

## Chapter 16: Third Ledge — Anger (Marco Lombard) (Purgatory)

No night was ever so dark as the darkness created by the smoke that enveloped Dante and Virgil. No veil ever obscured vision as much as that smoke.

The smoke was so stinging that Dante could not see, and so Virgil grabbed Dante's hand. Virgil placed Dante's hand on his shoulder so he could be Dante's guide through the smoke. Virgil was a sighted man leading a blind man.

Virgil told Dante, "Be careful not to go away from me. You need me now."

Dante thought, *That is true in more than one sense. I literally need Virgil to prevent me from going over the edge of this ledge of the mountain. But also Virgil is a perfect example of reason. This smoke is blinding me the way that anger can blind a human being. Reason is needed to be a guide to good conduct when one is angry. If a human being is not guided by reason, that human being can do harmful actions.*

Dante heard voices singing the "Agnus Dei" or the "Lamb of God":

"Lamb of God, You who take away the sins of the world,

"Have mercy on us.

"Lamb of God, You who take away the sins of the world,

"Grant us peace."

The voices sang the song in unison and harmony.

Dante asked Virgil, "Those voices — do they come from saved souls?"

Virgil replied, "Yes. The lyrics help heal and take away anger."

One of the saved souls then spoke: "Who are you who walks through the smoke? You are speaking of us saved souls as if you were not one of us — as if you were still

living and measuring time by the calendar instead of by the intensity of your purgation.”

Dante replied, “Saved soul, you who clean your soul so you can give it back to God, I can tell you wonders if you walk with me.”

Dante thought, *The wonders are that I have traveled through the Inferno and am climbing this mountain although I am still alive.*

The saved soul replied, “I will walk with you for a while — for as long as I am allowed. Because of this smoke, we cannot see each other’s face, but we can hear each other’s words.”

Dante said, “I am still alive, and God is allowing me to climb this mountain. To get to the Mountain of Purgatory, I journeyed through the Inferno.

“God wants me to see Paradise. Please tell me who you are, and please tell me the way up this mountain. We will follow your instructions so that we may climb higher.”

The saved soul replied, “My name is Marco, and I come from Lombard. I knew the world, each of whose inhabitants is like a slackened bow that no one uses to aim at virtue. The path you are on is the correct one; it will lead to the way up to the next ledge. When you are above, in Paradise, please pray for me.”

Dante replied, “I promise that I will pray for you, just as you have requested. But I have a question that I hope you can answer. This has been bothering me. As you have said, correctly, the world lacks every virtue and it lacks no evil. Why? Please tell me so that I can tell living men. Some people believe that the cause of evil is due to the stars’ and planets’ influence on people, while other people think that the cause of evil is people themselves.”

Marco sighed and said, “The world is blind, and from your question I can see that in this matter you are blind, too. Too many people on earth attribute evil entirely to the influence of the stars and planets on people. If this were

true, human beings would have no Free Will. And if people have no Free Will, why should people be rewarded with the bliss of Paradise for doing good or rewarded with the pain of the Inferno for doing evil?

“If Free Will does not exist, then God’s afterlife does not make sense. Why should there be an Inferno if people are not responsible for their sins? Why should there be a Paradise if people are not responsible for their good deeds? Why should there be a Purgatory if people are not responsible for the sins they have repented and are not responsible for their repentance? If no Free Will exists, people are not responsible for what they do or don’t do.

“But first let me give you some background information. People of your time and my time believed in the astrological idea that the stars and planets influence us. People in the afterlife are often able to see the future. I see that the future will bring the rise of science, which will show that the stars and planets do not influence us. Astrology is not science. However, it is true that heredity — as well as environment — influence us. Instead of the influence of the stars and the planets, we should talk about the influence of heredity and environment. And neither the influence of heredity nor the influence of environment takes away our Free Will. People still know the difference between good and evil, and people still have the ability to choose to do good or chose to do evil.

“According to Determinism, nothing is free to move in any other way than it moves. Everything follows natural laws. For example, planets orbit the Sun because of natural laws. Planets are not free to stop orbiting the Sun. Planets are not free to stop revolving. We will never have a day in which the Earth stops revolving for an entire day, meaning that one side of the planet is light for 24 hours, and the other side is dark for 24 hours, and then the planet starts revolving again. Using the laws of physics, scientists will

be able to accurately predict where a planet will be 100 years from now.

“Of course, Determinism as applied to planets is not controversial. However, people who are Determinists say that human beings are also determined. We are alive, however, and therefore it is much more difficult to predict our behavior, but according to the Determinists, everything we do is caused by our environment and heredity. According to the Determinists, Humankind does not have Free Will. Whenever we make a decision, we are making the decision in accordance with the kind of character we have. Our character is caused by heredity and environment. According to the Determinists, we have no Free Will that we can use to shape our character.

“In contrast, Free Will is what it sounds like. Planets may be determined, but human beings have the ability to make choices. You can choose to do good, or you can choose to do evil. The choice is yours to freely make.

“Human beings are free to choose good or evil, and so if the world is filled with moral evil, that is due to human beings alone, and not due to heredity, with an exception given to the criminally insane, who, like criminals, should be locked up, although the criminally insane should be locked up in a mental hospital rather than a prison.

“Just because you have Free Will does not mean that it is easy to use it. Doing the right thing can mean making a major effort of the will. Willing yourself to do the right thing can be difficult.

“Instead of you giving in to your desires and saying that what you do is determined by the planets and stars (or by heredity and environment), you need to work at controlling your desires. Instead of taking the easy way out and giving in to every desire, you need to decide what it is that you ought to do, and then you need to do it.

“This is something that all of us ought to be working for. In fact, it is what the souls in Purgatory are working

for. Instead of giving in to feelings of anger, or envy, or pride, the souls in Purgatory want to rein in these feelings and to substitute instead feelings of meekness, generosity, and humility.

“Listen, for this is important. I will explain to you how evil enters the world. The soul is born innocent, without evil. The soul can turn its attention to various things, some of which can be as trivial as a toy. The soul needs good guidance. The soul needs good teachers, just laws, and good rulers. We need good lawmakers to come up with just laws to be a guide for us. The just laws will not annihilate our excessive desires, but just laws can help us restrain our excessive desires.

“Currently, Italy has good laws, but it has no one to enforce them. The Holy Roman Emperor is not in Italy, and the current Pope, Boniface VIII, is more interested in playing power politics than in ruling justly and enforcing just laws, so the Roman law is not doing Italy any good. The Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope have even fought each other instead of working together to provide a good environment for all people, including the common people.

“The people who should be enforcing just laws are instead more interested in gaining wealth and power. The bad behavior of their leaders has a bad influence on the common people.

“Yes, we do have Free Will, but it is best not to be tempted in the first place. Bad leaders can create a society in which temptation reigns.

“Bad leadership has created an environment in which it is difficult for people to use their Free Will to do the right thing. The Pope and the Bishops are pursuing wealth and power. The common people see that, and they feel free to pursue their own base desires. Just leadership is important if you want a just society.

“Three good people still exist: Currado da Palazzo,  
“Three good people still exist: Currado da Palazzo,

Gherardo da Camino (who was the captain-general of Trevisio and the father of Gaia, a poet), and the nobleman and poet Guido da Castel. Currado bore a banner in a battle. Even though both of his hands were cut off, he held the banner in his arms and kept it waving to boost the morale of the troops.

“Dante, tell the world that the Pope has grabbed secular power as well as spiritual power. Secular power does not belong to the Pope.”

Dante replied, “Well spoken, Marco. I see why the sons of Levi were not permitted to inherit wealth. They served the Temple, and to keep focused on their service, they were not permitted to own property. The Pope and the Church have amassed secular power and wealth and so are distracted from the spiritual service that they should be performing.”

Marco said, “Rays of light are piercing the smoke. We are approaching the angel. I must leave before the angel sees me. God be with you.”

Marco turned and walked away from Dante and Virgil.

Dante thought, *I have learned from you, Marco. When I return to the Land of the Living, I must be a good leader. Leaders need not be Emperors or Popes; they can be teachers, parents, and other ordinary people, including poets.*

*I have also learned that Free Will exists and that we ought not to blame the stars and planets for our actions. Astrologers do that, and astrologers are in the Inferno.*

*Suppose you regarded astrology as a way to live your life. What then? Then you would regard the stars as exerting control over your life. You would not make an important decision without consulting an astrological chart, and then you would decide in accordance with what the stars “told” you.*

*By doing this, of course, you would be denying your Free Will. You would be controlled by what you think the*

*stars are telling you. A strong belief in astrology can lead to a denial of Free Will. A denial of Free Will can lead to an abdication of responsibility. Repenting your sins means acknowledging that you are responsible for committing sins and regretting your sins. Unless you take responsibility for your sins, you cannot repent your sins. Unless you repent your sins, you cannot achieve Paradise.*

*The astrologers are in the Inferno because they have kept people from taking responsibility for their actions, including their sins. Sinners can say, "It's no wonder I sinned. The stars predetermine it all. It is not up to me whether or not I sin. Therefore, I don't have to take responsibility for my sins."*

*Of course, we have seen that many of the sinners in the Inferno avoided taking responsibility for their sins. Francesca da Rimini blamed Love and a book for her sins.*

*Unless you take responsibility for your actions, how can you change your life for the better?*

*We need to reject astrology and to affirm Free Will and responsibility.*