

Chapter 20: Fifth Ledge — Avarice and Wastefulness (Hugh Capet) (Purgatory)

Dante left then, respecting the wishes of Pope Adrian V. The desire to be purged of sin is more important than the desire to have a few more questions answered.

Virgil, as always, led the way. Many souls have been guilty of avarice, and this ledge was crowded. Walking along the outside of the ledge would have been dangerous, and so Virgil led Dante to the innermost part, next to the mountain. A narrow path was there.

Avarice is a sin that has captured many, many souls. Someday someone will come to drive away the She-Wolf that is avarice.

Dante and Virgil walked slowly, and Dante kept thinking about the souls lying face down on the ledge. From a soul ahead of Dante and Virgil came a voice crying out like a woman having the pain of giving birth, “Mary! Your poverty was shown by the place where you gave birth!”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *I am beginning to piece together more information about the Mountain of Purgatory. On each ledge saved souls are given examples of a virtue they need to acquire and a sin they need to purge. So far, an event from the life of Mother Mary has been the first example of the virtue the saved souls need to acquire. That has been the case in the first five ledges of Purgatory Proper, and probably it will be the case with the two ledges Virgil and I still need to climb. The virtues that need to be acquired here are Charity and Detachment from Riches and What Riches can Buy, and the sin that needs to be purged is, of course, avarice, aka greed. The first example of the virtue that needs to be acquired is the Christmas story. Mary was pregnant and about to give birth, but no room was available in an inn; therefore, Mary gave birth in a stable and lay baby Jesus in a manger — a*

trough used to feed animals. She accepted this, and she did not complain about it.

In Paradise, an angel thought, *If Mary had lived in a much later time, she may have given birth in a decrepit trailer park.*

The saved soul then cried out, “Good Fabricius, you chose to keep your virtue and be impoverished rather than to acquire vice and live in luxury.”

Dante thought, *Gaius Fabricius Luscinus was incorruptible, refusing to take bribes, and he died without money to pay for his funeral or to provide dowries for his daughters. Fortunately, the Romans greatly respected him. The Romans paid for his burial, and the Romans paid for the dowries of his daughters. Fabricius valued virtue. He could have become rich by taking bribes when he served as Consul and as Censor, but he chose to stay poor.*

Dante was impressed by the words that the voice had spoken, and he pushed ahead to find out which saved soul the voice belonged to. As he did so, the voice spoke again, this time speaking of St. Nicholas, whom a later age would know as Santa Claus, and of the gold he had given to an impoverished father.

Dante thought, *Saint Nicholas provided dowries for three girls so that they could be married instead of being forced into prostitution. At that time and place, females needed a dowry in order to be married. Their father lacked the money to provide dowries for his three daughters and so it seemed that they would be forced to give up lives of virtue. Each night for three nights, Saint Nicholas threw a bag of gold through the window of the father’s house, and the three bags of gold became the dowries for the father’s three daughters.*

Dante said, “Saved soul, you who speak of such good things, please tell me who you are and why no one else is speaking. I can reward you with prayers when I return to the Land of the Living.”

The saved soul replied, “I will help you, but not for any reward that I may win. I will help you because we souls in Purgatory are helpful, and because your presence here as a living man shows that God is showing you grace.

“I am Hugh Capet, and my descendants have been bad Kings of France. They have ruled from my time until the present day, and they have been named Louis and Philip.

“When the old line of Kings had died, my family was rich and influential enough to replace the old line. My descendants at first were not especially good, but they were not especially bad because they had a sense of shame.

“But then they became greedy. They annexed the kingdom of Provence to the kingdom of France, and then they annexed Ponthieu, Normandy, and Gascony.

“Let me tell you about three descendants of mine, all named Charles, and their sins, some that are already done and some that will be done. The first Charles, of Anjou, defeated Manfred at the Battle of Benevento in 1266. He was so evil that people thought that he had poisoned Saint Thomas Aquinas and sent him to Paradise. Charles of Anjou thought that Saint Thomas was going to give a bad report about him to the 1274 Ecumenical Council of Lyons. Charles asked Saint Thomas what he was going to say about him. Saint Thomas replied, “Only the truth.” People think that therefore Charles poisoned him.

“The second Charles is Charles of Valois, who serves Pope Boniface VIII. The Pope brought him to Italy to be a peacemaker, but his real job is to beat down the enemies of the Pope. This Charles, who is Philip the Fair’s brother, will play a role in helping the Black Guelfs.”

Dante thought, *I am a White Gueff, and I oppose the Black Guelfs.*

Hugh Capet thought, *This Charles will play a role in helping the Black Guelfs take over Florence. You, Dante, will be exiled.*

The saved soul continued, “The third Charles is Charles II, King of Naples. In return for a large amount of money, he will marry his young daughter to a much older man: Azzo VIII of Este. He will be like a pirate selling for as high a price as possible a female captive.

“These sins, past and future, are bad, but worst of all is a future sin. A Pope will be badly treated. A King of France — one of my descendants — will send troops to Anagni to take the Pope prisoner and treat him badly for three days, beating him and threatening to carry him off in chains and execute him. In doing this to a Pope, it is as if he is doing this to Christ Himself. Again Christ is mocked, and again Christ is crucified, and this Christ is crucified between two living thieves: the leaders of the forces this King of France sent against the Pope. I want to see this King of France punished. The Pope is the Vicar of Christ, and he ought not to endure such treatment.”

Virgil thought, *I know the future. King Philip IV (aka the Fair) of France will send bullies to beat up Pope Boniface VIII, who will die on 11 October 1303, one month after he was badly beaten. Of course, Pope Boniface VIII will end up in the Inferno, but I know Dante well enough to know that he will find this bad treatment of a Pope — even a Pope who is his enemy — to be shocking. Dante would never approve of this kind of treatment for any Pope.*

The saved soul then said, “On this ledge, to purge avarice by day we saved souls cry aloud the examples of the virtues known as Charity and Detachment from Riches and What Riches can Buy and by night we cry aloud the examples of the sin known as avarice.

“By night we cry aloud the name Pygmalion. Dido was married to Sichaeus, but Pygmalion, her brother, killed him out of greed to steal Sichaeus’ wealth. Because of that, Dido fled. Landing in northern Africa, she founded Carthage. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, she has an affair with Aeneas, and after he leaves her to fulfill his destiny in Italy, she

commits suicide. She is in Circle 2 of the Inferno, which punishes the Lustful.

“By night we cry aloud the name Midas. He was so greedy that he wished that everything he touched would turn to gold. The god Bacchus heard and granted his prayer. Unfortunately, whenever Midas wanted to drink something, the liquid turned to gold. Whenever he tried to eat something, the food turned to gold. And when his young son ran to him for a hug, his son turned into a statue made of gold. Bacchus took back his gift when Midas requested him to.

“By night we cry aloud the name Achan. Joshua ordered the blowing of trumpets, and the walls of Jericho fell down, so the Jews conquered the city. The spoils of Joshua were supposed to be consecrated to, aka set aside for, the Lord, but a Jew named Achan stole some of the spoils: a good garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight. He and his family were stoned to death — the other Jews threw heavy stones at them and killed them.

“By night we cry aloud the name Sapphira. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold some land for the Apostles, but he kept part of the land (with his wife’s knowledge) rather than selling all of the land and turning over all of the money to the Apostles. Peter rebuked him, and he fell dead. Later, Peter rebuked her, and she fell dead.

“By night we cry aloud the name Heliodorus. Heliodorus wanted to steal treasures from the temple in Jerusalem, but a man in golden armor appeared. The man was riding a horse that kicked Heliodorus. Also, two strong men whipped Heliodorus, and he was carried away in a litter.

“By night we cry aloud the name Polymnestor. Polymnestor was a King of Thrace to whom King Priam of Troy entrusted his son, Polydorus, in an attempt to keep him safe. Unfortunately, King Polymnestor coveted the

treasure that the prince had, and out of greed, after Troy fell, he killed the prince so that he could steal the treasure.

“By night we cry aloud the name Crassus. Crassus is a very wealthy man from Roman history. He, Pompey, and Julius Caesar were triumvirs. Crassus led an army against the Parthians, who in 53 B.C.E. defeated him, cut off his head and right hand, and sent them to King Hyrodes. The King knew of Crassus’ great wealth and of his greed for more wealth, and to mock the fallen enemy, he poured melted gold into the mouth of Crassus’ head.

“By night we cry aloud these names. Sometimes, we cry these names loudly. Sometimes, we cry these names softly. By day we cry aloud the names of the virtuous you heard me crying. I am not the only one who cries these names. It was simply by chance that no other soul was crying the names of the virtuous when you heard me crying them.”

Dante and Virgil had already started to continue their journey when the mountain shook as if an earthquake had struck. The island of Delos used to float freely until Jupiter rooted it so that it would be a stable place for his paramour Latona, aka Leto, to give birth to his twin children: the god Apollo and the goddess Diana. The mountain shook more than that moving island ever did.

All of the souls on the mountain cried out, and Virgil, afraid that Dante would be alarmed, said to him, “Don’t worry. I am still here, and I am still your guide.”

All the saved souls shouted, “*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*” This song — “Glory to God in the Highest” — is the song that angels sang on the eve of the birth of Christ.

Dante and Virgil stood still and listened, just as the shepherds had listened to the angels. Then they walked on.

Dante wondered about the meaning of the shaking of the mountain and the shouting of the souls. He did not want to slow their pace by questioning Virgil, and so he walked on, wondering.