



# The Ordeal of Mercy: Dante's Purgatorio in Light of the Spiritual Path

*Jennifer Doane Upton*

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*The Ordeal of Mercy* is a book of wide erudition and simple style; its goal is to present the Purgatorio, according to the science of spiritual psychology, as a practical guide to travelers on the Spiritual Path. The author draws upon many sources: the Greek Fathers, notably Maximos the Confessor; St. John Climacus; Fathers and Doctors of the Latin Church, including St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas; John Donne, William Blake and other metaphysical poets; the doctrines of Dante's own initiatory lineage, the Fedeli d'Amore; the modern Eastern Orthodox writers Pavel Florensky and Jean-Claude Larchet; and the writings of the Traditionalist/Perennialist School, including René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Martin Lings, Leo Schaya, and Titus Burckhardt.

Other exegetes of Dante have dealt with the overall architecture of the Divine Comedy, its astronomical and numerical symbolism, its philosophical underpinnings, and its historical context. Jennifer Doane Upton, however--while preserving the narrative flow of the Purgatorio and making many cogent observations about its metaphysics--directs our attention instead to many of its "minute particulars," unveiling their depth and symbolic resonance. She presents the ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory as a series of timeless steps, each of which must be plumbed to its depths before the next step arrives; in doing so she demonstrates how the center of this journey of purgation is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere.

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