
> vedi che la ragione ha corte l'ali.
> Ma dimmi *quel che tu da te ne pensi*».
>
> (ll. 52-58 – emphasis mine)

[330] See also 1Corinthians 12:12-26.

I do not think that Beatrice, by saying that reason is 'short-winged', and that with or without the help of the senses does not go too far, is trying to discard human experience and knowledge altogether. Just a few lines later, she invites Dante to prove by experience and reasoning the truthfulness of her words, and asks him to learn from her so that, in future situations, he will be able to 'sol tener lo guado' (l. 126). I think that by means of this dialogue, in which he first gets the wrong answer and then Beatrice corrects him, Dante seems to be suggesting that a scientific, rational endeavour should not be carried out as a solitary activity: that would be tantamount of making 'ali' out of 'remi', and setting forth on a 'folle volo'.[331] We could say that here, staged on the scene, we see an encounter between two rationalities. I will come back to this specific idea below. The choice of the dialogue exemplifies the fact that a successful scientific quest has the character of a performance, of a lived experience, more than just and only a logical reasoning: in this way, Dante is already reminding us of the fundamental experience of the 'pan de li angeli'. To be simply concerned with giving the straightforward right answer, would be tantamount to falling, again, into the realm of 'rational' knowledge alone using only its categories and leaving the 'intellectual' – or experiential – kind of knowledge behind: in other words, this would mean forgetting the experience of the 'pan de li angeli'.

Christian Moevs has made a very similar point.[332] He holds that a solely rational answer to the question about the coexistence of unity and diversity, of necessity and contingency, is not possible. Such an answer needs to be experienced through oneself, in the moment in which the person recognises that he or she is 'transparent to, one with the ground of his [or her] being', in the 'awakening to the Christic nexus between One and Many, between self-subsistence and contingency'.[333] From this perspective, he reads the experiment outlined by Beatrice and points to the fact that the shape formed by Dante, the light and the three mirrors involved in the experiment is that of a cross. More importantly for his argument, he emphasises the fact that, in order for the experiment to be carried out, Dante's body actually needs to be transparent to light, since the source is placed behind his back. In Moevs' insightful interpretation, therefore, to be aware of the experience of the 'pan de li angeli' while conducting the experiment described by Beatrice means to know oneself as one with one's own source of being, and this very fact is symbolised by the ability of the body to let the light pass through it and reach the mirror. However, I believe that this interesting perspective

[331] Scholars have often highlighted the similarities and the differences between Dante's address to the reader here in *Paradiso* II, and Ulysses' 'orazion picciola' in *Inferno* XXVI, precisely to highlight the two different ways to undertake a journey of knowledge. See, for instance, Andrea Battistini, *La retorica della salvezza* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), in particular pp. 29-34. Teodolinda Barolini, instead, holds that there is no substantial difference between Dante's way to lead the readers throughout the *Commedia*, and Ulysses' persuasive speech and rhetoric strategy. See Barolini, *The Undivine 'Comedy'*. This assumption informs her whole monograph, but see in particular pp. 48-73 and 122-42.
[332] Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), in particular the section 'Unity in Diversity: Moonspots', pp. 111-19.
[333] Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'*, p. 115.

makes Dante a little too Neoplatonic, because, by over-emphasising the importance of the self-awakening process, and the recognition of oneself as 'non-other' than God, it fails to consider the importance of the moment of the experiment itself, or – to remain within the terms of the story told in these lines of the poem – fails to recognise the fact that such a recognition happens within a dialogue, and a dialogue carried out precisely with Beatrice in a specific portion of (textual) time and space. The specific occasion which makes the recognition underscored by Moevs possible cannot be discarded, otherwise the risk is that of dismissing and losing the inherent value of created reality, and ultimately, of the single, specific person in his or her irreducible uniqueness.[334] Once more, in a full account of the experience of the 'pan de li angeli', the bread itself with its very specific taste cannot be discarded in favour of its 'meaning', because a fundamental part of the experience would otherwise be lost, and, ultimately, the knowledge of God not only as Intellect and Being, but as Love would be lost too.

One could also argue that this way to proceed in an intellectual enquiry – posing the question and presenting the arguments to be refuted before giving the correct answer – is a representation of the classic, scholastic way of argumentation. While this is true, I still want to emphasise that, in Dante's text, this 'scholastic' way to proceed is rendered in the form of a dialogue between two different persons and not carried out by one single person. Moreover, it is Beatrice herself who emphasises an aspect which usually does not come to the fore in the scholastic, rational or logical way to deal with questions. Before proceeding with the description of the experiment of the mirrors, she says something particularly important:

> Da questa instanza può deliberarti
> esperïenza, se già mai la provi,
> ch'esser suol fonte ai rivi di vostr' arti.
>
> (*Par*. II, 94-96)

Only after this tercet and the description of the experiment, will she provide an account of the process by means of which the moon-spots are born, an account which preserves the existence of diversity in its own right. As I mentioned before, it is not my intention here to discuss all the possible interpretations of Beatrice's explanation of the moon-spots, especially in terms of the different philosophical schools of thought involved in the answer. This is not because I believe that for Dante there was not a more accurate philosophical answer to this question, but because I do not want to

[334] 'È la domanda circa il senso del finito, e non un senso nonostante Dio, soltanto tollerato accanto a Lui, ma un senso davanti a Lui, *nella Sua Luce*. […] Può esistere nell'assolutezza del "cerchio" la incomprensibile *realtà di fatto della persona umana*? E non solo esistere, ma esistere dotata di significato, e dotata di significato davanti a Dio, adeguata alla Sua esigenza assoluta e capace per conseguenza di offrire anche all'esigenza di significato che è nell'uomo la garanzia necessaria?' (Guardini, *Dante*, pp. 203-04 – emphasis mine).

divert from the focus of this chapter, which is exploring Dante's approach to science. The pivotal word in the quoted tercet is one I have used many times in the course of this thesis: 'esperïenza'. If we are to consider all the aspects that constitute an 'experience' – as we have seen thanks to the hermeneutical key of the 'pan de li angeli' and the environment of the liturgy, shaped by it – we cannot forget that an experience is not something that is just thought about in the mind, but it is something that happens and involves the presence of a subject, a person, and of a reality outside of the person. Given that an experience is an *event*, it is something that *happens* in time and space, time and space themselves become a fundamental element to be known as part of the journey of knowledge. This is the point at which we can see, once more, how important the environment in which the action takes place is: Dante will be able to understand and receive Beatrice's explanation as truth because the very environment in which her words are now rooted is already shaped according to the same principles that she will enunciate by means of her intellectual discourse. Dante already experiences – and not without amazement – that his body and the body of the moon occupy the same portion of time and space:

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

The fact that he immediately links this different, heavenly experience of the body in space to the mystery of Incarnation is again another fact that allows us to understand this environment as liturgical. Beatrice's account of the cause of the moon-spots as metaphysical, as the manifestation of the co-existence of unity and multiplicity, makes sense also rationally precisely because the environment in which such an account is given already works according to the principles outlined in her explanation. To enter into Heaven, as well as into the narrative space of *Paradiso*, is to enter the life of Christ.[335] In this way, Dante is suggesting that truth can be known *from within*, only if one has already been reached and surrounded by its very event and presence and dwells in it, precisely as it happens in the

[335] See what Guardini wrote about the *beautiful* environment of the liturgy, which finds particular consonance with the environment of Dante's *Paradiso*: 'It is to give expression to the events of the Christian inner life: the assimilation, through the Holy Ghost, of the life of the creature to the life of God in Christ; the actual genuine rebirth of the creature into a new existence; the development and nourishment of this life, its stretching forth from God in the Blessed Sacrament and the means of grace, towards God in prayer and sacrifice; and all this in the continual mystic renewal of Christ's life in the course of the ecclesiastical year'. (Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic. The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. by Ada Lane (London: Sheed & Ward, 1935), p. 196).

liturgical environment.[336] As we have seen in the Introduction, the liturgical environment is that in which the person experiences himself or herself as being on a journey, and a journey that is inherently two-fold: it is towards somewhere, but the possibility to reach that somewhere can only exist because that same somewhere is already making itself present to the traveller.[337] Beatrice says that 'esperïenza' is usually the source for the 'rivi di vostr' arti': we know that, in Dante's time *arti* and *scienze* were used as synonyms, and to state that *all* of them are born from 'esperïenza' is extremely significant. If, again, we read 'esperïenza' not just and only as the empirical testing of something reproducible – as we might be drawn to do by the fact that she is about to describe the setting-up of an experiment –,[338] but precisely as the recognition of time and space as the bestowal of one's own 'pan de li angeli', then we can also understand why it is possible, for Dante, to acknowledge a point of connection between all the different realms of knowledge, and, as I shall discuss further below, even between poetry and science.

In this sense, before looking into it for further meanings, I believe that, first and foremost, the mirror experiment needs to be interpreted for what it is: the *performance* of an experiment, more than the image of something else.[339] *Paradiso* is indeed the environment whose experience, that of 'trasumanar', 'significar *per verba* / non si poria' (*Par*. I, 70-1), therefore we will have to stay 'contenti […] al *quia*' (*Purg*. III, 37) of Dante's very text; it is the 'essemplo' (*Par*. I, 71) of Dante's very words which will suffice to understand, for those 'a cui *esperïenza* grazia serba' (l. 72 – emphasis mine). Beatrice's explanation regarding the cause of the moon-spots – at once spiritual and rational – does not follow logically after the description of the experiment and of its expected outcome, but the scientific rigour of her description proves to be pivotal, nonetheless.[340] It is, in fact, only after the poetic simulation of such an experiment that Dante will be ready to receive the truth conveyed by Beatrice's words. The very moment of the performance should not only work as a confutation of Dante's previous idea, but it is meant to 'change' his mind altogether, delivering it from its solely logical, rational reasoning.[341] According to the literal truth of the text, however, Dante does not actually perform the experiment, he rather hears Beatrice's description of it: this is very significant,

[336] See Jesus' own words in the Gospel of John: 'Manete in me, et ego in vobis. […] Qui manet in me, et ego in eo, hic fert fructum multum, quia sine me nihil potestis facere.' [Remain in me, and I in you … Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing] (John 15:4-5).
[337] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 169-219.
[338] On the liturgical understanding of truth as radically opposed to the concept of a reproducible, ownable 'thing', see again the Introduction, in particular sections 1.3 and 3.
[339] For a reading of the experiment as an example of Dante's symbolism, see Allen Tate, 'The Symbolic Imagination: A Meditation on Dante's Three Mirrors, *The Kenyon Review*, 14 (1952), 2, 256-77. Also, for the symbolic meanings of the image of the mirror in this canto, see James L. Miller, 'Three Mirrors of Dante's "Paradiso"', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 46.3 (1977), 263-79.
[340] On the scientific rigour of the experiment, see Patrick Boyde, 'L'esegesi di Dante e la scienza', in *Dante e la scienza*, ed. by Patrick Boyde and Vittorio Russo, pp. 9-23, in particular pp. 13-17.
[341] See Beatrice's own words: 'or, come ai colpi de li caldi rai / de la neve riman nudo il suggetto / e dal colore e dal freddo primai / così rimaso te ne l'intelletto / voglio informar di luce sì vivace…' (ll. 106-10).

and it is again connected to the idea that scientific enquiry can be carried out successfully only within a relationship, and that it is fundamentally a dialogue between two rationalities, two persons, or two subjects.[342] In the poem, we know that Beatrice signifies – and not in a static way, but every new action performed by her keeps signifying, every time anew – Dante's experience of the 'pan de li angeli',[343] the very event by means of which he is reached by that 'somewhere', that truth towards which he is heading. To listen to Beatrice's voice describing the performing of the mirror experiment is, for Dante, one and the same – although non-identical – with the very act of performing it: the person of Beatrice is for Dante the 'esperïenza' *par excellence*, which disclosed to him the truth about reality in its integrity as something not self-subsistent but constantly bestowed as an act of love.[344] In Dante's life and poetry, her voice is the voice of the truth, and therefore her presence is the ground in which his journey of knowledge is first and foremost rooted.

From this experience, Dante suggests, *all different kinds of knowledge* can be born: 'esperïenza' is 'fonte ai rivi di vostr' arti'. Beatrice is the source of Dante's poetry, and to follow her in every step of the journey, being able to know the truth in a poetic form, is akin to the experience of the scientist who can know the truth in a scientific form in and through the very act of practising science, while acknowledging the reality in which he or she performs scientific experiments as his or her own 'pan de li angeli'. Without Beatrice, Dante was not able to give the right answer to the question of the moon-spots: this is not because science – or myths, as the reference to the legend of Cain proves –[345] cannot give an answer to a metaphysical question, it is rather science – as well as poetry – without 'esperïenza', without a knowledge of the 'pan de li angeli', that cannot reach the desired truth. By itself, outside of a dialogue with the reality in which it is embedded,[346] 'la ragione ha corte l'ali'. In this sense, it becomes clearer that the reason why Dante's dialogue with Beatrice is the same as, but non-identical with the performance of the experiment carried out by a scientist does not only lie in the fact that science is not poetry. Science and poetry are certainly two different languages, but two

[342] When talking about the dynamic of knowledge, Florenskij too refers to the need for a care towards the object of knowledge, considered as alive and cherished in its concreteness. See Pavel Florenskij, *Primi passi della filosofia. Lezioni sull'origine della filosofia occidentale* (Milan: Mimesis, 2021).

[343] See O'Brien, '"The Bread of Angels" in "Paradiso" II'.

[344] See Psalm 91:5; Psalm 99:3; Psalm 103:24. See also: Augustinus, *Confessiones*, IX, x, 25, 'si quis audiat, dicunt haec omnia, non ipsa nos fecimus, sed fecit nos qui manet in aeternum'[if anyone pays attention, all things say 'we did not make ourselves, but he who endures forever made us'] (my translation); Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, I, 15, <http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1221-1274,_Bonaventura,_Itinerarium_Mentis_in_Deum,_LT.pdf> [accessed 4 May 2023], 'Qui igitur tantis rerum creaturarum splendoribus non illustratur caecus est; qui tantis clamoribus non evigilat surdus est; qui ex omnibus his effectibus Deum non laudat mutus est; qui ex tantis indiciis primum principium non advertit stultus est.' [Thus, whoever is not enlightened by the many splendours of created things is blind; whoever does not wake up for so many sounds is deaf; whoever does not praise God for all these works of his is mute; whoever does not discern the first principle from so many hints is foolish (my translation)].

[345] 'Ma ditemi: che son li segni bui / di questo corpo, che là giuso in terra / fan di Cain favoleggiare altrui?' (*Par*. II, 49-51).

[346] This idea could recall the image found in *Paradiso* X and analysed in chapter 2, in which the whole of creation is described as embraced by the Trinitarian God 'che dentro a sé l'ama'.

different languages into which it is possible to 'translate' the experience and recognition – therefore knowledge – of the same truth. But poetry and science altogether are non-identical in the same way in which two poetic acts, or two scientific acts are not identical either, and the reason for this lies in the very fact that these two different acts happen in a different portion of time – and, in this sense, in a different portion of space too. From this, it follows that, even doing the same experiment as many times as the scientist needs it, does not mean that the experiment is identically repeated: however identical the results of the experiment might be, the portion of reality in which that experiment is carried out will always be new, and the experience of truth received through it always new as well.

At this point, a deeper investigation of Dante's understanding of time connected to scientific modes of knowledge seems to be needed. The use he makes of the mechanical clock and of the description of its functioning, proves to be really fitting for this purpose: by means of this technological device, Dante is again able to show how a symbolic synthesis between 'rational' and 'intellectual' knowledge, between *scientia* and *sapientia* is indeed possible when the phenomenon of time is looked at from a liturgical perspective.

4.3 The mechanical clock, 'là 've s'appunta ogne *ubi* e ogne *quando*'

Dante uses the image of the mechanical clock twice in the poem, and both times to describe the reality he experiences in Heaven. This fact is already significant, because it means that he found this technological device, the fruit of scientific endeavour, an appropriate image to make visible the heavenly reality, a reality which, as I discussed previously, cannot be straightforwardly named but can only be manifested through symbols.[347] In particular, when describing the heavenly reality, Dante uses this device to engage with the fundamental concepts of movement (and thus space) and time. In a single image, we see gathered together some of the scientific notions around these concepts which were shared in the late medieval cultural context – and by Dante himself, as we can learn from the *Convivio* – although reframed into a liturgical understanding of time and space: that is, understood from a perspective shaped by the experience of the 'pan de li angeli'.

During the thirteenth century, in physics – the study of motion and change – the only acknowledged natural mechanical cause for movement in the terrestrial region was gravity:[348] inertia, a fundamental principle involved in the functioning of the mechanical clock, was not known, or at least not with the precision and theoretical formulations of the laws of Newtonian dynamics.[349] This, perhaps, makes the creation of the mechanical clock even more striking: the invention of this device

[347] See again *Par*. I, 70-71: '… significar *per verba* / non si porìa; però l'essemplo basti…'
[348] Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo*, pp. 82-90.
[349] Pietro Cerreta, 'Il "foliot": regolatore inerziale del tempo in un modellino di orologio medievale' (forthcoming).

was received with marvel by the people of the time, and often scholars of horology talk about it as a truly outstanding achievement.[350] The mechanical clock became part of social life because it was installed in city towers as well as in some churches.[351] In the *Rationale*, Durand acknowledges the clock as a constitutive part of the church building, also mentioning that connected to the clock in the church there was a double bell, or 'nonula',[352] fundamental for the marking of the appointed hours of the Divine Office, and therefore a call to prayer. For this reason, the clock also acquired a symbolic meaning, which Durand exposes in this way: 'Horologium per quod hore leguntur, id est colliguntur, significat diligentiam quam sacerdotes in dicendis canonicis horis debito tempore habere debent, iuxta illud: Septies in die laudem dixi tibi' [The clock, thanks to which the liturgical hours are read, that is, counted, signifies the diligence that the priest must have in praying the canonical hours at the appointed time, according to that: Seven times in the day I said your praise (my translation)].[353] This explanation from Durand is particularly significant: first of all, it is helpful in understanding the implications that Dante's use of the image of the clock has on his representation of time, and particularly his experience of time in *Paradiso*, even though, at first glance, he seems to put more emphasis on the ways in which the clock moves, rather than on its proper use – counting time. This is typical of the ways in which Dante's imagery works, always capable of bringing together multiple layers of meaning, often non-obvious and unexpected, a functioning which is in tune, as we have seen, with a liturgical hermeneutics. Another reason why Durand's account of the purpose and symbolic meaning of the clock within a liturgical context is precious is that his text appears to be 'il più antico documento finora noto sull'uso in Europa dell'orologio meccanico':[354] this fact in itself could work as a testimony to the fact that there was indeed a place for scientific and technological innovations within a liturgical context, so much so that a liturgical treatise like the *Rationale* happens to be the first written source regarding the use of the mechanical clock in a social setting. This is the attitude which is developed and boldly displayed by Dante in the poem, as I have been showing throughout this thesis.

The descriptions of the mechanical clock within the *Commedia* with the reference to some specific details of its movements, suggest that Dante had a certain degree of knowledge of its complex functioning, showing thus the poet's all-round interest in different aspects of the reality and innovations of his time. Before leading us to consider how Dante approaches temporality, the

[350] Antonio Simoni, *Orologi italiani dal '500 all''800* (Milan: Vallardi, 1965); Carlo M. Cipolla, *Le macchine del tempo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1981); Otto Mayr, *Authority, Liberty and Automatic Machinery in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 5.
[351] Carlo M. Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture, 1300-1700* (London: Collins, 1967).
[352] *Rationale* I, iv, 11.
[353] *Rationale* I, i, 35.
[354] Pietro Redondi, *Storie del Tempo* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007), p. 70.

descriptions of this device seem to engage with the perception of movement and its link to the degree of blessedness experienced by the souls in Heaven. In *Paradiso* X, 139-48, Dante refers to the sweet sound produced by the clock ('tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota') and briefly describes its functioning to help the reader visualise in his or her mind the movement of the souls of the Heaven of the Sun:

> Indi, come orologio che ne chiami
> ne l'ora che la sposa di Dio surge
> a mattinar lo sposo perché l'ami,
> che l'una parte e l'altra tira e urge,
> tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota,
> che 'l ben disposto spirto d'amor turge;
> così vid'io la gloriosa rota
> muoversi e render voce a voce in tempra
> e in dolcezza ch'esser non pò nota
> se non colà dove gioir s'insempra.
>
> (*Par*. X, 139-48)

In one single line, 'che l'una parte e l'altra tira e urge', Dante is describing the principle of escapement: the two movements he refers to are, respectively, that of the weight, which, in the act of falling, 'tira', pulls a gearwheel, and is what actually causes the clock to function, and that of the verge, a rocker arm which, thanks to two blades and a *foliot* connected to it, 'urge', opposes the movement of the gearwheel caused by the weight, slowing it down and giving a rhythm to the whole mechanism, by means of which the passing of time is counted.[355] In *Paradiso* XXIV, instead, he refers to the different speeds with which two of the gearwheels of a medieval clock – respectively that close to the verge and the one connected to the hand – move:

> E come cerchi in tempra d'oriuoli
> si giran sì, che 'l primo a chi pon mente
> quieto pare, e l'ultimo che voli;
> così quelle carole, differente-
> mente danzando, de la sua ricchezza
> mi facieno stimar, veloci e lente.
>
> (*Par*. XXIV, 13-18)

It is not possible to be certain of the extent to which Dante was aware of all the mechanical laws implied in the functioning of the mechanical clock: first of all because, as I mentioned before, the principle of inertia which causes the *foliot* to move either slowly or swiftly was not known in its theoretical formulations, but also, more generally, because the ways in which he describes the device

[355] Cerreta, 'Il "foliot": regolatore inerziale del tempo in un modellino di orologio medievale'.

do not allow his effective grasp of the mechanics behind its functioning to emerge. I am not trying to suggest that Dante was an 'expert in technology', but what is nonetheless interesting is that his accurate descriptions presuppose a first-hand experience of seeing the clock working – which truly is wondrous –,[356] and therefore, at least, an experiential rather than a rational or theoretical understanding of its functioning. Nevertheless, the fact that Dante has recourse to the image of the clock even – possibly – without a complete rational understanding of its functioning proves that he found it a suitable image to understand and make visible to the readers the reality of his experience in Heaven. It is thanks to the different speeds with which the souls move that Dante is able to discern their different experiences of beatitude ('differente- / mente danzando, de la sua ricchezza / mi facieno stimar, veloci e lente'), and the similarity between this movements with those of the gears of a clock, allows him to communicate this experience to the reader. Once more, Dante proves that rational knowledge can be a way to communicate that which is perceived by means of intellectual or experiential knowledge.

In his overview of the presence of science in the *Commedia*, and of the attention that the scholarship has devoted to this theme in the poem, Gilson also mentions the important contributions of scholars like Vittorio Russo, who has discussed how, in his treatment of scientific matters, Dante always employs his poetic mastery to the full, in terms of imagery as well as rhetorical strategies used.[357] From the perspective that I am outlining here, we can understand that Dante's operation goes beyond uniquely literary purposes: if the starting point of a 'scientific' journey of knowledge is the experience of the 'pan de li angeli', then it is possible for scientific language and poetic language to find a connection and an agreement in the truth they are committed to know and communicate. If 'esperïenza' is indeed 'fonte ai rivi di [n]ostr' arti', then both science and poetry can have a real ontological value, acquire something in terms of their rational and symbolic status, and communicate the same truth only in different languages.

To talk about clocks inevitably makes us think about time. In section 2 of the Introduction of this thesis, I asked the question of how we are to interpret that 'per tempo' which characterises the experience of the 'pan de li angeli':[358] I think that Dante's use of the image of the mechanical clock, particularly in the passage taken from *Paradiso* X, has something important to say in this regard, because it represents the overlapping of the experience of time as it is lived out on Earth and the

[356] 'Avete mai veduto un orologio medievale in azione? Potrà sembrare incredibile a chi non lo ha veduto, ma dal ritmico e continuo vibrare di quella specie di spiritello della barra del bilanciere (il *foliot*), dal guizzare della serpentina, mentre le altre parti sembrano immobili, consegue una sensazione di cosa viva da restare incantati. È uno spettacolo che non ci si stanca di stare a guardare: infinitamente più suggestivo che non l'oscillare di un pendolo o il veloce vibrare dei bilancieri moderni. Il mondo umanistico ne fu estasiato e percosso di meraviglia'. (Simoni, *Orologi italiani*, p. 18).
[357] See Gilson, 'Medieval Science in Dante's "Commedia"', pp. 47 and 53-54.
[358] 'Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo / *per tempo* al pan de li angeli…' (*Par*. II, 10-11 – emphasis mine).

experience of eternity. In a chapter entirely dedicated to time and music in the *Commedia*, Matthew Treherne has reflected on the different forms of temporality we encounter in the poem.[359] He first shows how, by means of liturgical performances, throughout the *Purgatorio* Dante introduces into the poem a new pattern of temporality, which is liturgical and radically different from sequential time: in liturgy different moments, which happened at different times in history, are brought and experienced together as part of the same story and meaning, as happens too in the case of different temporal cycles, such as the daily and yearly ones. He then outlines the experience of time in *Paradiso* as a translation of the eternal present of God into temporal actions, highlighting the difference between the Empyrean – where there is no time or space – and the other spheres of Heaven, and showing the incarnational dynamic of this translation from eternity to time. He also refers to the example of *Paradiso* X on which I am focusing here, stressing the temporal performance of a joy that 's'insempra' (l. 148). In describing some aspects of the mechanics of the clock, I said that with this device time is counted by means of a rhythmical movement: this is very much in accordance with the definition of time given by Aristotle, and paraphrased by Dante in his *Convivio*: 'lo tempo, secondo che dice Aristotile nel quarto de la Fisica, è "numero di movimento secondo prima e poi" e "numero di movimento celestiale"' (IV, ii, 6). It is interesting to see how, by adopting the image of the clock – the fruit of technological endeavour and a symbol of scientific thought – to describe the liturgical performance enacted by the souls of the Heaven of the Sun, Dante is able, once more, to nestle scientific modes of thought into an understanding of reality which revolves around the experience of the 'pan de li angeli'.

As discussed in the Introduction, the Latin West of the late Middle Age was profoundly influenced by religious practices, and the organisation of time was highly dependent on the liturgical framing of time, on a daily and annual basis. As we have seen from Durand's explanation of the role of the clock in a church, even the artificial counting of time by means of this device was embedded into this liturgical, cyclical understanding of time, and did not yet have much autonomy or value on its own. What is striking in Dante's use of this device with its articulation of time by means of small, rhythmical movements, is that by integrating it into a liturgical performance he validates it as meaningful in itself. The experience of time as it is described by Aristotle is a very basic and fundamental one, even if it is not charged with a specific meaning, even when the moments scanned by the rhythmical movements of the hand are not 'appointed moments': what Dante does here is to suggest that time itself, in the way in which Aristotle describes it, has the same meaning as the

[359] Treherne, 'Liturgy, Time and the Music of Incarnation in the "Commedia"', in *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 49-111.

'appointed', liturgical hours of the Divine Office, designated to the remembrance and cherishing of the experience of the 'pan de li angeli':

> Indi, come orologio che ne chiami
> ne l'ora che la sposa di Dio surge
> a mattinar lo sposo perché l'ami,
> che l'una parte e l'altra tira e urge,
> tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota,
> che 'l ben disposto spirto d'amor turge;
> così vid'io la gloriosa rota
> muoversi e render voce a voce in tempra
> e in dolcezza ch'esser non pò nota
> se non colà dove gioir s'insempra.
>
> (*Par*. X, 139-48)

Dante is here considering the mechanical clock as an integral part of a liturgical practice, describing its use within the context of the prayer of Lauds or Matins. Every morning on Earth there is an *appointed* time which is devoted to the praise of God, and such a time is characterised as being as sweet and intimate as the love between spouses: 'Indi, come orologio che ne chiami / *ne l'ora* che la sposa di Dio surge / a mattinar lo sposo perché l'ami (139-41). This time of praise, sweet and intimate, is the time in which the experience of the 'pan de li angeli' is renewed; such a time is also designated by the sound of the mechanical clock, which wakes the people up and by that very sound reminds them of the special meaning of that portion of time. In Heaven, we are confronted with a situation similar to that of the liturgical environment, in which, however, *every* moment is an *appointed* moment,[360] and the image of the mechanical clock perfectly exemplifies this idea. To taste the 'pan de li angeli' every time anew is a non-identical repetition precisely because time 'happens' in the way Aristotle describes it: every new moment is itself the renewed possibility to experience the 'pan de li angeli'. It is important to recall the fact that the different spheres of Heaven, in which the souls come to meet Dante, are not the actual place in which those souls dwell: the spheres still have spatial and temporal features, whereas the proper dwelling of the souls is the Empyrean, the place in which 's'appunta ogne *ubi* e ogne *quando*' (*Par*. XXIX, 12), where time and space are subsumed in one single point. The journey through the spheres is also the journey of all the things which, existing in time and space – and in fact time and space themselves – come back together and find their radical unity in a point, that is God himself. Time and space can be therefore understood as the very condition

[360] On the idea of time as *kairotic*, both in the liturgical environment and in the life of individuals, see Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 51-52, 62-63, 76 and 92.

of the Incarnation.[361] The journey of time and space *back* to the point of God, as well as the incarnational journey of the unique point that is diffracted into the many consequential points of time and space are symbolised in a unique, synthetic image which is that of the mechanical clock. If on Earth there are *certain* appointed moments, underscored by the liturgy, in Heaven every moment – or every point – like every 'tin tin' of the clock, is filled with the eternal bliss of the divine point, is acknowledged as being another crumb of the bread of the angels. In this way, Dante shows a restored image of sequential, Aristotelian time: once more, not only are science and rationality not discarded, but they are taken, restored and led towards their fulfilment.

4.4 Dante's Eucharistic biology

One of the fundamental dichotomies explored in this thesis is that of the body and the soul. In section 4.2 above, I referred to Dante's startled reaction when, on entering the Heaven of the Moon, he realises that his body and that of the planet mutually penetrate one another, yet without violating one another:

> S'io era corpo, e qui non si concepe
> com'una dimensione altra patio,
> ch'esser convien se corpo in corpo repe,
> accender ne dovria più il disio
> di veder quella essenza in che si vede
> come nostra natura e Dio s'unio.
>
> (*Par*. II, 37-39).

By considering the problem of how it is possible for two bodies, and therefore two separate identities, to occupy the same portion of space and time, Dante immediately points towards the mystery of Incarnation as the only hermeneutical key suitable for solving the riddle. The problem of two separate realities being manifested into one symbol, and the process, or concept, or means by which this is made possible is the very question at the core of the whole *Commedia*, and the mystery of Incarnation is constantly referred to as the only real solution to it. Nevertheless, this has never meant, for Dante, an abdication from rationality in order to delve into the mystery and its solution, and this thesis has been an attempt to prove it. The focus of this chapter is precisely that of exploring how Dante makes use of scientific knowledge in order to tackle this problem, and I have shown, first of all, an example of Dante's idea of science in general, then I suggested a reading of Dante's account of temporality by

[361] 'Christ enables us to journey towards the altar of God, and […] this true "way" which He opens for us is itself the altar of God, since Christ only mediates God by being fully God. […] to be in the time of sin is nonetheless to dwell in a kenotic space in which we have always already unknowingly arrived' (Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 185).

using the image of the mechanical clock. I now want to show how he employs the scientific notions available to him in order to address questions related to the human body.

If one wants to understand better Dante's conception of the human body, then a closer reading of *Purgatorio* XXV is unavoidable. Thus, I shall show how, through Statius' *lectio*, Dante is once more able to bring together science and liturgy – namely an understanding of reality which begins with the experience of the 'pan de li angeli' – in order to understand better the meaning and therefore delve into the mystery of the human body. Then, I will compare the account of the human body given by Statius with the description of the tortured body of Mohammed from *Inferno* XXVIII.

As was the case with the discussion of the moon-spots, Statius' account of the generation of a human being and the formation of the aerial bodies in the afterlife has been studied and explored by many scholars, and therefore it has inevitably been the object of many controversies. For the scholarship on *Purgatorio* XXV, as well as for *Paradiso* II, one of the most authoritative voices is that of Bruno Nardi,[362] followed by those of Gilson,[363] Boyde,[364] Gragnolati,[365] and Barański.[366] In Barański's fundamental essay, we can find an all-encompassing analysis of all the themes that have been developed in the exegesis of this canto, and he highlights the centrality of *Purgatorio* XXV for a deeper understanding of Dante's philosophical, poetical and doctrinal positions. He shows how any approach which considered only one of these themes, as if it were detached and not deeply intertwined with the others, would inevitably be reductive. My aim is to show how Dante's liturgical approach to scientific – in this specific case, biological – notions regarding the generation of the human body – and the consequent formation of the aerial body – proves to be, at the same time, a fitting hermeneutical key able to maintain all the aspects mentioned by Barański. Also, in comparing it with the lines of *Inferno* XXVIII, I hope to show how my interpretation can be consistent throughout the whole *Commedia*, and therefore a fundamental part of Dante's understanding and representation of that 'verità che viene' which requires us to open 'il petto' in order to be received and embraced.

Among the possible sources for Dante's knowledge of medical notions we find, of course, Aristotle (*De generatione animalium*), then Avicenna (*De animalibus*), Galen (*De usu partium corporis humanis, De natura foetus*), without forgetting the philosophical contributions to and interpretations

[362] See Bruno Nardi, 'L'origine dell'anima umana secondo Dante' in *Studi di filosofia medievale* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960), pp. 9-68; Bruno Nardi, 'Sull'origine dell'anima umana', in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, ed. by Paolo Mazzantini (Bari: Laterza, 1985), pp. 207-24; Bruno Nardi, 'Il canto XXV del P*urgatorio*', in *Letture Dantesche: Purgatorio*, ed. by Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), pp. 501-17.
[363] Étienne Gilson 'Dante's Notion of the Shade: *Purgatorio* XXV', *Medieval Studies*, 29 (1967), 124-42; Étienne Gilson, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une ombre? (Dante, *Purg*. XXV)' in *Dante et Béatrice: études dantesques* (Paris: Vrin, 1974), pp. 22-45.
[364] Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 270-81.
[365] Manuele Gragnolati, 'Embryology and Aerial Bodies in Dante's *Comedy*', in *Experiencing the Afterlife. Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 53-87.
[366] Zygmunt Barański, '*Purgatorio* XXV: Creating Poetic Bodies', in *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio. Literature, Doctrine, Reality* (Cambridge: Legenda MHRA, 2020), pp. 325-46.

of Aristotle's texts provided by Albert Magnus and Aquinas.[367] In particular, as Paola Ureni has shown, Dante does take a position in terms of the different medical accounts given for the generation of the human person, showing a propensity for Galenic solutions.[368] Here too, I will not engage with the specific medical traditions available to Dante in order to define which specific theory he embraces: I will show how the medical precision – according to the notions of the time – in the description of the formation of the human body is fundamental for Dante in order to give a more complete and all-embracing image and glimpse of the truth about the human person.

First of all, I should like to point to the fact that this conversation about the generation of the human being happens while the pilgrims are still on the Terrace of Gluttony, where the problem of the right relationship with food is thematised. Moreover, the language used by Statius often refers to situations related to the idea of meals and food: 'Sangue perfetto, che poi non si beve / da l'assetate vene, e si rimane / quasi alimento che di mensa leve' (37-39); 'ancor digesto' (43); and, last but not least, lines 76-78 'E perché meno ammiri la parola, / guarda il calor del sol che si fa vino, / giunto a l'omor che de la vite cola'. I think that, if we take all the processes described by Statius and, following the clues given by both the language related to food and the specific place in which the conversation happens, we compare it to a very specific 'meal' – the Eucharistic one –, we will have a new, broad and encompassing context within which we can interpret the poet's *lectio*, without having to discard any theme implied in it. The central, fundamental tercets in which Statius explains how the compound in the womb 'd'animal divegna fante', which have always been acknowledged by scholars as being particularly original and very 'Dantean', and which openly correct the 'errante', and nonetheless wiser, Averroes, have some striking similarities – if not in the precise use of words, at least in the images and ideas conveyed – not with an academic text, but with the most important 'text' of Christendom, as important as Scriptures: the celebration of the Eucharist.[369]

> Apri a la verità che viene il petto;
> e sappi che, sì tosto come al feto
> l'articular del cerebro è perfetto,
> lo motor primo a lui si volge *lieto*
> sovra *tant'arte di natura*, e spira
> spirito novo, di vertù repleto,
> che *ciò che trova attivo quivi, tira*

[367] See Anna Cerbo, *Poesia e scienza del corpo nella 'Divina Commedia'* (Naples: Libreria Dante & Descartes, 2001); María Clara Iglesias Rondina, 'Conceptos médicos en *Purgatorio* XXV, vv. 37-78. Las virtudes y el desarrollo vital del feto', *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, 14 (2007), 69-85; Vittorio Bartoli and Paola Ureni, 'Controversie medico-biologiche in tema di generazione umana nel XXV del *Purgatorio*', *Studi danteschi*, 68 (2003), 83-111.

[368] Paola Ureni, 'Human Generation, Memory and Poetic Creation: From the *Purgatorio* to the *Paradiso*', *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 31.2 (2010), 9-34.

[369] Barański has pointed to the heavy scriptural undertones of Statius' discourse (Barański, '*Purgatorio* XXV', p. 338), whereas Anna Cerbo pointed to the general Christian symbolism of meal and of wine in particular (Cerbo, *Poesia e scienza del corpo*, pp. 35-36).

in sua sustanzia, e fassi un'alma sola,
che vive e sente e sé in sé rigira.
E perché meno ammiri la parola,
guarda il calor del sole che si fa vino,
giunto a l'omor che de la vite cola.

(*Purg*. XXV, 67-78 – emphasis mine)

As Matthew Treherne has shown, Dante seems to make clear in this passage that the mystery of the human person can only be understood in the light of the mystery of the Eucharist.[370] Besides the different accounts given by the scholars of his time, and therefore besides the dispute between the plurality or unicity of forms of the human soul, Dante could have developed his own account of the generation of the human person first of all by looking at it from a liturgical, Eucharistic point of view, and then, from that perspective, using the philosophical categories offered to him by his intellectual environment in a creative way. Treherne has also discussed how Dante's poetry imitates God's art, and has shown how this too implies a fundamental consideration of the Eucharist,[371] which could be considered as 'God's masterpiece'.[372] The link between the lines quoted above and the Eucharist can be found by looking at the way in which Mass was celebrated, besides being evoked by the use of images related to wine and meals. During Mass, just before the consecration of bread and wine, by means of which they would be transubstantiated into the real body and blood of Christ, the bread and wine themselves were offered to the priest, who would then recite some prayers in order to make those offerings acceptable to God. Among these prayers – called *oratio super oblata* – there are two in particular that express the ideas similar to those we find in Dante's lines:

> Suscipe munera, quaesumus, domine, quae tibi de tua largitate deferimus, ut haec sacrosancta mysteria gratiae tuae operante virtute praesentis vitae nos conversacione sanctificent et ad gaudia sempiterna perducant.[373]

[370] Matthew Treherne, 'Human personhood and Eucharistic freedom', in *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 175-83.
[371] See Treherne, 'Ekphrasis and Eucharist'.
[372] In some liturgical prayers preceding the consecration of the Eucharist, both God's works of creation and redemption of humanity are referred to as 'mirabilia': 'Deus qui humane substantie dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti et mirabilius reformasti da nobis per huius aque et vini misterium eius divinitatis esse consortes …' [O God, you who created the dignity of human substance in an admirable fashion and renewed it in an even more admirable way, grant us, through the mystery of this water and wine, to partake in his divinity…] (*Missale Romanum, Mediolani 1474*, vol. 1, ed. by Robert Lippe LL.D (London: Harrisons and sons, 1899), p. 200.
[373] *Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Aeclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli (cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 316/Paris Bibl. Nat. 7193, 41/56) (Sacramentarium Gelasianum)*, ed. by Leo Cunibert Mohlberg OSB (Rome: Casa Editrice Herder, 1960), p.178.

[Accept these gifts, we ask you o Lord, which we offer from your generosity, so that, by the effective power of your grace, these most sacred mysteries may sanctify us while we carry on in the present life and may lead us to sempiternal joy (my translation).]

And

> Deus, qui nos per huius sacrificii veneranda commercia unius summeque divinitatis partecipe efficisti, praesta, quaesumus; ut sicut tuam cognoscimus veritatem, sic eam dignis moribus et mentibus adsequamur.[374]

[O God, who by the venerable work of your unique sacrifice made us partake of your divinity, grant us, we beseech you, that we might know your truth, so that we can follow it with virtuous acts and minds (my translation)]

It is noteworthy that, in these two texts, the emphasis is placed on the bread and wine as gifts offered to God – which had already been received by him in the first place – in order to become his sacraments, and on the fact that, thanks to these sacraments, the faithful are admitted to take a part in God's divine life. Also, as we learn from Durand's *Rationale*,[375] the offering of bread and wine to the priest in order for them to be consecrated were understood as the offering of the fruits of one's own work – recalling Dante's line, 'tant'arte di natura' –, which God would happily, 'lieto', accept. The Offertory came after the Creed, 'ac si unusquisque offerens dicat: Credo, et in fidem quam in Symbolo professus sum, *opera compleo*'[as if everyone making an offering says: I believe, and the faith that I professed in the Creed I will complete with my works],[376] and would also be accompanied by a chant, 'hilarem namque datorem diligit Deus' [for God loves the cheerful giver].[377] Hence, in a way similar to that which happens during the liturgy of the Eucharist, after that 'l'articular del cerebro è perfetto', and therefore after the perfect work of nature is completed – 'tant'arte di natura' – God 'lieto' accepts such an offering by creating it as something entirely 'novo' which does not erase the presence of the offering itself with its own qualities, but 'tira' it 'in sua sustanzia'.[378] In the same way in which the bread and the wine are 'assumed into the Body and Blood of Christ', and thus 'become signs' of the fact that 'Christ is our nourishment'[379], similarly the vegetative and sensitive souls – 'ciò che trova

[374] *Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Aeclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli*, p. 182.
[375] *Rationale* IV, xxvii, 2.
[376] *Rationale* IV, xxvii, 3 – emphasis mine.
[377] *Rationale* IV, xxvii, 5, but see also 2Corinthians 9:7.
[378] See Treherne, *Dante's Commedia and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 178-79.
[379] Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 259.

attivo quivi' – are *assumed into* the rational soul – 'tira / in sua sustanzia' – becoming its signs – 'e fassi un'alma sola' –, in a Eucharistic sense which entirely preserves their reality. This liturgical account of human generation is also precisely that which allows for a serious and attentive consideration of the biological process which leads to the formation of vegetative and sensitive souls, as Statius had done in the initial part of his *lectio* (ll. 37-60). Moreover, it gives a broader understanding of Dante's own endeavour in depicting the mystery of human nature while imitating God's own art.[380]

The following section of Statius' discourse (ll. 79-108), in which he explains the process of generation of the aerial body in the afterlife, together with granting credibility to Dante's poem and his account of the state of souls in the afterlife, also adds to the understanding of the physical, biological functions of a human being, and it is therefore important for Dante's readers who still live on Earth. I am indeed profoundly persuaded by the fact that every time Dante lingers on eschatological issues, it is because they have something to say to the lives of his readers, and they are therefore meant to have an effect on the present reality.[381] As Barański has noted, following Patrick Gardner's argument,[382] the question that opened the way to Statius' complex explanation was not so much about the way in which the persons in the afterlife, with an aerial body, can feel sensations such as pain: Dante asks instead how it is possible for the purging souls to grow thinner when those souls do not need to eat in the first place, given that they do not have a 'fleshy' body. For Barański, and for Gardner, this question is important mainly because it entails a justification for the narrative building of the *Commedia*, where there is a need to manifest in a visible and therefore tellable form the process (either damnation, purification or beatification) undergone by the souls.[383] However, I believe that the question is mainly designed to address, again, the problem of the relationship between body and soul within the human person – thus with implications for the lives of the readers – and this time by problematising one of the most fundamental human functions: that of nourishment, which seems a fitting thing to do on the Terrace of Gluttony.[384] As I discussed above, in order to fully answer Dante's question, Statius needs, first of all, to ground Dante's understanding of the human person in a

[380] See Treherne, 'Ekphrasis and Eucharist'. On Dante's conception of human's work in relation to God's, see also Susanna Barsella, 'Il "poema sacro" tra arte e teologia del lavoro. *Purgatorio* X-XII e *Paradiso* XXV-XXVI', in *Le teologie di Dante. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Ravenna 9 Novembre 2013*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2015), pp.181-200.

[381] See Claire Honess' reflections on the political implications of Dante's theology: Honess, 'The language(s) of Civic Invective in Dante'; Honess, 'Dante and the Theology of Politics'; Honess 'Politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia'*.

[382] Patrick M. Gardner, 'Dante and the Suffering Soul' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2009), cited and discussed in Barański, '*Purgatorio* XXV'.

[383] Barański, however, highlights later that Dante's creation of the aerial body must have a doctrinal or theological charge, and cannot be discarded as a mere poetic device: 'How likely is it that Dante would have reduced a doctrinally complex notion involving fundamental aspects of divine creation to a simple fictio?' (Barański, '*Purgatorio* XXV', p. 342).

[384] See Treherne's discussion of the Terrace of Gluttony on the light of its Eucharistic resonances: Treherne, *Dante's Commedia and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp.154-75.

Eucharistic context. Not surprisingly, this specific choice to ground the truth of the human person in a sacramental reality was foreshadowed by Virgil's words when assessing the impossibility for him to answer questions related to the aerial body – and therefore related to truth about the human person:

> A sofferir tormenti, caldi e geli
> simili corpi la Virtù dispone
> che, come fa, non vuol ch'a noi si sveli.
> Matto è chi spera che nostra ragione
> possa trascorrer la infinita via
> che tiene una sustanza in tre persone.
> State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*;
> ché se potuto aveste veder tutto,
> mestier non era parturir Maria…
>
> (*Purg*. III, 31-39)

Interestingly, Virgil points to a 'fact' – the *quia* –, which is further characterised as being the *fact* of Incarnation, as that which, alone, can grant some answers to such a question: this is not a reference to a 'constative' knowledge of the Revelation, as if it were a mere notion, because that would not be enough.[385] To be 'contenti […] al *quia*' can be understood as being in a relationship with the 'pan de li angeli', as staying in the possibility of tasting it, and, *from within* that experience – as discussed in section 4.2 –, finding the answers one looks for, as a knowledge that is gained by tasting something,[386] rather than just by reading about it. Hence, since this is the ground on which Statius' *lectio* unfolds, it cannot but change completely the perspective on all the details implied in such a *lectio*, including the more material and 'biological' ones. Clearly, Statius' answer to Dante exceeds the limits of the question: the pilgrim asks a question confined to the problem of nourishment, but Statius responds in a way that – as we shall see – grounds *all* human functions in a sacramental reality – 'e quindi *organa* poi / *ciascun sentire* infino a la veduta' (ll. 101-2 – emphasis mine). Commentators have generally interpreted the verb 'organa' as either a simple synonym of 'to organise' or as a proper description of the process of formation of the aerial 'organs' of the soul: as Francesco Torraca has pointed out, the presence of 'organa' here recalls line 57,[387] where the work of the 'virtute informativa', proper of semen, is described as giving shape to all human limbs. I believe that this correspondence is fundamental in understanding the role played by the aerial body – and by the body altogether – in its relationship with the soul. The way in which the aerial body is shaped mirrors the way in which the

[385] Barański too quoted this passage to highlight the 'contrast between the flawed capacities of human reason and the infinite power of divine revelation' when discussing the mystery of union of matter and spirit ('*Purgatorio* XXV', p. 340). However, he does not explore the implications of the references to Revelation further, therefore not clarifying to which *kind* of knowledge of Revelation Virgil seems to be pointing.
[386] 'Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus' [taste and see how good the Lord is] (Psalm 34:9).
[387] Dartmouth Dante Project, note *ad locum*.

body of the human person in the womb is formed, however with a fundamental difference: in the process happening in the womb there is in fact a moment of discontinuity – precisely that in which the embryo 'd'animal div*enta* fante' – where the rational soul created directly by God, the 'spirito novo', absorbs the vegetative and sensitive ones. This moment is also that in which the human person as such is brought to life, which means that the pre-existent faculties proper to the vegetative and sensitive souls are now grounded in a different reality, which is not the outcome of a natural process. My point is that, precisely by virtue of their being now rooted in a different, new reality, these faculties are now shown as being new themselves. Moreover, this unity of all the different components establishes the senses as an integral part of human reason, meaning that the body must be with full rights involved in the process of knowledge, together with the mind: human knowledge, as liturgy suggests, needs to be both intellectual and experiential. Statius goes on explaining that, when the person dies, the soul is detached from the 'fleshy' body and, once in the place correspondent to its condition, it exerts its formative power on the surrounding air. This explanation was meant to be an answer to the question 'how is it possible for these bodies to grow thinner, when they do not even need to eat, given that they are made of air?': a possible conclusion, after Statius' *lectio*, is that the soul – the threefold soul, rational, sensitive and vegetative – suffers from the desire to eat and therefore manifests that suffering through an emaciated appearance. But, if that were the case, how does this description change our understanding of the material reality? This answer alone would not add much to a scientific understanding of the material, biological processes of the body related to the function of nutrition, here 'in hac vita',[388] and so attentively described by Dante in his vision of the afterlife: and in fact, why would Dante's Statius talk about the generation of the biological body in order to help the pilgrim see the truth about the status of the aerial bodies? I believe that Dante's doctrine of the aerial body is meant to show the reality of that which on Earth can only be seen as if through a mirror,[389] as the correspondence between the two processes of generation in the womb and formation of the aerial body – which in fact seem to mirror one another – suggest. I think that, by means of his representation here on the Terrace of Gluttony, Dante is restoring his understanding of the very function and act of eating, acknowledging its concretely spiritual reality, and therefore reframing all the bodily, biological aspects involved in the process of nourishment within a spiritual meaning. In her exegesis of the celebration of Mass according to the Roman Rite, Catherine Pickstock asserts something particularly helpful in order to understand that which, I believe, Dante represented in the poem:

[388] See the *Epistle XIII to Cangrande della Scala*, where we read that the main goal of the *Commedia* is that of 'removere viventes *in hac vita* de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitatis' (emphasis mine).
[389] 'Videmus enim nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem; nunc cognosco ex parte, tunc autem cognoscam, sicut et cognitus sum' [Now we see as in a mirror, unclearly, but then face to face; now I know partially, then I will know fully as I am known fully] (1Corinthians 13:12).

> this context implies that every meal should only occur *as* a ritual feast, thus drawing everyday life towards a ritual mode just as much as vice-versa. The community which prepared and enjoyed the feast was itself only bestowed in and through the liturgical celebration. Thus, the meal could be seen as a communal activity which took place only because it was embedded in liturgical life, rather than as a liturgical form additional or subordinate to the meal, in the form of a linguistic elaboration.[390]

In reading the very action of eating as inherently liturgical in its essence – meaning that it overflows from a reality received as a gift and with which the human person is in a relationship of radical dependency – the bodily, natural processes involved in the act of eating cease to be 'only' natural, to be seen as entirely *human*. Dante's poetic representation shows that, while these processes still remain entirely readable with a scientific or biological language, which describes the functioning of the organs and their interconnections, such processes will also speak of another reality, a spiritual and even 'more real' one,[391] of which they are the very embodiment. The human body is therefore a real symbol of a transcendent and yet concrete reality, so real that it does affect the very functioning of bodily organs, interfering with the biological processes.[392] There is in fact no discontinuity in the symbolic act of embodiment of the soul in the aerial body, as we learn from Statius: the mysterious point of discontinuity exists in the moment in which the human person is born, in the moment in which nature is subsumed into the transcendent supra-nature. The body, therefore, is not a 'substitutional sign' for a transcendent reality: it only fully becomes a sign – or better yet, a *symbol* – once it has 'been assumed into' the reality of the 'spirito novo'.[393] This is the point in which a link with the description of Mohammed as he appears in *Inferno* XXVIII proves to be helpful in understanding Dante's account of the human 'biological' body even further.

The early commentators were very careful in defining the specific condition of Mohammed, who is found among the schismatics and not among the heretics. According to some traditions, the prophet was originally a Christian departed from the Church more for 'political' reasons, rather than for

[390] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 174-75.
[391] '[E]ternity stands before those who contemplate artistic images, by means of which reality is elevated towards its eternal archetypes, leading us *a realibus ad realiora*. (Domenico Burzo, 'The Artist's Gaze Between Ascent and Descent', in *The Origin of the Threefold Seeing: Educate and Exercise the Space of Knowledge. Grounding Cross-Disciplinarity and Cross-Culturality in Romano Guardini's Weltanschauung*, ed. by Yvonne Dohna Schlobitten and others (Alexandria, VA: G&B Press – Virginia Theological Seminary Press, forthcoming).
[392] On the medieval understanding of illness and disease, see also: Claire E. Honess, 'Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXIX', in *Voci sull''Inferno' di Dante: Una nuova lettura della prima cantica*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Maria Antonietta Terzoli, 3 vols (Rome: Carocci, 2021), II. 737-54.
[393] See Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 259.

theological or doctrinal ones.[394] In this sense, Buti's comment is particularly helpful in understanding the difference between the sin of schism and that of heresy: if the latter is a rejection of a specific tenet of the faith of the Church, the former is a rejection of the faith altogether, inasmuch it is a departure from the unity of the Church, the body of Christ.[395] With the increasing interest in Dante's relationship with the Islamic world and texts, some scholars have suggested a text from the Islamic tradition – in its Latin translation – as a convincing source for Mohammed's punishment: the book is the *Liber de generatione Mahumet et nutritura eius*.[396] There is a particular passage of this text in which the young Mohammed gets kidnapped by three men who eviscerate him and clean him with snow, and then take a black grain away from his heart: after this process, he is now purified and ready to be a prophet in the service of God. The similarity with Dante's description of Mohammed's body in the ninth *bolgia* is clear. Pier Mattia Tommasino, however, has suggested that it is important to look carefully at this similarity, and not to lose sight of the fact that Mohammed is here punished as a 'seminator di scisma' as well as all the other souls in this portion of Hell, and not specifically for being the founder of the Islamic religion: the scholar holds that Dante's aim, in depicting this *bolgia*, goes beyond a mere anti-Islamic polemic, and is geared towards a consideration of the horrific consequences of division within the human community as such.[397] I find his suggestion particularly convincing and, whether Dante used the Latin translation of the Islamic source or not, I believe that the way in which he depicts Mohammed's body proves Tommasino's point.

Ironically, Mohammed is introduced as looking like a broken barrel:

> Già veggia, per mezzul perdere o lulla,
> com'io vidi un, così non si pertugia,
> rotto dal mento infin dove si trulla.
> Tra le gambe pendevan le minugia;
> la corata pareva e 'l tristo sacco
> che merda fa di quel che si trangugia.
> Mentre che tutto in lui veder m'attacco,
> guardommi, e con le man s'aperse il petto,
> dicendo: «Or vedi com'io mi dilacco!
> vedi come storpiato è Maometto!

[394] See, for instance, the comments of Jacopo della Lana, Benvenuto da Imola and Francesco da Buti.
[395] Buti, note to lines 22-27.
[396] See Karla Mallette, 'Muḥammad in Hell', *Dante Studies*, 125 (2007), 207-24; Andrea Celli, '"Cor per medium fidit": il canto XXVIII dell'*Inferno* alla luce di alcune fonti arabo-spagnole, *Lettere italiane*, 65 (2013) 171-92; Heather Coffey, 'Encountering the Body of Muhammad. Intersections between "Mi'raj Narratives", the "Shaqq al-Sadr", and the *Divina Commedia* in the Age before Print (c. 1300-1500)', in *Constructing the Image of Muhammad in Europe*, ed. by Avinoam Shalem (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 33-86; Mahmoud Salem Elsheikh, 'Lettura (faziosa) dell'episodio di Muḥammad, *Inferno* XXVIII', *Quaderni di Filologia Romanza*, 23 (2015), 263-99.
[397] Pier Mattia Tommasino, '"Visio" e "divisio" in "Inferno" XXVIII: qualche riflessione sulle fonti islamiche della "Commedia"', in *Dante e la dimensione visionaria tra medioevo e prima età moderna*, ed. by Bernhard Huss and Mirko Tavoni (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2019), pp. 61-79.

Dinanzi a me sen va piangendo Alì,
fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto.

(*Inf.* XXVIII, 22-33)

The irony is given by the fact that wine, the very reason for the existence of a barrel, is strictly prohibited by the Islamic tradition.[398] But, of course, wine immediately recalls another tradition too, the Christian one. At a first glance, therefore, Mohammed is described as a barrel that cannot contain wine, because it is broken. But, more interestingly, Dante seems to linger a bit longer on the description of the prophet's digestive apparatus. I believe that this is not by chance: the use of language and images related to food, in the light of what I discussed above, can prove to be particularly significant. Dante's Christian faith, as well as his devotion to the Church is something that cannot be denied: we saw in chapter 1 that he is eager to show how much his life is rooted in the faith of St Peter and of the Apostles. And yet, the *freedom* with which he engages with both the world and the tenets of the faith of the Church always makes him bold and original, although never unorthodox,[399] in the solutions he proposes to problems. The punishment of Mohammed, I argue, is not meant to address the problem of schism from an *ideologically* religious perspective. If, as we have learnt from Statius' *lectio*, all human functions, and that of nourishment in particular, plunge their roots into a transcendent reality that implies and establishes all humans as being part of one body, a breach from that reality cannot but affect the material, bodily functions which depend on that reality.[400] If the roots of a tree are detached from their nourishment, the leaves as well as the invisible roots will inexorably rot.[401] In the case of Mohammed, Dante seems not to represent him as condemned to the ninth *bolgia* of Hell inasmuch founder of the Islamic religion *per se*: otherwise, as Tommasino pointed out, there would be no reason for the prophet's relative and disciple Alì, who brought even more division, but still within the Islamic community, to be represented in Dante's Hell

[398] Tommasino, '"Visio" e "divisio" in "Inferno" XXVIII', p. 68.
[399] See Zygmunt Barański '(Un)orthodox Dante', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by C. Honess and M. Treherne, II, pp. 253-330.
[400] On the idea of human bodily organs as the concrete embodiment of the soul's creative functions see Pavel Florenskij, 'La proiezione degli organi', in *Il simbolo e la forma. Scritti di filosofia della scienza*, ed. by Natalino Valentini and Alexandre Gorelov (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), pp. 121-229.
[401] 'Il pasto di chi non si comunica è di per sé una malattia della funzione alimentare, un *cancro* delle radici spirituali di tale funzione. […] E tutte queste malattie delle radici spirituali che minano l'equilibrio della persona finiscono prima o poi, in un modo o nell'altro, per manifestarsi e con tutta probabilità proprio nella sfera dei disturbi psicologici (nevrosi), ma poi anche fisiologici e anatomici, di quelle stesse funzioni – quando non degli organi – alle cui radici spirituali "è avvenuto qualcosa" […] e dove qualcosa si è rotto. Quindi, se si vuole, gli stessi sacramenti possono essere definiti come […] radici, come fondamenti assoluti delle funzioni dell'uomo.' (Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, pp. 266-67). See also, again, Jesus' own words: 'Ego sum vitis, vos palmites. Qui manet in me, et ego in eo, hic fert fructum multum, quia sine me nihil potestis facere. Si quis in me non manserit, missus est foras sicut palmes et aruit; et colligunt eos et in ignem mittunt, et ardent. Si manseritis in me, et verba mea in vobis manserint, quodcumque volueritis, petite, et fiet vobis' [I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and will wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me, and my words will remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you] (John 15:5-7).

as sharing Mohammed's same destiny.[402] The difference between their specific punishments underscores this even further: it is Mohammed who is mainly punished in his digestive apparatus, whereas Alì has a broken face. But why specifically the organs designated for the function of nourishment? If we understand the reality of the Eucharist as being both the source and aim of the bodily function of nourishment, the answer will appear clearer. The Eucharistic meal is, at once, that which establishes the human person in his or her own individuality, grounding him or her in the self-giving love of God as the very essence of the person,[403] but it is also that which establishes the person as one with and non-detachable from the human community that receives that same gift.[404] In this sense, what we see in Dante's description is the consequence of Mohammed's choice to detach himself from the Eucharistic community: his sin is in fact a sin of schism and not of heresy, it is a sin against charity, before being a sin against faith, as highlighted in the comment of Buti. This detachment therefore results in a damage – inflicted by a devil with a sword – of Mohammed's digestive apparatus, here described in its decayed state. When the act of eating is no longer consistent with an act of sharing in God's love and therefore living in his Body – both in the sense of the bread and of the community of the people who eat it – it degrades into a beastly 'trangugiar', and the stomach is only able to produce 'merda', waste,[405] rather than nourishment and life for the rest of the body and the whole person.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have shown how Dante's experience of the 'pan de li angeli', as both something personal and related to his own experiences of life – his love for Beatrice –, and at the same time something communal and universal – the Eucharistic liturgy of the Church –, gives him a very original and new perspective from which he is able to engage with the scientific discourses of his time, be they related to astronomy, to the use of technology, to the account of temporality or to the biological knowledge of the human body. Perhaps, among the case studies here discussed, the one regarding Dante's representation of the human, biological functions, is the most revealing of the great potential of a liturgical kind of knowledge. To be able to look at the human body in its integrity, and therefore without discarding the reality of its transcendent component, can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of its functioning: this could certainly be a more appropriate starting point when

[402] Tommasino, '"Visio" e "divisio" in "Inferno" XXVIII, p. 73.
[403] 'Non per aver a sé di bene acquisto / ch'esser non può, ma perché suo splendore / potesse, risplendendo, dir "Subsisto", / in sua etternità di tempo fore, / fuor d'ogne altro comprender, come i piacque / s'aperse in nuovi amor l'etterno amore'. (*Par*. XXIX, 13-18).
[404] See Pickstock, *After Wrting,* pp. 174-75.
[405] On the significance of Dante's use of scatological imagery, see Zygmunt Barański, 'Scatology and Obscenity in Dante', in *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio,* pp. 603-14.

considering how to deal with diseases, but also a more fitting background in which it is possible to frame and understand our bodily interactions.[406] Moreover, I have discussed how Dante's scientific method, rooted in 'esperïenza', in the acknowledgement of reality as one's own 'pan de li angeli', shows even more how the integration and cooperation of both body and mind is pivotal in order to carry out a more comprehensive and successful journey of knowledge.

Overall, I think it is important to emphasise once more that, to believe in the Incarnation as the only definitive answer to any question regarding the truth of the created world, as well as of the afterlife, has never meant, for Dante, to abdicate a responsible use of rational, scientific discourses: as I have attempted to show, the opposite is, in fact, true. It is precisely his love for that mystery that works as a propulsive thrust for his intellectual endeavour and his openness and curiosity towards both the dynamics of the functioning of the created world, as well as of technological devices, the fruit of human ingenuity.

[406] For a study of Dante's representation of gestures, see Heather Webb, *Dante, Artist of Gesture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

Conclusions

> Prima autem sabbatorum Maria Magdalene venit mane, cum adhuc tenebrae essent, ad monumentum et videt lapidem sublatum a monumento. Currit ergo et venit ad Simonem Petrum et ad alium discipulum, quem amabat Iesus, et dicit eis: 'Tulerunt Dominum de monumento, et nescimus, ubi posuerunt eum!'. […] Maria autem stabat ad monumentum foris plorans. Dum ergo fleret […] Dicit ei Iesus: 'Mulier, quid ploras? Quem quaeris?'. Illa, existimans quia hortulanus esset, dicit ei: 'Domine, si tu sustulisti eum, dicito mihi, ubi posuisti eum, et ego eum tollam'. Dicit ei Iesus: 'Maria!'. Conversa illa dicit ei Hebraice: 'Rabbuni!' – quod dicitur Magister. Dicit ei Iesus: 'Iam noli me tenere, nondum enim ascendi ad Patrem; vade autem ad fratres meos et dic eis: Ascendo ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum, et Deum meum et Deum vestrum'. Venit Maria Magdalene annuntians discipulis: 'Vidi Dominum!', et quia haec dixit ei.
>
> (John 20:1-2; 11, 15-18)

> …esso studio, lo quale è applicazione de l'animo innamorato de la cosa, a quella cosa.
>
> (*Convivio* II, xv, 10)

> [U]t consolentur corda ipsorum instructi in caritate et in omnes divitias plenitudinis intellectus, in agnitionem mysterii Dei, Christi, in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi.
>
> (Colossians 2:2-3)

The aim of this thesis was that of exploring further the potential that liturgy has as a hermeneutical lens for reading and interpreting Dante's *Commedia*. I have built my research on the work of other scholars who have documented the pervasive presence of liturgy in the poem and have demonstrated its importance in order to better understand the gestures and the symbols described on the scene, as well as the multiple layers of meaning involved in specific passages where liturgical formulae are employed in the text.[407] In particular, I have followed Matthew Treherne's ground-breaking, insightful suggestion to look at liturgy as something altogether capable of shaping a worldview, informing ideas, ways of thinking and acting, thus challenging our own habits of thought, as scholars and readers of the twenty-first century.[408] Hence, I have discussed how a focus on the liturgical approach to knowledge and truth proves to be particularly helpful in deepening our understanding of Dante's own approach, within the *Commedia,* to these same concepts, and I have therefore explored the declination of this approach to knowledge within the different realms of thought available to the

[407] For all the bibliographical references, see the Introduction, notes 1-5.
[408] In particular, Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*.

poet in in the cultural context of the thirteenth-century Latin West, namely theology, philosophy, poetry and science.

I have grounded my choice to employ liturgical principles for the understanding of the *Commedia* in the text itself, and I have pointed to the concept of the 'pan de li angeli' as the fundamental key of my hermeneutical approach to the poem. *Paradiso* II, with its warning to the reader not to proceed further in the journey of reading, interpretation and knowledge if he or she does not *know* the 'pan de li angeli' truly is a hermeneutical challenge. We do not see, at any point in the poem, a surrendering of human reason, nor we see the discarding of any of those modes of thought by means of which knowledge was pursued in Dante's time. As I have shown in this thesis, they are all present and addressed throughout the whole poem, and in *Paradiso* as well. This means that a knowledge of the 'pan de li angeli' is not something that replaces theology, philosophy, poetry or science, but rather a different way to engage with these different realms of thought and knowledge. As I stated in the Introduction of this thesis, I have been looking at liturgy as a *way of knowing* that is also a *way to be in a relationship*.

What I have discussed throughout this thesis is that all these modes of knowledge are presented in the poem as grafted onto a very specific *experience* of reality: thus, while remaining themselves, with their own specific properties, languages and objects of interest, they are understood as performed in response to an *event*. This, perhaps, comes to the fore most powerfully in chapter 4, where I discussed Dante's liturgical approach to science. Broadly speaking, we can say that the main focus of this discipline is the functioning of the created world and the laws governing it, and that it tends to be built on evidence and facts – in Dante's time as it is now, even if with due differences. While Dante does acknowledge this, I showed how he also frames the performance of science and scientific acts into a reality understood liturgically, understood from the perspective of the 'pan de li angeli'. This therefore means that reality is acknowledged as alive and not dead: that is, reality, in its very features of time, space and human, embodied interactions is known *as* Christ, the Incarnated, Resurrected Christ. In this sense, the very focus of one's own enquiry – be it theological, philosophical, poetical or scientific – is no longer considered as a 'dead object' to own, but as an event to follow and, ultimately, *someone* to be in a relationship with and to know from within that relationship. The episode of the encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus after his resurrection, narrated in the Gospel of John, could be particularly helpful in understanding this dynamic. While she was at the tomb, sad because she could no longer find even the dead body of Jesus, he approaches her asking the reason for her tears. However, even if he is standing right in front of her, she does not recognise him from his appearance. This fact is particularly significant: that Jesus is not immediately recognisable to her eyes means that a further engagement with that portion of reality is required to

Mary, a hermeneutical engagement which involves something more than direct sight.[409] And in fact, she only recognises him when he calls her by her name. She then rejoices, and her acknowledgement of Christ's presence is witnessed by her bursting into the utterance of 'Rabbuni!'. At this point, Jesus invites her not to hold on to him, but to rather go and announce that he is alive. In this request, we can read precisely an indication of a different relationship to hold with reality: no longer the search for a dead body to own,[410] but the hermeneutic endeavour of recognising, time and time again, the presence of Christ, risen and alive in and through the created world.[411]

In chapter 2, I have discussed how this liturgical approach shapes Dante's idea of theology and philosophy, and I have repeatedly highlighted the emphasis that he places on the consideration of both these two speculative disciplines as *performances*. This is a most fundamental operation because, as I have discussed, it is from this perspective alone that a possible and yet paradoxical reconciliation between the many schools of thought of the time can occur. When the words of many different theologies and philosophies, represented by the men that Dante encounters in the Heaven of the Sun, are all rooted in the same experience of *erotic* acknowledgement of the truth as present, then the differences existing between all the rational re-elaborations and understandings of that experience are at once preserved and overcome. Inasmuch as they are *symbols of the truth*, rather than *the truth itself*, they can be, on the one hand, de-absolutized, and, on the other, treated each as the individual sounds composing the symphony,[412] or as precious thresholds to be crossed in order to engage in a *personal* relationship with the same truth of which they are symbols.[413] This idea of pursuing knowledge, even in its speculative forms, as one and the same with an engagement with that which one loves is also the element which makes Dante able to build a bridge between the theological and philosophical disciplines, and his own poetic activity. As we can read both in the *Vita nova* and in the *Convivio*,[414] for Dante the activity of 'studying' is always nurtured by the love for a concrete being. The implications of this connection are huge, because, as discussed in chapter 3, among other things it means that Dante is able to engage in a dialogue with different mythological traditions, and specifically that of the pagan world.

The experience of the 'pan de li angeli' is something entirely integral with the Church, although without the actual possibility of ever being owned by it ('Iam noli me tenere'…).[415] That of the 'pan

[409] We have seen a similar dynamic in the episode of the road to Emmaus, discussed in chapter 3.
[410] See Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 101-18.
[411] See Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 171-75.
[412] See Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 88-111.
[413] See Florenskij, *La filosofia del culto*, pp. 495-528.
[414] '…io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com'ella sae veracemente.' (*Vita nova*, XLII); '…esso studio, lo quale è applicazione de l'animo innamorato de la cosa, a quella cosa.' (*Convivio* II, xv, 10).
[415] John 20:17.

de li angeli' is an experience entirely available to any person existing in the created world regardless of their beliefs: this is precisely the experience Dante seems to account for when representing the dynamic of his relationship with Beatrice, a human being who is not the historical person of Jesus Christ. However, the fact that Dante is still able to see Beatrice as his own 'pan de li angeli', and therefore as mysteriously and yet truly making Christ himself present and known to him, is that which grants him the freedom he expresses in making his bold, unexpected and at the same time always orthodox claims of truthfulness within the poem, especially when dealing with particularly thorny questions regarding the relationship between the Christian and the pagan traditions. As I have discussed in chapter 3, Dante acknowledges in the poetic experience of Virgil his same experience: the difference between the two is in the possibility to fully know one's own erotic acknowledgement of the present truth in Eucharistic terms. In other words, for Virgil the experience of the divine does not change his knowledge of the gods as 'falsi e bugiardi', and, ultimately, death wins over life; Dante knows instead that the 'pan de li angeli' is freely given by a loving Father, and that, inasmuch as it is God's act of self-giving love, the 'pan de li angeli' is already the bestowal of eternal life.

From the hermeneutical perspective of the 'pan de li angeli', to know the words of Revelation and even believe that they are true and divinely inspired, does not yet mean to *know*, nor to have a 'verace fede' – as we have seen in chapter 1. If the words of Revelation do not announce and lead to the recognition of the present, Incarnated, living Christ, they only talk of a dead past. Still from the hermeneutical perspective of the 'pan de li angeli', to study reality from either a theological, philosophical, poetical or scientific perspective, and to do that while believing that this is the way to finally own the truth, is an illusion, or a way to treat reality as a corpse.

I am aware that, in this thesis, I have just begun to explore the implications that this approach, which I have called a *liturgical hermeneutics*, has both within the boundaries of Dante's poem and its interpretation, as well as on broader questions regarding our own intellectual activities as such. A particularly important focus of this research, crosscutting my analysis of Dante's engagement with the different realms of knowledge, has been on his understanding of time:[416] a consideration of time is indeed pivotal when looking at intellectual activity as an embodied performance. However, in some instances I have also begun to discuss Dante's understanding of space, always drawing connections with the ways in which space is treated in liturgy. In the liturgical environment, space is always understood as depending upon time, and ultimately, time and space form a whole unit which Catherine Pickstock calls 'the liturgical chronotope'.[417] In chapter 4 in particular, I have referred to

[416] See Treherne, *Dante's 'Commedia' and the Liturgical Imagination*, pp. 49-111.
[417] Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 233-38. Interestingly, Florenskij too, in his discussion on the nature of the work of art, talks of time and space as a single, inseparable unit. Pavel Florenskij, *Lo spazio e il tempo nell'arte*, ed. by Nicoletta Misler (Milan: Adelphi, 1995).

Dante's experience of space in *Paradiso*, in which his body can occupy the same portion of time and space occupied by another body (*Par*. II, 37-9), and in which he realises that he is able to move upwards – meaning against the pull of gravity – and as fast as, or even faster than, light: 'folgore, fuggendo il proprio sito / non corse come tu ch'ad esso riedi' (*Par*. I, 92-3). I believe that to explore Dante's experience of space in *Paradiso* from the perspective of a *liturgical hermeneutics* would be an exciting development of this present thesis, showing even further how the principles according to which liturgy interprets reality help us deepen our understanding of the experience conveyed by Dante's poem, and can perhaps renew our way to look at our own reality too.

This thesis has been particularly concerned with *the experience* of which Dante's *Commedia* stands as a witness, precisely because I am aware of the fact that words without presence do not mean much – if anything at all. In this sense, I believe that, ultimately, Dante did not try to 'teach' us the truth: an event cannot be taught, but only lived, and thus witnessed and accounted for. For this reason, I believe that by means of the very writing of his poem, Dante invited us to personally engage in a relationship with the event he witnesses: and thankfully indeed, the hermeneutical challenge that Dante threw down to us with his *Commedia* has been urging and questioning us ever since. He invites us not to abdicate the use of our reason nor to discard our humanity with our specific desires and needs, but to rather look at them as the precious resource we have in order to be able to carry out our own journey, 'servando *suo* solco / dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna equale' (*Par*. II, 14-15). In doing this himself through the very writing of his poem, he passed the baton to us, asking us to let our assumptions be constantly challenged, to never delude ourselves into thinking that we own the truth, and offering to our freedom, to our personal experience and understanding, his own experience and knowledge of reality as an act of self-giving love from God, as our very own 'pan de li angeli'.

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