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## Piccarda: Contentment in Paradise

Dante, the pilgrim in the story he tells, is ascending through the nine “spheres” or levels of heaven. In the lowest sphere he encounters a woman named Piccarda, whom he addresses as “spirit made for bliss” (*line 37 below*). After she identifies herself, he is curious about her contentment. Wouldn’t she prefer to be in a higher sphere, closer to God’s dwelling (*line 64-65*)? She explains that in any level of Paradise, our desires cannot be “discordant with His will, which assigns us to this place” (*line 73-74*). In fact, the “very essence of this blessed state” is remaining within the will of God (*line 79-80*), which contributes to the joy of the entire kingdom (*line 83*) because it pleases the King (*line 84*). She summarizes the open secret of contentment, “And in His will is our peace” (*line 85*), a principle of contentment that applies now as well as in eternity.

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Translation by Robert Hollander & Jean Hollander, *Paradiso* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), p. 67-71.

<b>37</b>	'O spirit made for bliss, who in the beams	<b>64</b>	'But tell me, do you, who are here content,
<b>38</b>	of life eternal savor the sweetness	<b>65</b>	desire to achieve a higher place, where you
<b>39</b>	that, untasted, cannot be understood,	<b>66</b>	might see still more and make yourselves more dear?'
<b>40</b>	'I shall take it as a kindness if you share with me	<b>67</b>	Along with the other shades, she smiled,
<b>41</b>	your name and lot, and the lot of others here.'	<b>68</b>	then answered me with so much gladness
<b>42</b>	Then she, eager and with smiling eyes:	<b>69</b>	she seemed alight with love's first fire:
<b>43</b>	'Our love shuts not its doors against just will,	<b>70</b>	'Brother, the power of love subdues our will
<b>44</b>	any more than does the love of God, who wills	<b>71</b>	so that we long for only what we have
<b>45</b>	that all His court be like Himself.	<b>72</b>	and thirst for nothing else.
<b>46</b>	'In the world I was a virgin sister.	<b>73</b>	'If we desired to be more exalted,
<b>47</b>	If you search your memory,	<b>74</b>	our desires would be discordant
<b>48</b>	my having grown more fair will not conceal my name	<b>75</b>	with His will, which assigns us to this place.
<b>49</b>	'and you will recognize me as Piccarda,	<b>76</b>	'That, as you will see, would not befit these circles
<b>50</b>	placed here among these other blessed souls,	<b>77</b>	if to be ruled by love is here required
<b>51</b>	and blessed am I in the slowest of these spheres.	<b>78</b>	and if you consider well the nature of that love.
<b>52</b>	'Our affections, which are inflamed	<b>79</b>	'No, it is the very essence of this blessed state
<b>53</b>	only when they please the Holy Spirit,	<b>80</b>	that we remain within the will of God,
<b>54</b>	take joy in their adherence to His plan,	<b>81</b>	so that our wills combine in unity.
<b>55</b>	'and this our lot, which seems so very low,	<b>82</b>	'Therefore our rank, from height to height,
<b>56</b>	is given us because of vows neglected	<b>83</b>	throughout this kingdom pleases all the kingdom,
<b>57</b>	and, in part, no longer valid.'	<b>84</b>	as it delights the King who wills us to His will.
<b>58</b>	Then I said to her: 'From your transfigured faces	<b>85</b>	'And in His will is our peace.
<b>59</b>	shines forth a divinity I do not know,	<b>86</b>	It is to that sea all things move,
<b>60</b>	and it transforms the images I can recall.	<b>87</b>	both what His will creates and that which nature makes.'
<b>61</b>	'That is why my memory worked so slowly,	<b>88</b>	Then it was clear to me that everywhere in heaven
<b>62</b>	but now what you have said has helped me	<b>89</b>	is Paradise, even if the grace of the highest Good
<b>63</b>	and I more readily recall your features.	<b>90</b>	does not rain down in equal measure.

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