



46. DANTE'S DIVINE COMEDY

*O you possessed of sturdy intellects,
observe the teaching that is hidden here
beneath the veil of verses so obscure*
(Inferno, IX. 61-63)

At the end of *The New Life*, Dante declared that he had reached the "admirable vision". That work is the account of his inner journey, starting from the initiatic rebirth to the ever higher inner experiences, cadenced by periods symbolically represented by the number nine, up to the actual realization of the level of perfect master. On the other hand, the "admirable vision" corresponds to the universalization of such individual perfection. Dante's *Comedy*¹ describes this universalization that leads the Poet not only to "indiararsi" (in Italian: to become one with God), as he writes, but also to return to the earth of men (sskrt. *mānuṣa loka*) with a mission to restore order in the West. In fact, the *Divine Comedy* is entirely woven by recurrent allusions to the Cross, symbol of Spiritual Authority (sskrt. *brāhma*), and to the Eagle, symbol of Temporal Power (sskrt. *kṣātra*)². In the Western Middle Ages, the former was represented by the Church and the latter by the Empire. However, it was already for several centuries that the papacy had usurped the authority of the Church, which, after turning its attention to earthly power, had lost both the sacred knowledge and the monastic initiation.



1. The Cross and the Eagle

It had also gradually lost interest in theology, increasingly transformed into a rationalistic philosophy, neglecting even the simple responsibility of herding the souls towards their posthumous salvation. The only evident purpose of the papacy was to supplant the Empire in the leadership of the temporal things of Christianity. The Empire had been weakened by the subversion carried out by the papacy and the centrifugal tendencies of many kingdoms and principedoms, starting from France. The Empire maintained a direct relationship with chivalric and artisan initiations, but paid a serious price for maintaining its formal loyalty to the Spiritual Authority, although this was already unworthy and completely profane. Even the Order of the Temple, which represented the initiatic link between the Church and the Empire, had been affected, having to religiously obey a papacy that had become increasingly hostile. Even its initiatic relations with the Empire were complicated by the continuous politically motivated excommunications inflicted on the Emperors. This destabilized position of the Templars also explains their spiritual and military weakening. The Templar elite, represented by the Holy Faith, remained the only intellectual bulwark for the initiatic ways of Christianity. However, the constant threat of persecution

¹ Dante called *Comedy* his *opus magnum* referring to the classic meaning of this term. By "comedy" it is meant a narrative that, starting from a negative prelude, it reaches a happy outcome in the end. "Comedy" is opposed to "tragedy", which, differently, is a story that starts well but ends "tragically". And what better outcome than to become a Universal Man? However, to understand the exceptional nature of Dante's creation, it must be added that his universalization took place in life, as will be seen below. This highlights his exceptional qualifications, since a path of non-supreme knowledge usually leads to universalization only after death.

² Luigi Valli, *Il segreto della Croce e dell'Aquila, nella Divina commedia*. Bologna, Zanichelli, 1922.



was pushing the Faithful of Love to take increasingly critical positions towards the Spiritual Authority, which only erroneously was identified with the corrupt papacy (*Morte Villana*, i.e. Rude Death)¹.



2. Papacy against Empire

This was not what Dante, *Imperator* of the Catholic esotericism, from the height of his wisdom considered to be the solution to the serious crisis of the western tradition. His plan, or better his mission, entailed a repair action to be carried out in two stages: firstly, to restore the power and prestige of the Empire, cutting off the claims to the temporal supremacy pursued by the papacy²;



3. Emperor Henry VII

to bring the independence ambitions of the national Kings back to their natural borders; to restore the legitimate aristocratic governments in the cities and *villas*, taking them away from the greedy and intrusive administrations of the nascent bourgeoisie. Secondly, once this part of the project had been carried out, it would have been the responsibility of the *Holy Faith* to fill the spiritual void left in the heart of the Church. To be precise, Dante was ready to transmit his Holy Wisdom (Beatrice) to the ecclesiastical hierarchies in order to rectify the Church. Thus, he would have restored an authentic

¹ In reality, the corrupt Church was the result of a usurpation. Dante, therefore, wisely distinguished the principle of Spiritual Authority from its historical degeneration. The confusion between the two is only an error of estimation; the same that occurred during the 18th century, when the Freemasonry, cornered by the two papal excommunications, reacted by assuming an increasingly secular and anti-religious position.

² Boniface VIII in the *Unam Sanctam* bull (1302 A.D.) dared to affirm that the imperial dignity was prerogative of the pope, who delegated part of his power to the various sovereigns, including to the Emperor himself! With this act, the pope no longer recognized the imperial transmission from the Roman Caesars, fraudulently confusing it with the apostolic religious one.



Spiritual Authority in place of that form devoid of any content to which the Church had been reduced, which for too long had been breeding ground for all sorts of deviations. If any Faithful of Love with poor understanding did not intend to follow him in this endeavour, he was ready to "be part with himself" and go on alone¹. However, to implement the divine plan, it was first necessary to identify a prince who could follow the directives of this sacred project and who possessed, at the same time, the necessary power to act. This character manifested in the person of Emperor Henry VII of Luxembourg. Thus was found the Emperor able to implement the designs of Dante the *Imperator*. We will illustrate the historical events of that enterprise in the following chapter.



4. The ultimate vision

Unlike *The New Life*, which focuses on the Poet's personal realization (sskrt. *adhyātmika kṣetra*), the *Comedy* describes the possible consequences of his internal experience on the human (sskrt. *adhibhautika kṣetra*) and divine domains (sskrt. *adhidaivika kṣetra*). Therefore, it was no longer the mere account of his spiritual journey starting from the initiation, received from his master Guido Cavalcanti, to its completion; here the same journey was exposed as a mission call.



5. Dante e Guido

For this reason, in the *Comedy*, Dante's initiation and his entire inner path were represented as the effect of a divine will. This had provided him with the means to reach God (*indiarsi*, i.e. entering God) so that he later could operate the rectification of the Tradition the West. In this universal perspective, Dante completely abandoned the stereotypical and artificial troubadour style of jargon (*trobar cloz*) to use true

¹ Many Faithfuls of Love did not understand Dante's high purposes. They believed he had abandoned the *Holy Faith* to pursue fame among the powerful of the time or to ingratiate himself with the Church of Rome. Among these we find also Cino da Pistoia, one of the Poet's closest friends. Cino reproached Dante for having made Beatrice the symbol of his own Wisdom, while instead, according to him, she was the knowledge common to all the Faithful of Love.



traditional symbolism. This is what the poet called "*dolce stil novo*" (sweet new style). It is not our intention to condense such a vast, complex and articulated poem into a few lines. We will just give a brief summary underlining the most salient points.



6. The Dark Forest

Midway upon the journey of his life, at the age of thirty-five¹, Dante found himself lost in the dark forest of secular life. He could not get out of it because a lynx, a lion and a she-wolf barred his way. The three beasts represented incontinence (greed), mad bestiality (violence) and fraud (bad faith), origins of all other sins². The ravenous she-wolf, in particular, proved aggressive. At the same time Virgil appeared to him, the great Latin poet of the Augustan circle, representative of the Roman imperial initiation that had been conveyed to Dante through the Holy Roman Empire.



7. The lynx, the lion and the she-wolf

Virgil offered to bring Dante to safety. However, this route had to include a descent into hell and then an ascent along the cosmic mountain of Purgatory, until reaching the highest of the heavens (sskrt. *Brahmaloka*). This "long path" was unavoidable, because the *Veltro*³ who would have driven the she-wolf to hell, opening thus a "short path" or direct way to Paradise, had not yet descended from heaven.

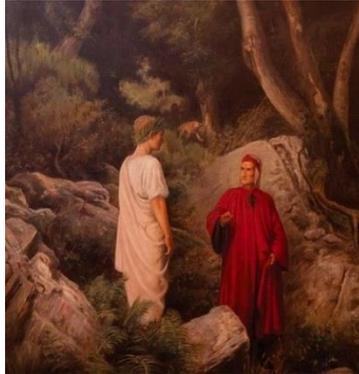
¹ The symbolic duration of life, seventy years, is encapsulated in the seven days of the Poet's otherworldly journey, from entering hell to the vision of God in Paradise. Pythagorean numerology makes his initiatic journey coincide with the 1300 A.D. That year fell halfway through the 13,000 year-long biblical cycle, that is to say 6,500 from the creation of the world. In turn, the biblical cycle corresponds to a half precession of the equinoxes. Thus, Dante renders his inner experience a cosmic event of universal significance. Paolo Vinassa de Regny, *Dante e il simbolismo pitagorico*, Genova, F.lli Melita ed., 1988 (I ed. 1956).

² Hell is divided into three increasingly deep underground parts, which correspond precisely to greed, violence and fraud.

³ A fast and big hound used mainly against larger prey, such as bears and the wolves. Most commentators, deceived by easy assimilation, identified this mysterious character with Cangrande (i.e. "Granddog") della Scala, Imperial Vicar for Italy. We will immediately see that this is not the case.

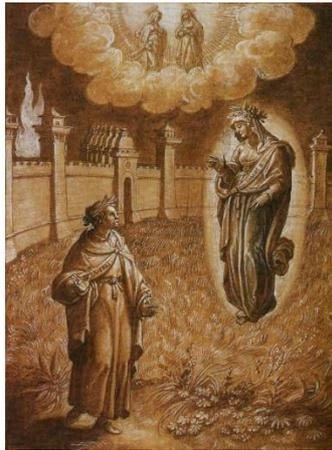


Pleading unworthy of such honour, Dante replied that far more important people than him had gone to heaven alive: Aeneas, progenitor of Imperial Rome, and Saint Paul, founder of the Church of Christ¹.



8. Virgil's apparition

Virgil's answer is more than surprising: Dante was equally worthy of making the otherworldly journey. By the will of God, the Virgin Mary had commissioned Saint Lucy to ensure that Dante could get out of the dark forest to climb to the highest heaven after passing through Hell, Purgatory and the terrestrial Paradise.



9. The Virgin and St. Lucia send Beatrice to Virgil

In turn, Lucy² had delegated this mission to Beatrice, and the latter, the Holy Wisdom, had commissioned Virgil to act as teacher and guide to the poet. Dante was still not aware³ that he was destined for the very high mission of bringing back to humanity the meaning of his "admirable vision".

¹ In truth, the western tradition had known several other characters who had descended into hell and then gone up to heaven alive. Among them are Orpheus, Theseus, Hercules, Odysseus, Saint Patrick, Saint Brendan, the knight Tungdalous and the Benedictine monk Albericus da Settefrati. But for Dante, the most important were Aeneas and Saint Paul, on account of the two sacred institutions they had founded.

² Saint Lucy's Day falls on December 13th, when the sunlight is enveloped in the long solstice night, thus heralding the birth of the sunlight symbolizing the Christ. Saint Lucy (i.e. Holy Light) represents the principle that leads to enlightenment. It is the power that raises the mind to cross the world of action and leads to the heavens. For this reason, Lucy is the symbol of the imperial wisdom. It appears in the form of an eagle that takes Dante on his wings to the entrance of purgatory. Note the alternation of delegations in the divine will: The Holy Virgin Mary (*Madonna*, my Lady) or the contemplative wisdom, Lucy or the active wisdom, Beatrice the contemplative wisdom, Virgil the active wisdom.

³ As in all traditions, the "missioned" people (sskrt. *adhikārin*) acquire awareness of their cosmic function only at a certain age, in the mid path of life, when they recover innate knowledge (sskrt. *vāsanā*).



For this reason, he did not realize that he himself was the *Veltro* mentioned by Virgil, who from heaven had to return to earth to drive the she-wolf back to hell. The mission Dante was destined to fulfil is confirmed in two other passages of the Divine Comedy.



10. Cacciaguida

The second confirmation comes from Beatrice when she met Dante in the Terrestrial Paradise. She heralded the arrival of a divine envoy, whose name would have been "five hundred, ten and five", that is, in Roman numerals, D X V. The third confirmation is comes from Cacciaguida, great-great-grandfather of Dante, a knight who died in the Holy Land during the second crusade¹. He said that envoy, completely detached from the lust for power and wealth, would have lived at the court of Cangrande della Scala². However, the magnitude of his mission was not yet evident in that year of 1300 AD, because he had entered a new phase of life (or *vita nova*) for only nine years³. Cacciaguida also provided Dante with further information regarding his family. The surname Alighieri⁴, which would later supplant Dante's original family name, that is Elisei, derives from the surname Allighieri of Cacciaguida's wife, an illustrious family. She was originally from Val di Pado, near Ferrara⁵, which remained exactly halfway between Feltre and Montefeltro. Here, then, is explained why Virgil had claimed that the *Veltro* was originally from a place located between Feltro and Feltro (literally, between Felt and Felt). Furthermore, all this information⁶ gives us the key to correctly interpret the Latin acronym DXV as *Dantes Xsti Veltris*⁷, Dante *Veltro* of Christ. Some may wonder why such a high mission has not produced any results. Indeed, historically it seems to have been a real failure. In reality, Dante's legacy to the western world remains as a unique monument owing to his height. Its spiritual content is by no means exhausted and has assumed an ever-greater eschatological relevance over time. If this were not the case, all the envoys of God to

¹ In his youth, Dante also participated as a knight in various feats of arms, such as, for example, the Battle of Campaldino (1289).

² Dante was exiled from Florence under papal pressure. He found hospitality with the Marquises Malaspina, the da Polenta, lords of Ravenna and with the della Scala, lords of Verona.

³ According to the calculations of the Dantists, the "initiatic death" of Beatrice, *viz.* of Dante himself, had occurred precisely in the year 1291 AD. However, Benini rightly pointed out that Cacciaguida spoke of the ten years of the planet Mars revolution, corresponding to 16 years, 11 months and 3 days of Earth time. Therefore, this date refers to May 1283, when the Poet's *New Life* in fact began. Hence, the "nine years old missioned" of the year 1300 was none other than Dante. Rodolfo Benini, *Dante tra gli splendori de' suoi enigmi risolti*, Roma, A. Sampaolesi ed., 1919, pp. 154-158.

⁴ Both Dante's father and his great-grandfather were called Alighiero by name.

⁵ The Allighieri were from time immemorial numbered among the patrician families of Ferrara. Pio Rajna, "Il casato di Dante", *Studi danteschi*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1921, pp. 59-88.

⁶ The Dantists have never been able to understand the meaning of the so-called three prophecies of the *Divine Comedy*. In fact, they have never linked them together in a single thematic sense. However, Dante, through numerical symbolism, has drawn a clear connection between them. The *Veltro* is mentioned in verses 101-102 from the beginning of *Inferno*; DXV is in verses 101-102 from the end of *Purgatorio*; Cacciaguida's revelations are exactly in the middle of *Paradiso*, between verse 2372 from the beginning and the verse 2372 from the end of the *cantica*. Benini, *cit.* p. 138.

⁷ Where *Xsti* stands paleographically for *Christi*.



mankind should be equally be considered as failures for having fallen short in touching all humankind and in establishing the lasting kingdom of peace and justice as promised.



11. The Hell up to the centre of the earth

We will not enter into the detailed narration of the *Comedy*. The subject is well known and its reading within everyone's reach. Furthermore, the description of its space-time cosmology and of the events reported would result so complex as to be impossible to cover in a few lines. The first part of the journey consists in passing through hell. For the uninitiated, this is the place the damned receive their punishment. But for those who are making the descent into hell during the course of their lives, Hell is the secular life, which must be overcome through initiation. This is why several characters who were still alive in Dante's time are already in hell, including numerous kings and popes. In this case, the descent into hell corresponds to the recognition of the faults and the motivations leading to sin (sskrt. *saṃcita karma*). If on the one hand the motivations are summarized in incontinence, mad bestiality and fraud, on the other hand the corresponding actions are articulated in the sins of Lust, Gluttony, Avarice-Prodigality, Wrath-Sloth, Heresy, Violence and Fraud¹.



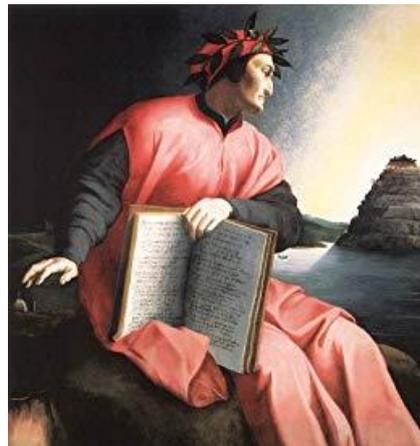
12. Lucifer devours the traitors of the Empire and Religion

The traitors of the Empire and of Religion are the worst among the fraudulent. Lucifer resides in the depths of hell, at the centre of the Earth, cast out from the heavens and thrown there over his sin of rebellion against God. Lucifer has three faces. In his right and left mouths, the traitors to the Empire

¹ Giovanni Pascoli, *Minerva Oscura*, Livorno, Raff. Giusti ed., 1898, pp. 18-53.



Brutus and Cassius¹ are constantly chewed by the fallen angel. In the central mouth Judas, the traitor to Religion², is devoured. Using the gigantic body of Lucifer as a ladder, Dante and Virgil climb up from the centre of the earth through a tunnel to the island-mountain of Purgatory, located in the Ocean of the southern hemisphere. From there the two poets clambered up the cosmic Mount of Purgatory, on whose summit is the Terrestrial Paradise. The Purgatory is a place for atonement made up of seven frames³. Upon entering, an angel marked Dante's forehead with seven Ps (sins, in Italian *peccati*) on. For each of the seven frames passed, a P was erased from his forehead. It is clearly a path of mental purification which results in the restoration of the primordial state, the one in which Adam was before the original sin. Once reached the Terrestrial Paradise, after drinking the water of the oblivion of sin, Dante found himself in front of Beatrice who was waiting for him there. Then Virgil, his first master, discreetly stepped aside.



13. The mountain of Purgatory

From that moment, Beatrice, no longer a human person (sskrt. *amānava puruṣa*), left the Earth behind, led the Poet through the Heavens to the Empyrean or Celestial Paradise⁴. There are nine Heavens (sskrt. *loka* or *svarga*) to be crossed, named after the seven planets representing the seven virtues⁵ and governed by different angelic hierarchies⁶. That of the Fixed Stars is the eighth Heaven. Whereas as ninth is the Crystalline or Primum Mobile. During Dante's ascent, he met with increasingly contemplative souls who

¹ The assassins of Julius Caesar.

² Recently, the most prominent exponents of the Vatican are trying to rehabilitate Judah in the hope of absolving themselves, having an ominous awareness of sharing the same guilt with that most traitor.

³ The existence of purgatory was formalized during the council of Lyon (1272). However, Catholicism owes Dante its final formulation. The absence of the Purgatory in the Islamic conception greatly weakens the theory of the origins of Dante's afterword from possible Hispano-Moorish sources as advanced by Asin Palacios and Cerulli. However, it does not completely dismiss it. In fact, there are several convergences between the Comedy and the account of Muhammad's Mir'aj. Indeed, Dante's and his contemporaries' alleged ignorance of Arabic and Greek languages is unproven and based exclusively on the prejudice of the Enlightenment against the Middle Ages.

⁴ Two Paradises exist, the Terrestrial and the Celestial. The first is at the summit of the earthly world. The second, also called Empyrean, sits ablaze (sskrt. *taijasa*) beyond all heavens. Both Paradises share a vegetal symbolism. The Terrestrial Paradise is a garden, the Celestial one a White Rose. The heavens are places of fruition for the saved, whereas the Paradises are obtained through the initiatic way. It is not by chance that these are accessible in life. By totally ignoring what initiation is, catholic theologians have always confused Paradises and heavens as if they were the same thing.

⁵ The virtues still depending on the action are: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Whereas, the contemplative virtues are faith, hope and charity.

⁶ From bottom to top: Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominations, Thrones and, in the spheres of the Fixed Stars and in the Crystalline, the Cherubim and the Seraphim. They correspond to the deities of Hinduism who rule the *lokas*.



instructed him to continuously higher doctrines. Once crossed the extreme limit of the *Primum Mobile*, the entire perspective turns upside down.



14. Beatrice's apparition in Earthly Paradise

The Earth, instead of being at the centre of the Ptolemaic system, becomes the extreme periphery, and the heavens become more and more spiritual as one proceeds towards the centre. The entire universal manifestation then appears as a "Snow-White Rose"¹, which has at its centre the mysterious presence of God. At that point, Dante turned to Beatrice hoping for an explanation, but she had already disappeared in silence, replaced by St. Bernard, the last contemplative monk of the Latin tradition and patron of the Order of the Temple.

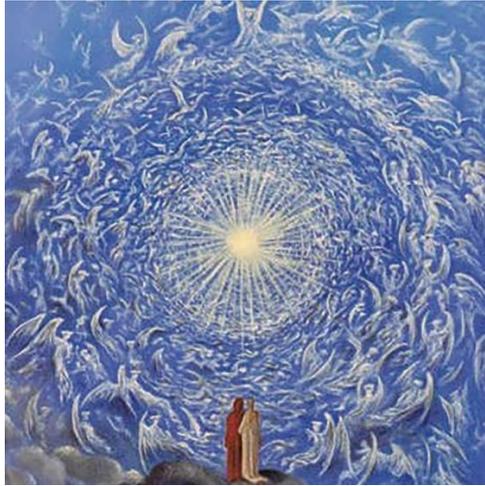


15. Meeting with St. Bernard

It was St. Bernard who led Dante towards the final vision to "*indiarsi*" (in Italian: to become one with God). The poet beheld the divinity which seemed to be made up of three coinciding circles of different colours. One of those circles mysteriously seemed to have human form, in which Dante recognized himself. But his mind was inadequate to understand how this could be. It would seem that Dante was unable to square the circle of this vision, when, suddenly, his mind obtained a dazzling intuition of the divine reality, exceeding any capacity for imagination and description. After this supreme vision, desire and will reappeared, but this time they belonged no longer to Dante the individual, but to the very "Love who moves the sun and the other stars"².

¹ Note the terminology characteristic of the Faithful of Love. However, this Rose or White-Flower far exceeds the meaning attributed to it in the knightly way of the troubadours.

² Last verse of the *Comedy*.



16. The White Rose

Universalization had taken place. Dante was now ready to undertake his mission by returning to the world of men.

Maria Chiara de' Fenzi