

Dante's Divine Comedy

Lecturer: D. Gregory MacIsaac

Schedule of Topics:

1. *Inferno* Cantos I-XVII — Incontinence and Violence

Dante is led by his guide, the Roman poet Vergil, on a journey through Hell, in order to learn that sin is an act of the soul's own will rather than an external impediment to happiness. In the first two divisions of Hell, he sees sinners who loved bodily goods without the restraint given by rational deliberation (Incontinence), and those who sought bodily goods through the use of force on others, on themselves, or on the world in general (Violence).

2. *Inferno* Cantos XVIII-XXXIV — The layout of Hell; Fraud

In the third division of *Inferno*, Vergil shows Dante the worst sinners (Fraud). They corrupted their highest human faculty, the power of reason, by using falsehood to deprive others of their good. Their falsehood culminates in treason, which destroys all human community.

3. *Purgatorio* Cantos I-IX — Ante-Purgatory; Confession, Contrition, Satisfaction

Dante and Vergil climb the first part of the Mountain of Purgatory, passing those souls who must wait for a time before entering Purgatory proper, as punishment for their own delay in repenting their sins during their lives. At St. Peter's Gate, Dante learns how souls are saved, and the purpose of Purgatory as a training ground in 'moral virtue'.

4. *Purgatorio* Cantos X-XXXIII — The Cornices; The Earthly Paradise

Dante and Vergil climb past the seven cornices, on which souls convert the seven deadly sins (Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust) into corresponding virtues. Dante returns to the Garden of Eden, where he is reunited with his beloved Beatrice.

5. *Paradiso* Cantos I-XIV — The Moon, Mercury, Venus, The Sun

Beatrice guides Dante in an ascent through the heavenly spheres. In each sphere, Dante learns more about the nature of the universe and about human nature, as an image of the development of 'intellectual virtue'. The souls in the first three heavens, he discovers, were preoccupied in life with earthly things, which is reflected in their place in Heaven. The Doctors of the Church, in the Sun, provide an image of the organising principle of Heaven.

6. Paradiso Cantos XV-XXXIII — Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, The Fixed Stars, The Primum Mobile, The Empyrean

The souls in the second group of heavens (Mars-Saturn), during life, were devoted to the principles of Justice and Goodness, but with an imperfect understanding of how the divided manifestations of these ideals on Earth are rooted in God as their single cause. The souls in the final group (Fixed Stars-Empyrean) have overcome their divided, earthly understanding and now see the Truth itself. Dante's journey culminates with a vision of God as the single cause of all things and with a glimpse of the highest mystery, the dual nature of Christ as both Divine and Human.