



Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)

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THE DIVINA COMMEDIA

DANTE ON TIME AND ETERNITY

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(revised 2022.02)

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Dante's *Divina Commedia* represents St. Augustine's synthesis of *eros* and *agape*.¹ The poet's own personal experience of love is its central motif. The poem describes the universe as the stage of a drama whose theme is the connection of time and eternity. Its red line is the idea of *contrapasso* ("divine retribution in the right measure") as an expression of the justice of God: God's Judgment *is* the exposure of our temporal deeds to the Light of Truth and Eternity.

Dante is often mentioned on a par with Homer and Shakespeare, and rightly so. In his *Divina Commedia* is infolded not only the variegated life of a whole epoch, but the very urge of the entire Middle Ages. Its poetry is a kind of metaphysical architecture which in its solemn grandeur has been compared to the lofty gothic cathedrals of his time. For a modern reader, the key to Dante's cathedral is found in the *motto* of the Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen: *A poet's vocation is to pass judgment upon himself*.²

Dante's poem is a true doomsday-book: over himself, over his contemporaries, and over man in his relation to God. Ending happily, it was given the name of *Commedia*. Interpreting the unknown 'beyond' by the images of what is already known and given, it is realistic and even modern. Visualizing the meaning of human life by evaluating the lives and deeds of man *sub luce aeternitatis*, it is at the same time *epos*, *drama* and *lyrics* - the ultimate contrast to the absurd theatre of modern times.

Dante carries a light which he does not intend to hide under a bushel:
*Here begins the Comedy of Dante Alighieri - florentine by birth, but not by conduct!*³
With such words he introduced his poem. He even insisted that it should be read on a par with the Holy Scripture of the Bible! To this purpose he gave guidance in several places, see for instance Inferno (Canto 9,61):

*Oh, ye who have the gift of reason:
behold the teaching which is dimly hidden
behind the veil spread out by my odd verses!*

Firmly rooted in the catholic tradition for Biblical exegesis, he follows the lead of St. Thomas Aquinas by reckoning four different layers of sense, or meaning, which will here be rendered liberally as follows:

- 1) the immediate, or literal, sense (*historical*)
- 2) the transferred, or pictorial, sense (*allegorical*)
- 3) the edifying, or educational, sense (*anagogical*)
- 4) the uplifting, or spiritual, sense (*mystical*)

Dante described his work as an allegory. Since *allegoresis* is in general rejected by protestant theology and discarded by aesthetic theory, it seems pertinent to consider whether this lessens the dignity of the comedy as an item of genuine poetry. For my part, I side with Kurt Leonhard (*Der gegenwärtige Dante*, 1966):

An allegory is a pictorial presentation that unfolds itself with the aim of depicting a definite and clear-cut concept. It speaks only to the reason and is emptied as soon as we have grasped the concept. A symbol, by contrast, is a form having its own inner life ...

If a true poet were to create an allegory, it would change under his hands to become a symbol.

Taken in the outward sense, the Comedy presents a journey of our poet, made in the holy year of Jubilee 1300, through Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso. In the inward sense, it is an account of our poet's way to conversion and faith; further, it is a moral guide for every Christian on her/his pilgrimage to God; finally, the Comedy may be interpreted as a token of Divine Providence and its temporal act of eternal Grace aiming at the salvation of Mankind.

Formally, Dante's Comedy is composed according to very strict aesthetic rules. It contains 100 songs (*canti*), the first one serving the purpose of introduction, and it is divided into three major parts, corresponding to the three "realms of the beyond". Each part comprises 33 songs, of which each on the average contains 12×12 lines. The verses are *terzini*, each strophe with 3 lines, where the second line in each strophe contains a rhyme of the first and third lines of the following.

The contents of this cosmic poem appear at first sight as a peculiar blend of fact and fiction, a *mixtum compositum* of myth, history, poetic phantasy, and autobiography. The frame of the poem is the Lucifer-myth. In the Old Testament, Jes.14.12, we hear of the king of Babel, who was like the bright shining morning-star, but for the sake of his arrogance was thrown down from Heaven into the abyss of death. Dante, in agreement with an already wide-spread tradition, interpreted this myth as a metaphysical drama which takes place at the cosmic stage encompassing the entire world of creation.

Lucifer, from the very dawn of creation, was one of the most dignified angels, and a member of the heavenly choir; however, aspiring to be the foremost among angels, he revolted against God, his own Creator. As a rebel against the law of Heaven, he came to be regarded as the root of everything wicked in this world; indeed, he came to be seen as the personification of the very principle of evil.

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Only on the background of this exceedingly strange myth can we hope to grasp the urgent need, felt by medieval believers, for the Divine Act of Salvation.

The myth of Lucifer furthermore determines the entire topology of the Comedy. When the evil one was eventually cast out from the gates of Heaven, it happened so fast that his wings were set ablaze by his fall. The Earth, who beheld this awful creature approaching, was so terrified that her belly opened itself like a funnel having its entrance right beneath the hill called Golgatha, i.e., "the place of skulls"; and the impact of the fall, by which Satan (his real name) was wedged into the center of this globe, was so violent that a mountain arose as its antipode. However, during all that turmoil, the heavenly circuits remained undisturbed and calm.

The world-picture of the Comedy, of course, which Dante inherited from Aristotle and Ptolemy, is *geocentric*. Galileo, the famous physicist, later wrote a small treatise concerning the geography of Hell; but, in my opinion, his literal interpretation of the words of Dante is wholly off the track. Dante is perfectly conscious of the chasm that separates fact from fiction. Nevertheless, he obviously regards his poem as being both dream and reality. How can that be? This is an urgent question.

At the beginning of his pilgrimage, the poet finds himself situated in a forest, terrified by three ferocious beasts. His state is one of sensual confusion, and passions imperil his mental health. He can spot the sunny peak of a distant alp, the mountain of purification, but his ascendance is impeded by the animals. The situation is dreamlike, and the figures act stily like dolls on a tiny theatre. Suddenly, the shadow of the long departed Roman poet Vergil appears next to him, "hoarse like one who did not speak for a long time". In fact, Dante was not ready to listen to him until now.

Vergil personalizes the human wisdom which Dante so frivolously has forgotten. Three heavenly women have seen his distress and have decided to come to his rescue. Beatrice, the early deceased love of his youth, therefore, has left her place in Heaven and visited the limbo of Hell in order to persuade Vergil to salvage their friend, his admirer, and, as a tool sent from Heaven, guide him back to the narrow passage of righteousness. In spite of the fact that Vergil, as a pagan, is doomed for his lack of true faith, his noble and friendly nature is easily motivated to fulfil their plea. Symbolizing unassisted reason, Vergil generously accepts to be the guide of Dante, albeit realizing that even the noblest of wisdom, when pagan, cannot be saved.

But for Dante to take the straight path to the peak of purification is impossible. He is so weak that he cannot choose Heaven unless he is confronted with the plagues of those doomed to Hell. Hence Vergil tells him that his only option is to accompany him on a detour through the sites of eternal suffering. So they choose instead the broad way through the always wide open gates of Hell. Its inscription is sinister: *Here all hope must be left out!* Still worse is this: *Eternal love prepared me, and I shall stand forever!* Such words are incompatible with a human perception of love, unless they are interpreted as implying that the possibility of separation from God by sinning was inevitable.

Inside the gates of Hell they immediately face the half-hearted. These people are the wretched ones who are neither let into Heaven, nor into Hell; since they did not care to keep themselves alive they are not allowed to die either, so they stumble around without purpose, just as they spent their time on earth. In retaliation for wasting their time with trifles, they are harrowed by insects; or, rather, the insects that bite them are the eternal token of that mess of vain trifles which occupied them during their temporal existence. This is the first example of just retaliation, but already sufficient to enlighten the principle of retribution according to right measure, *contrapasso*.

The point to be grasped is that the torments of Hell are not sanctions laid upon the departed spirits from the outside by the supreme authority, God. The spirit judges itself, and its punishment is righteous, because it is nothing but the very wickedness of its sin, as this is exposed to the clear light of eternity. In this regard, Dante is extremely realistic. Hell, as the place of divine punishment, is nothing but a decoding of a fact, namely, what sin has done to the life of man. According to this view, it is not God who invented Hell in order to punish man: that He could safely leave over to man and his wickedness!

Shortly later, Vergil and Dante together cross Acheron, that is, the river of death, and the ferry of Charon lies heavily in the stream, since Dante has come onboard: of all characters in the comedy, Dante is the only one to be alive and, as a living human being, he carries his body with him, but that body is material. This is displayed in *Inferno* by his weight, and in *Purgatory* by his shadow; but in *Paradise* these traces of his earthly origin are no longer perceptible. The description of how the ferry takes him over, of how the dead gather at the shore like fading leaves whirled away by an autumn storm, and of how Charon, daemon of death, hits the procrastinate with his oar, has a horrifying power.

Horror induces the doomed spirits to damn God and their parents, the day of their own birth, and their whole life on earth. But, suddenly, their terror is transformed into a burning desire: now they long for death and judgement! This illustrates another crucial point in Dante: every human being is allotted to partake in eternity in accordance with his or hers deepest desire. God has created Man as a free nature and gives to everyone after one's longing - this holds both for the saved in Heaven, and for the doomed of Hell.

The first site Vergil and Dante arrives at is Elusion, abode of Vergil: as compared to the Christian Paradise, that of paganism is placed in an abyss! Everything down here is clean and nice, and the dead are missing nothing - except hope! Dante sights many great philosophers and poets, and is greeted as their equal. Then the two rovers arrive at the first genuine place of torment: here the lecherous are punished by being chased around by a never ceasing whirlwind, the picture of their own barren passion and sensuality. In a famous scene we meet two lovers, Francesca and Paolo, who had the misfortune to be found and killed *in flagranti* by the woman's infuriated husband.

The gluttonous, lying almost dissolved in hellish rain, are passed over in silence, and, similarly, the avaricious and the prodigal, who are carrying heavy burdens around in opposite directions, are ignored. These circles, together with that of lechery, show the conceivable variations of the sin of impudence.

The way down to the inner circles of central Hell is to cross the river Styx; they are carried over the stream by Phlegias, who ignited the temple of Apollo and by this despicable act scorned its famous inscription: *Know thyself* ! On their way they pass near some mute beasts gurgling for fury and rage in the mud, showing that the lack of selfknowledge may lead to the loss of language.

Dante and Vergil are now confronted with the walls around the very center of Hell. The poet here describes the repressed regions of mentality as an infernal stronghold. He thereby forebodes the idea of the "unconscious", six centuries ahead of Freud!

The devils, which are the custodians of the castle, will not let them in and attempt to separate them; but, separated from reason, insanity threatens, and Dante may perish. He is now in desperate need of good counsel, but his heavenly guardians have sent him help already: an angel is on his way, hovering forward without touching the mud, while trying with his hand to keep the evil odour away from his nose. With his wand he lightly touches the gate - and the gate is opened up at once.

Dante and Vergil enters - and the entire shocking scenery is changed in a sudden. First: a burning castle, with devils and furies wildly screaming from its ruined parapet. Next: a soundless wasteland with flaming graves as far as the eye can see.

The denial of God gives entrance to the inner strongholds of Hell. The first figure to be observed by Dante is the arrogant *condottiere* Farinata. From then on, the way opens further downwards to the crimes of violence: first murder, then suicide and, as the third, self-centered lascivious sodomy. The murderers, whose blood boiled over, are now boiled in their own blood. The suicides, who have let themselves be overwhelmed by selfcompassion, are transformed into a lifeless brushwood that, when wounded, pours out clotted blood with a hissing sound. Dante already knows the "knotty man"!

On the brink of a precipice, usurers and skinflints are densely seated. Prompted by his guide Vergil, Dante uses a monk's girdle as an angler's line, and gets a catch at once: a disgusting beast, displaying the face of an honest man, but possessing the body of a serpent covered by gaudy scales, and provided with the poisonous stingtail of a scorpion. This is Geryon, the picture of sly deceit, who is going to take them down into the abyss. Here are cellars filled with rats and snakes and much else. The lick-spittles are covered with dung right up to their mouth. The office-vendors are knocked down into the ground, and sit like stakes stuck into this earthly flesh. The circle is full of clergy.

There then follows one of the most absurd and grotesque scenes of the poem. Dante obtains an audience of pope Nicolaus 3rd. The pope, who has given offices away for bribe (grease) and thus has trampled upon the sacrament (ointment), stands with his upper body half down in the ground while sprawling with his ignited soles (a parody on the flame of the holy ghost). Knowing that his successor, Boniface 8th, is going to meet the same fate as himself, he mistakes Dante for Boniface and is pleased by his arrival before time, but is disappointed at once. Dante, who indeliberately disclosed the pope's secret, feels like a confessor facing an unrepenting criminal sentenced to death.

In some other dungeons in Hell Dante meets fortune-tellers who have had their neck turned around to remind them that their view of truth was distorted, and hypocrites who must carry leaden mantles because, when alive, they had put too much weight on external matters. Here the symbolism is "ponderous"! The tale of how the thieves in the snakepit by turn are changed into snakes and back to men again offers direct allusions to sexuality, so that the poet's psychological insight appears to match that of Freud.

The account of the devils with forks who roast their wretched victims in a boiling pool of pitch is apt to appear absurdly grotesque, until one realizes that it is just a sober description of what goes on among the officials of a corrupt state. That sowers of discord and agitators for war are punished by being exposed to all the terrors of warfare is not to be wondered. By contrast, it is surprising to hear that coiners and alchemists must suffer under all temporal plagues and diseases, but only until one recalls that forgery was seen as a sin against nature. Obviously, Dante did not eschew dark humour in order to carry the principle of *contrapasso* through to its utmost consequences.

One of the strangest characters of Hell is Ulysses, the ancient adventurer, placed in the dungeons of evil because of his treason with the wooden horse. A false counsellor, he has been changed into a self-consuming tongue of fire. But his real sin, however, is his insatiable curiosity which led him to seduce his tanned crew to set out with him on an audacious voyage across the ocean, bound for the antipodes where their ship was wrecked on the cliffs of "Mount Purgatory". Ulysses may be seen as an early foreboding of modern man with his boundary-breaking aspirations. Dante makes him into a bogey, an omen of admonition against effrontery.

The descent into the deepest regions of Hell betokens a last gigantic potensation of evilness: over the central abyss tower the bodies of the titans who rebelled against Zeus. On the command of Vergil, they get help from Antæus, earthborn adversary of Hercules, who carries them down into the pit. Now all limits are transgressed and, at the very site where superman, moron, and beast, become unified, Homeric cunning is transformed into Titanic stupidity in the poet's final explanation of the ultimate sin, treachery.

In this chasm the consuming fire has been superseded by permafrost: all passion is now dead and gone, only a moronic calculating reason is left, but left is also the most horrifying awful of all scenes in this enthralling drama. Dante now discovers two figures, downcast into the ice of the infernal river and unified in a dreadful embrace: they are count Ugolin and archbishop Ruggieri, the victim and his tormentor, amalgamated into a single sculpture: one body, one soul. The two were bitter enemies. Once the bishop trapped the count together with his two sons and two grandsons, locked them up into his tower and cast the key away! The count, who was the last to die, became a cannibal and, driven by unquenchable lust for revenge, he gnaws the bishop's neck in all eternity!

The last great character of the Inferno is Lucifer himself, in another word: Satan. There is something comical about him that makes it rather difficult to take him seriously.

As a furry triceps, encapsulated in the ice and flapping his batwings helplessly, he is a miserable plagiarism of the Holy Trinity, only a poor parody. In each of his three gaps he masticates a hapless sinner: Brutus, Cassius, and Judas. Vergil and Dante creep around in his fur like lice until they come to his hip, which is locked in the very center of the Earth. Here they turn half around with great difficulty: in this way they are literally converted! Now they see Satan as he really is: nothing but the very fool of the Comedy ...

Being converted they discover a cleft in the rock: this is the lacrymal duct through which all the tears of a penitent humanity flow down from the mountain of purification. Only by following the way of repentance can they find their way out of Hell.

From this exposition of human wickedness, we arrive with our poet to Purgatorio, to whose description is devoted the second part of his poem. Purgatory, however, is not eternal in the same sense as is Inferno and Paradiso; its existence is merely transitory, since it will become closed at the day of Judgment.

Vergil and Dante behold a beautiful dawn on the starry Heaven at the moment they emerge from the womb of the Earth to the shore beneath the mountain of purification. The first figure they meet is a venerable old man, Cato Uticensis. But, strangely, Cato was both a pagan and a suicide. How can he be saved? The ways of God are inscrutable. He may damn just people like Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and Vergil, and may save pagans like Cato, Trajan, and Rifeus. Cato is saved, since he chose to die for the sake of freedom, in order to avoid serfdom; he is here because his motif was love for freedom.

Now Venus (i.e., the desire of man) turns up in the sign of Piscis (Christianity). On the old man's chest four holy lights are sparkling; these are the pagan virtues: wisdom, courage and temperance, which are united in justice. Cato crowns the pilgrims with rush for humility and sends them upwards. The plain is wasteland, but clean. Suddenly they observe a boat approaching. It hovers over the sea and is driven forth by the wings of an angel of light. Immediately, when it is landed, a host of souls come out. Newly deceased, they are foreigners in the country and behave like a flock of sheep without a shepherd. In spite of peace and no danger, they do not know where to go.

Dante is greeted by a youthful chum who reminds him of their good old days. They flow away reciting poems of love, but are chased by Cato who directs them from lyrical dizziness to ethical firmness; then they climb upwards. In passing, they see the excommunicated, the late repenting, and those who were not absolved by the church. All of these have to wait outside for long. The path is narrow and stony, the cliff is steep, and Dante groans for fatigue. In the meantime twilight is falling on, and they resolve to spend the night in a beautiful valley peopled by princes who did not fulfil their duty.

Every night the inhabitants are haunted by a serpent that comes to test the weak souls whereafter it is expelled by two angels with flaming swords. When daylight (grace) is missing, it is impossible to go a single step upwards, but, in return, the Heaven is lit up by three stars: faith, hope and charity. So the ascent depends on the presence of sunshine. Only by grace is that unification of decision and capacity obtainable which makes good

actions possible. Lacking all good deeds, the soul must wait until the day of Judgement. However, Dante gets the necessary aid. At the early dawn he has a dream: a golden eagle (: poetic inspiration) strikes down to carry him up unto a narrow gate.

He now stands in front of "the needle's eye". Ahead of him he beholds three steps: that of confession, that of repentance, and that of penance. The door is heavy, and inside a narrow path leads towards the stars. An angel marks his forehead with seven P's (i.e., for *peccatum*, sin); these are the signs of his serfdom. For every circle of his ascent, the angel guardian of that circle will delete a P. First he must do penance for his arrogance, next for his covetousness. The proud, who are walking along bent under heavy burdens, are roused on their pace of penance by the sight of warning pictures cut into the rock.

The visions from Dante's passage through Hell are here, literally, cut into relief. Inferno is altered from mental energy to spiritual symbol. This change from energy to symbol is essential for a correct interpretation. The envious have been cut off from the objects of their desire by having their eyelids sewn with iron thread; so they have to turn their gaze inwards whereby their inner discord between will and duty is exposed to them. The right will must choose a path equally far from fury and blunt.

This gets our poet to ponder the relation of thought and will. The dignity of man consists in the veracity of reason and the freedom of will. By his fall his similarity to God was darkened and defiled. The sin of man was to follow his own craving and desire, instead of following the will of God. The divine sanction, according to right measure, was that he was left on his own, so that he became a slave of his own momentary impulses. Only purification, gained by true repentance and penance, leads to recovery of freedom. According to Dante we do not possess a free will, but we may acquire one.

In three circles of purification, avarice and prodigy, gluttony, and lust, are expiated. While the stingy and the wasteful are chained to the rock, the gorgers stretch in vain towards the fruits of a beautiful tree, resembling the tree of knowledge. The fate of the gorgers is significant; they are so starved that the orbits of their eyes together with their noses form the letters OMO, denoting: *man*. In this way the image of God is clarified. The lustful are cleansed by fire. Dante endures this last of trials by thinking of Beatrice.

His will is now one and pure, so he is free to follow his own impulses. This shows that he is ready, prepared to enter the earthly paradise. He has his light in himself, and is not subject to any power, or authority. The mediation of the church is no longer needed, his relation to God is direct! On leaving, Vergil adorns Dante with signs of this dignity: imperial crown and papal mitra, thus making him a witness against all external authority. By this very act, our catholic poet takes on an almost protestantic character!

In the earthly paradise Dante has recovered his innocence, his nature is now pure. What remains is: his final confrontation with Beatrice, the triumph of the church which ends up in a failure, and his spiritual baptism when bathing in the two rivers of paradise: first Lethe, which induces to him forget all evilness, then Eunoë, fountain of happiness, developer of good memories. On his way through Hell, Dante was loaded by his weight. On his climbing of the mountain of purification he still showed a shadow.

The tears of repentance, shed at the feet of his beloved one, have released his soul, and under his ascension, passing through the spheres of Heaven, he gradually becomes translucent to himself. His ascension is ventured by her side, and the power to conquer gravity he gets by gazing firmly into her fair eyes. Together they fly from circle to circle, ever higher, towards the light. Together they leave the world of time and space, entering the heavenly rose which is depicted as a reflection of God's light in the pearl of the globe. First the sight of God Himself - *visio dei* - can satisfy his yearning. The final goal of his pilgrimage is to win himself from God *sub luce aeternitatis*.³

God gives to everyone in accordance with his yearning, and more we cannot get. However, the crucial question is whether the goal to which we aspire is lofty enough. Thus, in paradise, all spirits are alike blissful, but not all shine equally fair. They all have a seat in the heavenly rose, but they appear in different places. The Sun, planet of light, shows an important line of separation in the poem; and in the same vein it delineates the border between natural and revealed theology. The lower spheres bear stains of earthly imperfection. The Moon is the site where the weak appear to Dante. Mercury is the site of the busy, who sought their own honour. At Venus the lovers appear, lush and joyful. At the Sun, human reason and wisdom attain their highest perfection.

Knowledge of God is personified by the Dominican friar St. Thomas Aquinas who lauds St. Francis, and by the Franciscan friar St. Bonaventura who lauds St. Domingo. The two mendicant orders, blackfriars and greyfriars, thus agree better in the Heaven than upon the earth. Further, the two important intellectual streams of the Middle Ages, Aristotelianism and Platonism, are harmonized: the Franciscans were usually Platonists, while the Dominicans were Aristotelians. But it is surprising that the zealous inquisitor St. Domingo seems to attain a higher place than the pious, gentle, lovable St. Francis.

By contrast, it is only consequent that the crusaders are placed at Mars. Dante here encounters the progenitor of his lineage, his source, who predicts his destiny *ex eventu*. The heavenly eagle, token of the Divine Justice, that is not obtained by wishing, but only by acting, is first met in Jupiter. The last planet is Saturn: from here a heavenly ladder leads directly up to God. Among the fixed stars, Dante witnesses how the archangel Gabriel hails Mary. Then he is called aside by the apostles Peter, James, and John, who want to examine him in the three cardinal virtues: faith, hope, and charity.

The test is passed *summa cum laude*, and Peter is dancing for spontaneous joy. Dante is now allowed to proceed to *primum mobile*, the border of time and space, where Beatrice teaches him about the angelic choirs, their origin and nature. The true Heaven, site of the blessed, is that of fire beyond the created world. Beatrice appears in flaming beauty in order to inspire Dante with new power. A river of fire is floating between banks covered with flowers of springtime. He bows to drink from the stream, which then takes the form of a white rose. Beatrice guides him into the midst of a huge crowd of white spirits who are assembled here, mentioning the names of the blessed.

The eyes of all the blessed are firmly fixed upon the eternal source of light, God. Dante is overwhelmed like a child by the strength and brightness of this heavenly vision. Turning towards Beatrice, he sees in her place an old man in white garment: Bernhard of Clairvaux who initiated the cult of Mary, mother of God. St. Bernhard tells him that Beatrice has resumed her heavenly site and sent him to guide Dante the last few steps towards fulfilment of his yearning. The face of Bernhard is like the icon depicted on the holy sweatcloth of St. Veronica; he asks Dante to fix his gaze firmly on the heavenly queen, and Dante gives himself over to the final union with God (Canto 33,82):

*Oh source of grace who granted me the courage
to look so steadfast on thy blaze eternal
that all my power of vision was exhausted!
Within thy depths I clearly saw collected
all leaves that in the universe are scattered
bound up with love as in a single volume!*

One can say that the theme of Dante's Comedy is *Time and Eternity*. The poem places the lives and deeds of human beings *sub luce aeternitatis* and describes the world as a great unity, the visible sign of the invisible. With Dante the entire *kósmos*, stage of the struggle between light and dark, good and evil, is depicted as a mighty symbol!

NB: The author wants to acknowledge his deep and abiding debt to the Norwegian poet Ingeborg Refling Hagen (1895-1989) who introduced him to Dante's immortal poem and taught him the crucial import of poetry to the spirituality of human life.

Notes:

1. Cf. Anders Nygren: *Eros och Agape*, Stockholm 1966.
2. Henrik Ibsen: *Samlede Værker I-X (Bd.4, s.433)*, København 1899.
3. *Incipit Comedia Dantis Alagheri - florentini natione, non moribus!*

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