

Dante, Political Theology & *The Divine Comedy*

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Summary

Title: Dante, Political Theology and *The Divine Comedy*.

Author: Lydia Blake

Despite the vast critical interest in Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) theology and philosophy there still remains much work to be done in order to identify and appreciate more fully and critically his political theology, especially relating to his *Divine Comedy*. The key focus of my research is on how Dante's political theology was expressed in *The Divine Comedy* and on identifying his political theological agenda. In this thesis, Dante's political theology is considered as his analysis and criticism of the governing political authorities and ecclesiastical organizations of his era. This thesis demonstrates that Contrapasso is the key literary and theological technique which Dante employs to express his political theology. Dante's, Virgil's and Beatrice's interactions with the souls in the afterlife confirm this. Dante's political theological message is of the need for reform of the Catholic Church, especially of corrupt clergy and of a wider corrupt society.

The thesis demonstrates how Dante connected theology with his social critique. It shows that he imaginatively expresses his theology through poetry, thereby creating the conditions for a critical analysis of the political structures of contemporary Florentine society. His political thought is grounded in theology. He presents to his readers the ways in which theology articulates God's justice and challenges unjust political arrangements of his time, particularly as these impact on the Church. In so doing, Dante reveals the truth of the current situation in Florence through his use of Contrapasso, thereby giving the readers of *The Divine Comedy* an ideal framework to strive towards, hence revealing his political theological message of reform.

Jean and Robert Hollanders' translations of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* were chosen as the main texts for this thesis. This research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to my chosen methodologies and chapter two is the literature review. Chapter three maps Dante's historical and social surroundings. Chapter four maps Dante's hermeneutical horizons. Chapter five is the case studies chapter which maps and analyses Dante's political theology. Finally chapter six is the conclusion which also outlines considerations for future study.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	8
1.1 Overview	8
1.2 Investigative Agenda	11
1.2.1 Research Questions	11
1.2.2 Further Questions	12
1.2.3 Aim	12
1.2.4 Forming the Research Question: How Did The Main Hypotheses Emerge?	13
1.2.5 Contribution to Knowledge	23
1.2.6 Sources and Translations	24
1.2.7 Timeframe	28
1.3 Methodology	29
1.3.1 Qualitative Research	29
1.3.2 Hermeneutics, Narrative Inquiry and Historical Research	31
1.3.3 Case Study Approach	35
1.4 Limitations	40
1.5 Mapping the Landscape: <i>The Divine Comedy</i>	41
1.5.1 Structure of <i>The Divine Comedy</i>	42
1.5.2 <i>Inferno</i>	45
1.5.3 <i>Purgatorio</i>	48
1.5.4 <i>Paradiso</i>	51
1.6 Definitions	52
1.6.1 Dante's Political Theology	53
1.6.2 Contrapasso	55
1.7 Chapter Structure	56
Chapter Two: Mapping the Horizons of the Research	56
2.1 Introduction	57
2.2 Truth In Fiction	58
2.3 Dante the Christian Theologian: Dante's <i>Divine Comedy</i> as Theology	60
2.4 Contrapasso: Free Will, Choice and Virtuous Pagans	67
2.5 Political Theology: Historical and Contemporary	83
2.5.1 Dante's Medieval Political Theology: Kantorowicz's <i>The King's Two Bodies</i>	88
2.5.2 Biblical Grounding: Civil Institutions, Authority and Justice	91
2.5.3 Dante's Medieval Political Theology: The Reform Orientated Poet	93
2.5.4 A Political Theological Matter: Dante's Utopian Political Vision as a Remedy to Counter Corruption	95
2.6 Dante's Medieval Imagination and Memory	99
2.6.1 Modern Narratives Of The Imagination In The Context Of <i>The Divine Comedy</i>	105
2.7 Conclusion	109
Chapter Three: A Mapping of Circumstances	110
3.1 Aim	111
3.2 Agenda	112
3.3 Introduction	112
3.4 Who was Dante Alighieri?	113

3.4.1 Beatrice and la <i>Vita Nuova</i>	116
3.4.2 The <i>Convivio</i>	121
3.4.3 Dante's Education	122
3.5 Dante's Medieval Florence	125
3.5.1 Layout of Florence	127
3.5.2 Italian Medieval Civil Society	129
3.5.3 Italian Medieval Religious Orders	136
3.5.4 The Franciscans and Dominicans	137
3.5.5 The Donation of Constantine	143
3.6 Italian Medieval Church and Social Relations.....	145
3.7 Simony.....	146
3.7.1 Simony in Theory	146
3.7.2 Simony in Practice.....	148
3.8 An Introduction to a Simoniac Pope	152
3.8.1 The Rise of Pope Boniface	154
3.8.2 The Man Behind The Title Of Pope	157
3.8.3 Pope Boniface and Italian Civil Society	159
3.8.4 Pope Boniface and King Philip IV	159
3.8.5 <i>Unam Sanctam</i>	160
3.8.6 Dante's Response To <i>Unam Sanctam</i>	162
3.8.7 Pope Boniface and Dante	166
3.9 Dante's Death	167
3.10 Conclusion.....	168
Chapter Four: A Mapping of Dante's Hermeneutical Horizons	170
4.1 Aim	170
4.2 Agenda	171
4.3 Introduction	171
4.4 The Active Life and the Contemplative Life	172
4.5 The Way of the City	176
4.5.1 Dante's Political Philosophy	176
4.5.2 Virgil's Significance in <i>The Divine Comedy</i>	180
4.6 The Way of Contemplation	188
4.6.1 Beatrice and the <i>Vita Nuova</i>	188
4.6.2 Dante's idea of God in <i>The Divine Comedy</i>	194
4.7 The Way of the Soul	198
4.7.1 Contrapasso	198
4.7.2 Examples of Contrapasso	198
4.7.3 Sin and Redemption	201
4.7.5.1 Original Sin	204
4.7.5.2 Sin as Weakness Of The Will	205
4.7.6 Redemption.....	207
4.8 Is Philosophy Subordinate to Grace?	211
4.9 Conclusion	216
Chapter Five: A Mapping and Analysis of Dante's Political Theology	217
5.1 Aim	217

5.2 Agenda	217
5.3 Introduction	218
5.4 Political theological critique in <i>The Divine Comedy</i>	221
5.4.1 The Critical and Creative Canto XIX.....	221
5.4.2 Divinely Sanctioned Justice: Canto XIX	223
5.5 Dante's plea for Reform in <i>The Divine Comedy</i>	230
5.5.1 Imaginative Condemnation	240
5.5.1.1 <i>Inferno</i> Canto III	244
5.5.1.2 <i>Inferno</i> Canto XXIII	248
5.5.2 Imaginative Redemption	251
5.5.2.1 <i>Purgatorio</i> Canto XVI	251
5.5.2.2 <i>Purgatorio</i> Canto XIX	254
5.5.3 Imaginative Reform	257
5.5.3.1 <i>Paradiso</i> Canto XXI	257
5.5.3.2 <i>Paradiso</i> Canto XXVII	260
5.6 Conclusion	264
Chapter Six: Conclusion	267
6.1 Introduction	267
6.2 Summary of Key Findings.....	268
6.3 Conclusion	272
Bibliography	273
Illustrations.....	283

Chapter One: Introduction



Fig. 1

1.1 Overview

With the exception of Shakespeare, no other writer has been subjected to as much analysis, critique and commentary as Dante Alighieri (1265-1321).¹ Seven hundred years of research, scholarship, interpretation and examination have focused on his magnificent and profound work, *The Divine Comedy*. Dante's everyday life has been the basis for fascination; his triumphs, his numerous defeats, his quest for peace and his love at first sight that would immortalise his poetry. Incredibly self-assured, Dante considers himself among the six greatest writers of all time² namely Homer, Virgil,

¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols (London: ALMA Classics, 2012), 495.

² Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 23.

Lucan, Horace and Ovid. I agree with Robert Hollander; many today would shorten that list, to simply two, Homer and Dante.³ “His self-confidence may seem overweening, but he was even more of a prophet than he realised”⁴; as it is said of Dante that no other poet has managed to produce a body of work which is as realistic, dramatic and insightful as *The Divine Comedy*. Dante relayed the general knowledge, history, theology and mythology of his time within each line of his cantos. He “gave every theorem which he reproduced a slant so new and so surprising that the evidence proving his dependency on other writings serves mainly to underscore the novelty of his own approach and his own solutions”.⁵

This thesis is concerned with Dante’s political theology and his political theological agenda. This is identified by navigating Dante’s social circumstances, his philosophical influences, his multifaceted theological positions and his political standpoint. Dante, as a political philosopher and diplomat, had clear opinions on matters of the state. As a theologian, he also had concerns about the state of the soul in this life and in the afterlife. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante developed a literary and theological device named Contrapasso, which is the narrative undercurrent of the whole poem. The idea of Contrapasso was inherited from various theological and literary sources. This device is a mesh between the sin committed on earth and the nature of the punishment met in the afterlife. The suffering that the souls endure after death is a continuation, intensification and definitive fixation of their earthly situation. It embodies what

³ Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, 23.

⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁵ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies, A Study In Medieval Political Theology* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 452.

Dorothy L. Sayers calls, “The drama of the soul’s choice.”⁶ Contrapasso is integrated into the poem, allowing the reader to progressively learn about the nature of the afterlife. Dante refers to Contrapasso only once in his *Divine Comedy*, in Canto 28 of *Inferno*. Contrapasso is a poetic literary device, drawn from Dante’s imagination, and I will argue that it also functions as a theological device demonstrating his political critique of contemporary society.

In Dante’s cosmic-theological creation, we are aware that the eternal state can be in one of three realms; the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*. In his depiction of these realms, Dante critiques the social situation in Florence by assigning souls to their rightful place, punishing or rewarding them for their lives lived on earth. The soul’s placement in Dante’s cosmic-theological creation depended on whether one had committed mortal sins against God and/or crimes against the state or Monarch. This location was assigned according to Dante’s assessment of the soul and their crimes. This thesis will argue that Contrapasso is the theological device where his political theology emerges most clearly.

This chapter is dedicated to the research methodologies employed in the thesis.

Anyone who reads Dante can find meaning within the text. Dante himself, in his letter to Cangrande, said that the poem is an allegory and is to be interpreted throughout at four levels: literal, political, moral and mystical. Sayers identifies three ‘sign-posts’ and names these: ‘The Way of the City’, ‘The Way of the Soul’, and the ‘Way of

⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Introduction to The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine –Cantica 1: Hell (L’inferno)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), 11.

Contemplation'. It is through these three ways that the literal interpretation of the poem is to be considered throughout. Sayers emphasises the word 'throughout' to make clear that these levels run parallel at every point in the poem, and these three ways, inevitably, become one 'way'; the way to God. This hermeneutical approach will be adapted for this thesis and will be discussed further below.

Since *The Divine Comedy* is a huge body of work, a full canto by canto commentary on the political theology of the entire *Divine Comedy* is beyond the scope of this study. Taking this into consideration, this thesis utilises a case study approach and treats Canto 19 from *The Divine Comedy* as showing clearly the connection between theology and social critique, as well as demonstrating how divinely-sanctioned accountability takes concrete shape. In order to demonstrate Dante's message of reform for the men behind their ecclesiastical titles, this thesis will examine two cantos per canticle; *Inf.* Canto 3 and *Inf.* Canto 23; *Purg.* Canto 16 and *Purg.* Canto 19; *Par.* Canto 21 and *Par.* Canto 27.

1.2 Investigative Agenda

1.2.1 Research Questions

The questions at the heart of this thesis are these: how does Dante express his political theology in his *Divine Comedy*? And what is his political theological agenda? In this section I will unpack the approach taken towards providing answers to these questions.

1.2.2 Further Questions

This thesis focuses on questions surrounding human failure and eternal destiny, which relate to the ways in which Dante uses Contrapasso to express his political theology. It will also ask questions pertaining to his political theological agenda; is it inspired by his circumstances or his literary, philosophical, political and theological influences? This thesis will also ask if *The Divine Comedy* can be seen a plea for reform of contemporary society.

1.2.3 Aim

This thesis will demonstrate Dante Alighieri's political theological development, some of the primary motivations behind his social critique and the extent to which his theology and political philosophy converged in *The Divine Comedy*. This thesis will argue that Dante's literary and theological device, Contrapasso, is an important vehicle to express his political theology.

As noted above, Dante's political theology, for this thesis, is considered as his analysis and criticism of the governing political authorities and ecclesiastical organizations of his era. This study shows how Dante's political theological agenda is articulated in his *Divine Comedy*, by outlining his connection of theology with social critique. I shall argue that Dante imaginatively expresses his theology through poetry, creating thereby the conditions for a critical analysis of the political structures of Florentine society. This thesis shows how the *Inferno* displays the moral obstacles which hinder the people of his day from achieving a perfect state and living a moral life, namely a corrupt Papacy, and the temptations of wealth, power and greed. In *Purgatorio* we see

the remedies to counter those obstacles, and in *Paradiso* we see a framework to strive towards. I argue that Dante's presentation of divine punishment arises from the damage it has caused to the civic and ecclesiastical community. Dante's dialogue with the souls, along with their placement and punishment in particular circles and ditches, contribute to the imaginative expression of his political theological agenda.

1.2.4 Forming the Research Question: How Did The Main Hypotheses Emerge?

To begin forming my research question, it was important to pay particular attention to the primary texts: *La Vita Nuova*, *Convivio*, *De Monarchia* and *The Divine Comedy*.⁷

Throughout his works, Dante placed his authorial stamp on every page, using various textual techniques combining historical facts, fiction and people, and his own current 'reality' as he considered it. His lived experience was the inspiration that informed and shaped his political and theological commitments. The formation of his political, religious and philosophical views, as found in *La Vita Nuova*, *Convivio* and *De Monarchia*, combine and are presented in *The Divine Comedy*.

My starting point was where Dante himself left off in the theological *Vita Nuova*. The *Vita Nuova* provides the reader of *The Divine Comedy* with an insight into Dante's disposition and also acts as a theological underpinning. In the *Vita Nuova*, we learn that Dante has a vision of Beatrice in which he saw things that made him resolve "to

⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans., Mark Musa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed., Philip H. Wicksteed (London: The Temple Classics, 2015); Dante Alighieri, *De Monarchia*, trans. Aurelia Henry (New York: Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012); Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander; Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* trans. Jean and Robert Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2004); Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2007).

say no more about the blessed one until [he] would be capable of writing about her in a more worthy fashion.”⁸ Beatrice thereby undergoes a mystical transformational process forgoing the character of a static muse, to become a revolutionary female figure of supreme theological authority. In *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice assumes the role of the mirror image of divine love that leads and connects Dante to his salvation. By “the stretching out of the soul into God by the desire of love”⁹, Dante theologizes love, thereby divulging his understanding of mysticism. As mysticism is one of the signposts in understanding *The Divine Comedy*, it will be discussed further in chapters two and four.

I pay particular attention to books two and three of the *Convivio*, where we see Dante diverting his attention from his preoccupations with Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*, to Lady Philosophy. Book four discusses the nature of nobility, the need for a supreme head to regulate human affairs, the authority of the Roman Empire and the ways in which human happiness in this life can be achieved under the guidance of an Emperor who bases his commitment to truth on philosophy. “In the *Convivio*, he did not try to see anything beyond natural limits. In the *Commedia*, on the other hand, it has been granted the poet to overcome, in an ecstatic rush, those human restrictions”.¹⁰ However, Dante began to vocalize his political opinions in *De Monarchia*. This work was crucial for this thesis; *De Monarchia*, specifically division three, lays the groundwork for the complex understanding of the poem’s political theological context

⁸ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans., Mark Musa, 84.

⁹ Edmund G. Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics: A Study of the Mystical Aspect of the Divina Commedia and its Relations with Some of its Mediaeval Sources* (New York: J.M Dent and Sons, 1913), 12.

¹⁰ Ulrich Leo, ‘The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante’s Rereading of the *Aeneid*’, in Richard H. Lansing, ed., *Dante: The Critical Complex*, Volume 2, 189-214; 197.

which is continued and developed fully in *The Divine Comedy*. In section three, Dante outlines the two separate, chief governmental elements, the spiritual and the temporal. He explains that the Papacy and the Empire are both from God, and for the good of humanity.¹¹ Although they have different functions in the temporal realm, neither one surpasses the other in authority or the right to exist.

Robin Kirkpatrick proposes that both poetry and theology are “better realised in a detailed engagement with texts and historical situations ... On this view, a close reading, or practical criticism, seems a very Dantean way to truth”.¹² Since *The Divine Comedy* itself could be seen as an historical account of medieval Florentine society, specifically in the debate concerning ecclesiastical and temporal dominance, it is an important source to consider and analyse. This viewpoint can and will contribute to the unpacking of the political events of his era. Dante’s political view is reflected in *The Divine Comedy*. “Political thought is always contextual, influenced by currents of thought of the day or responsive to particular situation”.¹³ Hans Kelsen believes that Dante represents his political philosophy as the result of his view on life.¹⁴ Roger Theodore Lafferty also believes that Dante “meditated deeply on his experience”¹⁵ and that his philosophy “begins in his own private and public life ... thus we see Dante’s

¹¹ Throughout this thesis I capitalise Papacy, Church, Emperor and Empire as these institutions are central to understanding Dante: the Roman Empire and the Church as two distinct institutions which are essential to human existence and the leaders of these institutions who have a central role to play in leading the community.

¹² Robin Kirkpatrick, ‘Polemics of Praise: Theology as Text, Narrative, and Rhetoric’, in Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, eds., *Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 14-36; 15-16.

¹³ Christopher Rowland, ‘Scripture: New Testament’, in Peter Manley Scott and William T. Cavanaugh eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 28-41; 28.

¹⁴ Oliver Lepsius, ‘Hans Kelsen on Dante Alighieri’s Political Philosophy’, *European Journal of International Law*, 27/4, (2016), 1153–1167; 1159. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chw060>. Accessed 15 of June 2024. He examines not only *De Monarchia*, but *The Divine Comedy* also.

¹⁵ Roger Theodore Lafferty, ‘The Philosophy of Dante’ *Annual Reports of the Dante Society*, no. 30, (1911), 1–34; 20. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40165857>. Accessed 3 July 2023.

philosophy to be the expression of his own inner life”.¹⁶ Therefore caution will need to be taken, as the “truth is purportedly revealed to us through a historicity that is itself the product of interpretation.”¹⁷ For that reason, it can be tempting for some readers to use his exile and public dishonour as an emotional excuse for the harsh views of the city of Florence evident in his writings.¹⁸ Conversely, some critics believe that Dante’s treatment by his city brought him a sense of being chosen to witness the truth of the political events of his time¹⁹ and to combat “the spirits of wickedness in the high places”.²⁰ He “‘curated’ his life in his works,”²¹ and lays out a story; “the story of ‘our life’: his and ours and of many other individuals encountered over the course of the journey”.²² This curation coincides with Dante’s request, throughout *The Divine Comedy*, that we must take his text as truth. For example;

To the truth that bears the face of falsehood
a man should seal his lips if he is able
for it might shame him, through no fault of his,
but here I can’t stay silent. And by the strains
of this Comedy – so may they soon succeed
in finding favour – I swear to you, reader.²³

¹⁶ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷ William Franke, *Dante’s Interpretive Journey* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 14. For Erich Auerbach, *The Divine Comedy* is a form of history and Dante’s treatment of truth is a disclosure of this history. The *Divine Comedy* recounts the sinners’ earthly historical existence and “in the light of an eschatological dawn ... the truth about them, the essence of their being in the sight and judgement of God, is revealed”. Franke, *Dante’s Interpretive Journey*, 10.

¹⁸ John M. Najemy, ‘Dante and Florence’, in Rachel Jacoff, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2007), 236-257; 236.

¹⁹ Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 552. “Dante ... shows how all sins contribute to the social disorder, not only the overtly disruptive sins of violence, fraud, and treachery but even those that seem most personal. Lust, gluttony, greed have socio-political overtones; even heresy and suicide are presented within a political context”. Joan Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 133.

²⁰ Ibid., 552.

²¹ Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden, ‘Introduction: Dante Unbound: A Vulnerable Life and the Openness of Interpretation’ in Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Dante* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) xxiii-xxxv; xxvii

²² Alison Cornish, *Believing in Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 8.

²³ *Inf.* 16. 124-129.

Dante himself states that *The Divine Comedy* is intended “to remove those living in a state of misery and guide them to a state of happiness.”²⁴ He also strove to expose the truth of his current situation in Florence, in order to present those living in a state of sin with the road to salvation and reform. James Russell Lowell also recognises this divine mission; “There is proof upon proof that he believed himself invested with a divine mission.”²⁵

Dante is a political philosophical poet, who used poetry to challenge and consider the moral and the political aspects of society.²⁶ His political hopes were unattainable and he “was forced to replace them with the staging of a divine justice that he didn’t see in life”.²⁷ His philosophical theories and his political theories are etched into the narrative of *The Divine Comedy*, which were originally articulated in his political philosophical treatise *De Monarchia*, written around the year 1313, “shortly before the death of Henry VII,”²⁸ and his philosophical *Convivio*, which was written during the early years of Dante’s exile from Florence, possibly between 1304 and 1307.²⁹ In both the *Convivio* and *De Monarchia*, in accordance with Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Dante states that each individual has an end goal and this goal is to live happily, “man

²⁴ Dante Alighieri, Letter XI, ‘To Cangrande Della Scala’, in George Rice Carpenter, ed., *A translation of Dante’s Eleven letters, with explanatory notes and historical comments* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 1891), 199.

²⁵ James Russell Lowell, ‘Dante.’ *Annual Reports of the Dante Society*, no. 5, (1886), 15–38; 37. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40165747>. Accessed 13 June 2023.

²⁶ The philosophy which Dante uses, is moral or ethical philosophy. He states that the reason for this use, was for “practice.” Dante Alighieri, Letter XI, ‘To Cangrande Della Scala’, 199.

²⁷ Gragnolati, Lombardi and Southerden, ‘Introduction: Dante Unbound’, xxiii.

²⁸ Tristan Kay, ‘Politics’, in Gragnolati, Lombardi and Southerden, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, 273–286; 274.

²⁹ Robert Hollander, *Dante* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 46.

may live in felicity, which is that whereto man was born.”³⁰ Dante believes that there are two ways of pursuing a virtuous life; “in the activity of his natural powers”³¹ or what Dante calls “the active life”³², and the “blessedness of life everlasting” or “the contemplative life.”³³ The active or worldly powers concern the corruptible body and the spiritual life concern the everlasting soul, which will be discussed further also in chapter four.

Dante’s predominant and fully developed political idea stems from the debate concerning the role and authority of the Empire and the Catholic Church. Through the *Convivio* and *De Monarchia*, Dante states that in order for a society to function correctly, it must recognise its ultimate aims or purpose, that is, live in a state of happiness. This state of happiness is achieved by the maintenance of peace, by the virtuous action of justice. For that reason, Dante considers that there is a need for a universal Monarch to regulate human affairs. This authority is based on that of the classical Roman Empire. He believes that the ways in which human happiness in this life can be achieved is under the guidance of an Emperor who bases his truth on philosophy,³⁴ which included moral and intellectual virtues.³⁵ Ernst Kantorowicz states that Dante articulates his political theology through *The Divine Comedy* as a vision for

³⁰ *Conv.* 4. 4. “Legislation is needed if the end is to be attained”, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, revised by Lesley Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 198; Aristotle (384BC-322 BC) was born in Greece, in the small township of Stagira. His father, Nicomachus, was a doctor to King Amyntas of Macedon and his mother, Phaestis was wealthy. His works impacted and contributed to every aspect of human knowledge. During the Middle Ages, his philosophy was ‘the’ philosophy of every major thinker. *Inf.* 4. 131. Hollander eds., *The Inferno*, 87. Jonathan Barnes eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-4.

³¹ *Mon.* 3. 16. 4. 5-8.

³² *Conv.* 4. 17. 8-9.

³³ *Conv.* 4. 17. 8-9.

³⁴ *Mon.* 3. 16. 6. 13 “the Emperor to guide [the human race] to temporal felicity by means of philosophic instruction”.

³⁵ *Mon.* 3. 16. 5. 8.

a world community³⁶ established by a universal political Monarch, whose authority was “free from papal jurisdiction.”³⁷ The Pope’s duty is to lead the human race “to life eternal by means of revelation”.³⁸ As will be explained and examined throughout this thesis, in *De Monarchia* he argues that the Papacy and the Empire are both from God, and are intended for the good of humanity. Both the “*papatus*” and “*imperiatu*” “were institutions established by God for the proper guidance of mankind”³⁹ and derive their respective independent and equal rights to authority from God.⁴⁰

The relationship between religion and politics forms a major part of history,⁴¹ as religion and politics are inevitably interconnected and one is usually influenced by the other. In medieval Italy at the time of Dante, political power and religious power closely co-existed; the governing political authorities, i.e., the state/temporal (*regnum*),⁴² ruled by an Emperor,⁴³ and the ecclesiastical authorities, i.e., the Church which is governed by the Pope (*sacerdotium*).⁴⁴ This relationship often became

³⁶ “His *humana universitas* embraced not only Christians or members of the Roman Church, but was conceived of as the world community of all men, Christians and non-Christians alike... Dante’s *humana universitas* included all men ... And Dante, while repeating a common argument, could maintain that the world had been at its best when mankind was guided by Divus Augustus, after all a pagan emperor, under whose reign Christ himself chose to become man, and, for that matter a Roman citizen.” Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 465.

³⁷ Kantorowicz to supports this claim by quoting Etienne Gilson, that the idea of a universal Monarch “borrowed from the Church its ideal universal Christendom and secularised it”. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 457 and 471.

³⁸ *Mon.* 3. 16. 6. 12.

³⁹ The Papacy was “to be measured by the standard of God” and the temporal was to ‘be measured according to the standard of man.’ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 458-459.

⁴⁰ A problem which had been “broadly treated by canonists ever since the twelfth century”. Ibid., 456.

⁴¹ “History is a representation of the past.” History is a “reconstruction” of “what is no longer” and can often be “problematic and incomplete.” History, because it is considered an intellectual production, it “calls for analysis and criticism.” Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.’ *Representations: Memory and Counter-Memory*, no. 26 (1989), 7–24; 8-9. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520>. Accessed 29 September 2022.

⁴² *Imperiatu*, who dealt with temporal matters.

⁴³ A system of having a King or Queen ruling a state. Kings or Emperors were anointed by a bishop or a pope to show that they were divinely chosen to serve and now have an established right for earthly dominance over a region.

⁴⁴ *Papatus*, who dealt with spiritual matters. For many, the pope’s authority was derived from divine mandate, to lead the souls of this earthly universe to eternal salvation and to assert their sacred

extremely turbulent and “all over Europe the conflict between popes and the Emperors had split local communities”.⁴⁵ For Dante, the Papal claim to temporal power contradicted the Christian way of life, and he considered that the Pope’s mission was to be both “separate and distinct”⁴⁶ from the Monarch’s duty. For Dante, both claimants derive their respective independent and equal rights to authority from God,⁴⁷ therefore their respective institutional existence was non-hierarchical. He believed that a universal Emperor was needed to establish peace and create stability for the common good of the people due to this history of the papal and imperial struggle, along with the Church’s engagement in temporal affairs and interference in political disputes.

Through further examination of the *Convivio*, *De Monarchia* and *The Divine Comedy*, a number of major points stood out for me in relation to Dante’s opinion as to why the Church has gone astray. To begin with, one of the most important arguments is that it

authority. Authority figures within the early Christian community are identified as those who serve. “An argument also began between them about who of them should be reckoned the greatest; but he said to them, ‘the kings of the gentiles lord over them, and those who have authority over them are given the title Benefactor. Not so with you, but the greatest among you must be as the youngest, the leader as the one who serves’” Luke 22.24-27. *Holy Bible: Revised New Jerusalem Bible* (readers edition) (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2021). Authority within the Christian community, is based upon the authority of Jesus Christ and his commission to the disciples. This is stated in Matthew 28:18-20. “Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’”. “Authority within its original Latin form was used as a form of self-description by Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, his aim was to communicate the possession of something far more important than mere military or political power ... The historian Leonard Krieger has argued that what was significant and distinct about ‘the Christian dimension of authority’ was its independence from political power: while ‘medieval men’ would use the terms ‘interchangeably in many contexts’, a ‘context was established for the separation of authority from power’”. Frank Furedi, *Authority: A Sociological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

⁴⁵ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I, 6.

⁴⁶ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 44. Kantorowicz also makes this observation: “The distinction between person and office stands out clearly and sharply in Dante’s work.” Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 545.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 456.

is not the institution itself that caused the greed and corruption, but the men behind the institution were leading their congregation astray, and hence were failing in their divine mission to lead their flock to “life eternal by means of revelation”.⁴⁸ Dante in *The Divine Comedy* addresses this issue in Canto 16 of *Purgatorio*, where he discusses free will and the moral and political degradation of the Catholic Church. Free will, which will be discussed below in chapter four, is the ability to choose right from wrong and is a driving force in our decision making. Dante believes that the cause of moral corruption is the misuse of that free will; for this reason, this canto was important as a case study in demonstrating both what Dante means by free will and what he considers to be the misuse of it. It also demonstrates the political discourse surrounding the Empire and Papacy and how proper guidance is needed. The Empire’s role is to establish earthly laws and provide ethical guidance. However, the Pope assumed this temporal role of authority. As Dante’s character Marco Lombardo observed; “you can plainly see, failed guidance is the cause the world is steeped in vice”.⁴⁹

On further investigation into *The Divine Comedy*, one particular sin emerged consistently throughout the narrative, that of avarice. Echoes of the sin of avarice are manifested in Canto 19 as simony and in Canto 23 as hypocrisy, which will both be defined and examined below. In relation to simony, this sin destroys the natural bond of God’s gifts to humankind, the use of free will. The sin of simony is the lusting after possessions which subsequently chases away peace. This sin affects the social structure of the community, the pursuit of the common good of society and blocks the

⁴⁸ *Mon.* 3. 16. 6. 12.

⁴⁹ *Purg.* 16. 103-104.

route to the highest good, which is God. Therefore, for ecclesiastical institutions, it has strong political and social implications. Regarding hypocrisy, Dante detected it in many aspects of Church life. Some members of the Church were presenting a fraudulent image of devotion, poverty and spirituality, whereas in reality they were the opposite.

Throughout *The Divine Comedy*, Dante states that these sins are being committed by ecclesiastical leaders in the Catholic Church. Specifically in Canto 7 of *Inferno*, Dante shrewdly queries, “all Clerics?”,⁵⁰ leading to the assumption that there could be any number of corrupt clergy present within this circle with no hope of redemption. This question highlights to the reader that this is a widespread issue in contemporary society. The mirror image to these sins is found in *Paradiso*, specifically Canto 21, where the reader encounters those souls who, on earth, renounced worldly possessions and removed themselves to a life of contemplation and prayer. In this canto, Peter Damian (1007-72), a Church reformer, condemns the wealth that the Church has accumulated along with its corruption. However, in relation to the Church and state debate, the most powerful critique of the Church can be found in Canto 27 of *Paradiso* where Dante meets St. Peter, who ardently condemns what the Church has become. However, Dante cleverly gives the reader the remedy to counter these sins in Canto 19 of *Purgatorio* where we find Pope Adrian who is guilty of avarice because he was “fixed on earthly things,”⁵¹ and as a result wasted his “chances to do good works”⁵²; thus “justice here has bound [him] fast.”⁵³ Since Adrian repented

⁵⁰ *Inf.* Canto 7. 38.

⁵¹ *Purg.* 19. 119.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19. 122.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19. 123.

before he died, he is now purging his sins in the fifth terrace. This shows Dante's solution to the current greed and corruption plaguing his beloved city: repentance. Dante insisted that "if the present world has gone astray, the reason lies, and should be sought, in you,"⁵⁴ hence claiming that the restoration of a society must come from within with a "recognition of error, repentance, and the purging off of evil states of mind."⁵⁵

Through this canto analysis, it became evident that Dante's targeted audience were those who live "so ill"⁵⁶ in the world. Alison Cornish acknowledges this, that *The Divine Comedy* offers us a reading "of us; a judgement [and that] Dante is not necessarily preaching to the converted."⁵⁷ Hence, a theme of reform, specifically in relation to the clergy, began to emerge. For the reasons mentioned above, these cantos specifically highlight the key themes in demonstrating Dante's political theological agenda, which is why they are the chosen case studies.

1.2.5 Contribution to Knowledge

Important relationships between Dante and politics, Dante and political philosophy, and Dante and theology have been explored and examined in the existing scholarly literature. Prior studies have noted the importance of Dante's engagement with political philosophy and his political and ecclesiastical aspirations, specifically relating to Church and Empire. However, to date, there has been little engagement with

⁵⁴ Ibid., 16. 82-83.

⁵⁵ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet in his Writings* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 114.

⁵⁶ *Purg.* 32. 103.

⁵⁷ Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 11.

Dante's political theology. To my knowledge, no prior study has drawn the connection between political theology and Contrapasso. Neither have I seen the methodological approach or the conclusion that Dante's political theology is grounded in the idea of reform for the Catholic Church, specifically the reform of a corrupt clergy. With Tristian Kay, I agree that Dante has written "a poem that seeks to reform human behaviour and governance (and the two objectives emerge, ultimately, as inseparable) ... Politics should not be understood as a poetically and intellectually isolated strand of Dante's work, but should be recognized as a dimension that is integrated into his theological understanding and his wider ethical and social critique".⁵⁸ Therefore, this thesis documents these gaps in research by presenting a contribution to the area of Dante's political theology, while also producing a framework within which future research can be conducted. The main strength of my research however, is that it provides a different and fuller picture of the scope or extent against which Dante can be viewed. He is a multifaceted poet and his *Divine Comedy* is a testament to that.

1.2.6 Sources and Translations

The Divine Comedy is considered a primary source as it is a first-hand account of events from Dante's era. There are many sources and English translations of *The Divine Comedy*, by Ronald L. Martinez, Robert Durling, Mark Musa, J.G Nichols and many more.⁵⁹ Jean and Robert Hollander's translations of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* were chosen as the main editions for reference in this thesis. Jean and Robert

⁵⁸ Tristian Kay, 'Politics', 285.

⁵⁹ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I; Mark Musa, *The Divine Comedy: Volume 1: Inferno* (Indiana: Penguin Classics, 2003); Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols (London: ALMA Press, 2012).

Hollander bring significant combined talents to the task of translation, Jean as a master poet and Robert as a renowned scholar. Their translations were also chosen for the dual-language aspect in which the Italian original text and English translation face one another. It is also an accessible and readable translation, containing valuable notes with extended commentary and invaluable historical background information. In this thesis, their translations will be referenced in abbreviated form; *Inf.*, *Purg.* and *Par.* However, when referencing their commentary notes, it will be referenced as, for example; *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).

Amongst Dante's other works, the *Vita Nuova*, is also an important text for this thesis to the extent that it acts as a prelude to *The Divine Comedy*, while also providing valuable information about Dante's "blessed one,"⁶⁰ Beatrice. Mark Musa's translation was selected for its critical introduction and explanatory notes. Musa gives a straightforward rendering of the original Italian and avoids the use of rhyme which could jeopardise the original meaning of the text, which I found beneficial in understanding what Dante was originally saying. Aurelia Henry's translation of *De Monarchia* and Philip H. Wicksteed's translation of the *Convivio*, were chosen on account of their accessibility, and Henry's useful introduction and accompanying notes. In this thesis, their translations will be referenced in abbreviated form; *Mon.* and *Conv.* However, when referencing their commentary notes, it will be referenced

⁶⁰ Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 84.

as, for example; Dante Alighieri, *De Monarchia*, trans. Aurelia Henry (New York: Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012).

Given Dante's involvement and evident self-interest in his *Divine Comedy*, I have set his text in a more critical historical framework. This study relied upon a number of historical sources, such as Marco Santagata, *Dante: The Story of his Life*⁶¹ which explores, not only Dante himself, but his circumstances and surroundings, allowing for a clear and comprehensively detailed account of the complexities of Medieval Italian society. Santagata's approach provides a strong sense of Dante's political and social life, which helped illuminate Dante's political opinion and the man behind *The Divine Comedy*. Robert Hollander's *Dante* was also useful in the initial and medial stages of this research, as he situates Dante within the context of his major works, and allows the reader to prepare for and engage with the range of interests within *The Divine Comedy*. The second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* provides an accessible, wide-ranging and insightful collection of contemporary perspectives on Dante's life and works by distinguished Dante scholars. This *Companion* was not only helpful in setting the historical and political context of Dante's work, but also in the analysis of his works as it explores his theological and biblical influences, his early work in relation to *The Divine Comedy*, his reception in history and literary techniques; lyrical poetry, the vernacular and allegory. Two of the major sources for all Dante scholarship are *The Dante Encyclopedia*⁶² and *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*. The *Encyclopedia* is a compilation of contributions by various distinguished Dante scholars,

⁶¹ Marco Santagata, *Dante: The Story of his Life*, trans. Richard Dixon (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016)

⁶² Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

and is a highly useful and organised resource bringing together contemporary theories on Dante and his writings. This *Encyclopedia* acted as a point of reference and in my work I have relied particularly on entries relating to characters depicted in *The Divine Comedy*. The *Oxford Handbook of Dante*, includes contributions from various distinguished scholars exploring, assessing and challenging Dante's themes, formation and textuality. It provides an up-to-date focus on where Dante scholarship is going and how far it can go, which was important to me while assessing my own research.

Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid* and the Bible are also used as sources within this thesis. The *Aeneid* is a philosophical, cultural and political epic of the ancient Roman world. It is difficult to overstate the impact of the *Aeneid* on Dante.⁶³ I focus on book six, as it serves as a model for Dante's underworld. Another source of information which Dante drew upon and which will be used as a source within this thesis is the Bible. However, Dante's Bible differs from the widely accessible vernacular texts with which today's readers are familiar. The Bibles known by Dante would have been large, valuable and "only rarely portable".⁶⁴ According to Ronald L. Martinez, the thirteenth century inherited a "standardised system of dividing biblical books into chapter and verse, making the book more 'searchable' by readers."⁶⁵ According to Martinez, one of the explanations for varied interpretations of the Bible in *The Divine Comedy*, which often needs to be explained to contemporary readers, "was that the biblical text was

⁶³ Virgil, *The Aeneid* (London: Penguin Books, 1990). This edition was chosen as it is eminently readable and accessible. This edition contains an informative introduction with summaries and analysis of each book.

⁶⁴ Ronald M. Martinez, 'Duels of Interpretation: The Bible between Dante and the Church', in Christopher Kleinhenz and Kristina Olson, eds., *Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine Comedy* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2020), 59-67; 60.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

mediated by its interpreters, and thus human agents, who almost invariably nurtured political agendas”⁶⁶ and thus in Dante’s time, “led to conflict, persecution and even war”.⁶⁷ Therefore, caution will need to be taken with any of Dante’s biblical interpretations. Since the translations and interpretations were different in Dante’s era, I use the *Revised New Jerusalem Bible* (readers edition) for reference.

This study also draws on existing work by Joan Ferrante, author of *The Political Vision of The Divine Comedy*, who examines the “political concepts expressed in the *Comedy*, in relation to contemporary history and theory, and to define the political message(s) of the poem.”⁶⁸ Ferrante analyses Dante’s political thought and engages with the themes of city and Empire, and Church and state, in the context of *The Divine Comedy*. Although her work lacks a clearer methodology and a slightly more in-depth historical analysis in its introductory chapter, she has written a clear and accessible book which provides insightful and relevant information which influenced the creation of this thesis.

1.2.7 Timeframe

The focus in this dissertation is on the years 1265 to 1321, as these are the years within which Dante Alighieri lived and became involved in Florentine political life. They are the years when he served on the council of the Commune of Florence, and the years within which Dante was exiled and subsequently wrote *The Divine Comedy*. The

⁶⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁸ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 4.

1300s were also the years when there was a bitter divide within the Guelf political party, resulting in the emergence of two opposed groups, the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Qualitative Research

This thesis will use a qualitative research approach, as qualitative research, simply put, is data expressed in words.⁶⁹ By data expressed in words, I am referring to non-numerical data, such as historical and scholarly sources, for example, first-hand and secondary sources and narrative analysis and interpretation all relating to Dante Alighieri. A quantitative approach relies on a numeric method which is suited to some disciplines and differs from qualitative research which is more suited to the humanities. The research skills used in this thesis – historical sensitivity, theological literacy and hermeneutics – fall into qualitative research. This method includes desk-based research which relies on information which has already been collected and published. The information gathered requires judgement of the truths that have been recorded, which will then be analysed, weighing and measuring the literature to render justice to Dante and to his original texts. Through the information gathered we gain an understanding of Dante's social reality including an understanding of his beliefs, attitudes and interactions, thereby generating a new theoretical framework to work from. The case study design uses cantos from *The Divine Comedy* and was chosen as it further explores, evaluates and compares the different aspects of this

⁶⁹ Kjell Erik Rudestam and Rae R. Newton, *Surviving your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 2015), 53.

research, providing an in-depth interaction with the text as well as understanding the meaning and implications of the text. This approach will be discussed further below.

Qualitative research is contextual, and therefore this thesis will contextualise the subject of the research.⁷⁰ Such research allows this thesis to reimagine the political world and after-world of Dante through imaginative literature, therefore qualitative research is both exciting and important. This study will give a historical account of Medieval Europe's conflict between the Pope and the Emperors in the context of Dante Alighieri's life and work. Qualitative research also allows the thesis to explore different dimensions of Dante's world, including his own everyday life. Qualitative research recognises the importance of the role played by the individual and is considered a discovery-orientated approach.⁷¹ This method allows this thesis to use Dante's experiences and factor them into its analysis and exploration, thereby producing an argument that assists us in re-reading his *Divine Comedy* within the historical context of Medieval Europe.⁷² As qualitative research can sometimes be viewed as an unfolding story,⁷³ this thesis aims to show how the implications of the Church's corrupt actions on society impacted on Dante's writings. *The Divine Comedy* is the story that we are invited to see through the eyes of Dante Alighieri, and therefore this method of research is the appropriate approach. Since qualitative

⁷⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁷¹ Ibid., 53.

⁷² "In qualitative studies, the goal is more likely to focus on description, exploration, search for meaning, or theory building." Ibid., 53. "The key to unravelling it is an understanding of some concepts which are characteristic of the culture in which it was written and some which are central features of the mind of Dante himself". Rodney Johns Payton, *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante* (New York: Lang Publishing, 1992), 1.

⁷³ "Qualitative study is fundamentally the capture of a story. Not only the story of a person or group, but also the story of an organisation or social movement." Robert E. Stake, *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 170-179.

research includes hermeneutics, narrative inquiry and historical research these aspect will now be discussed in relation to how they apply to this research.

1.3.2 Hermeneutics, Narrative Inquiry and Historical Research

When first confronting *The Divine Comedy*, the reader is met with significant historical subject matters which can be perplexing if one is not familiar with the social, religious, political and cultural situation in medieval Florence. Therefore, historical research will also be undertaken as part of this thesis. History connects the past with the present and historical research interprets events. The main emphasis within historical research is the interpretation of documents, both primary and secondary sources. However, “it is not simply the accumulation of dates and facts or even just a description of past happenings but it is a flowing and dynamic explanation or description of past events which include an interpretation of these events in an effort to recapture implications, personalities and ideas that have influenced these events”.⁷⁴ Historical research allows us to understand people and societies, and is an active process of enquiry, investigation and analysis. It allows for an analysis of both texts and social situations. Looking back at the past is a discipline in which knowledge is obtained, interpreted and portrayed to different audiences from various backgrounds in the present. The act of looking reveals a new history, and what we are able to discover from that history depends on the questions we ask. Therefore, it could be argued that history is a

⁷⁴ Jovita J. Tan, *Historical research: A Qualitative Research Method*, academia.edu, 21 April 2015, https://www.academia.edu/24276932/HISTORICAL_RESEARCH_A_QUALITATIVE_RESEARCH_METHOD. Accessed 18 March 2020.

construction or an invention of the historian. Events that occurred in the past cannot be changed, but knowledge of that past is dependent on the questions one is asking.

The theory and practice of interpretation is also considered a key methodological tool for this historical research approach, and therefore this thesis relies on hermeneutics and narrative inquiry. Hermeneutics is simply the theory of interpretation.⁷⁵ The term derives from the Greek, “to utter, to explain, to translate.”⁷⁶ This thesis adopts a hermeneutical approach, not just because of its interest in textual interpretation, but also because of its concern with how Dante’s language expresses a form of ethical obligation to record the truth of what he witnessed both on his journey through hell and what he was witnessing in Florence at the time.⁷⁷ *The Divine Comedy* is an event, where truth is allowed to emerge.⁷⁸ In Martin Heidegger’s terms, its truth is something that permits itself “to be unconcealed.”⁷⁹ Therefore, in line with William Franke’s hermeneutical theory, *The Divine Comedy* becomes an experience of truth, both human and divine.⁸⁰ Dante, the didactic poet, consistently shows his readers the road

⁷⁵ The philosopher Plato used the word in dealing with poets as “hermeneuts of the divine”. Aristotle wrote a treatise on hermeneutics “which he showed how spoken and written words were expressions of inner thought”, Jens Zimmermann, *Hermeneutics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 39-40. The history of hermeneutics is a conversation about knowledge; writers include: Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Ricoeur.

⁷⁶ Zimmermann, ‘*Hermeneutics*’, 3. The term is also related to Hermes, who interprets the ways of the gods to mortals.

⁷⁷ “Language is regarded as the core of understanding.” Rudestam and Newton, *Surviving your Dissertation*, 66.

⁷⁸ Stanley V. Benfell ‘Dante’s Interpretive Journey, William Franke’, *Religion & Literature*, 31/2, (1999), 87–93; 87. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40059772>. Accessed 17 August 2021.

⁷⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 8. Stanley V. Benfell, ‘Dante’s Interpretive Journey, William Franke’, 87.

⁸⁰ “Dante’s *Commedia* makes extreme claims to truth of the most absolute kind ... state of the soul in an unchanging transcendent realm.” Franke, *Dante’s Interpretive Journey*, 15.

that leads to personal salvation. Those sinners who strayed away from God and committed terrible sins on earth are destined to spend eternity in Hell.

As mentioned above, in Dante's Epistle to Can Grande,⁸¹ he says that the aim of *The Divine Comedy*, "is to remove those living in a state of misery and guide them to a state of happiness."⁸² His *Divine Comedy* should be read as; "poetic, figurative, descriptive, digressive, transumptive, and in attrition, explanatory, divisible, probative, condemnatory, and explicit in examples."⁸³ There are four elements, or as Sayers calls them, "sign-posts",⁸⁴ to understanding Dante's work and to guide the reader;

1. *The Divine Comedy* is an allegory.
2. This allegory, "is to be interpreted through-out at four levels: literal, political, moral and mystical".⁸⁵
3. With regards to the literal, the only concern "is the state of the souls after death".⁸⁶
4. The significance of allegorical, is concerned with the moral actions and behaviour of a person within this life on earth.⁸⁷ "The subject is man, liable to the reward or punishment of justice, according as through the freedom of the will he is deserving or undeserving."⁸⁸

As mentioned above, Sayers examines Dante's four levels of interpretation; literal, political, moral and mystical. The literal meaning of *The Divine Comedy* is the story of a journey through the afterlife. Therefore the allegorical levels "deals exclusively with

⁸¹ Alighieri, Letter XI, 'To Cangrande Della Scala', 187.

⁸² Ibid., 199.

⁸³ Ibid., 196.

⁸⁴ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, xiv.

⁸⁵ Ibid., xiv.

⁸⁶ Alighieri, Letter XI, 'To Cangrande Della Scala', 194.

⁸⁷ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, xiv.

⁸⁸ Alighieri, Letter XI, 'To Cangrande Della Scala', 195.

the life of man in this world”.⁸⁹ Sayers labels the other three allegorical levels of interpretation as: ‘The Way of the City’ which applies to the social, historical and political situation of people; ‘The Way of the Soul’ which involves a person’s moral pathway found in the experience of the ‘common Christian’ and the ‘Way of Contemplation’ which concerns “that immediate apprehension of the divine which is enjoyed by those who have the gift.”⁹⁰ It is within these three levels that the literal interpretation of the poem is to be considered throughout. Using this hermeneutical approach I will examine these allegorical ‘ways’ in chapter three, in order to establish Dante as a political thinker, a philosopher and a theologian, all of which establish Dante as a political theologian.

Many of the historical events which occurred in Dante’s lifetime, and the individuals who were influential on him, exist now only as live concerns for those who study medieval history in general and Dante in particular. Through representation of his experience in *The Divine Comedy*, Dante evokes his own historicity and the historicity of the readers. The mind of Dante himself can never be fully infiltrated. It is for this reason that this study is considered an interpretation of his work. Hermeneutics recognises the significance and the various challenges posed by understanding and by “making oneself understood”.⁹¹ By using words to create a visual picture, Dante employed well-known myths and legends along with Christian theology, Florentine history, and contemporary society to create his cosmic vision. By allowing “us to

⁸⁹ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 112.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹¹ Zimmermann, *Hermeneutics: A Very Short Introduction*, 38.

recognise things in the world as familiar”,⁹² he makes the ineffable and transcendental experience accessible to his readers. Pertile points out that Dante the pilgrim is shown “only the souls of well-known people, for the readers of the poem will not profit unless its examples are manifestly clear and rooted in the reality of life.”⁹³ Therefore, chapter three will be dedicated to observing Dante’s historical context. By looking closely at Dante’s historical and social surroundings, dialogues that Dante is establishing throughout his *Divine Comedy* appear. These reveal the motivations behind his social life and the extent to which his personal life and his political circumstances converged within his *Divine Comedy*. Thus it is important for this research to integrate the context within which he lived into the meaning of this research, thereby showing how Dante uses theology as a critical reflection on the political through Contrapasso and his appeal to the creative and critical capacities of Imagination.⁹⁴

1.3.3 Case Study Approach

The case study method usually refers to an in-depth examination, focus or description on a single problem, process, organization, individual, phenomenon, program or issue.⁹⁵ It can be defined as an intense study of a single event, situation or phenomenon, “bounded by space and time”⁹⁶. The ultimate aims are to generalise or

⁹² Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 10.

⁹³ Lino Pertile, ‘Contrapasso’, in Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 219- 222; 220.

⁹⁴ This is often referred to as the “hermeneutic circle method”, which was proposed by Wilhelm Dilthey. Rudestam and Newton, *Surviving your Dissertation*, 66-67.

⁹⁵ “specific unique bounded system”. Rudestam and Newton, *Surviving your Dissertation*, 69.

⁹⁶ Dawson R. Hancock, Bob Algozzine, Jae Hoon Lim, *Doing Case Study Research; A practical Guide for beginning researchers* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2021), 9.

apply it across a larger set of units⁹⁷ and developing on or contributing to existing knowledge. This method allows the researcher and the targeted audience, to grasp and retain the “holistic and meaningful characteristic of real-life-events”.⁹⁸ The process usually involves initial research, data collection, analysing that data and identifying the common element, or lack thereof. Case studies are frequently used in the social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, business, and practice-orientated disciplines, such as education, nursing and urban and community planning.

The case studies method is a popular approach in qualitative research, especially for the researcher who wants the answers to the “how” and “why” questions.⁹⁹ However, Robert K. Yin points out that this approach can also be a “less desirable form of inquiry.”¹⁰⁰ It is often viewed as putting too much value on specific instances and using them as examples, therefore, case studies are sometimes criticized for their lack of generalizability.¹⁰¹ Researcher bias is also an issue Yin raises when discussing traditional prejudices against the case study method. This is where the researchers’ views and opinions influence the direction of the study. He also points out, that it is a time consuming process; “they take too long”,¹⁰² and that they can often result in “massive, unreadable documents”.¹⁰³ However insights from case studies can “directly influence policy, procedures, and future research.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (California: SAGE, 2009), 4.

⁹⁹ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 45.

¹⁰⁰ Less desirable than “Experiments or surveys”. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 15 and Hancock, Algozzine, Lim, *Doing Case Study Research*, 10.

¹⁰² Yin, *Case Study Research*, 15.

¹⁰³ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁴ Hancock, Algozzine, Lim, *Doing Case Study Research*, 10.

As mentioned, the case studies method is a bounded system or case, which differentiates it from other methods of inquiry. This method does not claim any particular method of collecting data, but mainly “focuses on holistic description and explanation”.¹⁰⁵ According to Sharan B. Merriam, case studies can be characterised as being particularistic, descriptive and heuristic.¹⁰⁶ Particularistic for her, means that the case studies focus on particularly situations or events. Descriptive, meaning that the finished research is a “rich, ‘thick’ description”¹⁰⁷ of the event or situation and Heuristic, meaning it illuminates the reader’s understanding of the event, situation or phenomenon under investigation.

In line with Merriam, my approach is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Situating my interpretation of medieval political theology and Dante’s understanding of the political and social dimensions of his time, I would argue that in this instance, this case study approach provides my research with the opportunity for a greater depth of understanding. The case studies method, albeit a time consuming process, allowed me to explore the past as Dante saw it, while also illuminating his personal and political opinions. The methodological approach I have taken, allowed me to consider the political and social circumstances of his Florentine society, his own personal history, his theological standing and political thought, and re-read the *Divine Comedy* in these different lights to see how and why they affected the poet and how he applies these different yet inter-changeable approaches to his work. By applying this approach, the

¹⁰⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 29.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 43.

process of the case study method emerged. To give a full canto by canto commentary on the political theology within the entire *Divine Comedy* would be a task beyond this thesis. However this method was employed with the purpose of displaying to other researchers in the field, the “holistic and meaningful characteristic of [the] real-life-events”¹⁰⁸, and the political theological stance of Dante in his *Divine Comedy*, which can then be retrospectively applied to other cantos in his *Divine Comedy*.

Chapter five will be dedicated to this case study approach. This allows for the immersive examination and expansion of the world of Dante for the purpose of understanding how Dante expresses his political theology further. This approach will support the view that through Dante’s imaginative appeal to Contrapasso, he creates a body of work which reflects critically on the governing political authorities and the ecclesiastical organisations of his time, thereby expressing his political theology.

Chapter five’s case study approach will show Dante’s disapproval of corruption within the Catholic Church. Canto 19 of the *Inferno* will be the principal passage from *The Divine Comedy* to demonstrate the connection between theology and social critique, and to show how divinely sanctioned accountability takes concrete shape for the sinners in this circle. When initially delving into this study of Dante’s political theology, Canto 19 immediately stood out as a prime example. Canto 19 is where Dante presents the Simonists residing within the third ditch of the eighth circle. Dante skilfully expresses his own opinions and his distaste for Simony, as it embodies the

¹⁰⁸ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and methods*, 4.

corruption within Dante's beloved Church. Dante also criticizes the Simoniac popes within this circle, who wedded the Church to unholy political aspirations, and who chose money and power over God, righteousness and morality. This canto encapsulates Dante's own beliefs and judgements, while also emphasizing that these sinners are rightly placed and deserve the punishments which are bestowed upon them. Canto 19 articulates Dante's quest for justice for unjust authority figures. It shows how the amalgamation of theology and poetry creates the conditions for a critical analysis of the political governing structures of Florentine society. He introduces the reader to the way in which one can attain a 'perfect state', while adhering to one's own moral code, which is almost always influenced by Christian moral teaching. Thus, his poetry is an inherently revealing medium. While engaging with this canto, I realised that it is important to appreciate how influential and dominant the historical, political, and religious traditions are within his poetry, as Dante drew from personal experience, political affiliations and ecclesiastical institutions. Therefore, incorporating these elements into this thesis was vital.

Dante the didactic poet makes the world of *The Divine Comedy* his own social and political responsibility. His political theological message is that of reform for a stagnant Italian society, and particularly for the contemporary Papacy. For Dante, the Catholic Church had fallen into disarray mainly due to corruption, avarice and power-hungry figures of authority. His reforming attitude, expressed within his *Divine Comedy* is a testament to his commitment for change within the Church. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante represents the Italian city of Florence as it has become; a condemned corrupt society, which he depicts as the *Inferno*. In *Purgatorio*, Dante gives the reader the

remedies to counter the traits found in the *Inferno* in an attempt to motivate those currently living in sin, to change their ways and repent. In *Paradiso*, Dante's idea of an ideal society appears in the form of Rome. According to Dante, Rome was "formed the world for good."¹⁰⁹ Dante's *Paradiso* provides the reader with an ideal framework to strive towards. To demonstrate the claim that *The Divine Comedy* is Dante's plea for reform, chapter five will also focus on how Dante envisages condemnation, redemption and reform with examples from *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. This study will examine two cantos per canticle; *Inferno*, Canto 3 and Canto 23; *Purgatorio*, Canto 16 and Canto 19; *Paradiso* Canto 21 and Canto 27.

1.4 Limitations

The main limitation to my research revolves around language. As a non-Italian speaking researcher, issues of interpretation and disconnection between the original text and the research can arise. Various translations and commentaries of *The Divine Comedy* have been in circulation for many years, generating debate over the best ways in which to translate and interpret Dante's work. My research focuses on more thematic issues and on the way in which the device of Contrapasso functions: it is not concerned primarily with linguistic issues. Nevertheless, a range of translations and interpretations were consulted to avoid possible misreading of the key texts.

The Divine Comedy, along with Dante's other literary creations and his life, have been heavily researched and analysed for centuries, thereby accumulating a vast amount of

¹⁰⁹ *Purg.* 16. 106.

research, which can be challenging to navigate. Therefore, decisions relating to what research was included and excluded were tactfully made in order to present the relevant research in an informative, analytical and non-compromising way.

As mentioned above, this research relies on non-numerical research addressing the areas relating to Dante, his politics, his theology, his philosophy and his social critique.

As a researcher, I brought to the text not only questions and presuppositions but an ontological scheme which realizes meanings in what the text conveys beyond its immediate meaning. In other words, my history shapes my understanding and my approach. Therefore, I carry it with me to the act of interpreting. As a result of this, I am bringing my own distinctive observations.

1.5 Mapping the Landscape: *The Divine Comedy*

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante maps the existing and potential circumstances of the world and invites his readers to imagine it with him. He heralded a new age by introducing the idea that Church officials, particularly the popes, were corrupt; therefore it can be said that Dante is anticipating some of the key concerns of the Reformation,¹¹⁰ for example, by condemning simony and nepotism. In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante represents the popes and other key religious figures of his own era

¹¹⁰ The Reformation occurred in the aftermath of the renaissance period in the 16th century. It was a western European movement. It centres around key figures such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli. The Reformation movement was not just simply about the reform of certain Church doctrines. The Reformation can be viewed as the scene of a recurring issue with the hope of a resolution, which addressed fundamental issues that were embedded within Church practices, for example, the corruption and the social and economic gain of the Catholic Church. Across the Christian community, both in Dante's era, and up to the 16th century, there were many who criticised corruption within the Church. Some members of the Christian community argued that the Church's immoral behaviour and malpractice was not in line with Jesus' teachings, and that therefore the Church should reform itself.

amongst the dominant, greedy, corrupt and power-hungry figures; “Ravenous wolves in shepherd’s clothing”.¹¹¹ The role of the Papacy, as desired by Dante, would resist being driven by the acquisition of worldly power and possessions, and be therefore capable of leading others in following Christ’s teaching and example.¹¹² One of the many reasons why Dante’s *Divine Comedy* surpasses its original time and place is that Dante saw clearly the root cause of issues which plagued his beloved city of Florence, and he sought to educate and dissuade future generations from making the same mistakes as their predecessors. “His relentless self-invention as an unbending prophet of justice and a mythical quester for the divine”¹¹³ is one reason why “generations of readers have found the story of Dante’s life compelling”.¹¹⁴ According to Barbara Reynolds, Sayers saw Dante as the “voice of the present”¹¹⁵ and that only his words “are out of date,”¹¹⁶ and not the “wrong-doings”¹¹⁷ he denounced.

1.5.1 Structure of *The Divine Comedy*

Undeniably, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is a poem worthy of serious attention. Scholars of his era found *The Divine Comedy* an “indisputably major work”.¹¹⁸ It spoke to the ‘every-day’ person, tackling and challenging subjects that not many people of that

¹¹¹ For example Pope Boniface and Pope Clement. *Par.* 27. 55.

¹¹² *Inf.* Canto 19. 90-100. “Dante’s age was, more than anything else, a religious age”. Payton, *A Modern Reader’s Guide to Dante*, 1.

¹¹³ Giuseppe Mazzotta, ‘Life of Dante’, in Jacoff, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 1-14; 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁵ Barbara Reynolds, ‘Fifty Years On: Dorothy L. Sayers and Dante’ *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center*, vol. 16, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College (1999), 3–6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45296739>. Accessed 13 October 2021.

¹¹⁶ Reynolds, ‘Fifty Years On’, 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Hollander eds., *The Inferno*, xxvii.

time would address publicly, such as corruption within the Church of his day.¹¹⁹ *The Divine Comedy* contains one hundred cantos, divided into three sections; the *Inferno*, which consists of thirty-four cantos, *Purgatorio*, with thirty-three cantos, and finally *Paradiso*, which also contains thirty-three cantos. *The Divine Comedy* is written in a rhyme scheme called *terza rima*,¹²⁰ which is entirely Dante's own creation. *Terza rima* is a flexible medium that operates using three stanzas and is a "vital essence of Dante's poem".¹²¹ Surprisingly, the poem was written in the vernacular¹²² and not in Latin which would have been more usual in a body of work like this. Dante, in his *Convivio*, states that Latin would only serve "those few Italian scholars"¹²³ whereas he wanted to be "of service to many".¹²⁴ In a letter to Cangrande della Scala (1291-1329), Dante considers this style of language "careless and humble"¹²⁵ as it was the "vulgar tongue"¹²⁶ "in which even housewives hold converse".¹²⁷ By writing in the vernacular,

¹¹⁹ This is mainly because the Church was an omnipresent European centre of political and religious power.

¹²⁰ *Terza rima* utilizes three stanzas and could be a symbol for the Holy Trinity.

¹²¹ Ronald de Rooy, ed. *Divine Comedies for the New Millennium* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 58. Hollander refers to Erich Auerbach who observed that *terza rima* was, "a brilliant solution for a narrative poem, for it both 'looses and binds', at once bringing the verse to momentary conclusion and propelling it forward". Robert Hollander, *Dante* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 144.

¹²² Alighieri, Letter XI, 'To Cangrande Della Scala', 197. Dante within the *Convivio* "proposed to take the philosophical and theological knowledge of his day ... and serve it up in the vernacular language, thereby offering a general banquet for those too immersed in worldly obligations to be able to dedicate themselves wholly to the pursuit of learning". William Franke, 'Dante and the Secularization of Religion Through Literature,' *Religion and Literature*, 45/1 (2013), 1-31; 3. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24397807>. Accessed 17 August 2023. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 127. According to Ferrante, in 1335 one of the Dominican houses in Florence, Santa Maria Novella, prohibited the studying or reading of "poetic books composed in the vulgate by the one called Dante". Moreover, several passages from *The Divine Comedy* were condemned during the Spanish Inquisition and Ferrante gives the examples of; *Inf.* 11. 8-9, *Inf.* 19. 106-117 and *Par.* 9. 136-142. which expressed antipapal views. However, these views were particularly appealing to the conciliarists who "had the poem translated into Latin and commented by Giovanni da Serravalle at the Council of Constance" in the year 1414. *Ibid.*, 127, 128, 129.

¹²³ *Conv.* 1. 9. 2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1. 9. 29.

¹²⁵ Alighieri, Letter XI, 'To Cangrande Della Scala', 197.

¹²⁶ Richard Lansing, *Dante and Philosophy: Nature, the Cosmos, and the Ethical Imperative: Dante: The Critical Complex* Vol 3 (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

¹²⁷ Alighieri, Letter XI, 'To Cangrande Della Scala', 197.

Dante divulged the “bread of angels”¹²⁸ that had previously been “reserved for those schooled in Latin, chiefly clerics.”¹²⁹ Dante, therefore, aimed to make his work accessible to an everyman, inviting his readers to share his insights into human sin, human nature, degradation, redemption and the grace of God. The vernacular was considered a “radical choice”;¹³⁰ Giovanni del Virgilio¹³¹ complained that “Dante had written nothing for scholars and urged him to stop throwing pearls before swine for the learned man despises the vulgar tongue”.¹³² Dante, evidently, sought to challenge and extend the linguistic tradition of medieval society. The vernacular seems, indeed, to be at the core of Dante’s identity and he uses it as a tool of endearment and allurement: in *Conv.* 1.13, for example, Dante explains how it was the Italian vernacular that brought his parents together, and subsequently led to his existence. “it was that which brought together them who begat me, for it they spoke ... wherefore it is manifest that it took part in my begetting and so was a certain cause of my being”.¹³³ By writing in his native tongue, he was capable of expressing complex truths first in the *Convivio* and then in his *Divine Comedy*, thereby letting “new light of this Italian tongue shine upon those who sit in darkness which no ray of the Latin tongue has reached.”¹³⁴ Therefore, a further connection can be drawn between the *Convivio* and *The Divine Comedy* with regard to human experience and knowledge, as Dante, in *The Divine Comedy*, wanted to remove those “living in this life from a state of

¹²⁸ *Par.* 2. 11 and *Conv.* 1.51.

¹²⁹ Franke, *Dante and the Secularization of Religion Through Literature*, 3.

¹³⁰ Lansing, *Dante and Philosophy*, 1.

¹³¹ A scholar and poet who exchanged “Latin verse letters with Dante in the years 1319-1320”. *Ibid.*, 865.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³³ *Conv.* 1. 13. 1-12.

¹³⁴ *Conv.* 1. 13. 12.

misery”¹³⁵ and bring them “to a state of happiness.”¹³⁶ This linguistic choice reveals how Dante wanted to turn this once ‘vulgar tongue’ into a ‘high’ instrument which reveals, reflects and reviews the very truth and nature of existence and the divine.

Redemption and soul-crafting are vital aspects and themes of *The Divine Comedy*.

Belliotti considers the writing of *The Divine Comedy* as a redemptive process.¹³⁷ Dante the pilgrim visits the *Inferno* in order to begin his own route to redemption and salvation. By encountering the souls in hell, he gains a deeper understanding of despair, suffering, depravity, corruption and of God’s justice. This can also be said of the reader, who accompanies the poet on this spiritual journey of imagination.¹³⁸

Dante presents his readers with their route to morality and examines personal strategies “for transforming our character in fulfilling ways”.¹³⁹

1.5.2 Inferno

I shall be held for the rest of my days at the gates of Sheol.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Alighieri, Letter XI, ‘To Cangrande Della Scala’, 199.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 199.

¹³⁷ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins, Moral Philosophy in Hell* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 169.

¹³⁸ Edward Hagman recalls how *The Divine Comedy*, has sometimes been called an *itinerarium mentis*. Based on this assertion, Hagman correctly makes the connection to the mystical medieval work of Bonaventure, *itinerarium mentis in Deum* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Hagman states that “Bonaventure’s writings are seen as an integral part of the entire medieval and religious culture from which Dante drew ideas and inspiration”.

Edward Hagman, ‘Dante’s Vision of God: The End of the *Itinerarium Mentis*.’ *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 106, (1988), 1–20; 1–2. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166367>. Accessed 4 July 2022.

¹³⁹ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 148.

¹⁴⁰ Isaiah. 38.10.

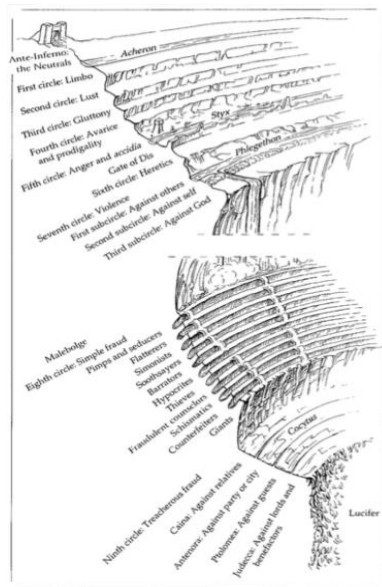


Fig. 2

The most graphic description of hell can be found in the first book of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the *Inferno*. Hell, for Dante, is represented as a conical hole created by the impact of Lucifer's fall from Heaven.¹⁴¹ It is said to be located under the city of Jerusalem, hence the name 'the underworld',¹⁴² and is divided into three parts: one this side of the river Acheron;¹⁴³ another between Acheron and the walls of Dis; and lastly the City of Dis itself. Together, these locations are the setting for the *Inferno*, which consists of 9 circles, three rings and ten ditches. The *Inferno* is a mapped voyage through "the immense historical archives of the world's evil."¹⁴⁴ This dwelling place for

¹⁴¹ Scott G. Bruce considers hell to be the instigator in inspiring fear which has been used as a tool to control the behaviour "of countless human beings for more than two thousand years". According to Bruce, the Bishop of Chester, argued that "Hell was an essential deterrent to bad behaviour that allowed human society to function". It could, therefore, be argued that deterrence is also a major principle of a doctrine of Hell, since fear of eternal suffering would serve as a motivation to act according to the Church's teachings. However, according to Sayers, the doctrine of Hell is not "medieval: it's Christ's". It is not simply a ploy by medieval clergy to frighten people into donating money to the Church, "it is Christ's deliberate judgement on sin". Regardless, "Christ is ever present in Dante's Hell". Scott G. Bruce, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hell*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 13, 222. Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 44-45.

¹⁴² Martinez and Durling, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno* Volume 1, 553.

¹⁴³ *Inf.* Canto 3. 78. "on the mournful shore of Acheron". In Greek mythology Acheron is the classical river of the dead, or the river of woe, which souls cross to the under-world.

¹⁴⁴ Pertile, 'Introduction to *Inferno*', 77.

the condemned souls and Satan¹⁴⁵ builds on and incorporates elements of other mythical depictions of 'the place of the dead', such as Gehenna, Sheol and Hades.¹⁴⁶

In Canto 1, Dante the pilgrim begins his allegorical journey in a dark wood¹⁴⁷ on Good Friday in the year 1300.¹⁴⁸ He is unable to find the right path, or the "straight way",¹⁴⁹ and this darkness mirrors the ignorance and blindness of the lives that sinners lead on earth. Dante begins this voyage "Midway in the journey of our life"¹⁵⁰. Here, Dante implies that he is middle aged, which, for him, is thirty-five years old alluding to the biblical ideal expressed in Psalm 90.10,¹⁵¹ which presents seventy years as an idealised duration of human life. Dante, by using the word "our", shows the reader that he

¹⁴⁵ Satan appears in the Bible and in legends, old tales and superstitions that have been passed down through generations. 'The great dragon, the primal serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had led all the world astray' (Rev 12:9).

In the *Inferno*, Satan resides at the centre of the earth in Judecca. "Look there at Dis! And see the place where you must arm yourself with fortitude." Canto 34. 64-69.

¹⁴⁶ The notion of punishment, fire and Hell is graphically presented in the idea of *Gehenna*. "The New Testament word for the place of final punishment is *Gehenna*." *Gehenna* or originally *Ge Bene Hinnom* had been a site of human sacrifices and it is referenced frequently in the Old and New Testament. Jeremiah 7:31, 19:2-6. It is here where all the dirt and dead bodies of animals and criminals were burnt and the fires always kept burning, and so Gehenna became known as a place of fire and destruction. References to this form of Hell can also be found in 2 Kings 23:10, Matthew 5.22, 5.29-30, Matthew 18:9, 23:15, 33 Mark 9:43, 15,47 Luke 12:5 and James 3:6. Sheol is another world which is inhabited by demons who are in opposition to God, Genesis 42.38, Psalms 86:13, 89:48. Hades was seen in the New Testament as being a place of incarceration for the wicked where they will be judged. Revelations, 20:13-15. "The entire New Testament distinguishes clearly between Hades, the intermediate state, and Gehenna (hell), the place of final punishment. Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Sheol. In the Old Testament, human existence does not end with death. Rather, person continues to exist in the netherworld. The Old Testament does not peak of one's soul or spirit descending to Sheol; people continue to exist as 'shades' ... Jesus almost has nothing to say about Hades... In one parable Jesus draws upon contemporary ideas of Hades to set forth the danger people face if they refuse to hear the word of God." George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed., Donald A. Hagner (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 194 and 196.

¹⁴⁷ Also named the Canto of fear. This wood for Dante is meant to be 'historical' to a certain extent. Canto 1.2

¹⁴⁸ Hollander, *Dante*, 93. Hollander states that "Dante was almost certainly using Profacius' star charts for 1301." According to Hollander and Emmanuel Poulle author of 'Profacio', "Dante took his star charts from the Almanach of Prophacius Jusaesus, ca. 1236-1304." Hollander, *Dante*, 196.

¹⁴⁹ *Inf.* 1.3

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.1.

¹⁵¹ Psalm 89.10.

wants them to be a part of, and involved in this journey.¹⁵² Dante thus links his personal experience with that of humankind: life is a journey and Dante's journey through Hell is for the 'everyman'.¹⁵³ He thus claims that his voyage can be understood as our journey as well. By establishing this context, Dante makes *The Divine Comedy* both personal and universal.

1.5.3 Purgatorio

But night is rising in the sky. It is time
For us to leave, for we have seen it all.¹⁵⁴

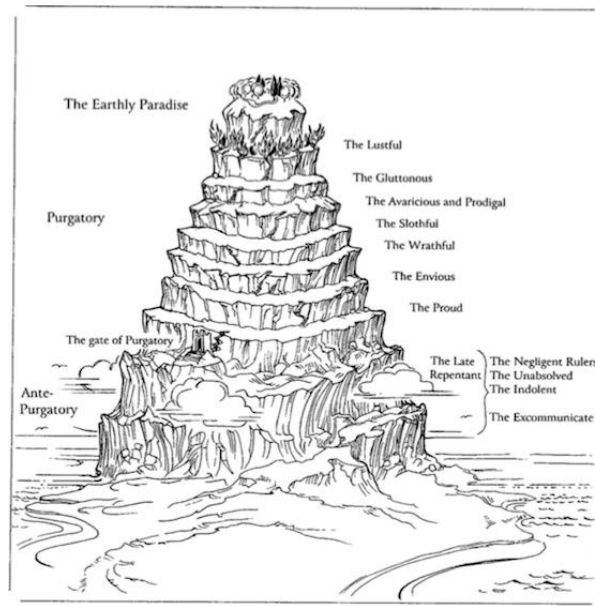


Fig. 3

One hundred years after the widespread recognition of the doctrine of Purgatory, Dante "the poetic genius ... carved out for it an enduring place in human memory".¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Many scholars have also pointed out that the opening of this canto echoes Isaiah 38:10.

¹⁵³ He does this by mixing first persons singular and plural.

¹⁵⁴ *Inf.* 34. 68-69.

¹⁵⁵ Jacques le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 334. le Goff states that between the fourth and eleventh centuries, the belief which helped the inception of Purgatory, was that "the souls of the dead could be helped by prayer, and more particularly by suffrages... this belief and its associated practices, which required the intervention

Dante and Virgil had climbed out of the *Inferno* and arrived on the island of Mount Purgatory at the antipodes of Jerusalem, in the southern hemisphere.¹⁵⁶ Dante's Purgatory, therefore, is not underground, but is situated on earth, under the starry heavens.¹⁵⁷ The journey through the *Inferno* took the poet and his guide twenty-four hours. Their journey through Purgatory takes three days and three nights, and they reach the earthly paradise on Wednesday, the fourth day.¹⁵⁸ On the lower slopes of the mountain, souls await purgation in ante-Purgatory. Dante himself "invented this place of "prepurgation".¹⁵⁹ Above these souls are seven terraces on which are purged the seven deadly sins: Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lust. Once Dante has passed through all these terraces, and "is free, upright, and sound,"¹⁶⁰ he is allowed to enter earthly paradise.

Purgatory is a place of purification and temporary punishment. It is a realm of accountability, where Christian sinners atone for their earthly sins. Once purged of their sins, they will eventually attain Paradise. In the opening lines of the first canto, Dante gives the reader a sense that divine grace is in operation:

Now I shall sing the second kingdom,
There where the soul of man is cleansed,
Made worthy to ascend to Heaven.¹⁶¹

of the Church, in particular for the eucharistic sacrifice ...which afforded the Church the benefits of alms and other gifts, helped to tighten its control over the living". Ibid., 134-135.

¹⁵⁶ "Stands straight above Jerusalem". *Purg.* 2. 3.

¹⁵⁷ "Then we came forth, to see again the stars". *Inf.* 34. 139. Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 334.

¹⁵⁸ "Come along, for the time we are allowed should be apportioned to a better use." Ibid., 23. 5-6.

¹⁵⁹ Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, xxv.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 27. 140.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 1. 4-6. "Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? The clean of hands and pure of heart, whose soul is not set on vain things, who has not sworn deceitful oaths." Psalm 23: 3-5.

The souls in Purgatory and their Contrapasso are different from the souls in the *Inferno*. It is clear that the hatred and lack of hope present in the *Inferno*¹⁶² has been replaced by the divine love which operates within Purgatory. Hollander, while emphasizing this claim, makes plain that the pain the soul endures in Purgatory serves a joyous purpose which he supports by quoting Canto 23, where Forese Donati says; “I speak of pain but should say solace.”¹⁶³ Moreover, in Canto 3 of *Purgatorio*, when Dante and Virgil begin their climb up Mount Purgatory, Dante describes the rising sun on Easter morning; “the sun and its rays (were) like red flames at my back.”¹⁶⁴ The presence of the sun contrasts greatly with the *Inferno* and functions as a symbol of hope and the presence of God’s grace. Once Dante reaches the summit of Mount Purgatory, he also reaches the first of five major phases in Heaven.

¹⁶² *Inf.* 4.42.

¹⁶³ *Purg.* 23.72.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.16.

1.5.4 Paradiso

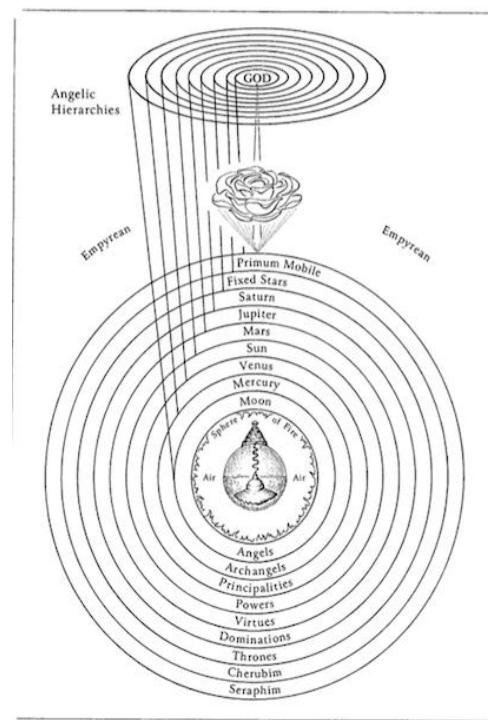


Fig. 4

Dante is now ready to “rise up to the stars.”¹⁶⁵ This journey through the heavens shows the inner workings of the mysteries of divine justice that transcend human understanding.¹⁶⁶ *Paradiso* “will tell of the souls of the blessed found in each sphere”.¹⁶⁷ Here he is accompanied by Beatrice, who has now become his guide through the nine heavenly spheres; the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Starry Sphere and the Crystalline Sphere or the Primum Mobile. The Primum Mobile is enclosed by the Empyrean and contains the rose of Paradise, which is the systematic arrangement of the blessed. In stark contrast to *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, which were concerned with the punishing and purging of sin, *Paradiso* recalls the three theological and four cardinal virtues. The three theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, are found within the first three planetary spheres of Moon,

¹⁶⁵ *Purg.* 33. 145.

¹⁶⁶ Jeffreery T. Schnapp, ‘Paradiso’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 674-678; 675.

¹⁶⁷ Carpenter, *Dante Alighieri, A Translation of Dante’s Eleven Letters*, 215.

Mercury and Venus.¹⁶⁸ The four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Fortitude, Justice and Temperance, are found in the second phase, as Dante passes through the remaining four planetary spheres of the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The third phase is within the Starry Sphere, where the theological virtues are presented in their perfected form. The fourth phase, the transparent Crystalline sphere, Primum mobile, is the largest sphere in Dante's cosmology.¹⁶⁹ Finally, Dante and Beatrice reach the Empyrean, the "Heaven of pure light"¹⁷⁰ in the form of "a luminous white rose".¹⁷¹ Jeffrey Burton Russell correctly observes that Dante knew and appreciated the appeal and excitement that the very idea of heaven brings to the imagination: "The human idea of heaven is a complex tapestry shot with flashes of glory".¹⁷² He asserts that Dante applied what had already been established about Heaven, and both theologically and poetically, "restated it with unparalleled conviction".¹⁷³

1.6 Definitions

There are two main definitions which must be briefly dealt with before embarking on a study of Dante's political theology. First I must outline what is meant by political theology and, particularly, by Dante's political theology. Second, I explain Contrapasso, which is the literary technique which Dante employs to express his political theology.

¹⁶⁸ These spheres are located in a cone of shadow which the earth casts into the universe. Robin Kirkpatrick, 'Paradise', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 671-674; 671.

¹⁶⁹ It also moves the fastest.

¹⁷⁰ *Par.* 30. 39.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31. 1. Beatrice's place in Heaven is in the Empyrean.

¹⁷² Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), xiii.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, xiv.

Further explanation of how these definitions emerged will be provided in chapter two, below.

1.6.1 Dante's Political Theology

William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott, define political theology thus:

Theology is broadly understood as discourse about God, and human persons as they relate to God. The political is broadly understood as the use of structural power to organise a society or community of people ... political theology, is, then, the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social and economic aspects) from perspectives of differing interpretations of God's ways with the world.¹⁷⁴

Cavanaugh and Scott's broad definition offers a multi-disciplinary application and approach, allowing for greater nuance and engagement in the humanities. However, the fault with this definition is that it is too open-ended. Ironically, Cavanaugh and Scott themselves claim that, in general, political theology is itself too broadly defined, but claim that their use of the term "political arrangements", encompassing "cultural-psychological, social and economic aspects", essentially relates the basis of the political sphere to most, if not all, human experience. Also, the connotations of the word "aspects", raises the possibility that some "aspects" may not be taken into consideration and therefore, more clarification is needed on what particular aspects of experience are subject to analysis and criticism.

Another definition of political theology, which is slightly more to the point, is that of Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips, and is included in a contribution to a treatment of

¹⁷⁴ Peter Manley Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, 'Introduction', in Peter Manley Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1-5; 3.

political theology as a specifically Christian theology, where political theology is understood as an inquiry carried out by “Christian theologians in relation to the political, where the political is defined broadly to include the various ways in which humans order common life.”¹⁷⁵ Even though this definition is slightly clearer, the issue with this definition is similar to that presented by Cavanaugh and Scott, as the terminology used – “political” and “various ways in which humans order common life” – remains too broad. The distinctively Christian aspect emphasised by this definition is relevant to this thesis, however, I question the limiting of Christian political theology to a discipline purely explored by theologians.

Even though there are terminological issues with defining political theology, it also opens a flood gate of opportunities for what can be explored and defined as political theology. William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott, while discussing what is political theology and how it can be conceived by different thinkers, suggest another explanation which I have adapted within this thesis. “Theology is a critical reflection on the political. Theology is material and reflects and reinforces just or unjust political arrangements”.¹⁷⁶ Drawing on these definitions, Dante’s medieval political theology will be considered for this thesis as his analysis and criticism of the governing political authorities and ecclesiastical organisations. Reasons and explanations for this choice will be discussed below.

¹⁷⁵ Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips, ‘Preface’, Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), xi-xiv; xii.

¹⁷⁶ Scott and Cavanaugh, ‘Introduction’, 4.

1.6.2 Contrapasso

Contrapasso derives from the Latin phrase *Contra patior* (to 'suffer the opposite').

Dante imagines a link between the soul on earth and the soul once it leaves this earth and enters into an everlasting 'reality'. Thus, Contrapasso is a continuation and

intensification of the soul's life on earth. In Dante's cosmic-theological creation, we are aware that the eternal state can exist in one of three realms; the *Inferno*,

Purgatorio or *Paradiso*. In the *Inferno*, the soul does not accept its wrong-doings and is subsequently punished for its crimes in a fitting manner which correlates to its crime on earth. Hence, Contrapasso, in this circumstance, allows the reader to understand and grasp the severity of the sin committed by the sinner while they were on earth.

Dante has a slightly different approach in *Purgatorio*. There, sinners who are present are saved because they repented of their sins before they died. Therefore, their souls are in a transitional phase and the sin does not exist anymore. Their souls will undergo purgation and will eventually reach eternal bliss. Finally, we have *Paradiso*, in which Contrapasso does not necessarily exist, however, the principles of Contrapasso can be applied; the blessed souls, are placed here for having led a virtuous life on earth.¹⁷⁷

This thesis proposes that Contrapasso is an important component which expresses Dante's political theology, and what will emerge in due course is that his loyalty to community and to his faith is unwavering and resilient, and this commitment can be seen through the moral law of Contrapasso. Contrapasso, along with Dante's poetic skills and his appeal to imagination, serves the didactic poet's fundamental aim, "the

¹⁷⁷ They are placed in various proximities to God.

reformation of a society on the brink of eternal ruin”.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, this thesis will show that the punishment arises from the crime itself; however, it also arises from the damage it has caused to the community: the sinners have not only harmed themselves, as individuals, but “the public good – namely the sanctified bodies of Church, republic, city and kingdom”.¹⁷⁹ It is important to note here that Dante intentionally places the souls in the afterlife for a reason; it is for that reason, therefore, that Dante is able to communicate with them, allowing the reader to subsequently learn about their wrong-doings and their life lived on earth. A further analysis of this important topic will be discussed in the next chapter.

1.7 Chapter Structure

This thesis is broken into five chapters. Chapter two will map the research; chapter three maps Dante’s historical circumstances; chapter four maps Dante’s hermeneutical horizons; chapter five reveals Dante’s political theology, and, finally, chapter six presents my conclusion.

And thus, the journey begins ...

Chapter Two: Mapping the Horizons of the Research

¹⁷⁸ Pertile, ‘Contrapasso’, 221.

¹⁷⁹ Justin Steinberg, ‘More than an Eye for an Eye: Dante’s sovereign Justice’, in *Ethics, Politics and Justice in Dante*, ed., Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen (London: UCL, 2019), 80-94; 88.



Fig. 5

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the authors who have helped shape this research. The result of my research analysis provides a snapshot of a vast, diverse and ever expanding field. This research draws on a number of different fields, including: theology, philosophy, politics, poetry, history and classical studies. It can, therefore, be considered as interdisciplinary research, as each of these disciplines engage with the topic in different ways. When embarking on a study of Dante and his writings one is confronted with a vast literature, specifically in the areas of political philosophy, Contrapasso and theology. Etienne Gilson wisely remarked; “I cannot think of it without experiencing a kind of dizziness”.¹⁸⁰ To ignore the extent to which the study of

¹⁸⁰ Cited by Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet in his Writings* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), xiii.

Dante requires multidisciplinary competencies would open the thesis to criticism. However, I find myself agreeing with Sayers that, “to take them all into account is to bury Dante and his poem under a cairn so heavy that nothing can issue from it except the faint voice of his protesting ghost ... Dante wrote to be read by the common man and woman.”¹⁸¹ Sayers insists that, at the end of the day, Dante is a poet. She fears that, as readers, there is a tendency to over-complicate or “worry”¹⁸² over interpretation and that this fear is faced when we accept him for what he means, that he means what he says and what he says matters.¹⁸³ “It is more comfortable to explain him away”.¹⁸⁴

2.2 Truth In Fiction

In order to establish the reasons why Dante was capable of critiquing his own modernity and interpreting him from a modern perspective, I found Cornish’s *Believing in Dante: Truth in Fiction*,¹⁸⁵ a useful resource. Cornish states that like every new generation, we have experienced a cultural shift and Dante is capable of critiquing his own modernity by setting “other narratives, such as those of the ancient pagans, which is to say, non-Christians”¹⁸⁶ against one another. In this same way, Dante is able to measure and outline what makes his modernity “different, better even, and how exactly it has changed the narrative and shifted the paradigm”.¹⁸⁷ Virgil can be seen as an example of where Dante chose not to save him “because of his

¹⁸¹ Ibid., xiii.

¹⁸² Ibid., xviii.

¹⁸³ Ibid., xviii.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., xviii.

¹⁸⁵ Alison Cornish, *Believing in Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁸⁶ Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 24.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 24.

fundamental conviction, similar to our own, that modernity is right while antiquity had it wrong.”¹⁸⁸ Cornish further observes we are “always and everywhere called to read (to interpret, to make sense of) what is set before us and to respond accordingly”.¹⁸⁹ She asserts that “almost any book is capable of telling the right story to the right person at the right time, if you know how to read it.”¹⁹⁰ As we have seen previously, Dante in his own words states that it should be read through the literal, political, moral and mystical. Cornish, however, points out that Dante particularly in *Purgatorio* Canto 21, where the Latin poet Statius, who was guilty of avarice, seriously misreads a passage from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and concludes that this passage demonstrates “how we are always called upon to read, and to read carefully and reread”,¹⁹¹ paying particular attention to ways in which narratives and fictions relate to facts and other narrative patterns.¹⁹²

By skilfully engaging with specific cantos, Cornish shows the reader how narratives like *The Divine Comedy* continue to speak to us; “even though we cannot always take them at their word”, we still read with a “certain level of trust”.¹⁹³ For her, *The Divine Comedy* is a story ‘of us’ set against Dante’s poetic autobiography, in which “there is indeed a reality outside individual experience, and it is against this reality that the individual life can be read, can be seen to make sense, and to have purpose and direction, or to be way off track,”¹⁹⁴ which is why *The Divine Comedy* continues to be

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 245.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 247.

¹⁹² Ibid., 249.

¹⁹³ “The entirely faithful interpreter, sticking to the literal meaning, might well miss the whole point...believing not what the text says, but what the text has to say”. Ibid., 250.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 24.

read, analysed and praised. Dante's work is full of rich complexities which for some modern readers can be difficult to appreciate, especially in light of Dante's Catholic beliefs and his utopian vision. Cornish's work, however, proves that it is more important than ever to revisit, revive, re-evaluate and realise the relevance of Dante and his works.

2.3 Dante the Christian Theologian: Dante's *Divine Comedy* as Theology

Recently, there has been increased interest in the area of Dante's theology and the resulting studies continue to grow in richly diverse ways. For example, scholarship has addressed Dante's use of biblical sources and scriptures in the context of how these were read in the Middle Ages,¹⁹⁵ as well as his insightful theological reflection on revelation, resurrection and transformation.¹⁹⁶ Further studies also reflect on the theology of morality, sin and redemption.¹⁹⁷

Before Montemaggi and Treherne's collection of essays, *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry* a "detailed engagement with the *commedia* [did] not often find a place in

¹⁹⁵ Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Dante and the Bible: Intertextual Approaches to the Divine Comedy.' *Italica*, 63/3 (1986), 225–36. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/478622>. Accessed 18 July 2023; Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Biblical Citation in Dante's Divine Comedy.' *Annali d'Italianistica*, 8 (1990), 346–59. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24004267>. Accessed 18 July 2023.

¹⁹⁶ Barbara Nolan, 'The "Vita Nuova": Dante's Book of Revelation.' *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 88 (1970), 51-77. David G. Lummus, 'Dante's Poetics of Transformation, Berkeley Forum Georgetown University, Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affair. Accessed, 18 July 2023.

¹⁹⁷ Wallace W. Marshall, 'Dante and the doctrine of original sin a theological gloss on Purgatorio XVI, 80-105 and Paradiso XXVII,' 121-141. *Dante: Rivista Internazionale Di Studi Su Dante Alighieri*, vol. 3, (2006), 21–40. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26480902>. 23 June 2022; Raymond Angelo Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sins, Moral Philosophy in Hell*. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014)

theological studies ...alongside discussions on the relationship between religion and literature.”¹⁹⁸ Montemaggi and Treherne argue that an understanding of the theology of *The Divine Comedy* ought to be embraced. Their scholarship is dedicated to exploring Dante’s theology as poetry. As Montemaggi states, Dante’s choice of language is theological,¹⁹⁹ however, “theology is not what underlines his narrative poem, nor what is contained within it”,²⁰⁰ it is, like the literal, political, moral and mystical ways of understanding *The Divine Comedy*, “fully integrated with its poetic and narrative texture.”²⁰¹

Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, maps the historical and theological development of Western Christian mysticism, from early Jewish apocalyptic writings to its “founding father”, Augustine. McGinn’s large volume of work is methodical and engaging. While recognising that the concept of mysticism is often misused and something of a post-Enlightenment construct,²⁰² he remedies this by investigating the historical theological elements of the tradition to explore what has been taken to count as the “direct experience of God”.²⁰³ Instead of providing a definition of mysticism, McGinn offers the reader what he understands by the term and discusses it under three headings: mysticism as a part or element of religion;

¹⁹⁸ Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, ‘Introduction: Dante, Poetry, Theology,’ in Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, eds., *Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 1-14, 4.

¹⁹⁹ Vittorio Montemaggi, ‘In Unknowability as Love, The Theology of Dante’s Divine Commedia’, in Montemaggi and Treherne, eds., *Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, 60-94, 60-61.

²⁰⁰ Montemaggi and Treherne, ‘Introduction: Dante, Poetry, Theology,’ 4.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰² “‘Mysticism’ as a noun is a fairly recent creation, the product of early seventeenth-century France, as the researches of Michel de Certeau have shown”. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century: of The Presence of God, Vol 1: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 266-267.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3.

mysticism as a process or way of life; and mysticism as an “attempt to express a direct consciousness of the presence of God.”²⁰⁴ These insights have helped shape my understanding of mysticism in relation to Dante and his *Divine Comedy*.

McGinn accords the word “presence”²⁰⁵ a central role for grasping mysticism.

According to Angela G. Meekins, mystics sought knowledge of God through “direct and personal experience of the divine.”²⁰⁶ She explains that mystical union with God is attained by following a process of steps, which requires the mystic’s intellect and will be directed towards God. Mystical union is a merging with the divine, where the mystic “both becomes more godlike and comes to ‘know’ God.”²⁰⁷ However, the mystic is unable to express the divine vision as language is inadequate and memory is incapable.²⁰⁸ I discuss the beatific vision in relation to Dante further in chapter four, below.

Also in chapter four, I have dedicated a section to ‘the way of contemplation’, in which I will argue for and establish Dante’s own theology, emphasizing Dante’s revolutionary portrayal of Beatrice as a “supreme authority”, “teacher” and also as a woman with an essential function within his poetry. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante undergoes a transformational and mystical journey of purification in order to attain a mystical union with God. What will become clear in this section, is that the Beatrice of *The*

²⁰⁴ Ibid., xv-xvi.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., , xvii.

²⁰⁶ Angela G. Meekins ‘Mysticism’, in Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 634-636; 634.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 634.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 634.

Divine Comedy, is a mystical metamorphosis of the Beatrice from the *Vita Nuova*. She is the mirror of Divine love and consequently serves as Dante's bridge to salvation. By 'theologizing' love, Dante divulges his understanding of mysticism. To support my view, I will engage with the works of John A. Scott, Joan Ferrante, William Franke, Edmund G. Gardner, Teodolinda Barolini, Ernst Kantorowicz, Ulrich Leo, Rik van Nieuwenhove, Brian Davies and Denys Turner.

Denys Turner, *Dante the Theologian*, provided my research with further insights and reflections on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. His book shows one of the many ways in which Dante can be viewed, proving that constant engagement with Dante's work is required. *Dante the Theologian* displays Turner's skilful abilities and scope of knowledge by covering a range of complex topics such as; sin, redemption, truth, conversion, memory and hope. Turner states that the purpose of this book is to bring *The Divine Comedy* to the attention of a readership "whose principle interests are in, or else derive from the Middle Ages."²⁰⁹ Although recognising his concern and his assertion that the book is less theological and is addressed to those with more historical interests in mind, it lacks a thorough analysis and investigation into the inner workings of *The Divine Comedy* as well as an assessment of the material circumstances of Dante's writings. He instead offers the reader a more descriptive insight into Dante's theology. By contrast, this thesis offers a more in-depth examination of *The Divine Comedy* by analysing certain cantos in order to examine Dante's theological and political dimensions, while also taking into consideration Dante's circumstances,

²⁰⁹ Denys Turner, *Dante the Theologian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), xi.

particularly the political and social circumstances which influence his theology and subsequently his *Divine Comedy*.

Turner, discussing the figure of Satan and absolute evil, rather boldly gives the reader this problematic statement;

Satan ... is not to be satisfied with evil actions, howsoever many, not even spectacular world-historical evils on the scale of the Holocaust, for they too fall short of the evil that embodies a fallen angel's malice – they are focused campaigns of evil, too concrete, too particular, they are the targeted strategies that are the best humans can do to in imitation of Satan. Satan is not just a terribly bad person, worse say than Hitler. Bad actions cannot be enough for Satan himself who demands a universal evil as the formal principle of his agency. Possibly the Holocaust is the nearest a particular human will get to a universal evil ... but even the Holocaust stops short of a fallen angel's defiance...[as] we cannot achieve Satan's exalted level of pure evil desire.²¹⁰

This statement is unsettling for many reasons. I realise that Turner is trying to explain how Satan wants “nothing that falls short of absolute evil, an evil that has not only no good consequences ... but is intrinsically and intentionally without them.”²¹¹ However, it can reasonably be argued that the Holocaust was not “possibly” or the “nearest” the human will may get to a universal evil or absolute evil: it is a universal evil and to state otherwise is to be severely misled. It is not too focused of a “campaign,” nor “too particular” and these “targeted strategies” committed by the Nazi party and those affiliated with them, are not just imitations of Satan, they are an example of a perverse sense of rationality, a people devoid of humanity who abandoned the virtuous path to God and committed horrific war crimes that no one living can understand. There is “no good consequence” that came from the Holocaust. As Elie Wiesel might argue, it was and still is, “a universe outside the universe, a creation that exists parallel to creation. Auschwitz lies on the other side of life and on the other side

²¹⁰ Ibid., 95-96.

²¹¹ Ibid., 95.

of death.”²¹² Behind every person who survived the Holocaust, there is a story to be told. However, these stories only give us only a small glimpse into the horrors which actually occurred.²¹³ The Holocaust goes well beyond our understanding and beyond even the imaginative literary images Dante produced. The Holocaust was and continues to be something that is unimaginable and that resists representation or comprehension. No one knows the horrors of the concentration camps, other than those who experienced it, and for those who have experienced it “can never fully reveal it.”²¹⁴ Turner himself “stops short” in his rather unnecessary and “possibly” insensitive observations. Despite this, his book skilfully presents content in an accessible manner and in turn provided my research with new perspectives on the theological dimension of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, particularly in relation to the theologies of Aquinas and Augustine, and the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. His drawing on current and historical authors and scholars orientates the reader in establishing the extent to which Dante ranged, while also placing Dante in the current context and debates. This wider scope has proved to be valuable to my research.

Tedolinda Barolini conversely offers the reader a de-theologised reading of *The Divine Comedy*, which breaks the hermeneutical guidelines that Dante himself stipulated and had integrated into the structural poetic narrative of his poem. She does so in order to

²¹² Elie Wiesel, ‘Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory’, *The New York Times*, 11 June 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html> Accessed 14 August 2023.

²¹³ During the past few decades, it has been suggested that it is nearly impossible, or even inappropriate to represent the Shoah in films or TV shows. Sander L. Gilman, ‘Is Life Beautiful? Can the Shoah be Funny? Some Thoughts on Recent and Older Films’, *Chicago Journals*, 26/2 (2000), 279-308.

²¹⁴ Wiesel, ‘Art and the Holocaust’.

“understand what makes the theology stick”.²¹⁵ She explicitly states that de-theologising is not anti-theological, or a call to abandon theology, but rather a strategy to “go through the looking glass to get behind the author.”²¹⁶ Barolini exposes the textual strategies which Dante uses to create *The Divine Comedy*, in order to construct authority for his own work, which according to Montemaggi and Treherne “are rarely cast in ways that explicitly point to the theological implications of these strategies”.²¹⁷ Barolini defines Contrapasso as “less [of] a theological device,”²¹⁸ than a “narrative stroke of genius”²¹⁹ as its presence “anchors the narrative ... to create a sense of order and confer a persuasiveness on the text”.²²⁰ She discusses how, in Canto 3, Dante takes the opportunity to introduce Contrapasso as “‘textual Contrapasso’, a technique whereby the text inflicts a distinct punishment of its own – with the result that it becomes an instrument of God’s justice in its own right, and the poet has engineered a conflation of the ‘reality’ the text represents with the vehicle that represents it”²²¹ and gives the example of the neutrals as Dante’s “deliberate suppression of information”²²², which will be discussed further in chapter five, below. Barolini’s book is a wealth of knowledge with arguments that often branch off from the original question of tensions between “textuality” and “truth.” She succeeds in bringing the

²¹⁵ Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 17.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹⁷ Montemaggi and Treherne, ‘Introduction: Dante, Poetry, Theology’, 4.

²¹⁸ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, 46.

²¹⁹ Teodolinda Barolini, ‘Why Did Dante Write the Commedia? Or the Vision Thing.’ *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 111 (1993), 1–8; 5. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166465>. Accessed 4 September 2022. I agree here with Barolini, that “Dante’s greatness is in his unsurpassed subtlety in deploying the not-so-simple staples of the narrator’s art” and that he is cunning in his narration. *Ibid.*, 6.

²²⁰ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, 47.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²²² *Ibid.*, 35.

reader through the looking glass. Although acknowledging that her book is de-theologizing to theologize, I feel that is exactly where my critique lies, in the lack of theological examination, especially in relation to Contrapasso. Therefore, in my investigation I focus on how Dante expresses his theology through poetry by exposing his textual strategy Contrapasso, which I deem as also a theological strategy which he employs to critique his current political society. Thus, it is fitting now to discuss the theoretical framework surrounding Contrapasso.

2.4 Contrapasso: Free Will, Choice and Virtuous Pagans

Research on Contrapasso has a long and contested and widely discussed tradition, specifically relating to the role and the literal and/or allegorical meaning of the term. This thesis seeks to add another layer to this debate. Since this thesis proposes that Contrapasso is a vital component which expresses Dante's political theology, what will emerge is that Dante's loyalty to community and to his faith is unwavering and resilient, and this commitment can be seen through the moral law of Contrapasso. Contrapasso, along with Dante's poetic skills and his appeal to imagination, serves the didactic poet's fundamental aim, namely the reformation of society. To support this view and to give a balanced argument, this thesis remains in dialogue with Sayers, Barolini, Ferrante, Jean and Robert Hollander, Lino Pertile, Justin Steinburg, Matthew Pearl, Rachel Jacoff, Raymond Angelo Belliotti and Thomas Peterson.

According to Sayers, the Way of the Soul, is the way of the City, "lived by the individual as well as it can be lived in a world where the City is divided by Church and Empire

impotent or at odds... in the ultimate resort, the Way and the choice are in the human heart.”²²³ In this instance, Heaven and Hell are within the individual. Having chosen Hell, one would live in the sin for eternity; having chosen heaven the sin must be purged or die with Christ in order to embrace and free its will in order to be at one with God. Sayers continues that once this is achieved, the soul can be “crowned and mitred”²²⁴ over itself, thereby able to “freely accept the demands which Church and State rightfully make upon it,”²²⁵ with “Love” at the helm, for “love rightly ordered ... will keep the Law because it wants to keep it, and find its freedom in that service”.²²⁶ This is why the openly corrupt Church and its interactions with stately affairs “puts such stumbling blocks in the way of the soul”.²²⁷ This connection between choice, will and the individual is the essence of Dante’s literary creation Contrapasso.

Contrapasso is Dante’s form of divine justice. Contrapasso reflects the internal character of the sinner and the nature of their sin on earth.²²⁸ Dante creates a link between the living person on earth and their soul once it passes into eternity. The suffering they are about to endure is a “continuation, intensification and definitive fixation of their situation on earth”.²²⁹ Allegorically, Contrapasso is concerned with the moral actions and behaviour of a person during their life on earth,²³⁰ and is one of the sign-posts to guide the reader in understanding *The Divine Comedy*; “The subject is

²²³ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 120.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

²²⁸ Contrapasso allows the reader to understand and grasp the severity of the sin committed by the sinner, while they were alive on earth.

²²⁹ Pertile, ‘Contrapasso’, 220.

²³⁰ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, xiv.

man, liable to the reward or punishment of justice, according as through the freedom of the will he is deserving or undeserving.”²³¹ Dante seems to take a privative approach to evil and echoes the claim of both Augustine and Aquinas that evil is not something in itself, but is rather the absence of good,²³² with goodness necessary for the flourishing of human beings.²³³ Socrates, in Plato’s dialogues, contended that “to do evil is to harm the self by distorting the harmony and balance of the soul”.²³⁴ Consequently, to sin is to distort one’s humanity. When people sin, they turn from their true selves and from the highest good, God.

In Dante’s cosmic-theological creation, we are aware that this eternal state can be in one of three realms. The *Inferno*, where the soul does not accept their wrong-doings, and therefore is punished for its crimes in a fitting manner which correlates to its crimes on earth. *Purgatorio* is different. Here sinners are being redeemed, having repented before death, and therefore their souls are in a transitional position, where they will do penance for their sins on earth and will eventually reach eternal bliss. Finally, in *Paradiso*, we have the “citizen[s] of the eternal life,”²³⁵ Technically there is

²³¹ Alighieri, Letter XI, ‘To Cangrande Della Scala’, 195.

²³² “I answer that, It must be said that every evil in some way has a cause. For evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing. But that anything fail from its natural and due disposition can come only from some cause drawing it out of its proper disposition. For a heavy thing is not moved upwards except by some impelling force; nor does an agent fail in its action except from some impediment. But only good can be a cause; because nothing can be a cause except inasmuch as it is a being, and every being, as such, is good.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2nd, rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920; New Advent, 2008): I, Q.49, Art.1 https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_%5B1%5D,_EN.pdf. Accessed 5 August 2021; James Wetzel, ed., *Augustine’s City of God, A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 185.

²³³ Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae: A guide and commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 115.

²³⁴ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 84.

²³⁵ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 69.

no Contrapasso within heaven, however, the principle of Contrapasso can be applied, since, by God's grace, for having led a virtuous life on earth, the souls are placed in various proximities to God. Thus, Dante's use of Contrapasso allows for a combination of imagination and poetic abilities for didactic purposes "to serve the poem's fundamental aim: the reformation of a society on the brink of eternal ruin".²³⁶ Dante makes this clear within *Purgatorio*;

Therefore, to serve the world that lives so ill,
Keep your eyes upon the chariot and write down
What now you see here once you have gone back.²³⁷

Therefore, in Dante's eyes, the "world is perfectly ordered when Justice reigns supreme,"²³⁸ and, more specifically, when Dante's form of divine justice reigns supreme.

For Dante, every sinner must pay for the sins they have committed on earth – as judged in the light of his religious and political beliefs – regardless of a sinner's earthly status or rank. Dante establishes a universal need to see justice being administered. Sinners in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are punished for their earthly sins, whereas the virtuous rest in salvation in Heaven. Therefore, Dante assumes the role of a mighty judge who decides where each character, all of whom form part of his creation, should reside for eternity. Dante's political and religious beliefs contributed to his choice of who was to be placed in the *Inferno*, and his choices highlight just how influential

²³⁶ Pertile, 'Contrapasso', 220.

²³⁷ *Purg.* 32. 103-105. Teodolinda Barolini states that the simple answer as to why Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* is; "serve the world that lives so ill". Barolini, 'Why Did Dante Write the Commedia?', 1.

²³⁸ Florence Russo, *Dante's search for the Golden Age* (New York: Forum Italicm Publishing, 2011), 101 . "For God knows how to make souls that forsake Him conform to the divine order, and by their justly deserved misery to furnish the lower parts of His creation with the most meet and suitable laws of His wondrous dispensation." St. Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction*, trans., Joseph P. Christopher (Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Press, 1962), 59-60.

religious and political powers were. As mentioned previously, he refers to Contrapasso only once in his *Divine Comedy*. At the end of Canto 28, Dante reveals and defines Contrapasso;

Because I severed persons thus conjoined,
Severed, alas, I carry my own brain
From its starting-point here in my body.
In me you may observe fit punishment.²³⁹

It raises an interesting question: why does Dante wait until Canto 28 to reveal his form of divine justice when it has already been illustrated with great affect throughout the poem? In Canto 28, Bertran de Born tells the reader that his death is due to his wrongdoings on earth and as punishment for interfering he must carry his own brain,²⁴⁰ “just as they split the corporate bodies of Church and state, so their own bodies are now cleaved”.²⁴¹ Guido da Pisa, a Carmelite monk and one of the earliest commentators on *The Divine Comedy*, restricts Contrapasso to Bertran de Born’s punishment “since dividing persons joined through the bonds of friendship or family was by law a capital offence.”²⁴² For Guido, and for Dante’s son Pietro Alighieri, this connection between the sin and the ‘fitting’ punishment of Canto 28, contributed to the literal meaning of the text as it differed from the other punishments in the *Inferno*, which Pietro considered allegorical.²⁴³ Over time, particularly within the nineteenth century,²⁴⁴ Contrapasso has been given a more universal role, where the term has

²³⁹ *Inf.* 28. 139-142.

²⁴⁰ Bertran de Born (1140-1215) was a nobleman from Altaforte in Perigord. “He claimed to have played an important political role in the struggle that turned King Henry II of England against his sons... (he) is punished in the ninth bolgia of Malebolge as a sower of schism for having instigated Prince Henry to rebel against his father”. Michelangelo Picone, ‘Bertran de Born’, trans. Robin Treasure, in Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 100. “I am Bertran de Born, the one who urged the young king on with bad advice. Father and son I set to enmity”. *Inf.* 28. 134-136.

²⁴¹ Steinberg, ‘More than an Eye for an Eye: Dante’s sovereign Justice’, 82.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

been applied to all the punishments within the *Inferno* and subsequently *Purgatorio* in the twentieth century.²⁴⁵ Thus, “Dante’s word ‘Contrapasso’ has privileged status three times over”²⁴⁶, and my thesis is no different. Dante’s delay in introducing Contrapasso is not to “probe the elusive nature of the ‘fittingness’ involved in his poetics of punishments”²⁴⁷ as Justin Steinberg suggests, it is, rather, a deliberate delay to reinforce the “drama of the soul’s choice,”²⁴⁸ which can now be applied retrospectively to the other sinners.

Steinberg notes that *The Divine Comedy* “indicates a symbolic relationship between transgression and punishment”.²⁴⁹ Steinberg, Anthony Cassell,²⁵⁰ Jean and Robert Hollander all correctly observe that Dante developed his idea of Contrapasso out of the Aristotelian concept of *contrapassum*, or reciprocal justice,²⁵¹ which insists “Should a man suffer what he did, right justice would be done”.²⁵² Dante would have been familiar with the medieval translation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*²⁵³ where Aristotle explains that “to go to the judge is to go to justice; for the nature of the judge is to be a sort of animate justice ... the judge restores equality”.²⁵⁴ Aristotle,

²⁴⁵ Victoria Kirkham, ‘Contrapasso: The Long Wait to Inferno 28.’ *MLN*, 127/ 1 (2012), 1–12; 7. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41415839>. Accessed 5 April 2023.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴⁷ Steinberg, ‘More than an Eye for an Eye’, 81–82.

²⁴⁸ Sayers, *Introduction to The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine –Cantica 1: Hell (L’Inferno)*, 11.

²⁴⁹ Steinberg, ‘More than an Eye for an Eye’, 80.

²⁵⁰ Anthony K. Cassell, ‘Dante’s Fearful Art of Justice’, *University of Toronto Press*, (1984). *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt1h1hs5s>. Accessed 13 August 2021.

²⁵¹ Contrapasso, derives from the Latin phrase *Contrapassum*, which was later “refined by Thomas’s (Aquinas) commentary on Aristotle”. Hollander eds., *The Inferno*, 529.

²⁵² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 88.

²⁵³ Steinberg, ‘More than an Eye for an Eye: Dante’s sovereign Justice’, 84. According to Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen, Burnetto Latini’s *Tresor*, was translated into the Italian vernacular and “offered a partial version of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* alongside a collection of moral precepts of both classical and biblical origin to its civic readership”. Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen, ‘Introduction: Justice in the Heart’, in Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen eds., *Ethics, Politics and Justice in Dante* (London: UCL, 2019), 1–14; 4.

²⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 87.

needless to say, did not take into consideration divine justice, only the “counter-suffering”²⁵⁵ of human justice. On the other hand, both Augustine in the *City of God* and Aquinas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, rectify this by considering the human and the divine Monarch, in relation to mortal sins against God and public crimes against the state or Monarch. Both Aquinas and Augustine conclude that “crimes that threaten the very foundation of the secular order must be punished extraordinarily”.²⁵⁶ What distinguishes Dante from his predecessors is that, for him, Contrapasso is a fulfilment of a destiny chosen by an individual through their own free will, it is not only a “form of divine retribution”.²⁵⁷

As with any complicated concept, there are different interpretations of Contrapasso. Jean and Robert Hollander translate “Cosi s’osserva in me lo Contrapasso” as “In me you may observe fit punishment”,²⁵⁸ which is used in the same sense as “the biblical concept of retribution, expressed in the Latin *lex talionis*”.²⁵⁹ According to Lino Pertile, Contrapasso derives from the biblical law of retaliation,²⁶⁰ which required that “anyone who injures a neighbour shall receive the same in return”.²⁶¹ However, as mentioned and established, Pertile acknowledges that the law of Contrapasso is much more complex than just a “counter strike” of divine retribution.²⁶² In line with Pertile and Steinberg, Thomas Peterson states that the idea of Contrapasso “is biblical but

²⁵⁵ Steinberg, ‘More than an Eye for an Eye’, 88.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 89. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, ed., Gillian R. Evans (London: Penguin, 2003), xxi. 11.2.

²⁵⁷ Lino Pertile, ‘Work’, in Zygmunt G. Baranski and Lino Pertile eds., *Dante in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 475-509; 499.

²⁵⁸ Hollander ed., *The Inferno*, 523.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 529.

²⁶⁰ Charles T. Davis, ‘Canto XIX Simoniacs’ in Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross, eds., *Lectura Dantis, Inferno: A Canto by Canto Commentary*, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1998) 262-274; 270. Lino Pertile, ‘Introduction to *Inferno*’, 77.

²⁶¹ ‘Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth’. Leviticus 24:19-20.

²⁶² Pertile, ‘Introduction to *Inferno*’, 78.

derives, along with the entire moral architecture of the *Inferno*, from Aristotle's Nichomachean ethics and Aquinas's commentary on it".²⁶³

Matthew Pearl, on the other hand, disagrees; he states that "Contrapasso differs drastically from the biblical principle of "an eye for an eye".²⁶⁴ Pearl considers that Contrapasso is best described as a "counter strike".²⁶⁵ However, Pertile is more persuasive in arguing that the *Inferno's* function is not to exact divine revenge, but rather to fulfil a destiny which has been chosen by the individual soul throughout their life.²⁶⁶ For this reason, the soul's will and motivation play a vital role in the extreme consequences received in Hell and the sinners are judged accordingly. The weakness of Pearl's argument is that he believes the "punishment must arise from the crime itself, not from the damage it has caused".²⁶⁷ This is an oversimplification of the law of Contrapasso for two main reasons. First, the law of Contrapasso and by extension, God's divine plan as Dante understands it, is more complex than Pearl states. He uses the example of the hypocrites, who are located within the sixth ditch, and states: "Like the gold veneer of the hypocrites' cloaks, this element of sinners' punishment may add little to their ordeal, but for the punishment's observer it adds a level of meaning ... that all preoccupations with money are both futile and ridiculous."²⁶⁸ He fails, however, to mention other cantos in the *Inferno* which have added levels of depth and connotation, for example, in the seventh ditch, with the thieves like Vanni Fucci, a

²⁶³ Davis, 'Canto XIX Simoniacs', 270; Pertile, 'Introduction to *Inferno*', 77-78.

²⁶⁴ Matthew Pearl; 'Dante and the death penalty; How capital punishment fails its audience', *Legal Affairs*, Jan.-Feb. 2003. https://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2003/review_pearl_janfeb2003.msp Accessed 5 August 2021.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Pertile, 'Introduction to *Inferno*', 78.

²⁶⁷ Pearl, 'Dante and the death penalty.'

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

famous member of the black party, is confined to a snake pit. Fucci foretells Dante's upcoming exile from Florence.²⁶⁹ The placement of Fucci emphasises how Dante is not only the judge of his *Inferno*, but that his political and social affiliations had an intrinsic impact on who was placed there.

Second, Dante shows how all the sins committed contributed to social disorder within a community, even those sins that are not explicitly violent.²⁷⁰ Augustine believed that evil is a direct consequence of the misuse of free will and human freedom.²⁷¹ Similarly to Augustine,²⁷² Dante presents his audience with a moral choice between two cities; in Dante's case, either the city of God or the city of Hell. Unlike Augustine, Dante's cities represent humankind's political model and spiritual life on earth.²⁷³ Ferrante observes that both Bonaventure and Aquinas name four objects of love or sin: neighbour, self, body, and, finally, God.²⁷⁴ She notes that Dante adds another object to that list, community.²⁷⁵ Each sin presented by Dante within Hell has socio-political

²⁶⁹ He says that the White Guelfs will be defeated at Pistoria and suffer at the hands of the Black Guelfs, which indicates Dante's upcoming exile from his native city.

²⁷⁰ Pearl states that "the false representations they made while on earth elicit a punishment embodying the sin itself—its deceitful contrast between the external and the internal—rather than an attempt to revisit the effect their sin had on their victims." Pearl, 'Dante and the death penalty'.

²⁷¹ "Evil rather lies in the will, in false loves, in pride and self-worship resulting in disobedience... only the grace of God, prevents all the children of Adam from second death, namely the damnation of the soul" Wetzell, ed., *Augustine's City of God*, 220.

²⁷² "Human society, by metaphor a city, is a city where the good and evil live commingled where one can never securely judge the interior state of any person. More real than this city, however are two underlying cities, one the 'city of this world (or the devil), the annihilating anti-abode of those who are not saved, and the other the city of God, the community of those who are. The kingdom of heaven is the final realisation of the city of God." Russell, *A History of Heaven*, 86.

²⁷³ It is here that we begin to see examples of the amalgamation of philosophy, politics and theology. Dante's realist view on the conception of a good life and the city-state on earth, is similar to Aristotle's. Aristotle's feet were firmly planted "upon the earth in a Greek city-state, as a man among men, lays down the lines of a fruitful and happy life on earth." David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1962), 5. For both Augustine and Aquinas, "crimes that threaten the very foundation of the secular order must be punished extraordinarily". Steinberg, 'More than an Eye for an Eye', 89.

²⁷⁴ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 133.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

overtones; for example, the sin of barratry is located lower than the sin of simony in ditch five, as corruption within the state has a much greater effect on humanity and the community.²⁷⁶ In the final circle, we see Dante amalgamating Roman politics, particularly the Monarchism of Aristotle's government,²⁷⁷ the Emperor or King, with the monotheism of Christian theology.

Harold Andrew Mason considers Contrapasso to be "the perfect image for expressing [the] total reversal of values. Part of its poetic strength lies in the ability to mirror all the facets of the wrong done to Man and God through mistaking or deliberately violating the meaning of spirit".²⁷⁸ As mentioned above, in order to achieve a happy and fulfilled life on earth, each person needs the help of others. In order to live in harmony, a strong and stable government and well-functioning cities are essential.²⁷⁹ To combat the forces of greed and violence, an Empire is needed to promote the peace of the body politic. In the final canto, Dante celebrates Roman Imperialism, whose authority, he claims, came from God. According to Belliotti, senatorial aristocrats believed that Julius Caesar posed a threat to their political entitlements and privileges. It is possible to make a case that Caesar's assassination was morally unjustified and that for example, Brutus' and Cassius' treachery did not help or

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 133.

²⁷⁷ Aristotle proposed that there were three suitable forms of government (for the common interest); Monarchy, Aristocracy and Constitutional Government, which he called 'polity'. Book III, IV, V, IV and VI. Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair, revised by Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

²⁷⁸ Harold Andrew Mason 'A Journey through Hell Dante's 'Inferno' Re-Visited: The Magnificent 'Contrapasso'-Canto XIX.' *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 22/11, (1993), 1–24; 5. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42967198>. Accessed 20 June 2023.

²⁷⁹ Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sins*, 3. "Dante would come to view the wisdom of the leader of a healthy, universal commonwealth as the greatest guide to attaining earthly happiness, in analogy to how the word of God is the supreme guide to attaining eternal bliss in Paradise".

promote the common good for Rome, which was their stated reason for killing Caesar.²⁸⁰ Therefore, Dante's placement of these sinners seems both spiritually and politically justified. The sins of fraud and treachery abuse the divine gifts of reason and free will, according to Dante.²⁸¹ For him, the human ability to reason differentiates human beings from animals, therefore unreasonableness entails abusing a gift from God.²⁸² Dante's anger at those who disturb and abuse the divine and the governing political authority cannot be overestimated.

In Dante's vision, the betrayal of Julius Caesar was a betrayal of the sovereign city of Rome, which he believed was destined to rule the earth in its physical, political and spiritual forms, and which he considered necessary for human fulfilment, happiness and perfection. The establishment of a universal political Monarch was important to Dante;²⁸³ Brutus and Cassius destroyed the political Monarch, while Judas destroyed the spiritual Monarch. For Dante, the presence of a universal Monarchy would prevent the Catholic Church from controlling and interfering inappropriately in political affairs and political quarrels. It would also decrease greed, corruption and the quest for power and dominance. In its present state, however, Dante views the Catholic Church as the main obstacle hindering the growth, unity and peace in the state.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 95, 98, 99; Raymond Angelo Belliotti, *Roman Philosophy and the Good Life* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 143-177. Ferrante states that "hell reveals what society is when all its members act for themselves and not the common good". Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 132.

²⁸¹ Edward Cook, *The Deficient Causes of Moral Evil According to Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Paideia Publishers and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1996), 133.

²⁸² Franke observes that Dante received "vital impulses from Aristotle, leading to the rediscovery and reclaiming of the sensory and sublunary world by human reason." However, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, is an extraordinary example of how "this movement is driven by literary mechanisms". Franke, *Dante and the Secularization of Religion Through Literature*, 4.

²⁸³ "Dante believes peace in the political sphere is rendered impossible, in the absence of a universal Monarch, by the 'gloria d'acquistare' which inevitably taints all human relations". Dante Alighieri, *Four Political Letters*, ed., Claire E. Honess (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007), 19.

An example which proves the complexity of Contrapasso and demonstrates what Dante considers God's plan is *Purgatorio* Canto 1 and the character of Cato (95-46 BC).²⁸⁴ Cato is the guardian watching the entrance to Ante-Purgatory.²⁸⁵ Cato was a pagan, a sinful condition which would have him committed to limbo, as well as a suicide, another sin which would have him condemned to the seventh circle of the *Inferno*; and, moreover, he had opposed Julius Caesar in the civil war, a sin for which Brutus and Cassius were condemned to the lowest circle in Hell with Satan. It begs a question concerning theological inconsistency: why is a pagan suicide who fought for the Republic, now found among the saved in *Purgatorio*? Especially since Dante considered suicide a sin against nature and was an advocate for a universal Empire. The answer is twofold; for reasons of principles and loyalty.

Dante makes important distinctions between Cato, Brutus and Cassius. Ferrante points out that Brutus and Cassius were given positions of high office by Caesar within his Empire, who had "befriended them."²⁸⁶ Even though their allegiance should have been

²⁸⁴ Cato was an exemplary Roman military leader and statesman. Although he is never mentioned by name, "emerging details make his identity unmistakable." Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 18.

Dante describes him as an: "old man ... his beard was long and streaked with white, as was his hair, which fell in double strands down to his chest". *Purg.* 31-36. Cato's appearance, was a result of being "sickened with sadness by the Caesar-inspired civil war in Rome." While he was only in his forties when he fought against Caesar, he "let his hair and beard grow untrimmed as a sign of grief" and Dante "chooses to emphasize his age." Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 19. Kenneth C.M. Sills, believes that Cato was about forty-eight when he committed suicide, "in the prime of his life". He makes the observation that "in medieval literature guides and guardians are often older men. Moreover, when a person rises to a place of any significance, it is the usual popular and literary tradition to advance him in age". Kenneth C. M. Sills. 'Another Word on Dante's Cato.' *Modern Language Notes*, 20/6 (1905), 162-64. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2918063>. Accessed 17 September 2022.

²⁸⁵ *Purg.* 14. 40-48.

²⁸⁶ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 194.

to Caesar and the Empire, they “changed sides”²⁸⁷ and murdered Caesar, thereby earning their place in hell amongst the treacherous. Cato was considered an enemy of the Roman state because he fought against Caesar during the civil war; Cato, however, remained true to his principles, earning his place in Purgatory. He had been the leader of the resistance to Caesar, and was initially successful in his campaign, but he was defeated at Thapsus, and rather than surrender to Caesar, committed suicide.²⁸⁸ Cato “sacrificed his life, if suicidally, for political freedom”²⁸⁹ and moral virtue. Kantorowicz points to the resurgence of the ideal of “pro patria mori”, in the late thirteenth century.²⁹⁰ This emphasis on dying for one’s country means that “man is bound to love his patria more than himself.”²⁹¹ Therefore, Dante’s Cato represents a virtuous citizen who lived not for himself, but for his country and fellow citizens.

The complexities and possible contradictions proceed within *Paradiso* with the presence of Trajan and Rhipeus.²⁹² Trajan was a Roman Emperor (98-117 CE) and was dubbed “by the Senate as Rome’s best ruler”.²⁹³ His salvation was a medieval legend.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 194.

²⁸⁸ Apparently “after reading Plato’s *Phaedo* on the death of Socrates.” Ronald L. Martinez, ‘Cato of Utica’ in Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 146-149; 146.

²⁸⁹ Which in that case was almost identical with philosophic-intellectual freedom.” Dante considered Cato “the truest embodiment of all four civic virtues.” The rays of those four stars, adorned his face with so much light he seemed to shine with brightness of the sun. *Purg.* 1. 37-39.

Martinez states that Dante “drew from Roman imperial writers fascinated by Cato as a symbol of the political freedom and moral virtue lost with the passing of the republic” Martinez, ‘Cato of Utica’, 146. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 470.

²⁹⁰ “To what extent actually a hero’s death pro patria was religiously defended and defined may be gathered from the philosophers of the late thirteenth century, an age steeped in Aristotelian and often Averroistic modes of thought.” Remigio de’ Girolami, one of Dante’s possible teachers, taught that “the patria, the city community, takes precedence over both family and individual.” Ernst Kantorowicz ‘Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought’, *The American Historical Review*, 56/3, (1951), 472–92; 488-489. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1848433>. Accessed 15 September 2022.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 489.

²⁹² *Par.* 20. 44-45 and *Par.* 20. 68.

²⁹³ Barry Strauss, *Ten Caesars: Roman Emperors from Augustus to Constantine* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019) 172.

According to Dante in *Par.* 20 106-117, Trajan was brought back to life by Gregory's prayers in order to believe in Christ and be baptised before dying a second time, only this time to be received in Heaven;²⁹⁴

the living hope that furnished power to the prayers
Addressed to God to raise him from the dead
So that his will might find its moving force...

...and believing, was kindled to such fire
Of the one true love that, on his second death,
He was deemed worthy to enjoy our happiness.²⁹⁵

Conversely, Rhipeus is a Trojan character in Virgil's *Aeneid*, who is neither King nor Emperor. He plays a very small role, but is described by Virgil as being "the most righteous, the greatest lover of justice."²⁹⁶ Dante takes great liberty in the salvation story of Rhipeus as he is not mentioned in a Christian context.²⁹⁷ Unlike Trajan, Rhipeus "through grace"²⁹⁸ earned a place in heaven while he was still alive as grace caused him to love justice;

Through grace, which wells up
From a source so deep there never was a creature
Who could thrust his vision to its primal spring,

'set all his love on righteousness
And for that reason, from grace to grace,
God opened his eyes to our redemption yet to come,

'so that he believed and, from that time on,
Endured no longer paganism's stench
But rebuked the wayward peoples for it.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴ Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 561. Jennifer Petrie, 'Dante and the Classical Tradition', in Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 252-255; 255; Teodolinda Barolini, 'Baptism in Troy.' *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante. (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2014). <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-20/> Accessed 27 April 2023.

²⁹⁵ *Par.* 20. 109-117.

²⁹⁶ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 37

²⁹⁷ Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 557.

²⁹⁸ *Par.* 20. 118.

²⁹⁹ *Par.* 20. 118-126.

What they appear to have in common is that they both exemplify the Roman civic virtue of justice and this could be the element which allows us to gain an insight into Dante's theology of salvation for pagans.³⁰⁰ This indicates that Dante does not adhere to a "narrow version of Christianity"³⁰¹ as there is no straightforward or predictable formula when it comes to the concrete operation of Contrapasso. The salvation of Rhipheus and Trajan raises an important question, why was Virgil not saved? Virgil's impact on Dante cannot be overestimated. His choosing of a pagan as his guide "is something of a scandal"³⁰² in this Christian poem. However, we in turn gain an insight into Dante the man, who within his own life, leaned on Virgil's works for support. By using Virgil as his guide, Dante is able to connect his own work with the rich cultural and political legacy of Rome, while also positioning himself as a worthy successor to the poetic tradition to which Virgil belonged. So why was he not saved? Simply put, Dante makes this known in Canto 20 of *Paradiso*, that we do not know God's intentions, but can only "believe these things because I say them."³⁰³ Perhaps Dante's idea of God's plan for humanity is essentially a mystery for him to know, and for us to interpret. Cornish's opinion is a welcome addition to the debate surrounding his damnation; that Dante chose not to save Virgil "because of his fundamental

³⁰⁰ The salvation of pagans was an issue which theologians "sought to resolve: that a person can be entirely good (in natural terms) and yet be damned. The doctrinal barrier to the salvation of just pagans was that they lacked faith: as St. Paul says (Hebrews xi,6), 'without faith it is impossible to please God'". John. Marenbon, 'Virtuous Pagans, Hopeless Desire and Unjust Justice.' *Vertical Readings in Dante's Comedy: Volume 1*, George Corbett and Heather Webb, eds., 1st ed., Open Book Publishers, (2015), 77–96; 82, 85. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt17w8gx0.11>. Accessed 26 June 2023.

³⁰¹ Brenda Deen Schildgen, 'Dante's Utopian Political Vision, the Roman Empire, and the Salvation of Pagans.' *Annali d'Italianistica*, vol. 19, (2001), 51–69; 58. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24008625>. Accessed 27 April 2023.

³⁰² Robert Hollander, 'Virgil', in Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 862–865; 863.

³⁰³ *Par.* 20. 88.

conviction, similar to our own, that modernity is right while antiquity had it wrong. Just as we have outgrown the medieval worldview, so too Virgil is coralled with the ‘innocents,’ those who did not know better”.³⁰⁴ Curiously however, we get a glimpse at just how close Virgil was to eternal bliss in *Purgatorio* 21, with Statius’s salvation.

In sum, imagination plays a central role in the development, not only of Dante’s cosmological vision, but of the way in which he expresses and develops his theology and socio-political critique in the form of Contrapasso. Dante uses Contrapasso to weave in an allegorical understanding of his *Divine Comedy*. The allegorical significance is concerned with the behaviour of people on earth, “according as by good or ill deserving in the exercise of his free will he becomes liable to punishing or rewarding justice”.³⁰⁵ From the use of Contrapasso, the reader sees how *The Divine Comedy* is relaying Dante’s own understanding of the current circumstances of society. By showing how Dante’s distinctive form of Divine Justice takes concrete form as Contrapasso, we reveal an important element about Dante’s expressive and imaginative abilities.³⁰⁶ Human flourishing, the pursuit of the common good of the community and personal happiness are key issues for Dante.³⁰⁷ Dante introduces the readers of *The Divine Comedy* to the ways in which one can attain a ‘perfect state’, by adhering to one’s own moral code, which was almost always motivated by Christian

³⁰⁴ Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 2.

³⁰⁵ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, xiv.

³⁰⁶ One of them being the connection between discourse about God and contemporary society, specifically the implications of human actions on earth. It “is an allegory about that choice ... the whole poem is one gigantic composite image in which this drama of the threshold is presented to us by means of a series of word-pictures, which, locking together, make up the pattern of the soul’s choice.” “Allegory is a literary form ... in the fourteenth century it was so natural for writers to cast their ideas into this kind of pictorial shape that allegory was the ‘dominant form’ ... an allegory is a dramatized metaphor”. Ibid., 4-5.

³⁰⁷ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 76, 77.

moral teaching. Therefore, as we have seen from above, Pearl is mistaken in his statement. The punishment does indeed arise from the crime itself; however, it also arises from the damage it has caused specifically to the community. The *Inferno* displays to us the moral obstacles which hinder us from achieving a perfect state and living a moral life, namely a corrupt Papacy, and the succumbing to the temptations of wealth, power and greed. In *Purgatorio* we see the remedies to counter those traits and in *Paradiso* we see a framework to strive towards.

2.5 Political Theology: Historical and Contemporary

Political theology is a complex, diverse, controversial and ever expanding discipline. In a general sense, all theology presupposes, reflects and engages its political context, and therefore – in that sense – all theology is political theology, but the label is also reserved particularly for writers who explicitly address their political context. There are many views on political theology and on religion's involvement in political life. Here I list three. First there is a view that politics and theology are two distinct and separate activities,³⁰⁸ “one to do with public authority, and the other to do in the first place with religious experience and the semi-private associations of religious believers.”³⁰⁹ Second, it may be held that politics always already has theology embedded within it, and that therefore politics and theology are similar activities. “Both are constituted in the production of metaphysical images around which communities are organised... particular forms of organizations are implicit in doctrine

³⁰⁸ Kristen Deede Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 201.

³⁰⁹ Scott and Cavanaugh, ‘Introduction’, 4.

of, for example, Trinity...and eschatology.”³¹⁰ In this instance, in order to engage well with political theology, it is necessary to consider all the sub-genres within theology, such as eschatology, biblical theology, soteriology, trinitarian theology, etc. Third, theology may be viewed as a critical reflection on the political,³¹¹ where the “task of political theology might then be to expose the ways in which theological discourse reproduces inequalities of class, gender, or race, and to reconstruct theology so that it serves the cause of justice”.³¹² The latter is the view adopted within this thesis so as to acknowledge its resonance with the vision of Dante: in his *Divine Comedy*, Dante shows how theology – rightly understood – reinforces God’s justice and challenges unjust political arrangements. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* clearly relates discourse about God to his social vision and critique and, as Sayers puts it, “the drama of the soul’s choice”³¹³, thus emphasizing how *The Divine Comedy*, moves beyond theological allegory and serves as a prophecy or warning to his generation.³¹⁴

For the purpose of this thesis, political theology is constructed as Christian political theology. Theology³¹⁵ is the study of religious beliefs, the nature of God and our experience with God or in the words of Anselm, “*Fides quaerens intellectum*”, faith

³¹⁰ Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 3; Scott and Cavanaugh, ‘Introduction,’ 4; Hovey and Phillips, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, xii.

³¹¹ Phillips, *Political Theology*, 3.

³¹² Scott and Cavanaugh, ‘Introduction,’ 4.

³¹³ Sayers, *Introduction to The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine –Cantica 1: Hell (L’inferno)*, 11.

³¹⁴ According to Joseph A. Mazzeo “Dante had intended that his poem would contribute not only to his own salvation but that of his readers.” Joseph A. Mazzeo, ‘Medieval Hermeneutics: Dante’s Poetic and Historicity’, in *Religion & Literature*, The University of Notre Dame, 17/1, (1985), 1–24.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059261>. Accessed 30 of September 2021.

³¹⁵ “Medieval theologians were desirous for God. Their whole thinking reached out towards the divine” Rik van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

seeking understanding of itself.³¹⁶ The political, or *polis*, means city or the common life within the city where political communities engage with one another.³¹⁷ Politics expresses, either implicitly or explicitly, a vision of an ideal form of society; and every form of politics represents a vision for and of that society. Thus, political theology could be described as how God interacts with the world and how communities relate and co-operate with each other in respect of this relationship. It is an investigation into the connection between theology and politics, and into how theological concepts relate to the political. The question arises of how do these two distinct disciplines of thought and action become intertwined. Despite seeming at times to be mutually contradictory disciplines, theological motivations repeatedly appear within the political and social spheres, hence, political theology is not only an academic discipline. Political opinions, motivations, thoughts and actions will inevitably be shaped by religious convictions about what is morally correct and what is good.³¹⁸ Therefore, there is a wider connection to one's history, one's political beliefs, one's faith and one's tradition. "We all live within a political order and under some form of political authority."³¹⁹ Thus, political theology is unavoidable.³²⁰ This study, presupposes a more general account of political theology as a constant concern of Christian theological reflection and action,³²¹ rather than the specific and relatively recent tradition of 'political theology' that emerged in continental Europe during the

³¹⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 2.

³¹⁷ "Broadly understood as the use of structural power to organize a society or community". Scott and Cavanaugh, 'Introduction', 3.

³¹⁸ Phillips, *Political Theology*, 2.

³¹⁹ Jonathan Cole, *Christian Political Theology in an Age of Discontent: Mediating Scripture, Doctrine and Political Reality* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2019), xxiv.

³²⁰ Phillips, *Political Theology*, 2.

³²¹ In a sense, "There has been Christian political theology as long as there has been Christianity", Scott and Cavanaugh, 'Introduction', 4.

1960s.³²² This route was chosen in order to create a foundation for further studies into Dante Alighieri as a political theologian.

Dante's treatment of the social, theological and the political arenas of experience, and the role they play in his construction of *The Divine Comedy*, provide the constitutive elements of that which is recognised as political theology today.³²³ Similar to the vast literature on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, political theology is also inter-disciplinary, amalgamating the humanities, religious traditions, contemporary theory and philosophy, politics and secular ideas and practices. While the bibliography on Dante's political thought is vast and widely established, the following key authors have helped shaped this research; Joan Ferrante, John Joseph Rolbiecki, Hans Kelsen, Claire Honess, Brenda Deen Schildgen and Tristan Kay. The seminal works of two theologically opposing approaches to theology; Augustine, who views political society as fallen and sin as the cause of conflict, even within ourselves and Aquinas, the Aristotelian, who emphasises the good nature of political society and how this is necessary for human flourishing, were important works in establishing Christian

³²² The term political theology was coined by Carl Schmitt, a German political theorist. Carl Schmitt was born in Plettenberg, Germany on July 11th in 1888. He was one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century and a "committed Nazi and lifelong anti-Semite". He was a conservative constitutional lawyer "with a deep interest in matters of politics and culture, he wrote thought-provoking commentary on the human condition that was revered by some and reviled by others....Schmitt left a mark on four different incarnations of his native Germany: the absolutist regime that was Wilhelmine Germany, the failed republic of Weimar Germany, the authoritarian and totalitarian Nazi Germany, and the consolidated democracy of the Federal Republic of Germany". Schmitt died in Plettenberg on 7 April 1985. Jens Meierhenrich and Oliver Simons, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), XIX- 4. Johannes Baptist Metz revived "the term in the 1960s" and rescued "it from the bad odour in which the jurist Schmitt had enveloped it". Scott and Cavanaugh, 'Introduction', 5.

³²³ Here I agree with Jonathan Cole, that political theology is unavoidable in these current times. "For we all live within a political order and under some form of political authority." Jonathan Cole, *Christian Political Theology in an Age of Discontent: Mediating Scripture, Doctrine and Political Reality* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2019), xxiv. For Victoria Khan, political theology "is the problem that early modern constitutionalist theories of the state were originally designed to address and that modern liberal societies continue to confront today." Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies: Representations*, 106/1, 2009, 77–101; 77. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2009.106.1.77>. Accessed 20 July 2022

political theology, and also Dante's political theology as he was influenced by both their theologies. Since their work does not explicitly address or answer questions surrounding political theology, their works will be referred to when the circumstances arise throughout this thesis. In relation to medieval political theology, Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*, has been a major source for this thesis. His work, albeit dense, traces the natural and spiritual body of the 'king'. Kantorowicz's objective was to show how Dante visualised the nature and importance of a purely human organisation co-existing externally yet alongside the Church and with a separate justification and goal, thereby emphasising their duality of goals and how it "does not necessarily imply conflict of loyalties or even antithesis".³²⁴ Since this thesis presupposes political theology as constant concern of Christianity both Tsoncho Tsonchev's essay, *What is Christian Politics?* and David VanDrunen's *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World*, have helped contextualise the biblical understanding of Christian politics and the role which authority should play in the promotion of justice for the common good. VanDrunen's work, particularly his theological vision, which identifies four characteristics of political institutions all of which are grounded in scripture; *legitimate* but *provisional*, *common* but *accountable*, shaped my foundational understanding of the long history of Christian political-theological reflection and in turn sharpened my understanding of Dante's political theology within this context.

³²⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 464. Augustine, "emphasized that 'there is no division between earthly goods and heavenly goods, secular and sacred'. Both cities make use of the same goods, but for different purposes with different orientations". Elizabeth Phillips, 'Eschatology and Apocalyptic', in Hovey and Phillips, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, 274-293; 278.

2.5.1 Dante's Medieval Political Theology: Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*

By far the most notable contribution to our understanding of Dante's political theology is Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*,³²⁵ specifically his chapter on 'Man Centered Kingship: Dante'. Kantorowicz is considered one of the twentieth century's most important historians and his book on medieval political theology is the predominant text within the field. "Kantorowicz develops a new model that doesn't deny the theological origin of secularism... [and] there is no irrevocably secular location that protects us from theology."³²⁶ His ground-breaking work uses Dante as a literary resource to reimagine the relationship between theology and politics. Victoria Khan believes that he is able to accomplish this by considering theology as an already representational fiction, thereby allowing for the reconceiving of the relationship between the two.³²⁷ In my research, his work has contributed in the following main areas: the distinction between person and office and ecclesiastical and political powers; the standard of 'man'; Dante's secular religion of humanity; and Dante's "coronation."³²⁸ Additionally Kantorowicz's chapter gave this thesis a historical

³²⁵ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies, A Study In Medieval Political Theology* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

³²⁶ Kahn, 'Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies*,' 94.

³²⁷ By fiction, Khan means "literature, though the term is somewhat anachronistic when applied to medieval and Renaissance texts ... Kantorowicz ... links the idea of a legal fiction to literary fiction, when he frames the argument of *The King's Two Bodies* with ... Dante's *Divine Comedy* ...[which] articulates what the George circle saw as Dante's secular religion of humanity and his vision of a world community". Ibid., 79, 94.

³²⁸ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 491.

perspective on modern ideas in political theology and shed new light on what can be considered political theology, namely literary fiction.

Kantorowicz emphasises Dante's distinctive separation of person and office.³²⁹ This is an important distinction as it shows the reader that it is not the institution itself that is causing the greed and corruption, it is an individual Pope himself, and that therefore respect and dignity for the office is still intact. In a similar manner, Kantorowicz also draws on Dante's argument for the separation of the Catholic Church and the governing political authorities. As mentioned, in his *De Monarchia*, Dante argues that the Emperor derived his power directly from God and not through the pope "as the ultimate source of imperial power".³³⁰ Kantorowicz highlights Dante's 'dualist' position, which argued against his current canonists and political figures.³³¹ He notes that, at the time, there was a general agreement that Emperors would often rely on the Church for religious and sacramental matters, but also, at times, in temporal matters.³³² However Dante, "while on the whole accepting the teaching of the dualists, carried those doctrines to ends which their authors have never dreamt."³³³ Dante, for Kantorowicz, in order to prove that the universal Monarch would be free from papal jurisdiction built up a terrestrial paradise, independent not only of the

³²⁹ Hans Kelsen also emphasises this distinction. "We have repeatedly seen it in the systematic presentation of his doctrine and it is clearly deduced from his aspirations to free the state from the medieval guardianship of the Church, and coordinate it with it, as of equal magnitude". Hans Kelsen, *Lo Stato in Dante, Una Teologia Politica Per L'impero* (Vienna: Mimesis, 2017), 196.

³³⁰ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 456.

³³¹ Ibid., 456: "Their [the dualists] most prominent spokesman had been, in the twelfth century, Higuccio of Pisa, and what they stood for was, in face, the old Gelasian formula of mutual independence of Pope and emperor."

³³² Ibid., 456-457.

³³³ Ibid., 57.

pope, but also “virtually... the Christian religion,”³³⁴ and hence proved that man consists of both a “corruptible body”³³⁵ and an “incorruptible soul”.³³⁶ As a result, the Emperor and pope were given two separate and independent functions in order to guide humankind to their moral-ethical and ecclesiastical-spiritual goals, where their foundations lay in Christ and human law respectively,³³⁷ however both derive from and refer to God, hence excluding, “with regard to either office, the possibility of a human intermediary”.³³⁸ The authority of both pope and Emperor would be held to the standard of humanity. This form of authority will be discussed further below.

For Kantorowicz, Dante separates human from Christian. To be a Christian is not a “criterion for being a member of the human community of this world.”³³⁹ Kantorowicz stresses that Dante “did not turn *humanitas* against *Christianitas*, but thoroughly separated the one from the other; he took the ‘human’ out of the Christian compound and isolated it as a value in its own right – perhaps Dante’s most original accomplishment in the field of political theology.”³⁴⁰ Kantorowicz “also provided a new model of the sovereign subject”³⁴¹ in *Purgatorio* 27, where he “points to the role of literature in creating the notion of the sovereign subject and restoring the dignity of man”.³⁴² Kantorowicz rather ambitiously claims that this “coronation”³⁴³ was an

³³⁴ Ibid., 457.

³³⁵ Ibid., 457.

³³⁶ Ibid., 457.

³³⁷ Ibid., 463.

³³⁸ Ibid., 458.

³³⁹ Ibid., 465.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 465.

³⁴¹ Kahn, ‘Political Theology and Fiction in *The King’s Two Bodies*,’ 92.

³⁴² Ibid., 92.

³⁴³ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 491.

“intellectual and moral baptism by transference,”³⁴⁴ with Virgil as the Baptist. I

disagree with this depiction of Virgil’s crowning of Dante and will discuss this further in chapter five, below.

2.5.2 Biblical Grounding: Civil Institutions, Authority and Justice

The ideas which VanDrunen believes are crucial in understanding the foundations of political theology are: “God has ordained civil government – as the ruling authority of political communities – to be *legitimate*, but *provisional*, and to be *common*, but *accountable*”.³⁴⁵ To begin, VanDrunen distinguishes between the terms political and governmental. Political “is a broader term ... from a Christian theological perspective, civil government is only one of many distinct but related institutions that God has ordained to promote a degree of justice, peace, and prosperity in the common human life”.³⁴⁶ Therefore, Christian politics differs from contemporary politics in theory and practice. As a result it can be deemed “unconventional.”³⁴⁷ He shows how several texts within the New Testament speak explicitly of civil government and how they have affirmed Christian thinking about legitimate political authority, including 1 Peter 2, and 1 Timothy 2. In Acts, this is done implicitly, through the accounts of the early Church where Paul engaged in confrontation with the leaders of his era, however, he never challenged their laws or office and affirms their legitimacy in Romans 13;

Everyone is to obey the governing authorities, because there is no authority except from God, and the existing authorities have been ordained by God. So anyone who

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 492.

³⁴⁵ David VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Michigan: Harper Collins, 2010), 25.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 17.

³⁴⁷ Tsoncho Tsonchev, ‘What is Christian Politics?’ in, *The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Nibuhr: Essays in Political Theology and Christian Realism* (Montreal: The Montreal Review E-Publishing, 2018), 137.

disobeys authority is resisting God's ordinance, and those who resist draw punishment on themselves... for a ruler is God's servant to you for your good... the authorities are all serving God as his agents, engaged upon the same task.³⁴⁸

In the Old Testament, legitimacy is evident in relation to covenants made with the leaders of the Gentiles, where political treaties were made, "these political covenants are solemn oaths that establish mutual recognition and responsibilities,"³⁴⁹ for example Genesis 21:22-32, 26:26-31 and 1 Kings 10:1-13. This mutual recognition and legitimization can also be seen in the New Testament in Matthew 22:21, where Jesus states, "pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and God what belongs to God".³⁵⁰

Civil government is, however, provisional. While the civil government is described as providing a good, it does not provide things eternal. The main takeaway from VanDrunen's discussion of legitimacy and of how civil government is provisional, is his assertion that God commissions magistrates to promote justice, which as explained previously is one of Dante's most valued Roman civic virtues. Authority, "is the power that serves the common good... authority has no other goal but to promote justice. Authority is authority as an act of justice".³⁵¹ However, VanDrunen also points out that these magistrates are among the "grandest perpetrators of evil... civil governments in a fallen world are intractable sinful institutions... the power of the sword that enables them to keep some evil at bay, also enables them to do evil on a more vicious scale than private parties."³⁵² Romans 13, quoted above, also addresses VanDrunen's

³⁴⁸ Romans 13. 1-7.

³⁴⁹ VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom*, 28.

³⁵⁰ Matthew. 22:21.

³⁵¹ Tsonchev, 'What is Christian Politics?', 138.

³⁵² Genesis 6:1-4, 6:5-8, 6: 11-13, Luke 4:6.

common, but *accountable* characteristic, where he states that God established these civil institutions for the good of humanity under God's law and God's authority, but affirms that civil governments are morally accountable. Authority without justice is autocracy. "Autocracy is not authority because it does not care for the common good".³⁵³ Within his *Divine Comedy* Dante demonstrates exactly these points; the good which can come from a well-functioning society, where the maintenance of peace is maintained by the virtuous action of justice and also the damage it can cause when civil society is malfunctioning with corrupt leaders at the helm.

2.5.3 Dante's Medieval Political Theology: The Reform Orientated Poet

Dante's political thought is grounded in theology. In *The Divine Comedy*, "Dante's theology is not what underlies his narrative poem, nor what is contained within it: it is instead fully integrated with its poetic and narrative texture."³⁵⁴ Dante, obviously, existed before the "political theological" disciplinary label emerged. In the medieval era,³⁵⁵ politics and religion were intertwined, therefore, many would not question or understand why politics should be separated from the theological or vice versa. "Even though many have written about theology since this label was established, they tend to think or understand their work primarily in terms of doctrinal or systematic

³⁵³ Tsonchev, 'What is Christian Politics?', 138.

³⁵⁴ Montemaggi and Treherne, 'Introduction: Dante, Poetry, Theology', 4.

³⁵⁵ 'Medieval' or 'Middle Ages', are the terms used to describe a period of transition from antiquity to the modern period. The 'Medieval' or 'Middle Ages', are said to have begun with the fall of the Roman Empire in the year 476 and ended with the beginning of the Renaissance in the 14th century. The Middle Ages, gives historians and readers of history an insight into the Renaissance that followed, especially with relation to the rise of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church within the Medieval Ages became a uniting force after the fall of the Roman Empire. As a result, Monarchs and Emperors, became allies with the Catholic Church.

³⁵⁵ This thesis is approaching his work from a certain stand point (the 21st century looking back) therefore caution will need to be taken.

theology, or in terms of one of the disciplines writers might describe as parallel discourses to political theology such as ethics or moral theology.”³⁵⁶ However, this thesis accepts that within the medieval era, political theology is consistently present and unavoidable, especially in relation to Dante.

This thesis views Dante’s medieval political theology as his analysis and criticism of the governing political authorities and ecclesiastical organisations. Dante’s treatment of the social, theological and the political arenas of experience, and the role they play in his construction of *The Divine Comedy* provide constitutive elements of that which is deemed political theology today. In his *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, Dante looks beyond these ordinary surroundings of a corrupt world and into an ideal world.

Politically and literarily, Dante strove to envision and establish justice and his attempt to return to the evangelical roots of Christianity is evident. Dante uses theology as a critical reflection on the political, through the medium of poetry. He displays to his readers the ways in which theology reinforces God’s justice and he challenges unjust political arrangements.³⁵⁷ Throughout this thesis, what will be revealed is how *The Divine Comedy* reveals the truth of the situation in Florence in the medieval period and gives its readers an ideal framework to work towards. Therefore, the political theological message throughout this work, is that of reform and Dante reveals this through his use of Contrapasso.

³⁵⁶ Phillips, *Political Theology*, 5.

³⁵⁷ This accounts for his willingness to condemn the soul of Pope Boniface VIII to the *Inferno* in Canto 19, which will be discussed in detail below.

2.5.4 A Political Theological Matter: Dante's Utopian Political Vision as a Remedy to Counter Corruption

Joan Ferrante rightly observes that the “political propaganda of *The Divine Comedy* is an aspect which is often ignored by modern critics and readers.”³⁵⁸ The relationship between the governing political authorities and the ecclesiastical organisations is a vital theme in the political theology of Dante Alighieri. Dante the poet shows the reader not only the sinfulness of the present world, “but also identif[ies] the cause of the disarray.”³⁵⁹ Hence Dante the didactic poet makes the world of *The Divine Comedy* his own social and political responsibility. Ferrante's ambitious work, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*,³⁶⁰ has contributed in two main ways; the representational formatting of Dante's afterlife and through the shortcomings of her own work. Regarding the representational formatting of Dante's afterlife, Ferrante and Sayers politically and socially classified *Inferno* as a “corrupt society,”³⁶¹ *Purgatorio* as a society in transition, “engaged in purging off that corruption and returning to the ideal constitution,”³⁶² and *Paradiso* as the ideal “model”³⁶³ society, demonstrating the “ideal constitution in working order”.³⁶⁴ This study has adapted and expanded this interpretation for the purpose of demonstrating Dante's political theological message of reform for the Catholic Church. Ferrante stresses the importance of politics as a vital theme within *The Divine Comedy*. Ferrante's singular

³⁵⁸ Joan M. Ferrante, ‘Hell as the Mirror image of Paradise’ in Mark Musa, ed., *Dante's Inferno, The Indiana critical edition* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 353-367.

³⁵⁹ Russo, *Dante's search for the Golden Age*, 93.

³⁶⁰ Joan Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

³⁶¹ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of The Divine Comedy*, 132. Dorothy Sayers *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 112.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁶³ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of The Divine Comedy*, 253.

³⁶⁴ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 112.

thematic approach is pre-occupied with a political application and was without a doubt a difficult undertaking, but she successfully demonstrated what she set out to achieve. However, a singular view can often lead to inaccuracies. For example, she states that, “In the *Comedy*... the pope is called ‘father’ only sarcastically, as when Dante calls the recipient of Constantine’s gift ‘the first rich father.’”³⁶⁵ Yet, this statement is untrue; Dante addresses St. Peter, as “father” in *Paradiso* 24. 62. However, she avoids, probably deliberately, Dante’s obvious association with his Christian theological beliefs which had a major impact on his political beliefs and therefore his *Divine Comedy*. To conduct a singular view in a purely theological context, one would meet similar challenges since Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is multifaceted and no one meaning, can explain the entire meaning of the whole. However, when re-reading *The Divine Comedy*, after Ferrante’s enlightening political examination, and equipped with the theological and political interpretative tools, a theme of reform emerged, which merited further examination.

This thesis adapts Claire Honess’ observations that there are two underlying principles of Dante’s political philosophy; an Aristotelian idea that humans are social and political animals who naturally live together; and an Augustinian notion that fallen humanity is characterized by a desire for wealth, power and dominance”.³⁶⁶ As mentioned above, for Dante, the presence of a universal Empire would prevent the Catholic Church from interfering inappropriately in political affairs, accumulating a vast amount of wealth and corrupting a flock that is in need of guidance. Therefore, the establishment of a

³⁶⁵ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of The Divine Comedy*, 111.

³⁶⁶ Claire Honess, ‘Politics’, in Zygmunt G. Baranski and Simon Gilson eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante’s Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 192-207, 194.

universal political Monarch was important to him. John Joseph Rolbiecki argues that Dante was not in favour of an “absolute”³⁶⁷ Monarchy, as John T. Slattery³⁶⁸ and Karl Federn³⁶⁹ believe, “but rather a unity of government”³⁷⁰ as unity is the “objective for the entire human race”.³⁷¹ Rolbiecki and Kay state that Dante teaches the reader of *The Divine Comedy* that there should be a universal Empire, that will better secure the peace for warring states, political factionalism and “the present contamination of the Church’s divine purpose.”³⁷² For Kay, it is only when the Church withdraws from temporal affairs, and there is a restoration of a universal Empire, will “humans once again enjoy the conditions in which they may be guided both to worldly peace and spiritual redemption”.³⁷³ Kelsen highlights Dante’s primary objective, which is peace. Rolbiecki also believes that this is Dante’s resolution to permanent peace and quotes Dante’s last lines in book one of *De Monarchia*, which are taken from Psalm 133; “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”³⁷⁴ Kay states that Dante believes the Empire’s role is both political and providential and quotes *The Divine Comedy* in support of his argument, where Beatrice foretells of a strong imperial leader, “who - with divine sanction - will repair the political fragmentation of the Italian peninsula, restore justice on earth, and end the scourge of cupidity”.³⁷⁵ Rolbiecki, Kelsen and Kay’s observations and analysis, along

³⁶⁷ John Joseph Rolbiecki, *The Political Philosophy of Dante Alighieri* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018), 11.

³⁶⁸ John T. Slattery, *Dante: “The Central Man of All The Word”* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1920), 84.

³⁶⁹ Karl Federn, *Dante and his Time* (New York: Haskell House, 1970), 29.

³⁷⁰ Rolbiecki, *The Political Philosophy of Dante Alighieri*, 11.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁷² Tristan Kay ‘Politics’, in Gragnolati, Lombardi and Southerden, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, 270-286; 281.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 285.

³⁷⁴ *Mon.* 1. 16. 9-10. Psalm. 133. 1; Gk. 132. 1.

³⁷⁵ Kay ‘Politics’, 282.

with an in-depth exploration of *De Monarchia* and *Convivio*, allowed me to connect unity and peace in the state with the pursuit of the common good of the community and personal happiness.³⁷⁶ All of which, according to Dante, can be achieved in this life under the guidance of an Emperor who bases his truth on philosophy.

Kelsen considered Dante's idea of utopia, "brilliant... regarding its goals and a pitiful attempt regarding the possibility of its realisation."³⁷⁷ On a less sympathetic observation, Brenda Deen Schildgen deems Dante's political desires a "desperate attempt to restore Rome as the world's centre and to reinstate Roman civic virtue."³⁷⁸ Similarly Cornish quotes Christian Moevs who writes that these views are "'reactionary and unrealistic,' even theocratic and fundamentalist".³⁷⁹ She continues, quoting Enrico Fenzi who writes that "sometimes we want to skip over, with a certain embarrassment, the universalism of Dante's political vision, since it seems to be so backward-looking, a relic."³⁸⁰ While agreeing that Dante's unrealistic utopian ideals are, as Charles Till Davis summarized, resting "on memory and desire,"³⁸¹ I am of the opinion that Dante was possibly aware that these utopian views were unrealistic, particularly within his era, with constant French interventions in Italian affairs. Dante knew that peace in a united Italy would not last.³⁸² From this perspective, his viewpoint is possibly one of hope for the future.

³⁷⁶ Aristotle defined human flourishing as '*eudaimonia*'. It is an excellent "rational activity in accordance with virtue". Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.

³⁷⁷ Oliver Lepsius 'Hans Kelsen on Dante Alighieri's Political Philosophy', *European Journal of International Law*, 27/4, (2016), 1153–1167; 1165. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chw060> Accessed 15 June 2024.

³⁷⁸ Schildgen, 'Dante's Utopian Political Vision', 58.

³⁷⁹ Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 62.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁸¹ Davis, 'Dante and the Empire,' 263.

³⁸² Richard Kay, 'Empire', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 338-340; 339.

2.6 Dante's Medieval Imagination and Memory

The recurring appeal to 'imagination' must be clarified since this appeal encompasses a range of different disciplines which express and reflect political, social, religious and poetic experience. The importance of *mente*, *mens* or memory in medieval culture is incontrovertible.³⁸³ Memory "is what we are, and what defines us as individuals".³⁸⁴

According to *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, the discipline arose from the philosophical questions "regarding how people come to know things about their world."³⁸⁵ Memory is the ability to "retain information, to recall it when needed, and to recognize its familiarity."³⁸⁶ It is considered that the origins of our mental images are from memory, "understood as a reservoir of images which record our sensory impressions of reality".³⁸⁷ With regards to memory, Richard Kearney refers to Aristotle from whom we learn that memory "refers to that part of the soul to which

³⁸³ "Throughout the medieval centuries, memory, collective and individual, was acknowledged to be the primary repository of wisdom; that is to say, of knowledge and learning, of ethical judgement and of what is needful for salvation." Spencer Pearce, 'Dante and the art of memory', *The Italianist*, 16/1 (1996), 20-61; 20.

"Although usually translated 'mind', for medieval writers such as Bonaventure, this term goes beyond our usual intellectual understanding to encompass the entire human soul with its three faculties of memory, intellect and free will. These faculties, in the Augustinian tradition, are a reflection of the divine image imprinted by the Creator in the very depths of the human person". Hagman aptly makes the literary connection of these faculties to *Paradiso* in Canto 1. "I was in that heaven which receives more of His light. He who comes down from there can neither know nor tell what he has seen, for, drawing near to its desire, so deeply is our intellect immersed that memory cannot follow after it. Nevertheless, as much of the holy kingdom as I could store as treasure in my mind shall now become the subject of my song". *Par.* 1. 4-12. Hagman, *Dante's Vision of God*, 2-3.

³⁸⁴ Richard C. Atkinson and Richard M. Shiffrin, 'Human Memory: A Proposed System and Its Control Process', *Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, Academic Press, Vol. 2, (1968), 89-195, 115.

³⁸⁵ Endel Tulving and Fergus I. M. Craik, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3. From learning we acquire knowledge and remembering is the means of recalling that knowledge.

³⁸⁶ Arthur Wingfield and Dennis L. Byrnes, *The Psychology of Human Memory* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 4.

³⁸⁷ Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1998), 107.

imagination refers".³⁸⁸ Imagination is at the heart of memory, and to some extent, at the heart of this poem, as memory informs its composition.³⁸⁹ *The Divine Comedy* is a re-telling of Dante's vision of the afterlife. Dante's understanding of, and appeal to, memory throughout the *Comedy*, is beyond the scope of this thesis; but this section will comment specifically on how Dante appeals to memory to articulate his vision of the afterlife, and also on how Dante's appeal to memory functions as a transformative power in order to construct poetically the imaginative cosmology and landscape of *The Divine Comedy*.³⁹⁰

The "art of memory is the particular gift of mankind".³⁹¹ According to Robert Adams Day, the *ars memoriae* (art of memory), was a standard tool for an artist.³⁹² In Greek legend, memory or Mnemosyne, was the mother of the Muses. *The Divine Comedy* is structured as a first-hand account of Dante's journey through the afterlife. Through his 'memory', Dante sets the scene. In Canto 2, Dante the poet appeals to his 'memory;' he implores and invokes the muses to aid him in remembering and recounting his experience in the afterlife, in order to give a reliable, accurate and detailed account of his journey to his readers.

O Muses, O lofty genius, aid me now!
Oh memory, that set down what I saw,

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 107.

³⁸⁹ Frances Yates suggests that "Dante's Inferno could be regarded as a kind of memory system for memorizing Hell and its punishments, with striking images on orders of places", Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1966), 104.

³⁹⁰ Yates rightly notes that *The Divine Comedy*, is a "supreme example of the conversion of an abstract summa into a summa of similitudes and examples, with memory as the converting power, the bridge between abstraction and the image". Ibid., 104.

³⁹¹ Barbara Nolan, "The 'Vita Nuova': Dante's Book of Revelation." *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* no. 88, (1970), 51–77; 51. Another example of Dante's reliance and reverence for memory, would be Dante's book of memory in the *Vita Nuova*. "In that part of the book of my memory" Alighieri, *Vita Nuova* trans. Mark Musa, 3.

³⁹² Supposedly invented by the Greek poet Simonides.

Here your worth be shown!³⁹³

These few lines help to emphasise the importance of memory and bearing witness, not only in remembering the events of the afterlife, but in articulating these events adequately and exactly. The double narrative, of Dante the poet and Dante the pilgrim, plays an important role here. Dante the poet and narrator is recounting and reciting what he saw and experienced in the after-life and is therefore relying on his memory. This is a claim to a certain kind of authority for his work, making clear that it is 'not' a work of fiction. Dante makes several references to his role as an eye-witness, and even swears to his readers that his testimony is true.³⁹⁴ He thus presents himself to his audience as being duty bound to report the truth of what he witnessed, not only in his journey through the afterlife, but also in the social and political situation of Florentine Italy.³⁹⁵ "Memory will now faithfully retrace the real event of the journey, exactly as it took place. This most extraordinary journey through three realms of the afterlife is represented, never as dreamed or experienced in vision, but as a real happening ... Here, then, and in the following invocation, the poet's voice is heard for

³⁹³ *Inf.* Canto 2.7-9. Hollander raises a very interesting question; Why does Dante invoke the pagan muses within this Christian work? He affirms that most commentators believe that he invoked the muses "for aid in composing, by human art, the poetic artefact which makes his direct experience of God's universe available to mankind." I agree with Hollander: Muses and lofty genius (*alto ingegno*) must not be interpreted synonymously. Muse represents what humans may learn of art and *ingegno*, is the power of conceiving the truth. Using this literary style, emphasizes the revelation of divine truth. "Mente is put forward as the power within him [Dante] that records what *alto ingegno* makes available to it." Robert Hollander, 'Dante's Authority', in Mandelbaum, Oldcorn and Ross, eds., *Lectura Dantis, Inferno*, 25-36; 27-29.

Conversely in *Paradiso* Canto 33, memory and words fail the poet when he tries to recount the effaceable experience of Heaven; "My memory of that moment is more lost, than five and twenty centuries make dim that enterprise when, in wonder, Neptune at the Argo's shadow stared". *Par.* 33.94-96.

³⁹⁴ "I can't be silent ... I swear to you, reader". *Inf.* 16. 124-129.

³⁹⁵ Witnessing "plays an important role in the storytelling of the *Commedia*". Nicolo Crisafi and Elena Lombardi, 'Lust and the Law: Reading and Witnessing in *Inferno* V', in Gaimari and Keen, eds., *Ethics, Politics and Justice in Dante* (London: UCL, 2019), 63-79; 63. "Spread the word, then, that the Church of Rome, confounding in herself two governments, stumbles in the mud, befouling herself and her burden". *Purg.* 16. 127-129.

the first time as it speaks of his task as poet”.³⁹⁶ By memorizing the set visual images that Dante saw in the afterlife, a connection is forged between the artistic material within the poem, such as allegory, theology and language, and this string of images.

If we are to consider Dante’s word a work of fiction, as Cornish³⁹⁷ does, *The Divine Comedy* is therefore an encyclopaedic masterpiece of the imagination. “Dante’s knowledge is truly universal, he sought it everywhere, and obtained it from all sources at his disposal.”³⁹⁸ Therefore, it is worth considering imagination as a theme in its own right. *Phantasia* or imagination, at the beginnings of Greek philosophy was considered a lowly faculty.³⁹⁹ This was mainly due to the ways in which imagination was linked with the “senses and what appeared”⁴⁰⁰ to them in the mind’s eye. Over time, imagination became a faculty which was praised. It allowed a person to see a version of reality which some would not usually expect. During the Middle Ages, “imagination had become the pathway to divine life”.⁴⁰¹ Dante, similar to Aquinas, admired Aristotle, and crowned him “the master of those who know”.⁴⁰² Aquinas, who was profoundly influenced by then-newly available works of Aristotelian philosophy, believed we had five “interior senses:”⁴⁰³ Common sense, phantasy, imagination, estimative sense and memory,⁴⁰⁴ all of which depend on a normal functioning

³⁹⁶ Hollander, ‘Dante’s Authority’, 26.

³⁹⁷ Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 9.

³⁹⁸ Rolbiecki, *The Political Philosophy of Dante Alighieri*, 12.

³⁹⁹ *Phantasia* is the Greek word for Imagination. Gerard Watson, ‘Imagination and Religion in Classical Thought’, in James P. Mackey, ed., *Religious Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), 29-55; 29.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁰² *Inf.* 4. 131. Dante in his letter to the Italian Cardinals, Dante deems him the ‘master philosopher.’ Dante Alighieri, Letter IX, ‘To the Italian Cardinals Dante Alighieri of Florence’, 167.

⁴⁰³ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae*, 135.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

intellect.⁴⁰⁵ These interior senses act almost as an intermediary, allowing “us to recognise things in the world as familiar,”⁴⁰⁶ and thereby allowing us to input, process, and find meaning.⁴⁰⁷

Dante strove to envision and establish justice,⁴⁰⁸ and his attempt to return to the evangelical roots of Christianity is evident in his *Divine Comedy*. Through his linguistic and imaginative abilities, Dante brings the sins and virtues alive in the mind’s eye. Imagination has a crucial part to play in *The Divine Comedy*. Dante believes that it is the power of the mind which both produces and stores mental images, that derive from “sensation as well as suprasensory”.⁴⁰⁹ This understanding of imagination stems from Aristotle’s treatise *De anima* and its medieval commentaries.⁴¹⁰ The functional aesthetic element of Dante’s imagination is where we see the amalgamation of well-known myths and legends with Florentine history and the contemporary situation, which all contribute to the formation of his cosmology. In this sense, Dante’s imagination “is so fundamentally encyclopaedic in nature”.⁴¹¹ According to Kearney,

⁴⁰⁵ Watson, ‘Imagination and Religion in Classical Thought’, 52. God is the good of the intellect. “Perhaps in the sense that God is the point of having an intellect, what having an intellect is good for, the ultimate reality we want to know and insatiably seek. God is truth. The truth is God.” Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 7.

⁴⁰⁶ Warnock, *Imagination*, 10.

⁴⁰⁷ “As well as sensing things as they impinge on us physically, we must have some ability to relate to them – some capacity to coordinate, evaluate, and remember them in their impact on us. For Aquinas, ‘interior senses’ are what allow us to interpret the input provided by our exterior bodily senses and to eventually find meaning in it”. Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae*, 135.

⁴⁰⁸ In Canto 18, Beatrice and Dante are in the sphere of Jupiter. Each of the souls in this sphere spell out the letters; “*Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram*” (Love justice, you who judge the earth), a reference to the Book of Wisdom. 1.1. Throughout *The Divine Comedy*, we see justice, both human and divine, as a major theme. These lines emphasise this fact. For instance, Virgil could potentially represent the natural state of justice found on earth and in Paradise, Beatrice could represent the divine or spiritual justice in paradise, thereby representing both righteousness and Grace.

⁴⁰⁹ Paul A. Dumol, ‘Imagination’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 505-506; 505. The relationship between imagination and the intellect shapes *The Divine Comedy*.

⁴¹⁰ *De anima* or *On the Soul*, written c. 350.

⁴¹¹ Richard Lansing, ‘Preface’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, viii. I agree with Joanna Drell, that *The Divine Comedy* is “invaluable for understanding the pivotal, turbulent thirteenth and early

traditional western thought was mainly a blending of Greek and biblical concepts,⁴¹² specifically Greek ontology and Judaeo-Christian theology, leading to “onto-theology”.⁴¹³ This onto-theological characteristic of medieval thinking, “refers to its bringing together of the Judeo-Christian notion of a Divine Creator and Platonic-Aristotelian Metaphysic of Being”.⁴¹⁴ Augustine’s medieval work, advanced the understanding and possibility of “conscripting theology and ontology as joint allies in the pursuit of truth”.⁴¹⁵ For Kearney, medieval imagination was considered a “mimetic activity”⁴¹⁶ in the sense that it was a second-hand reflection of the original cause which gives meaning beyond the human, i.e., engaging meaningfully with God and the “highest Forms.”⁴¹⁷

Through *The Divine Comedy* “imagination gains a higher place than it had yet been accorded in poetry or philosophy”⁴¹⁸ It is an image-filled journey in which we see Dante’s imaginative representation of his society and God’s nature. It is a combination of fantasy, revelation and interpretation. Therefore, the functional aesthetic element of his imagination is the amalgamation of well-known epics, theological and philosophical texts that all contribute to the formation of his cosmology, by means of

fourteenth centuries in Italy. Joanna Drell, ‘Teaching Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in a History Course’, in Christopher Kleinhenz and Kristina Olson, eds., *Approaches to Teaching Dante’s Divine Comedy* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2020), 120-126; 120. Aquinas stated; “The fantasy or imagination is like a treasure house of images received by the senses”. ST 1.78. 4 quoted by Sally Mussetter in ‘Fantasy’, in Lansing ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 370.

⁴¹² Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 114. The Greek word for imagination is *phantasia* and appears in Plato’s middle dialogues. Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation and Cognition*, 23.

⁴¹³ Ontotheology is a term used by Martin Heidegger. Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 114.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁴¹⁵ Augustine “paved the way for the famous medieval model, ‘faith seeking and understanding’ (*fides quaerens intellectum*)”. Ibid., 116.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 115. For example, Bonaventure (1221 – 1274), believed that “all finite images are ... merely copies of the Divine Image of Christ ... by extension, human imagining is but a mirroring of the Divine act of creation”. Ibid., 124.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁴¹⁸ Watson, ‘Imagination and Religion in Classical Thought’, 53.

which Dante critiques both the past and his current ecclesiastical and temporal situation in Florence. Dante makes an ineffable and transcendental experience accessible to his readers, hence *The Divine Comedy* is a vision of a “divine reality.”⁴¹⁹ Therefore imagination, tied to memory, become the catalyst of the poem.

2.6.1 Modern Narratives Of The Imagination In The Context Of *The Divine Comedy*

Most of the research being conducted on the medieval imagination is modern in its perspective, therefore, this section will briefly outline some key modern concepts of imagination in the context of the poetic, social and political imagination of *The Divine Comedy*. This will be done as Dante engages all these aspects of imagination in creating his cosmic-theological vision. Dante’s political view and the way he imagined his society, is clearly reflected in *The Divine Comedy*. *The Divine Comedy* shows the reader the political and social situation of Florence and “tells us something about how we ought to live together in a society”.⁴²⁰ This way of thinking is “inescapably an idea of moral order”⁴²¹ and what will become evident, particularly in chapter four, below, is the depth of Dante’s loyalty to his community and to his faith.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁴²⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 159. His *Divine Comedy* could therefore be considered an insight into critical imagination. Mainly because, “the highest criticism... is in its way more creative than creation.” James Grant, *The Critical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

⁴²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 159.

⁴²² It should be noted that Dante also takes into consideration the moral rights and obligations that we have towards the Divine.

Contemplating the afterlife calls for a broadening of the imagination; no other poet has produced a body of work which is as realistic, dramatic and insightful as *The Divine Comedy*. Although disparaged by positivism, imagination is vitally important as we “use imagination in our ordinary perception of the world ... (and it) enables us to recognize things in the world as familiar.”⁴²³ When viewing *The Divine Comedy* through the lens of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s imaginative theory, we begin to see how Dante has shaped the imagination of generations and how he has helped shape the selves of countless readers and others through people’s moral responses to his work. Coleridge, famously, distinguished between Imagination and Fancy.⁴²⁴ For Coleridge,⁴²⁵ imagination may be divided into primary and secondary imaginations. The primary, he considers “necessary imagination”⁴²⁶ which involves human individuality intermingled with creative originality. Secondary imagination, he considers a superior faculty, where artistic genius flourishes. This is where new worlds are created and chaos is given order. Fancy,⁴²⁷ on the other hand, works on the creative imagination. Fancy is the poet’s mechanical ability to use certain literary devices such as allegory, alliteration and metaphor. It is the power to transform what we perceive. Coleridge describes

⁴²³ Mary Warnock, *Imagination*, 10.

⁴²⁴ Coleridge thought “that it was a new thing to distinguish Imagination and Fancy ... Before him the criterion was a value one: imagination is reliable, fancy is not; imagination apprehends reality, fancy does not. For Coleridge both imagination and fancy apprehend reality, but whereas fancy merely assembles, accumulates, imagination builds a new edifice”. E.J Furlong, *Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1961), 20.

⁴²⁵ Coleridge, ascribes the word ‘esemplastic’ for the imagination. Which means “shaping into one”. Warnock when discussing both Kant and Coleridge’s theory on the imagination, states that Coleridge derived his word ‘esemplastic’ from Kant’s *Einbildungskraft*. Warnock writes that “From Schelling, Coleridge derived the thought that poetic imagination must be able to bring together, as Schelling says, even contradictories”. Warnock, *Imagination* 92.

⁴²⁶ Peter Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 115.

⁴²⁷ According to G.G Watson, Fancy is considered the inferior term. According to John M. Aden, “G.G Watson, ‘Contributions to a dictionary of critical terms: imagination and fancy’, in *Essays in Criticism*, III (April 1953).” John M. Aden, ‘Dryden and the Imagination: The First Phase.’ *PMLA*, 74/1, (1959), 28–40; 28. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/460384>. Accessed 23 September 2022.

fancy as “a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phaenomenon of the will, which we express by the word of choice.”⁴²⁸

Mary Warnock correctly notes that the imagination is an essential element in our ordinary awareness of the world by attributing value to it.⁴²⁹ C. Wright Mills defined sociological imagination as the “awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society.”⁴³⁰ He explains that “the sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals”.⁴³¹ For Mills, the sociological imagination “enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.”⁴³² Robert J. Hironimus-Wendt and Lora Ebert Wallace argue that Mills’ approach to social imagination is activist at its core and includes a sense of social responsibility.⁴³³ This theory resonates with the concerns of the didactic poet Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* articulates his understanding of the importance of social responsibility. Through his appeal to a sociological imagination, he calls his readers to understand their personal and civic duties.⁴³⁴ He has helped

⁴²⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: Chiswick Press, 1847), 173.

⁴²⁹ David Hume proposes three elements found within the individual which produces our belief in objects. “The candidates are our senses, our reason and our imagination.” Warnock, *Imagination*, 21.

⁴³⁰ C. Wright Mills, *Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³³ Hironimus-Wendt, Robert J., and Lora Ebert Wallace, ‘The Sociological Imagination and Social Responsibility.’ *Teaching Sociology*, 37/1, (2009), 76–88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20491291. Accessed 20 May 2021.

⁴³⁴ Social responsibility is the ‘ethical theory that people themselves are responsible for their actions and are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty’. Mills wrote that “perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between ‘the personal troubles of milieu’ and ‘the public issues of the social structure’”. The personal troubles occur ‘within the character of the individual and within range of his or her immediate relations with others; they have to do with the self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware’. The resolution to these

shape the self through people's moral responses to his work, thereby calling the
"whole soul of men into activity."⁴³⁵

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante takes his readers on an image-filled journey through the afterlife. He makes this ineffable and transcendental experience accessible to his readers, and since his work is considered inter-disciplinary, it is correct to assume that his imagination is also. Therefore, it is impossible to restrict his contribution to just one aspect of imagination, as he contributes to the social, political, religious, creative, poetic and critical imaginations. As a result, this thesis will draw on each aspect as and when it emerges in the poem and as we see how Dante employs it in relation to political theology. The assumption that Dante employs his imagination in *The Divine Comedy* implies that it is a work of fiction. Dante, however, represents himself to his readers as a witness – that he actually was there in the after-life and everything he experienced was real. For this reason, an important point to note, is that there is a double-narrative focus within *The Divine Comedy*. First, there is Dante the poet, who is narrating his spiritual journey through the afterlife. Second, there is Dante the pilgrim or Dante the everyman who is undertaking this expedition. Hence Dante the poet is only recounting and reciting what Dante the pilgrim saw and experienced in afterlife,

troubles lies within the self and within the immediate scope of the milieu – the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his wilful activity, a trouble is a private matter. The 'public issues of the social structure' deals with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organisation of many such milieu into the institution of an historical society as a whole...An issue is a public matter". Engaging social imagination through poetry, Dante allows his readers to 'see' at first-hand one of the many moral evils which Dante identified as a public issue. Not only do we encounter Dante's sense of social responsibility; he calls his readers to understand their personal and civic duty too. Mills, *sociological imagination*, 8. Within both *De Monarchia* and *The Divine Comedy*, Dante presented himself as being duty bound to report the truth of what he witnessed, not only of his journey through the afterlife, but also in the social and political situation of Florentine Italy.

⁴³⁵ Warnock, *Imagination*, 10.

thereby employing the imaginative device of his memory. In doing so, Dante is stating that this is his testimony and he is duty bound by souls in the afterlife to “write down what now you see here once you have gone back.”⁴³⁶

2.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to present the authors who have helped shape my research. This research review is intended to assist the reader understand some of the different aspects posed by the different authors and scholars in their respected fields. I have demonstrated the strong relationship between Dante and politics, Dante and political philosophy, and Dante and theology within the current literature. It is clear from the research reviewed, that studies have noted the importance of Dante’s connection to Dante’s political philosophy and his political and ecclesiastical aspirations, specifically relating to Church and Empire. However, to date, there has been little engagement with Dante’s political theology. All the scholars above shed new light on the ways in which Dante can be read, proving that constant engagement with Dante’s work is vital as it is continually changing, therefore, there is always more to be done. My research proposes to add to this wealth of already established knowledge by viewing Dante through this medieval political theology lens, to hopefully promote even more research into the area of both medieval political theology and Dante Alighieri.

⁴³⁶ *Purg.* 32. 103-105

Chapter Three: A Mapping of Circumstances



Fig. 6

3.1 Aim

Dante was a reform-orientated poet, whose critical approach to society and whose religious concerns can be seen in abundance within his *Divine Comedy*. It is important to pay heed to the historical footing of this entire narrative. Like most important texts, *The Divine Comedy* has a history and this chapter will explore that history. By looking at Dante's historical and social surroundings, hidden dialogues – relating to his attitude and opinions towards society, the church, Beatrice, his family, his friends and himself – are revealed throughout his *Divine Comedy*, disclosing the motivations behind his social engagement and the extent to which his personal life and his political circumstances converged in the work.

3.2 Agenda

This chapter examines the questions surrounding the man behind *The Divine Comedy* and the motivations for writing *The Divine Comedy* in the way that he did. It questions the contemporary political and social situation in Florence in order to create context and depth for future chapters. It will explain Dante's theological work, *Vita Nuova*, the philosophical *Convivio* and *De Monarchia*, and specifically Dante's response to Boniface's *Unam Sanctam* which reveal Dante's political concerns which continue in *The Divine Comedy*. Above, I argued that one particularly sin emerged consistently throughout the narrative, that of avarice. Echoes of the sin of avarice are found in Dante's social surroundings, and are manifested in Canto 19 as simony and in Canto 23 as hypocrisy, which will both be defined and examined below in this chapter.

3.3 Introduction

Le poète romantique par excellence, c'est le Dante.
(*'Dante is the Supreme Romantic poet.'*)⁴³⁷

The life of Dante is filled with an endless series of public and private ordeals which he experienced and encountered in his fifty-six years. This chapter will introduce the poet of *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri and his historical context. It will discuss his personal life, education and death. It will explore Dante's writings; the religiously allegorical *La Vita Nuova*, the philosophical *Convivio* and the political commentary found in *De Monarchia*. It will delve into medieval Italian church and society, and into his relationship with them, especially his conflict with Pope Boniface VIII. This merits

⁴³⁷ Francesco Manzini, *Stendhal's Parallel Lives* (Germany: Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, 2004), 156.

unpacking, as Dante's personal, political and religious opinions informed the creation and geography of *The Divine Comedy*. This contextualisation is important as it lays the groundwork for understanding the poem's complex political theological context. This chapter, ultimately, reveals the motivations behind his societal life and the extent to which his personal life and his political circumstances converged within his *Divine Comedy*.

3.4 Who was Dante Alighieri?

Dante Alighieri was an Italian poet, political figure, moral philosopher and medieval thinker. Little is known about Dante Alighieri's early life. However, we know that he was born in the Italian Tuscan city of Florence in 1265,⁴³⁸ under the star sign of Gemini, to which Dante later attributed his talent.⁴³⁹ He was born to Bella and Alighiero degli Alighieri (or Bellincione). Dante mentions his parents only once in his writings, in the *Convivio*. He describes their courtship and how it was the Italian vernacular which brought them together, and led subsequently to his existence.⁴⁴⁰ The Alighieri are said to be descendants from Ancient Romans. Dante's great-great-grandfather, on his father's side, Cacciaguida degli Elisei,⁴⁴¹ was born in Florence,

⁴³⁸ In May, Under the sign of Gemini (Dante informs us of this in *Paradiso*, XXII 117). Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 10. Giuseppa Mazzotta, believes his birth was sometime between May 14th and June 13th 1265. Giuseppa Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', in Lansing ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 15-20; 15.

⁴³⁹ "O glorious stars, O light made pregnant with a might power, all my talent, whatever it may be, has you as source. From you was risen and within you hidden he who is the father of all mortal life, when first I breathed the Tuscan air... The little patch of earth that makes us here so fierce, from hills to river mouths I saw it all while I was being wheeled with the eternal Twins. Then I turned my eyes once more to those fair eyes." *Par.* 22. 112-154.

⁴⁴⁰ *Convivio* I, xiii, 1-12. Philip H. Wicksteed eds., *Dante Alighieri, Convivio* (London: The Temple Classics, 2015), 57-58.

⁴⁴¹ Barbara Reynolds, *Dante: The poet, the Thinker, the Man* (New York: I.B Tauris, 2010), 1. Almost all we know about Cacciaguida, derives from Dante in *The Divine Comedy*. Anthony Oldcorn, 'Cacciaguida', in Lansing ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 132-133; 132.

possibly in the years 1091.⁴⁴² Cacciaguida served in the second crusade and was allegedly knighted by Emperor Conrad III.⁴⁴³ Dante meets Cacciaguida in *Paradiso*, in the Heavens of Mars, with the militant spirits.⁴⁴⁴ Dante was christened in the baptistery of San Giovanni, where, he believed, his ancestor Cacciaguida was also baptised.⁴⁴⁵ At the baptismal font, he was given the name Durante. “It was a name he would never use: in his writings he called himself and always signed himself just Dante.”⁴⁴⁶ The Alighieri family were noble, they were, however, not among the most prominent citizens and their fortune had deteriorated over time.⁴⁴⁷ His father became a modest moneylender and speculator in land,⁴⁴⁸ nevertheless his family enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. Dante’s mother, Bella, was a member of the Abati family and had two children with Alighiero. Bella died while Dante was just a child, at some point between 1270 and 1273,⁴⁴⁹ leaving his father Alighiero to re-marry.⁴⁵⁰ Alighiero’s

⁴⁴² Anthony Oldcorn dates the possible birth of Cacciaguida as 1091 and refers to Dante’s mention of “astronomical circumlocution” in *Par.* 16.34-39. Oldcorn, ‘Cacciaguida’, 132. Hollander refers to Cf. Moore’s mathematical reasoning for placing Cacciaguida birth as 1091. Between the beginning of year one and the birth of Cacciaguida, “Mars returned 580 times to the constellation of Leo, which, being of like disposition to Mars, reinforces the influence of that planet. As Mars completes its revolution in 687 days, we shall get the year of Cacciaguida’s birth by multiplying 687 by 580 and dividing by 365: 1091.” Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 443.

⁴⁴³ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 1. This knighting of Cacciaguida by Emperor Conrad III is confirmed by Dante; “Later, I became a partisan of Emperor Conrad, who girded me to be his knight.” *Par.* 15. 139-140.

⁴⁴⁴ Oldcorn makes the connection between this meeting of Cacciaguida and Aeneas who meets his father in the underworld, in book six of the *Aeneid*. Oldcorn believes that this meeting with Cacciaguida, allows Dante “the opportunity to suggest that the nobility of his lineage matches the nobility of his character” while also expressing “nostalgia for a lost world of moral and political integrity and his defiant acceptance, given the corruption of his time, of a future exile and his uncompromising mission as poet of moral rectitude in the *Commedia*.” Oldcorn, ‘Cacciaguida’, 132.

⁴⁴⁵ Reynolds, *Dante: The poet, the Thinker, the Man*, 1.

⁴⁴⁶ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 10.

⁴⁴⁷ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 1.

⁴⁴⁸ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I, 4. Alighiero did not earn any high social position nor was he a member of any guild. Mazzotta, ‘Alighieri, Dante’, 15.

⁴⁴⁹ Allen Mandelbaum, ‘Dante in His Age’, in Mandelbaum, Oldcorn and Ross, eds., *Lectura Dantis, Inferno*, 1-9; 1. Mazzotta states that Dante was six years old when his mother died.” Mazzotta, ‘Alighieri, Dante’, 15.

⁴⁵⁰ Dante’s father died sometime between 1281 and 1283. Mazzotta believes that after the death of his father, Dante assumed the role as head of the household. As a result, he was thrown into the public and political life of Medieval Florence. *Ibid.* 16-17.

second wife, Lapa di Chiarissimo Cialuffi gave birth to a son, Francesco, and a daughter, Gaetana (Tana).⁴⁵¹

Dante's wife, Gemma Donati, was born about two years after Dante to Manetto and Maria Donati.⁴⁵² At the age of twelve, Dante was promised to Gemma according to customs of the era. According to Kathleen Verduin, records show that Manetto settled her dowry in 1277⁴⁵³ and they were married in the year 1285. Dante and Gemma had several children together, Giovanni, Pietro, Jacopo and Antonia.⁴⁵⁴ After Dante was exiled from Florence, little is known of what happened to Gemma, as Dante never mentions his wife in his works. Throughout his exile, Dante kept in frequent communication with his children and it was his sons who gathered his works after his death. According to Marco Santagata, Dante's sons "felt an enormous admiration – one might say reverence towards – their father,"⁴⁵⁵ even providing commentary on their father's works. However, Verduin believes that Gemma did not join Dante when he went into exile, because if she had visited him "she would probably have fallen under the city's ban against him".⁴⁵⁶ She makes reference to Maria's will, in which she left Gemma a "modest legacy".⁴⁵⁷ Gemma died sometime after the year 1332.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵¹ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 496.

⁴⁵² Jay Rudd, 'Donati, Gemma', in Jay Rudd, *Critical Companion to Dante* (New York: Fact On File, 2008), 437.

⁴⁵³ Kathleen Verduin, 'Gemma Donati', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 432.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 432. Mazzotta affirms that Antonia re-entered Dante's life in Ravenna. She became a nun and took the name Sister Beatrice. Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 16.

⁴⁵⁵ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 112.

⁴⁵⁶ Verduin, 'Gemma Donati', 432.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 432.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 432.

Public life for Dante began when he was twenty-four when he enlisted in the cavalry. Dante participated in many battles such as the battle of Campaldino and the siege of the Pisan fortress of Caprona. At the end of Dante's military career, he subsequently became involved in Florentine political life.⁴⁵⁹ He consistently and zealously campaigned for an independent Florence, despite Florentine political life being a harsh and unstable reality.⁴⁶⁰

3.4.1 Beatrice and la Vita Nuova

One image from Dante's personal life is to the forefront of his works, namely the "master-image"⁴⁶¹ of his muse Beatrice, whom Dante regards as the embodiment of female perfection. Nichols claims that the key formative event in Dante's life occurred while he was attending a festival at the age of nine,⁴⁶² when he was "colpito dal fulmine" (struck by lightning)⁴⁶³ after meeting a nine year old Beatrice (Bice)⁴⁶⁴ for the first time, who dressed in "the most noble of colours,"⁴⁶⁵ "crimson."⁴⁶⁶ Dante vividly recalled how he became a "servant of love"⁴⁶⁷ after their first sighting. When he sees her again nine years later, he becomes even more infatuated with this "gracious

⁴⁵⁹ Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sin*, 6. "In the mid-1920s Dante entered public service ... he first became a member of the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries".

⁴⁶⁰ Along with Pope Boniface's hegemonic claims over the city of Florence.

⁴⁶¹ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, XV. Mazzotta considers Beatrice the creative force of Dante's imagination. Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 16.

⁴⁶² "Nine times already since my birth the heaven of light had circled back to almost the same point when the now glorious lady of my mind first appeared to my eyes ... I first saw her near the end of my ninth year." Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 4.

⁴⁶³ Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sins*, 4.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶⁵ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 4

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶⁷ Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sins*, 4. Bice, was Dante's nickname for Beatrice. Hollander, *Dante*, 15.

lady".⁴⁶⁸ Though Dante himself never divulges the surname of his beloved muse, he is said to have fallen instantly in love with Beatrice and under her "powerful compulsion"⁴⁶⁹ he entered into the art of poetry. From our reading, we are led to assume that Beatrice was a beautiful Florentine noble woman of extraordinary goodness whom he believed her to be "God's gift to humanity."⁴⁷⁰ Dante's love for Beatrice was courtly love; it is, however, unknown whether Beatrice was aware of Dante's affection for her, or of the significant impact she had on his life and career. Her death brought him a great deal of sadness, and led to Dante's immersion in philosophy to understand love, spirituality, redemption, human perfection and the nature of being.⁴⁷¹

Some scholars of Dante believe that the Beatrice Dante is speaking of, was a historical figure named Beatrice Portinari.⁴⁷² Beatrice Portinari was the daughter of Folco Portinari, a leading member of a prominent family in Florence⁴⁷³ who were neighbours of the Alighieris. According to Dante, Folco Portinari was a man "of exceeding goodness."⁴⁷⁴ This Beatrice was possibly born in the year 1266 and married to Simone

⁴⁶⁸ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 8. "He defines it as a fundamental encounter that imaginatively turned into a radical beginning and revealed to his mind the existence of the realm of love and poetry. Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 16. "I was standing faint-hearted. She greeted me so miraculously that I felt I was experiencing the very summit of bliss... since that was the first time her words had entered my ears, I was so overcome with ecstasy that I departed from everyone as if intoxicated". Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 17.

⁴⁷⁰ Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sins*, 4.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁷² Dante discloses the name 'Beatrice' within his *Vita Nuova*, "Per quella moro c'ha nome Beatrice". Hollander translates this to, "I die for the one whose name is Beatrice." Hollander, *Dante*, 15.

⁴⁷³ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 75.

⁴⁷⁴ Paget Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri: His Life and Works* (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 108.

"She did not seem to be the daughter of any ordinary man, but rather of a God". Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans., Mark Musa, 5.

dei Bardi;⁴⁷⁵ she became a “citizen of the eternal life,”⁴⁷⁶ in June 1290, “during the first hour of the ninth day of the month”⁴⁷⁷ at the age of twenty-four.⁴⁷⁸ Dante’s own sorrow was “real and literal.”⁴⁷⁹ According to Paget Toynbee, Dante contemplated taking his own life after the death of Beatrice.⁴⁸⁰ This is significant, as Dante placed those who took their own lives within the second ring of the seventh circle in the *Inferno*. Therefore, throughout the *Inferno*, Dante is perhaps facing some of his own moral struggles and possibly contemplating his own mistakes in life; his journey through the afterlife would thus take on the character of a process of personal redemption.⁴⁸¹ Toynbee notes that in a particular canzone within the *Vita Nuova*, Dante appears to be in despair and in “his despair had been tempted to seek death, Cino strives to console him with the thought that Beatrice is glorified in heaven where she watches over him and recalls his devotion to her on earth”,⁴⁸² and this theme of love and devotion is present throughout *The Divine Comedy*.

⁴⁷⁵ Simone Dei Bardi was a knight and held “held prestigious public appointments in various cities”. By marrying him, she became member of the Florentine elite as the Dei Bardi’s were one of the major banking families in Florence. According Marco Santagata, the Bardi family commissioned Giotto to paint the “frescoes that decorate their chapel in Santa Croce (1325-1330). Their company would further grow until it became one of the largest in Europe”. The Dei Bardi’s were loyal followers of the Donati faction. Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 81-82.

⁴⁷⁶ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 69.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxix. This precise date and time of her death leads readers to believe she was in fact, a real person.

⁴⁷⁹ Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante, Second Series, Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: Haskell House, 1968), 139.

⁴⁸⁰ Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, 109.

⁴⁸¹ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 169.

⁴⁸² Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, 109. Cino da Pistoia is one of Dante’s friends. He is from one of the old Sigibuldi family of Pistoia “whose wealth he would further increase once he had become one of the most eminent jurists of the time” Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 131. Christopher Kleinhenz, believes their friendship may have begun in Bologna in 1287. Christopher Kleinhenz, ‘Cino da Pistoia’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 170-171; 171.

Dante's first large body of work was the *Vita Nuova*, (*A New Life Of Youth*).⁴⁸³ It is a collection of thirty-one poems. Although their date of composition is unknown, some readers believe it may have been between the years 1292 and 1294,⁴⁸⁴ a few years after Beatrice's death. Others, such as Robert Hollander, believe that the dates more probably run from 1283 to 1292. Dante's *Vita Nuova* is divided into three main sections:

1. "The unhappiness wrought in him by his love for Beatrice (II-XVII)".⁴⁸⁵
2. "His praise of his lady" (XVIII-XXVII).⁴⁸⁶
3. Beatrice, in morte: his grief, backsliding, and eventual vision of her in Paradise (XXVIII-XLII).⁴⁸⁷

The *Vita Nuova* is said to have been composed when Dante was nearly thirty years of age. It can be read in several different ways,⁴⁸⁸ as the *Vita Nuova* is a "difficult and puzzling work".⁴⁸⁹ It is an autobiographical, "confessional"⁴⁹⁰ account of Dante's first meeting with Beatrice, showing how that moment influenced his early life by acting as an invitation to a spiritual journey of transformation. It is about his joy, suffering, grief and loss, and of how all of these affected him in different ways. The *Vita Nuova*

⁴⁸³ *Vita Nuova* is one of Dante's earliest works. Before *Vita Nuova* around 1285-1290, Dante also wrote other works such as *Detto d'Amore*, which is a short narrative poem exploring love which is based on *Roman de la rose* and *Fiore* ('The Flower'), which is a series of 232 sonnets which also summarizes "the narrative of the *Roman de la rose*, the masterpiece of Old French allegorical literature". Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 17. Michelangelo Picone, 'Fiore', trans. Robin Treasure, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 379-381; 379. There is speculation whether Dante actually wrote *Fiore*, however Contini "convinced most Dantisti ... that he wrote it". Contini insists that Dante wrote *Fiore* around 1286 "a date which Petrocchi concurs". Hollander, *Dante*, 8.

⁴⁸⁴ Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 17. The *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies* dates it as being between 1293 and 1294. Gaetana Marrone and Paolo Puppa, eds., *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies: A-J* ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 553. While uncertain, Hollander is of the opinion that, their dates of composition "probably run from 1283-1292" Hollander, *Dante*, 12.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸⁸ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 499.

⁴⁸⁹ Hollander, *Dante*, 13.

⁴⁹⁰ Thomas Finan, 'Dante and The Religious Imagination', in Mackey, ed., *Religious imagination*, 65-86; 67.

describes love, and, as the story progresses, it describes Dante's betrayals and loss, which turn the *Vita Nuova* into an ethical drama,⁴⁹¹ which is deliberately left unfinished with a final vision, thus leaving the reader in suspense for what is to come.⁴⁹²

A sense of self-understanding can certainly be seen unfolding throughout both *The Divine Comedy* and the *Vita Nuova*. Dante's spiritual transformation fully evolves within his *Divine Comedy* and we see Dante on the beginning of his journey entering the fearful and dreaded "dark wood"⁴⁹³ of the *Inferno*, in a complete state of ignorance, confusion and unhappiness, before finally emerging in *Paradiso*. At the summit of the mountain of Purgatory, Dante exclaims;

And in my spirit which for so long a time
Had not been overcome with awe
That used to make me tremble in her presence –
Even though I could not see her with my eyes –
Through the hidden force that came from her I felt
The overwhelming power of that ancient love.⁴⁹⁴

For me, the *Vita Nuova* should be viewed as Dante's early expression of his philosophical and theological tendencies. In this book, we see Dante as a naturally spiritual man, whose interpretations of his life sought meaning in every experience. This is evident when Dante is describing first seeing Beatrice and then encountering

⁴⁹¹ Which according to Giuseppe Mazzotta is, "quite common in medieval lyrics." Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Dante: Healing the Wounded Will', in Tobias Hoffmann, eds., *Weakness of Will From Plato to the Present* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 138-159; 142.

⁴⁹² "Readers tend to be so pleased by this resumption of that first 'love story.'" Hollander, *Dante*, 121. Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 84.

⁴⁹³ *Inf.* Canto 1. 2.

⁴⁹⁴ *Purg.* 30. 34-39.

her again at the age of eighteen. He idolized her and in turn, elevated her to a spiritual level, binding her to all his inner thoughts and Divine Love. This 'theologizing of love', will be discussed further in chapter four.

In *La Vita Nuova*, Dante admits that his "eyes had wandered"⁴⁹⁵ to another *Donna Gentile*, or Noble Lady. This compassionate lady, who aided Dante in his time of distress after the death of Beatrice, awakened in him "a strange condition that often [he] would reason as one who is infatuated".⁴⁹⁶ Dante names his comforter the "gracious lady".⁴⁹⁷ This "gracious lady" is treated further in the *Convivio* as the allegorized Lady Philosophy.

3.4.2 The *Convivio*

The *Convivio*, or banquet, as mentioned earlier, was composed during the early years of Dante's exile from Florence, possibly between 1304 and 1307.⁴⁹⁸ According to Philip H. Wicksteed, "When the first treatise was written Dante had long been an exile and had wandered over almost every region of Italy. This places us at least some years later than 1302."⁴⁹⁹ The *Convivio* was intended to be around fifteen books in length, however, it was left unfinished possibly due to his new project, *The Divine Comedy*. Dante may have felt that treatment of human knowledge and divine wisdom would be treated better under the guise of a cosmic-theological journey through the afterlife.

⁴⁹⁵ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 79.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁹⁸ Hollander, Dante, 46.

⁴⁹⁹ Wicksteed, eds., *The Convivio of Dante Alighieri*, 420; Dante Alighieri *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 499.

The *Convivio* provides a “banquet of knowledge” and discusses many areas of interest, such as philosophy, politics, history and linguistics and is seen as a reflection and expression of Dante’s metaphysical and political thought.⁵⁰⁰ Book one of the *Convivio* serves as an introduction to the work and discusses Dante’s defence of the vernacular, which was briefly discussed in chapter one.

Books two and three of the *Convivio*, are closely related. We see Dante diverting his attention from his preoccupations with Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*, to Lady Philosophy. This Lady is allegorically exalted to personify human knowledge and divine wisdom⁵⁰¹ and is “the most fair and noble daughter of the Emperor of the universe, to whom Pythagoras gave the name Philosophy”.⁵⁰² Book four is dedicated to the nature of nobility, the need for a supreme head to regulate human affairs, the authority of the Roman empire and the ways in which human happiness in this life can be achieved under the guidance of an emperor who bases his truth on philosophy. This thesis will draw on these aspect when they emerge in relation to Dante’s political and philosophical agenda.

3.4.3 Dante’s Education

Dante received the traditional education of his time. This included Latin, logic, rhetoric, music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. Dante attended the University

⁵⁰⁰ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 499. Hollander, *Dante*, 46; Dante Alighieri *The Divine Comedy* New Translation by J.G. Nichols, 499; David Dean Brockman, *A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Dante's The Divine Comedy*, 29.

⁵⁰¹ Lansing, ‘Convivio’, in Lansing ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 224-332; 224.

⁵⁰² *Conv.* 2. 16. 100.

of Bologna in 1287 to study the techniques of style and rhetoric.⁵⁰³ It was at the University of Bologna that Dante befriended the poet and white Guelf Guido Cavalcanti.⁵⁰⁴ Dante considers Guido his “first”⁵⁰⁵ and “best friend”,⁵⁰⁶ and together, they explored human nature and the human condition. As a poet, Dante Alighieri was clearly a focused and hard-working self-teacher, within the *Vita Nuova* he declared that he had learned “by himself the art of speaking words in rhyme”.⁵⁰⁷ In regards to Dante’s philosophical and moral journey, this began with the works of Virgil, Cicero and Boethius. Dante also clearly benefited from his Italian surroundings, especially in Florentine society which was the home to many accomplished men of his time. *The Divine Comedy* discusses aspects of his experiences, such as his encounters with others who either impressed or influenced him, for example, the renowned scholar and statesmen Brunetto Latini (c.1220-1294).⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰³ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 3.

⁵⁰⁴ Guido Cavalcanti was born between 1250 and 1255 and died in August 1300. He was married to one of Farinata degli Uberti’s daughters. Maria Luisa Ardizzone observes that Guido does not appear in the *Comedy* because his death occurred in August 1300 and Dante made his journey through Hell on Easter Sunday.

According to Mazzotta, Dante and Guido became friends in the year 1287. Mazzotta, ‘Alighieri, Dante’, 17.

Maria Luisa Ardizzone, ‘Guido Cavalcanti’, in Lansing ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 459-461; 459. For Susan Noakes, Guido was “a notable magnate and bitter enemy to Corso Donati”, the leader of the Black Guelfs who forced Dante into exile. Noakes, ‘Blacks and Whites’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 103-107; 106.

⁵⁰⁵ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 7.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁰⁷ Mandelbaum, ‘Dante in His Age’, 2.

⁵⁰⁸ Brunetto Latini was the son of Bonaccorso di Latino. Brunetto was married and had three or four children.

According to the Florentine chronicler, Giovanni Villani⁵⁰⁹, Brunetto Latini, was “a supreme master in rhetoric”⁵¹⁰ and a “great educator and ‘refiner’ of the Florentine citizenry”.⁵¹¹ Brunetto sparked Dante’s passion for knowledge and was involved in the political activities of Florence during this time.⁵¹² However, Brunetto is condemned to the third ring of the seventh circle for sodomy.⁵¹³ According to Robert Durling, there have been questions about why Brunetto was placed within this circle in the *Inferno* by Dante,⁵¹⁴ mainly because Brunetto was a friend and mentor of Dante’s.⁵¹⁵ According to Durling, Dante used the term “*Soddoma* (Sodom), to refer to homosexuality”⁵¹⁶ in the *Inferno*, and in *Purgatory* 26.40 as a “sin against nature”⁵¹⁷ as it was a transgression against social norms of the time. However, there is “no other known independent evidence that Brunetto was guilty of this sin”.⁵¹⁸ Nichols claims that it was the value

⁵⁰⁹ A Florentine merchant, diplomat, administrator and chronicler. He is the author of the *New Chronicle of the City of Florence*. He was possibly born in the year 1276 and died in 1348 during the black death. John C. Barnes, ‘Villani, Giovanni’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 858-859; 858.

⁵¹⁰ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 148. Brunetto was the first to “instruct and civilize the Florentines, making them ‘skilled in speaking well and in knowing how to guide and rule our republic according to Politics.’ Peter Armour, ‘Brunetto Latini’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 127-129; 127.

⁵¹¹ Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 64.

⁵¹² Brunetto had returned to Florence from his exile in France (he spent most of his time in Artois and Picardy regions) in 1266 under the political reign of the Guelfs. Upon his return, he resumed his civil service as “protonotary to Charles of Anjou’s vicar in Tuscany (1269), scribe to the Councils and Chancellors of the Commune (1272), consul of the Guild of Judges and Notaries (1275), one of the guarantors of the Peace of Cardinal Latino (1280), member of the war council and negotiator in the league against Pisa (1284-1285), prior (August-October 1287), and member of the war council against Arezzo (1289).” Mazzotta, ‘Alighieri, Dante’, 16. Armour, ‘Brunetto Latini’, 127.

⁵¹³ These souls are left naked on burning sands while fire rain down upon them from unnatural clouds. *Inf.* 15. 13-124.

⁵¹⁴ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno Volume I*, 557.

⁵¹⁵ Dante did not only place his enemies within the *Inferno*, he also placed dear friends whom he respected greatly. It is evident therefore, that Dante wanted to portray that there is a higher judgement than human evaluation at work within hell.

⁵¹⁶ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno Volume I*, 557.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 557.

⁵¹⁸ Peter Armour, ‘Brunetto Latini’, 128. According to Peter Armour, it has “traditionally been assumed that Dante, perhaps learning about Brunetto Latini’s private life in later years, is condemning him for sexual sin – and particularly for homosexuality, regarded as a sin against nature and condemned by Brunetto himself in the *Tresor* and *Tesoretto*.” *Ibid.*, 128.

that Brunetto attributed to worldly fame that caused a gulf between the old friends,⁵¹⁹ and other critics set the “sin in a more general social context”⁵²⁰ relating to Brunetto’s “rejection of parental and therefore civic responsibilities.”⁵²¹ Peter Armour notes that some critics have also concluded that the sin is more of an academic “sin against nature”.⁵²² The “sin” to which these critics refer, is Brunetto’s refusal to use his own language in his large French encyclopaedia, *Il Tresor*.⁵²³ This controversy may have been sparked when Brunetto implores Dante to remember his works and make sure it lives on, “Let my *Treasure*, in which I still live on, be in your mind – I ask for nothing more.”⁵²⁴ Regardless of the nature of his perceived earthly sin, it is evident from Dante’s writings, that Brunetto had an impact and influence on Dante;

For I remember well and now lament
the cherished, kind, paternal image of You
when, there in the world, from time to time,
You taught me how man makes himself immortal.
And how much gratitude I owe for that
My tongue, while I still live, must give report.⁵²⁵
Who now just bides his time.⁵²⁶

3.5 Dante’s Medieval Florence

Florence and the Florentines are essential thematic depictions within *The Divine Comedy*. Through this imaginative body of work, we gain insight into life and society in

⁵¹⁹ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 68, 468.

⁵²⁰ Armour, ‘Brunetto Latini’, 128.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 128.

⁵²² Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I, 557.

⁵²³ By “writing the *Tresor* in French; opposition to the Empire; a quasi-Manichaeian rejection of the doctrine of the goodness of human nature.” Armour, ‘Brunetto Latini’, 128. *Il Tresor and Li Livres dou Tresor* are, “essentially parables of humanistic and civil education that are woven with several strands of tradition”. Ibid., 16.

⁵²⁴ *Inf.* 15. 119.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 15. 82-87.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 6. 64-69. Ciacco prophecy is being relayed to Dante in 1300, therefore, the events are near.

Medieval Italy.⁵²⁷ The chief aim of this section is to understand the connection between the Catholic Church and the social environment of medieval Florence, and to appreciate how this connection had a significant impact on his writings, especially on *The Divine Comedy*. *The Divine Comedy*, “shows deep engagement with a political view of the human condition”.⁵²⁸ This understanding is important in order to map and analyse Dante’s political theology. Hence, this section will be dedicated to Dante’s medieval Italian society. Historically, Dante’s era was the major turning point in European history, “fraught with developments and problems whose results are still with us today.”⁵²⁹ Dante, like most thinkers of his day, thought that the fate of “the individual is inextricably bound up with that of society as a whole”⁵³⁰ and that “neither could be changed without the other undergoing a similar transformation”.⁵³¹ He witnessed the result of corruption, greed, fraud and betrayal. *The Divine Comedy*, specifically the *Inferno*, is a commentary and criticism on the Church and the political affairs in Dante’s era. Dante, within his writings anticipates the beginning of the end for the Catholic Church. With the ever-increasing involvement of the Catholic Church in the political and economic struggle of Florentine society, Dante saw the ruthless, violent, manipulative and menacing city that it was and called for its reform.

⁵²⁷ The Medieval period is broadly used as a label to designate the epoch between modernity and antiquity. It is often known as the Middle Ages and spans roughly a thousand years from the fall of the Roman Empire to the 1400s.

⁵²⁸ Hollander, *Dante*, 130.

⁵²⁹ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I, 3.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³¹ R.W. Southern, *The Penguin History of the Church: Western society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), 16.

3.5.1 Layout of Florence

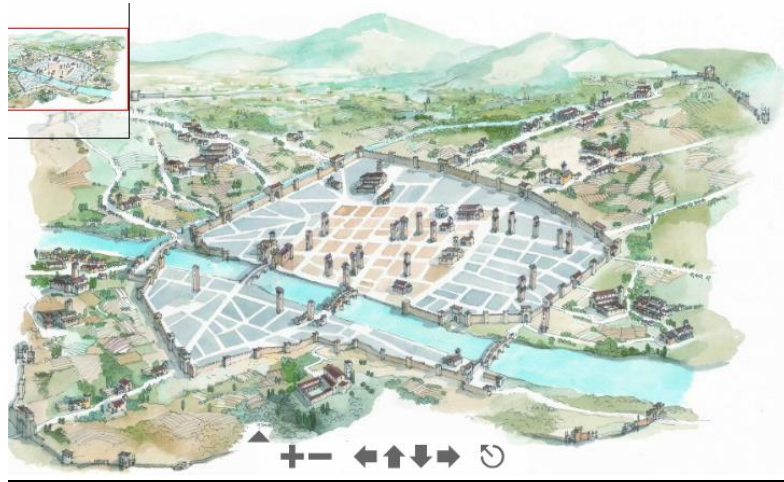


Fig. 7

Dante lived in the fractious city of Florence until he was thirty-six.⁵³² Florence is now renowned for its architectural monuments, beautiful art works, magnificent Churches, the bell tower, Brunelleschi dome and the Medici palaces. The city of Florence in Dante's era, however, had no such beauty. The city was mainly built around and formed by towers and campaniles.⁵³³ Florence was a web of narrow streets, buildings and houses constructed from stone and wood, with factories and workshops all piled on top of one another. Florence had many Churches, according to Marco Santagata, however these were small⁵³⁴ and were not as impressive as the ones that can be seen today. The city had countless towers which were often relatively tall. Santagata proclaims that the great family clans of Florence built them in order to display and flaunt their wealth and to defend "the houses and the workshops beneath them, and as high lookout posts from which they could control a vast area around them."⁵³⁵

⁵³² Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 21.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

“Tensions ran extremely high in Florence”⁵³⁶ and the city was constantly under attack.

As quarrels between individuals and rival parties resulted in daily violence and political unrest, the clans were thus left with little choice but to use defence and intimidation.

As a result, medieval Florence was in a constant process of devastation, repair, reorganisation and regeneration.

According to Santagata, medieval Florence was an energetic and lively city, which was driven by enterprise and economic growth, with the roots of that economic growth in finance.⁵³⁷ This financial system relied on the coinage of the florin, which quickly became the main coinage for international trade and currency.⁵³⁸ An extraordinary number of banks and trading companies were present in medieval Florence, mostly based within the city centre. These operated more widely throughout Europe and the Mediterranean “by way of a system of branch offices and alliances that could cover the most important markets, from Flanders, England and France, down to the kingdom of Sicily and northern Africa.”⁵³⁹ Due to economic growth and development, Florence fuelled an influx of urban growth.⁵⁴⁰ With urban growth came the arrival of workers, landowners, lords, craftsman, judges, notaries and many more. Dante disapproved of

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 223. John M. Najemy states that the city was in a series of conflicts “that repeatedly engulfed the city in rituals of revenge and vendetta.” John M. Najemy, ‘Florence’, in Lansing eds., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 386-403; 391.

⁵³⁷ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 24.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 25. Santagata also states that a famous Dominican theologian Remigio dei Girolami stated that the florin was “one of the seven gifts that Providence had bestowed on Florence”.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁴⁰ According to Najemy, “Dante’s Florence generated its exceptional wealth in three principles ways; first, as a magnet for surplus profits of a prosperous contado whose landowners, many of them city residents, also invested in lucrative forms of commerce; second, as the nerve centre of long-distance commerce and deposit banking that attracted the wealth not only of hundreds of Florentines but investors throughout Italy and Europe; and third, through its domestic textile industry and a wide variety of artisan trades and services.” Najemy, ‘Florence’, 388.

this increase in population,⁵⁴¹ urban growth and the sudden wealth forming within the city, and even went as far as to say that the golden florin was a “cursed flower, blossoming for corruption”.⁵⁴²

During the last twenty years of Dante’s life, Florence experienced further intense political and social upheaval. Peace proved short-lived in medieval Florence. A sustained conflict between the main rival parties had left the city in a state of total devastation and instability; physically, socially and politically. Giovanni Villani gives a vivid account of this fighting⁵⁴³ and Santagata asserts that the city was scattered with construction sites and scaffolding with debris everywhere which would remain “visible for many years.”⁵⁴⁴ In accordance with the Florentine spoils system, the winning party took complete control of the city, while the losing party lost their property, possessions, assets and, sometimes, even their lives.⁵⁴⁵

3.5.2 Italian Medieval Civil Society

J.G Nichols notes that in 1265 Florence was a city on its “progress towards the political and cultural dominance of Tuscany.”⁵⁴⁶ European and Italian politics and political affairs were deeply influenced by Florence⁵⁴⁷ as it was one of the largest and most

⁵⁴¹ According to Najemy, “The population of Florence grew rapidly from perhaps 30,000 in 1200, and no more than 50,00 around mid-century, to 100,000 in 1300 and, according to some estimates, to as much as 120,000 by the first third of the fourteenth century.” Najemy, ‘Florence’, 386.

⁵⁴² Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 25. This analogy is apt as the golden florin has a Florentine lily stamped on one side.

⁵⁴³ Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, 38.

⁵⁴⁴ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 32.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁴⁶ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 495.

⁵⁴⁷ It raises the question, how was the city of Florence, the most affluent and politically powerful city internationally? Philip Jones makes the assumption that “its competitive superiority, its ability to

important cities in Europe⁵⁴⁸. Tuscany⁵⁴⁹ was divided by two main political parties, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. According to Toynbee, the titles of these two political parties originated in Germany as Welf and Weiblingen.⁵⁵⁰ Florentine chroniclers have noted that the Guelphs and Ghibelline factions began in the year 1215.⁵⁵¹ Giovanni Villani listed the noble families who either joined the Guelphs, which included families like the Buondelmonti, Donati, Adimari, Bardi and Cerchi, or those that supported the Ghibellines like the Uberti, Amidei and Lamberti. The Florentine factions arose from a fight between two families arising from a broken engagement and subsequent murder between two noble families, the Buondelmonti and Amidei. A member of the Buondelmonti family, Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti, was murdered by a member of the Amidei family on Easter Sunday⁵⁵² as he crossed the Ponte Vecchio.⁵⁵³ Buondelmonte a Ghibelline, was betrothed to marry a woman from the Amidei family. Instead, he married a Guelph Donati. Tensions built upon an already deep-rooted conflict which stemmed from a century old power struggle between the German Monarchy and the pope. The German Monarchy claimed the title of Emperor and, for one hundred and fifty years, had sought to exercise sovereignty over Italy. From the middle of the eleventh to the early fourteenth century this rivalry shaped a particularly

dominate lesser cities militarily, its success at compelling Pisa to grant freedom of commerce into and out of its port and its close connection to the Roman Papacy were all important factors." George W. Dameron, *Florence and Its Church in the Age of Dante* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 4.

⁵⁴⁸ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I, 4, 5.

⁵⁴⁹ The Florentine republic originated in the year 1115 and was a medieval state. The republic was ruled by the Signoria, which was an executive council and consisted of eight elected Priori.

⁵⁵⁰ Rivalry between the house of Welf (Dukes of Bavaria) and the house of Hohenstaufen (Duke of Swabia). Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, 33.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 38.

⁵⁵³ Gordon, N. P. J. "The Murder of Buondelmonte: Contesting Place in Early Fourteenth-Century Florentine Chronicles." *Renaissance Studies*, 20/4, (2006), 459–477, JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/24416900. Accessed 10 August 2021. Incidentally, this is also the weekend that Dante chose to begin his descent into Hell in *The Divine Comedy*. Hollander, *Dante*, 5.

important and significant aspect of the internal politics of medieval Italy and between prominent leading families within the cities and towns themselves. The Guelphs favoured the pope⁵⁵⁴ and the Ghibellines the Holy Roman Emperor.⁵⁵⁵ Thus, Dante's Florence was fraught with chaos and factionalism. In the year 1266, the city of Florence was entirely Guelph; the Ghibellines were defeated by a papal sponsored invasion and were banished.⁵⁵⁶

Hostility within the Guelph party itself in Florence began to arise in the 1300s and the party split into the White Guelph or Bianchi, who stood for the new power of commerce⁵⁵⁷ and the Black Guelph or Neri of old nobility⁵⁵⁸ who supported papal ambitions to achieve power – spiritually, socially and politically – in Florence.⁵⁵⁹ The

⁵⁵⁴ According to George W. Dameron, the ecclesiastical communities and traditions “contributed ideologically, economically and politically to the formation of a territorial dominium and to the legitimization of the Guelf Commune”. Dameron, *Florence and Its Church in the Age of Dante*, 242.

⁵⁵⁵ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I, 6. The Ghibellines were renowned as being rulers who were extremely harsh. According to Robert Hollander, Medieval Italy was ‘distinguished by Factionalism.’ The Emperors at the time were tasked to govern all of Europe, however the Emperors avoided their duty, when it came to Italy. Hollander, *Dante*, 4.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵⁷ Seth Zimmerman, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (Nebraska: iUniverse, 2003) xiii. Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sins*, 7.

⁵⁵⁸ Zimmerman, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, xiii.

⁵⁵⁹ George Dameron states that the reasons for the eventual split remain unclear. However, “it is possible that rivalries between the major banking families might have helped precipitate it. George Dameron, ‘Dante and the Papacy’, in Kleinhenz and Olson, eds., *Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine Comedy*, 126-134; 129.

Black faction included members of the Donati family,⁵⁶⁰ and Spini family⁵⁶¹ and the White faction included members of the Cerchi family.⁵⁶² The political situation had far-reaching implications for the life and works of Dante. He and his family, the Alighieri, identified themselves with the Guelph party and after the split within the political party Dante identified himself as a White Guelph, although Nichols claims that Dante ended his career as a philosophical Ghibelline.⁵⁶³ Hollander agrees; he states that Dante's line of thinking lay in accord with Ghibelline ideas, for instance with their imperialist hopes. Dante found, however, that the Ghibellines lacked "the religious vision that he personally saw as the foundation of any imperialist program."⁵⁶⁴ Regardless of this, it was due to his political status as a White Guelph that he was subsequently exiled⁵⁶⁵ once the Black Guelphs obtained power in Florence in November 1301.

⁵⁶⁰ One of the leaders of the Black Guelphs was Corso Donati. Corso was an enemy of Dante's and is mentioned indirectly in *Purgatorio* by Corso's brother Forese, as a man "who bears the greatest blame" for Florence's problems due to his alliance with Pope Boniface VIII. *Purg.* 24. 82. For Najemy, Corso was a "charismatic and arrogant" man. He refers to Dino Compagni who describes Corso as "a knight in the mold of Catiline the Roman, but more cruel; noble blood, handsome of body, a charming speaker, adorned with good breeding, subtle of intellect, with his mind always set on evil-doing; one who gathered many armed men and kept entourage, who ordered many arsons and robberies and did great damage to the Cerchi and their friends." Najemy, 'Florence', 394. Corso was the chief magistrate of Bologna (1283 and 1288) and of Pistoria (1289). For Michael Papio he was a "ruthless Florentine knight and politician who made a name for himself through an act of reckless courage against Arezzo in the Battle of Campaldino." Corso's popularity faded over time and his political alliance also waned. "While attempting to escape Florence in 1308 he was murdered" or fell off his horse. Dante discusses this in *Purgatorio* 24. 82-90. Michael Papio, 'Corso Donati', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 232. Dante married into the Donati family by marrying Gemma Donati. Forese Donati was a distant cousin of Gemma's and "a friend to Dante". Susan Noakes, 'Forese Donati', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 403-404; 403.

⁵⁶¹ According to Dameron, the Spini family were prominent bankers and creditors to Pope Boniface VIII. Dameron, 'Dante and the Papacy', 129.

⁵⁶² The Cerchi family were "an enterprising and extremely wealthy family of non-knightly origins. Susan Noakes, 'Blacks and Whites', 105. According to Santagata, "Around mid-march 1300, a delegation was sent to Rome on a secret mission to find out whether any Florentines in the papal curia were plotting against the Cerchi." Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 222.

⁵⁶³ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 497.

⁵⁶⁴ Hollander, *Dante*, 6.

⁵⁶⁵ 27 January 1302.

Florence and its various political factions feature throughout *The Divine Comedy*. For example, in the *Inferno*, in the third circle where the Gluttonous (Gula) dwell, Ciacco, a fellow Florentine, discusses with Dante the difficulties in their native city. They talk about the political divisions between the Guelph and the Ghibellines, the subdivision of the Black Guelph (*neri*) and White Guelph (*bianchi*), and the help given to the Black Guelph by Pope Boniface;

Your city, so full of envy
That now the sack spills over,
Held me in its confines in the sunlit life.
You and your townsmen called me Ciacco.
For the pernicious fault of gluttony,
As you can see, I'm prostrate in this rain
And in my misery I am not alone.
All those here share a single penalty
For the same fault.⁵⁶⁶

Turner states that the souls present in Hell can only recount the past. However this statement is untrue as shades can "see beforehand that which time will bring."⁵⁶⁷ For example, Ciacco in Canto 6, insinuates about Dante's upcoming exile and Florence's impending fate;

After long feuding
They shall come to blood. The rustic faction,
Having done great harm, shall drive the others out.
But it in turn must fall to them,
Within three years, by power of him
Who now just bides his time.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ *Inf.* 6. 50-57.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10. 98-108. Farinata explains to Dante that the souls in Hell can recount the past and future, however the present and near future cannot be known. Turner, *Dante the Theologian*, 97.

⁵⁶⁸ *Inf.* 6. 64-69. Ciacco's prophecy is being relayed to Dante in 1300, therefore, the events are near.

Farinata degli Uberti, a political rival of Dante's and a one-time leader of the Ghibelline political party,⁵⁶⁹ prophesizes Dante's exile in Canto 10;

But the face of the lady reigning here
Will be rekindled not fifty times before you too
Shall know how difficult a skill that is to learn.⁵⁷⁰

Echoing Farinata and Ciacco, Brunetto also foretells Dante's exile in Canto 15;

But that malignant, thankless rabble
That came down from Fiesole long ago
And still smacks of the mountain rock
Rightly shall become, because of your good deeds,
Your enemy: among bitter sorbs
It is not fit the sweet fig come to fruit
The world has long belived them to be blind,
A people greedy, envious and proud.
Be sure you stay untainted by their ways.
Your destiny reserves for you such honour
Both parties shall be hungry to devour you,
But the grass shall be far from the goat.⁵⁷¹

Politically marginalized and facing false allegations, "[Dante] saw clearly now that the real villain was Pope Boniface, who had all along manipulated and schemed to gain control of Florence."⁵⁷² Within *Paradiso*, we see the poet turning to divine justice and truth with regards to his exile; "The populace shall blame the injured party, as it always does, but vengeance shall bear witness to the Truth that metes it out."⁵⁷³ As a

⁵⁶⁹ The theme Florentine political discord is not restricted to just prophecy. For example, Farinata is present with the sixth circle of the *Inferno*. This circle contains the souls of the heretics and the pagans, who maintain that the soul dies with the body and who do not know the effects and consequences of original sin. These souls are trapped in burning marble mausoleums. The feud between Farinata and Dante continues within the *Inferno*; "They were most bitter enemies, to me, my forebears, and my party – not once, but twice, I had to drive them out if they were banished, I responded, 'they returned from every quarter both the first time and the second, a skill that yours have failed to learn as well'". Ibid., 10. 46-51.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 10. 79-81.

⁵⁷¹ *Inf.* 15. 61-72.

⁵⁷² Reynolds, *Dante*, 43 and 44.

⁵⁷³ *Par.* 17. 52-54.

result of Dante's hatred and bitterness, Pope Boniface will forever remain a prominent condemned figure within the *Inferno*.⁵⁷⁴

During the first ten years of his exile, Dante moved frequently.⁵⁷⁵ He deeply resented his exile⁵⁷⁶ and in *Paradiso* 17, he relays the struggles of exile; the loneliness and feelings of abandonment.

You shall leave behind all you most dearly love,
And that shall be the arrow
First loosed from exile's bow.
You shall learn how salt is the taste
Of another man's bread and how hard is the way,
Going down and then up another man's stairs.⁵⁷⁷

After the death of Pope Boniface, Nicola Boccasini became Pope Benedict XI (1240-1304).⁵⁷⁸ Pope Benedict XI, sought to reconcile the various factions of Florence, however his efforts were unsuccessful. Dante, "disillusioned and embittered"⁵⁷⁹ broke away from the remaining exiled "wicked and witless"⁵⁸⁰ compatriots who sought to

⁵⁷⁴ As will all of the other political and religious figures who, in Dante's opinion, committed a sin which conflicted with the theology of the Catholic Church, or Dante's political party, the White Guelphs.

⁵⁷⁵ "So much so that his biographers are often at a loss to account for his whereabouts" Hollander, *Dante*, 6.

⁵⁷⁶ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 607. Santagata refers to certain letters which were written to Dante's Florentine friend, claiming that the path to his innocence is through intellectual merit and this might give Dante the chance to return home in dignified manner.

⁵⁷⁷ *Par.* 55-60.

⁵⁷⁸ Nicola Boccasini was born in Treviso. At the age of fourteen, he entered the Dominican order. He only survived nine months in office before his death. Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners, A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene Book, 2002), 163.

⁵⁷⁹ Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 19.

⁵⁸⁰ *Par.* 17. 62.

claim back the city of Florence from the Black Guelfs,⁵⁸¹ thereby becoming a “single party... alone”.⁵⁸²

3.5.3 Italian Medieval Religious Orders

Dante’s writings reflects an amalgamation of philosophy, theology and politics that was present in Florence in the 1290s, in the legacies of Thomas Aquinas,⁵⁸³ of Augustine⁵⁸⁴ and of St. Bonaventure.⁵⁸⁵ Dante widens his scope to incorporate politics, Florentine culture, Greek mythology and philosophy by evoking the works of Aristotle and of the Neo-Platonists. As Alison Morgan correctly notes, Dante “is the first Christian writer to combine the popular material with the theological and philosophical systems of his day”.⁵⁸⁶ Dante’s poetic skills enabled him to produce a work that excites and enlightens its readers, allowing them a better understanding of

⁵⁸¹ Initially, Dante roamed Tuscany and “joined other exiles at San Godenzo on June 8th 1302, where they met and planned to wage war against the Blacks.” Mazzotta, ‘Alighieri, Dante’, 19.

By the “fall he travelled with White partisans across the Apennines to Forlì” Dameron, ‘Dante and the Papacy’, 129. This attempt to return to Florence was around 1304. Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 474.

⁵⁸² *Par.* 17. 69.

⁵⁸³ Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-74), was born the youngest son of Count Landulf of Aquino. Despite opposition from his family, Aquinas joined the Dominican order in April of 1244. Subsequently he became one of the most celebrated religious thinkers to emerge from the Middle Ages. Aquinas is the author of *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*. Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas; A Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 8.

⁵⁸⁴ Augustine of Hippo, (354 - 430) or Saint Augustine, was born in the Roman North African town of Thagaste. His father, Patricius, was a pagan and a man of ‘slender means’. His mother Monica, was a Christian. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo; A Biography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 7-9.

Miles Hollingworth, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), XV.

⁵⁸⁵ St. Bonaventure, was born in Bagnoregio in 1221. When he was young, he was contracted a terrible illness, which was cured by St. Francis. When St. Francis heard that the child recovered, he exclaimed ‘buona ventura’. His mother changed his name to Bonaventura. He joined the Franciscan order and in 1257 he was made general of the order and offered the archbishopric of Albano. Bonaventure is considered one of the most celebrated philosophers of the middle ages. Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 333-334.

⁵⁸⁶ Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 103.

Dante, of themselves, and of the social, economic and political situation of medieval Florence.

3.5.4 The Franciscans and Dominicans

Dante's writings draw from the various theologies that were present in Florence in the 1290s. This section will map these potential influences through the lens of Dante's Florentine epoch, which had a thematic impact on his theology and on his subsequent political theological critique in *The Divine Comedy*. We have no information as to where Dante studied philosophy or theology. There were, as noted, three possible religious *studia*; the Franciscans⁵⁸⁷ at Santa Croce, the Dominicans⁵⁸⁸ at Santa Maria Novella, and the Augustinians at Santo Spirito. The Franciscans at Santa Croce was a *stadium generale*. In the *Convivio*, Dante himself states that he went to the "schools of the religious and the disputations of the philosophers"⁵⁸⁹ and Peter S. Hawkins believes that Dante is referring to "the convent school established by the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella and by the Franciscans at Santa Croce."⁵⁹⁰ According to Marco Santagata, Pietro di Giovanni Olivi and Ubertino da Casale were readers at Santa Croce; they, however, left before 1290 and therefore could not have taught Dante.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁷ Francis of Assisi (c.1181 -1226) founded the religious order the Franciscans. He was born in 1182 to a prosperous merchant, but, after suffering an illness, became deeply religious and renounced his earthly possessions to begin a life of poverty, prayer, preaching repentance and good works.

During the middle ages, there were three major theologians associated with the Franciscans; Bonaventure (1221-74), Duns Scotus (1266-1308) and William of Ockham (c.1285-74).

⁵⁸⁸ Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) was the founder of the religious order the Dominicans. The Dominicans had a particular interest in education and made significant contributions to the intellectual life of the Church. Notably theologians associated with the Dominican order emerged from the Middle Ages, such as; Albert the Great (c.1200-80) and Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-74).

⁵⁸⁹ In *Conv.* 2.12.7.

⁵⁹⁰ Picone, 'Bertran de Born', 100. According to John M. Najemy, "The Franciscans may have been more popular among artisans and middle-rank merchants of the popolo, while the Dominicans cultivated ties to elite families as well". Najemy, 'Florence', 398.

⁵⁹¹ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 175.

Santagata notes that even though Dante never mentions Olivi, he may have attended some of his sermons.⁵⁹² The Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella similarly became a *stadium generale* at the beginning of the 1300s. Dominicans did not allow lay students who were admitted to study theology to attend philosophy;⁵⁹³ however, there could have been indirect exposure to Aristotelian philosophy within the theology course of studies. According to Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen, Dante first encountered the philosopher's ethical and political thinking thanks to Brunetto Latini (c.1220-1294) and Remigio dei Girolami (1235-1319).⁵⁹⁴ Santagata affirms this, agreeing that Dante may have had the opportunity to attend the lectures of Girolami.⁵⁹⁵ Girolami was an Italian Dominican theologian and a central figure within Florentine culture. He was a pupil of Thomas Aquinas and was also a White Guelf like Dante. Even though there is no record of them ever engaging with one another, Santagata believes that Dante may have attended his lectures and heard his sermons.⁵⁹⁶ Santagata further claims that it is reasonable to believe that Dante attended lectures at both the Dominican and Franciscan schools until his exile.⁵⁹⁷

The Dominicans were known as "an order of students"⁵⁹⁸ due to the order's emphasis on academic learning and from the legacy of St. Dominic who was himself a teacher of

⁵⁹² Ibid., 175.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 175.

⁵⁹⁴ Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen, 'Introduction: Justice in the Heart', 3.

⁵⁹⁵ According to John M. Najemy, Remigio dei Girolami "openly preached political themes". Najemy, 'Florence', 398. According to John M. Najemy, at times, the Florentine Dominicans took political roles, specifically in the role the Dominican cardinals played in the 1280 mediation between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines. Ibid., 398.

Remigio constantly urged "the Florentines to compose their differences and embrace peace." John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200 – 1575* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 55.

⁵⁹⁶ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 176.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 177.

⁵⁹⁸ Nicholas Havely, 'Dominic, St.', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 312-313; 312.

renown.⁵⁹⁹ The order claimed a duty to study and preach, and, similar to the Franciscans, its friars undertook a vow of poverty. Dante gave both St. Francis and St. Dominic a special place within his *Paradiso* where he stresses the saints' peaceful collaboration in reforming the Catholic Church.⁶⁰⁰ In Canto 11 and Canto 12, Dante's respect is evident. He highlights their common element in Poverty: Francis was married to "Poverty"⁶⁰¹ and Dominic was wedded to "Faith".⁶⁰² Dante underlines the parallel virtues exhibited in the lives of Dominic and Francis, and also draws direct parallels between the rejection of material goods on the one hand, and just and moral actions on the other, compared with the misdeeds of a corrupt Papacy.⁶⁰³ Canto 11 is a tribute to the two "lovers,"⁶⁰⁴ Francis and Lady Poverty, who became "increasingly more precious to him (Francis)".⁶⁰⁵ Dante gives St. Francis an exalted place in Paradise, just below John the Baptist but above St. Benedict in the celestial rose, "in a section reserved for the great founders of religious orders."⁶⁰⁶

⁵⁹⁹ *Par.* 12. 85

⁶⁰⁰ In Dante's *Paradiso*, everyone lives harmoniously, however, this was not the case for the Dominicans and Franciscans. There was an institutional rivalry between these two orders, however both orders attracted large crowds to their preaching. Najemy, 'Florence', 398. According to Steven Botterill, there was a debate within the Church surrounding alchemy and its moral legitimacy. It became an subject which increased the rivalry between the two orders. For the Franciscans, "especially their radical 'spiritual' wing – were celebrated proponents of alchemical research and theorizing, whereas the Dominicans ... came to oppose it." Steven Botterill, 'Alchemy', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 12-13; 13. After St. Thomas died, his "reputation was dragged into an increasingly ill-tempered feud between the Dominicans and Franciscan theologians, and within decades he had become at once a trophy possession for the former and an object of bitter hostility among the latter." Turner, *Thomas Aquinas*, 48.

⁶⁰¹ *Par.* 11. 75.

⁶⁰² *Par.* 12. 61. "Where Francis married Poverty, Dominic took Faith as his wife". Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 327.

⁶⁰³ *Par.* 11.75, *Par.* 11.82, *Par.* 11.94, *Par.* 12.91-93 *Par.* 12. 98 *Par.* 12.131.

⁶⁰⁴ *Par.* 11. 75.

⁶⁰⁵ Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 299.

⁶⁰⁶ Ronald B. Herzman, 'Francis of Assisi, St.' in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 414-416; 415.

At the beginning of Canto 11, Dante relies on the eight earthly “foolish cares”⁶⁰⁷ of mortals from which he has now been temporarily released. These “cares” are a collection of pointless activities: law, medicine, priesthood, political power, robbery, civic affairs, sexuality and idleness.⁶⁰⁸ These activities on earth are in striking contrast to the joyous gratification which he is now experiencing in heaven. Although this framing of a mundane life by Dante may seem unduly negative, we gain an insight into the professions and activities available to privileged males of Dante’s time. It should be noted, that the word Dante uses for priesthood is *sacerdozio* and, according to Jean and Robert Hollander, Boschi/Reggio, drew attention to how *sacerdozio* indicates a position in an “ecclesiastical office that yields a good living to its holder”,⁶⁰⁹ thus reinforcing Dante’s previous attacks on the authorities and ethos of the contemporary Church. It is clear, however, that there is one lifestyle choice which is viewed sympathetically by Dante, namely the life of poverty, as manifested in the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

The Franciscans were a mendicant order, with an internal rivalry between the Spirituals and the Conventuals. The Spirituals insisted on strict observance of poverty and critiqued the wealth and power of the Church. The Conventuals accepted the “legal arrangements that allowed them to use property”⁶¹⁰ which had been forbidden according to Francis’s rule. Dante seems to have sided with the Spirituals, and this is evident within *Paradiso* Canto 11, where St. Francis is praised by St Thomas Aquinas,

⁶⁰⁷ *Par.* 11.1.

⁶⁰⁸ *Par* 11. 1-9.

⁶⁰⁹ Jean and Robert Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 296.

⁶¹⁰ Najemy, ‘Florence’, 398.

who proposed that the life of Francis should be a model for emulation; “Now think what kind of man it took to be a fit companion to maintain the steadfast course of Peter’s bark upon the sea!”.⁶¹¹ This lends support to the position taken by Ronald B. Herzman, that the short biography of Francis, in Canto 11 of *Paradiso*, can be viewed as a plea for the reform of the Catholic Church.⁶¹²

In Canto 12, St. Bonaventure begins to speak.⁶¹³ In his speech about St. Francis, it is evident that Francis is a unique individual, a ‘saint among saints, a saint unique in Christian history’.⁶¹⁴ In this canto Bonaventure also narrates and praises the life of the founder of Aquinas’s order, St. Dominic, emphasising the harmonies and simplicities of Heaven. St. Dominic was a scholar and a teacher, who studied Christ’s teachings not for social or political advancement, but for “love of the true manna”.⁶¹⁵ Bonaventure describes Dominic as operating effectively as a Christian soldier, fighting under the banner of Christ against heresy.⁶¹⁶ Steven Botterill persuasively refers to Dominic in

⁶¹¹ *Par.* 11. 118-120.

⁶¹² Herzman, ‘Francis of Assisi, St.’, 415.

⁶¹³ “The holy millstone once again began to wheel”. *Par.* 12. 3. Hagman, believes that “Dante must have thought highly of Bonaventure”. He bases this assertion on the role assigned to Bonaventure in Canto XI and in Canto XII of *Paradiso*. Hagman also correctly notes that within Canto XII of *Paradiso*, when Bonaventure identifies himself, he states that while he was in the “great office”, he “put last the left-handed care”, thereby giving priority to the right hand. Hollander notes that here Dante, is reflecting on the traditional link between the right and left hand which proposes that the right hand has more “positive purposes” and the left hand has more “sinister” qualities. Hagman believes that this refers to the more spiritual concerns and temporal affairs. Bonaventure was concerned with both, however, “during his life he always gave priority to the “right-handed” spiritual concerns as opposed to the temporal affairs... it was precisely his spiritual concerns which led him to link his speculative theology closely to prayer and contemplation, which by the grace of God would dispose the soul for mystical union with him”. *Par.* 12. 128-129. Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 334; Hagman, ‘Dante’s Vision of God’, 1.

⁶¹⁴ Herzman, ‘Francis of Assisi, St.’, 415.

⁶¹⁵ *Par.* 12.84.

⁶¹⁶ *Par.* 12. 36, *Par.* 12. 85-87, *Par.* 12. 100-102.

this canto as being presented as a force of nature, attacking the weeds which have grown on the “Catholic garden”⁶¹⁷;

Then, both with learning and with seal, secure in apostolic office, he went forth, like a torrent gushing from its lofty source, and fell upon the tangled weeds of Heresy, attacking with his overwhelming force wherever the resistance was most stubborn.⁶¹⁸ Jean and Robert Hollander observe that the “initial precept taught by Christ”,⁶¹⁹

discussed by Dante in lines 74-75, is that of poverty, since both Franciscans and

Dominicans take vows of poverty. Dante, through Bonaventure, discusses the

withering vineyard of the papal see which is corrupted, not by itself or what it stands

for, but by its occupant.⁶²⁰ The Papacy “in its design”⁶²¹ is supportive of the poor;

because, however, of failure on the part of successive popes – or, as Dante calls them,

“keepers”⁶²² – “ignoring that design”⁶²³ the “vineyard quickly withers.”⁶²⁴ Here, Dante

reinforces his political theological critique of the Catholic Church; goodness is

necessary for the flourishing human being, however, with neglectful leaders, who do

not practice the act of poverty and fail to give up their worldly possessions as Christ

requested, there is a turning away from their highest good, that is, God. Since the

problem lies, not with institution itself, but its occupants, reform must come from

within the individual themselves. Once the individual is reformed and sins have been

purged, society can flourish and function as God intended.

⁶¹⁷ *Par.* 12. 104. Steven Botterill, ‘Paradiso XII.’ *Lectura Dantis*, no. 16/17 (1995), 172–185; 180. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44806600>. Accessed 2 August 2023.

⁶¹⁸ *Par.* 12. 97-102.

⁶¹⁹ Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 328.

⁶²⁰ *Par.* 12. 88-90.

⁶²¹ Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 330.

⁶²² *Par.* 12. 87.

⁶²³ Particularly Boniface VIII.

⁶²⁴ *Par.* 12. 86

3.5.5 The Donation of Constantine

The anonymous author of the 'Donation of Constantine',⁶²⁵ wrote this document as a way to validate and defend the authority of the Catholic Church, along with its property, possessions and political influence.⁶²⁶ Since the Donation was believed to be authentic, it served as justification for the Church's earthly supremacy and temporal political power. For Charles Matson Odahl, the donation "suited the needs of the Roman See, which ultimately constructed a theory of Papal World Monarchy".⁶²⁷ Frank Furedi points out that this *Constitutum Constantini*, 'the Donation of Constantine', served as a warrant for imperial and papal claims to authority.⁶²⁸ This document stated that Constantine had moved the capital of the Empire from Rome to Byzantium⁶²⁹ and named it *Nova Roma* or the new Rome. By doing this, he gave temporal power of the West to the Church allowing and supporting the Church's claim to political authority.⁶³⁰

In Dante's era this document was considered legal and genuine, and Dante treated it as such within his poetry.⁶³¹ He believed that it marked the beginning of corruption

⁶²⁵ Constantine was the Roman Emperor from 306-37. According to Charles Odahl, after Constantine's conversion in 312, "he became a devout Christian believer, and allowed his religious confession to affect imperial policies". Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁶²⁶ Brett Edward Whalen, *The Medieval Papacy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

⁶²⁷ Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 284.

⁶²⁸ Frank Furedi draws on examples from the eighth to the eleventh century, in which the Papacy, "sought to justify its claim for supreme authority by 'insisting on the continued presence of St. Peter in Rome". Furedi, *Authority*, 102.

⁶²⁹ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 88.

⁶³⁰ According to Odahl, the popes of the Middle Ages "encouraged European kings to be like Constantine – a devout son of the Papacy who honoured the clergy, endowed Churches, opposed heresy ... if they wished to be great and successful rulers in Christendom". Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 284.

⁶³¹ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 88.

and impurity in the Church, and that it supported the inability of the Church to follow in the way of Christ, as the Church became immersed in the demands of its earthly goods and temporal power. It should be noted, however, that Dante does not blame Constantine for the events that unfolded after the donation was made; the fault, rather, lies with the men leading the Church, namely the popes. As a result, Constantine's Donation haunts the third ditch of the eighth circle of Dante's *Inferno*.

In the *Inferno*, Dante charges the Donation of Constantine with being the mother of much of the evil found within the Church. "Constantine in Dante's eyes, was a good Christian who with the best of intentions made a disastrous error".⁶³² This "dowry"⁶³³, initially an act of generosity, facilitates evil when Pope Sylvester took the "dowry" and became the "first rich father."⁶³⁴

Ah Constantine, to what evil you gave birth,
Not by your conversion, but by the dowry
That the first rich Father had from you!⁶³⁵

In relation to the Donation of Constantine, Dante, in book three of *De Monarchia*, denies the Church the right to possess temporal goods and the Emperor to bestow them:

For although we learn from Luke, of the mitigation of this order regarding certain things, yet I am unable to find that sanction was given the Church to possess gold and silver, subsequent to the prohibition. Wherefore if the Church had not the power to receive,

⁶³² By transferring "wealth and temporal power in the west to the pope, he helped corrupt the Church." Charles T. Davis, 'Dante's Vision of History', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 93, Johns Hopkins University Press, (1975), 143–60;143. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166193>. Accessed 28 October 2021.

⁶³³ *Inf.* Canto 19. 16. Supposedly, this dowry was given to Pope Sylvester, by Constantine in 314.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, Canto 19. 17.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, Canto 19. 115-117. Language is very important here. Dante uses the word '*prese*'. "Ahi, Costantin, di quanto mal fu madre, non la tua conversion ma quella dote che da te prese il primo ricco padre!" Most translations, such as that of J.G. Nicholas, translate '*prese*' as, 'donate'; Robert and Jean Hollander translate '*prese*' as 'had', whereas the direct translation of '*prese*' means 'taken'. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 88. Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, 351.

even had Constantine power to bestow, temporal authority, the action would nevertheless be impossible, because of the disqualification of the patient. It is demonstrated, then, that neither could the Church accept by way of possession, nor could Constantine confer by way of alienation.⁶³⁶

The Donation was exposed as a forgery by the Italian humanist, named Lorenzo Valla⁶³⁷ in the fifteenth century. This exposure, further enhanced critical views of ecclesiastical authority as corrupt, abusive and deceptive.

3.6 Italian Medieval Church and Social Relations

In Medieval Europe, important debates focused on whether the authority of the Emperor derived from God or the Pontiff, leading to the question of whether the Pontiff had the right to interfere in political affairs.⁶³⁸ There were always two petitioners to this power, with separate but complementary roles: the pope (*sacerdotium*)⁶³⁹ and the temporal ruler (*regnum*);⁶⁴⁰ neither could surpass the other.⁶⁴¹ However, according to Manuhua Barcham, the *sacerdotium* relied on the piety and goodwill of the temporal rulers in order to carry out and fulfil ecclesiastical responsibilities, as the Church was deficient in structural capacities of its own to implement its policies.⁶⁴² As a result, the Church became closely involved in the

⁶³⁶ Mon. 3. 6. 10-12.

⁶³⁷ William Franke, 'Constantine', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 216-217; 216. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 88.

⁶³⁸ "The conflict between the temporal power and the Papacy led to the development of a situation where competition was mediated through the common acceptance of the principle of universalism ... Competition encouraged both jurisdictions to devote considerable energy to the systematisation of the law ...in the end both of the jurisdictions drew on a shared source or foundation of authority". Furedi, *Authority*, 121.

⁶³⁹ As noted in chapter one, pp. 19, for many, the popes authority was derived from divine mandate, to lead the souls of this earthly universe to eternal salvation and to assert their sacred authority.

⁶⁴⁰ Who dealt with temporal matters.

⁶⁴¹ Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050-1300* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 1.

⁶⁴² Manuhua Barcham, 'Rule by Natural Reason: Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Conceptions of Political Corruption', *Corruption: Expanding the Focus*, ed., Manuhua Barcham et al., ANU Press, (2012), 53-72; 54. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hbwc.8>. Accessed 23 September 2020.

agencies of the temporal realm, often to the displeasure of prophetic voices within the Church. Papal elections were irregular and nearly always corrupt. The authority, power and control of the Papacy were usually secured through family lineage. Tension between religious and secular had very visible effects in the life of the Church. Many of the cardinals and bishops inherited their spiritual positions of authority from family members and many bishops, priests and popes bought their religious positions, rather than relying on their own merit. As a result, disputes impacted widely in both religious and temporal realms due to this nepotism and simony.

3.7 Simony

3.7.1 Simony in Theory

The word simony means the buying and selling of religious items and power. The word is an eponym, deriving from the figure of Simon Magus (Simon mago) in Acts 8:9-20.

Simon Magus practiced magic in the town of Samaria and was well-known for his sorcery.⁶⁴³ He was converted and baptised by Philip the Evangelist, and afterwards attempted to buy the powers of the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'⁶⁴⁴

The Apostles refused the money and Simon Magus was severely reprovved by Simon Peter for even thinking that God's gifts could be purchased. "But Peter answered, 'May your money perish for ever and you with it, for thinking that you could get God's

⁶⁴³ "Now a man called Simon had some time been practising magic arts in the town and astounding the Samaritan people, saying that he was someone great, and everyone from the least to the greatest paid attention to him, saying, "he is the power of God that is called Great". Acts 8:9-20.

⁶⁴⁴ Acts 8: 18-19.

gift by money!”⁶⁴⁵ Simon, for Dante, is the personification of the sin, however, here is where he ends this analogy. I believe, however, that Dante possibly intentionally left out the next line; “Simon replied, ‘Pray to the Lord for me so that none of the things of which you have spoken may happen to me’”⁶⁴⁶ as he had no personified role to give poetically, politically or theologically “for a repentant Christian.”⁶⁴⁷ Dante here saw beyond the literal sin and sought to provide the reader with the greater scope of the Church’s actual sin; engaging in temporal affairs, but most importantly, leading its flock away from highest good and potentially corrupting their souls as a result.

In the eleventh century,⁶⁴⁸ however, those accused of simony were often compared to Gehazi – again a biblical figure⁶⁴⁹ – a servant of the prophet Elisha who misused his position for monetary gain.⁶⁵⁰ Simony was condemned by the Church because ‘her’ founder, Jesus Christ, chose to renounce this model of access to power and authority, declaring to Pilate “My kingdom is not of this world,”⁶⁵¹ furthermore, Christ called his Apostles to live in poverty and to renounce earthy wealth and property. “So in the

⁶⁴⁵ Acts 8. 20. “Your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that this scheme of your heart may be forgiven, for I see that you are in the bitterness of gall and the bonds of sin”. Acts 8:21-23.

⁶⁴⁶ Acts 8.24.

⁶⁴⁷ Mason, ‘A Journey through Hell Dante’s ‘Inferno’ Re-Visited’, 5.

⁶⁴⁸ Christopher Kleinhenz, *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1048.

⁶⁴⁹ 2 Kings 5:1 -27.

⁶⁵⁰ Naaman, was the commander of the Aram army who suffered with leprosy. The king of Aram, told Naaman to go to Israel and find Elisha in order to cure him of his disease. Once Elisha has cured Naaman of his ailment, Naaman offered Elisha presents, which he refused by saying ‘As Yahweh lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing’. However, Gehazi, ran back after they departed to ‘try get something out of him’. Gehazi requested ‘a talent of silver and two festal robes’ but Naaman insisted he take ‘two talents’ instead, which Gehazi accepted. Upon returning to Opel, Elisha confronted Gehazi; “Was not my heart present there when someone left his chariot to meet you? Now you have taken the money, you can buy gardens with it, and olive groves, sheep and oxen, male and female slaves. But Namaan’s leprosy will cling to you and your descendants for ever.’ And Gehazi left his presence white as snow with leprosy.” 2 Kings 5:25-27.

⁶⁵¹ John 18:36.

same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all that you own.”⁶⁵²

Thomas Aquinas deemed simony a heresy and “since simony is an intentional will to sin, it would seem that it is always a sin against the Holy Ghost”.⁶⁵³ Aquinas then offers three reasons as to why the buying and selling of spiritual things is inappropriate. The first is that the items or positions, are not of this world and therefore cannot have an earthly monetary value. The second is that those items and positions are not anyone’s to sell. Lastly, he highlights the irreverent nature of the transaction, as Christ stated, “You received without charge, give without charge.”⁶⁵⁴ Therefore, the buying and selling of items is against the gratuitous nature and Grace of God to be given otherwise than freely.

3.7.2 Simony in Practice

Despite simony being considered a heresy, as it was understood as being an act against the Holy Spirit, it was still an act practiced by those in the highest positions within the Church. Horne correctly notes that Dante was “only one of many voices raised against it (simony) – though, because of his spectacular literary gifts, his undoubtedly became the voice that later ages would remember most vividly.”⁶⁵⁵ According to Horne, the corrupt act of simony, “had been a running sore on the body of the Church for centuries”.⁶⁵⁶ The first Church response we see on the matter comes

⁶⁵² Luke 14:33.

⁶⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*: Volume III-Part II, Second Section, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 1617. II^a-II^ae q. 100 a. 1 arg. 2.

⁶⁵⁴ Matthew 10:8.

“Keep no gold or silver, not even copper in your belt, no bag for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or staff, for the labourer deserves his keep”. Matthew 10:9-10.

⁶⁵⁵ Brian Horne, ‘The Devout Critic: Dante and the Church’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, (2012) 12/3-4, 279-292;280., DOI: 10.1080/1474225X.2012.730785. Accessed 22 August 2020.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 280.

at the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451 where there is a condemnation of the purchase of holy orders and Church positions;

If any bishop performs an ordination for money and puts the unsaleable grace on sale, and ordains for money a bishop, a chorepiscopus, a presbyter or a deacon or some other of those numbered among the clergy; or appoints a manager, a legal officer or a warden for money, or any other ecclesiastic at all for personal sordid gain; let him who has attempted this and been convicted stand to lose his personal rank; and let the person ordained profit nothing from the ordination or appointment he has bought; but let him be removed from the dignity or responsibility which he got for money. And if anyone appears to have acted even as a go-between in such disgraceful and unlawful dealings, let him too, if he is a cleric, be demoted from his personal rank, and if he is a lay person or a monk, let him be anathematised.⁶⁵⁷

Across the Christian community there were many who detected corruption within the Church. Some members of the community felt that the Church's immoral behaviour and malpractice was not in line with Jesus' teachings, and therefore the Church should reform itself and become more worthy of the gift that revelation brings. Between the sixth and tenth centuries, according to Joseph H. Lynch, "prohibitions of simony were widely ignored",⁶⁵⁸ and simony seemed to have been widespread. Pope Gregory VII referred to simony as heresy⁶⁵⁹ for the reason that the gifts from the Holy Spirit could not be bought and subsequently sold or offered in exchanged for some earthly goods.⁶⁶⁰ The Gregorian reform of the Church attempted to eradicate simony, but were ultimately proved unsuccessful as the heretical practice continued to Dante's day and beyond. In Canto 19, Dante the poet mentions three popes; Nicholas, Clement and Boniface.

⁶⁵⁷ Norman P Tanner, ed. 'Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D', *Papal Encyclicals Online*, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum04.htm> Accessed May 12 2021.

⁶⁵⁸ Horne, 'The Devout Critic', 1048.

⁶⁵⁹ H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 57.

⁶⁶⁰ There was a widening of the definition of Simony to include; "simony by the hand (*a manu*) when monetary payment passed, simony by service (*'ab obsequio'*) when the discharge of some duty was the quid pro quo for promotion, and simony by the tongue (*'a lingua'*), when there was an offer of favours, advocacy, or promises." Ibid., 57.

One of the souls that Dante encounters in the third ditch of the eighth circle, is Pope Nicholas, Giovanni Gaetano Orsini,⁶⁶¹ who had according to Mark Musa, “won renown for his integrity” as a cardinal.⁶⁶² However, once his pontificate began, in 1277, the situation changed significantly and Nicholas became famous for his simoniacal practices and nepotism. According to Horne, Nicholas III was a “clever and manipulative diplomat whose adroit political machinations had succeeded in enlarging the territory of the papal state.”⁶⁶³ He gave positions of ecclesiastical authority and public power to relatives.⁶⁶⁴ Kenelm Foster states that, while serving as a cardinal, Nicholas was a member and leader of the anti-French party in the Curia and used this position and his power as pope to hinder the power of Charles of Anjou, the King of Naples and Sicily.⁶⁶⁵ Foster claims that Dante had “detested and feared”⁶⁶⁶ French power within Europe, and therefore he finds curious the placement of this pope within this circle of hell.⁶⁶⁷ He provides three reasons for Dante’s justification. First, perhaps “as a Florentine he bore Nicholas a grudge for his interventions in Tuscany.”⁶⁶⁸ Second, “as a political anticlerical, he was repelled by this pope’s designs over the Romagna.”⁶⁶⁹ Third and last, “he seized on the nepotism of Nicholas”.⁶⁷⁰ This last point seems the most plausible as it provides evidence of the corruption and the

⁶⁶¹ ‘son of the she-bear’. *Inf.* 19.70. Giovanni Gaetano Orsini was born between 1220 and 1230.

⁶⁶² Musa, *Dante’s Inferno*, 145.

⁶⁶³ Horne, ‘The Devout Critic’, 280.

⁶⁶⁴ Musa, *Dante’s Inferno*, 145.

⁶⁶⁵ Kenelm Foster ‘The Canto of the Damned popes: Inferno XIX.’ *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 87, (1969), 47–68; 56. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40166111. Accessed 18 June 2021.

⁶⁶⁶ Foster, ‘The Canto of the Damned popes: Inferno XIX’, 56.

⁶⁶⁷ “It is then rather curious that Dante ... should have been so hard on this pope.” *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

deterioration of the Catholic Church. Dante was not anticlerical; he attributed fault to those who betray the institution of the Catholic Church, and in particular the popes who corrupted the principles and moral laws of their faith and community. Pope Nicholas died in the year 1280 after only three years in office. For his sins on earth, he is now famed as a pope encountered in Hell by Dante.

Eleven months after the death of Pope Benedict XI, Pope Clement, Bertrand de Got, was elected to the Papacy on 5 June 1305. According to Sophie Menache, Bertrand de Got was from a noble French family whose lineage had strong links with “both the ecclesiastical and the political establishments in the area”.⁶⁷¹ Similarly to his predecessors, Clement V was a nepotist and simonist.⁶⁷² He gave land and money to family and friends. He owed his ascent to the Papacy to King Philip IV of France, in return for moving the papal office from Italy to Avignon in the year 1309, where it remained until 1377.⁶⁷³ This act, according to Hollander, “caused much Italian outrage”.⁶⁷⁴ In his letter to the Italian cardinals, Dante ‘mourns’ the deterioration of Rome due to the papal absence. He refers to Rome as a widow who has been deserted

⁶⁷¹ Sophie Menache, *Clement V* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

⁶⁷² In Canto 30 of *Paradiso*, lines 145-148, Dante alludes to Clement V displacing Boniface VIII in the conical hole, in the circle of simony. “But short shall be the time God suffers him in holy office, for he shall be thrust down there where Simon Magus gets what he deserves, and push that fellow from Anagni deeper down”. *Par.* 30. 145-148.

⁶⁷³ George L. Williams, *Papal Genealogy: The Families and Descendants of the popes* (North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), 41. Eamon Duffy notes that King Philip “pursued a relentless vendetta against the memory of Boniface VIII, and tried to force Clement to summon a general council to brand him as a heretic and a sodomite. Clement had no love for Boniface, but realised the devastating consequences such a condemnation would have for papal authority.” When the Council of Vienne met in 1311, Clement “resisted the call for the condemnation.” Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 164.

⁶⁷⁴ Hollander, *The Inferno*, 357.

and betrayed.⁶⁷⁵ The “rulers of Pharisees”,⁶⁷⁶ by which he means the Church leadership, “took away the ministry from the tribe”⁶⁷⁷ of Rome and moved it to Avignon, having chosen to “run after riches and benefices”.⁶⁷⁸

3.8 An Introduction to a Simoniac Pope

When elected, Pope Boniface VIII⁶⁷⁹ was around sixty years of age.⁶⁸⁰ He was “confident, vigorous and ambitious.”⁶⁸¹ According to Eamon Duffy, however, Boniface demonstrated “some of the worst traits of clerical careerism, enriching his relations at the expense of the Church.”⁶⁸² Pope Boniface’s time in office was a turbulent journey which had a significant impact on the life and works of Dante. In order to understand the reason for Dante’s distaste for Boniface VIII and its impact on his work, it is necessary to review the man, the pope and the persona that Dante attributed to him in the *Inferno*. These three distinctions are an important aspect of Dante’s political theological agenda in *The Divine Comedy*.

For Dante, it was the men behind the institution, not the institution itself, that caused greed and corruption. Dante drew a distinction between the man and pope; however,

⁶⁷⁵ “How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations.” Alighieri, Letter IX, ‘To the Italian Cardinals Dante Alighieri of Florence’, in George Rice Carpenter, eds., *A translation of Dante’s Eleven letters*, 164-173; 164.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁷⁹ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 119.

⁶⁸⁰ F. M. Powicke, ‘Pope Boniface VIII’ *History*, 18/72, (1934), 307–329; 317. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24401107>. Accessed 17 September 2022.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 317.

⁶⁸² Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 119.

I agree with Frederick Maurice Powicke,⁶⁸³ that Pope Boniface easily confused himself with Benedict Caetani.⁶⁸⁴ Examples of this can be found in *Paradiso* Canto 11 and Canto 12. In these cantos, there seem to be ‘parallel’ virtues between the founder of Aquinas’s order, St. Dominic and St. Francis. Also, direct parallels are drawn between the rejection of material goods and just and moral actions towards a corrupt Papacy. Here I agree with Jean and Robert Hollander, that the “initial precept taught by Christ”⁶⁸⁵ that Dante discusses within lines 74-75, is that of poverty, as both Franciscans and Dominicans take vows of poverty. Dante, through Bonaventure, discusses the withering vineyard of the papal see which is corrupted, not by itself or what it stands for, but by its occupant.⁶⁸⁶ The Papacy “in its design”⁶⁸⁷ is supportive of the poor, however, due to popes, or as Dante calls them “keepers,”⁶⁸⁸ “ignoring that design”⁶⁸⁹, the “vineyard quickly withers.”⁶⁹⁰ From this, it is clear that for Dante, the Catholic Church, more specifically the men behind this institution, constitute the main obstacle which hinders the growth, unity and peace in the state and that this also prevents human flourishing, the pursuit of the common good of the community and personal happiness.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸³ Sir Frederick Maurice Powicke was an English medieval historian and author of ‘Boniface VII’.

⁶⁸⁴ Powicke makes an interesting point, which was first suggested by Professor Fedele, that Dante might have heard ‘the oration made by Boniface’s successor at Perugia in June 1304, when the bull *Flagitiosum scelus*, was issued against the persecutors of Boniface at Anagni’. Powicke, ‘Boniface VII’, 321.

⁶⁸⁵ Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 328.

⁶⁸⁶ *Par.* 12. 88-90.

⁶⁸⁷ Jean and Robert Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 330.

⁶⁸⁸ *Par.* 12. 87.

⁶⁸⁹ Particularly Boniface VIII.

⁶⁹⁰ *Par.* 12 86-87.

⁶⁹¹ Joan Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 76-77.

Dante and Boniface's paths crossed more than once, both figuratively and literally. Dante met Boniface in Rome and this meeting will be discussed below. From a literary perspective, Dante's political treatise, *De Monarchia*, specifically division three, can be seen as a direct response to Pope Boniface's Bull, *Unam Sanctam*. Within Dante's era, there were two irreconcilable powers that governed at the time; the temporal and the spiritual realm. The *Unam Sanctam* focuses on the way in which papal authority is exercised in the form of jurisdiction over both the temporal and spiritual realm; Dante, however, believed in a Papacy concerned with the spiritual only.

3.8.1 The Rise of Pope Boniface

For the Great Priest – the devil take him!⁶⁹²

The death of Pope Nicholas, at the end of the century in 1292, left the papal seat empty for twenty-seven months.⁶⁹³ The cardinals were unable to agree on a successor and sat in conclave for nine months.⁶⁹⁴ This long delay was due an apparent rift between the twelve cardinals.⁶⁹⁵ These twelve cardinals, ten Italian men and two Frenchmen, were, according to John O'Malley, "hopelessly divided, split this time as much by personal and family rivalries as anything else".⁶⁹⁶ The conclave first convened in Rome, transferred to Perugia, and then returned to Rome.

⁶⁹² *Inf.* Canto 27. 70.

⁶⁹³ John W. O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 132.

⁶⁹⁴ Powicke, 'Boniface VIII' 309.

⁶⁹⁵ O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 132.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

Charles II, King of Naples,⁶⁹⁷ urged Pietro da Morrone, a man in his eighties and living in solitude, to write to the cardinals urging them to fill the *sede vacante*, warning them of the dangers that would befall the Church if they delayed any longer. The letter impressed the cardinals; they were moved to elect its author and on July 5th 1294, Pietro da Morrone, Pope Celestine V, often known as the hermit pope, was elected to the papal office. Celestine was an outsider to the conclave, with no ties to politics or worldly possessions. He was a deeply spiritual man “who stood for poverty, austerity and holy simplicity”,⁶⁹⁸ and who was associated with the Franciscan movement. In his youth, he had retreated to the mountains of the Abruzzi to live in solitude, hence the name, the hermit pope.

Pope Celestine represented the very opposite of the existing Church’s activities in Dante’s medieval society. His election, according to Eamon Duffy, fed the hopes of a *Papa Angelicus*, who would cleanse the Church and prepare the world for Christ.⁶⁹⁹ However, during his time in office, Pope Celestine was unable to conduct Church duties efficiently.⁷⁰⁰ Five months and nine days after his election, on the 13th December 1294, Celestine, the spiritual Franciscan, abruptly resigned. Before his abdication, Celestine consulted with canonists, to discuss the legalities of papal

⁶⁹⁷ According to Powicke, this attempt to “direct their deliberations was firmly resisted by the cardinal who was soon to become Pope Boniface VIII.” Powicke, ‘Boniface VII’, 309.

⁶⁹⁸ O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 132.

⁶⁹⁹ Eamon Duffy, believes that Pope Celestine was a visionary. He was the founder of a brotherhood of Hermits. Celestine had strong ties to radical Franciscans, which was a demission of the of the thirteenth-century Church which “most detested the wealth, worldliness and legal and political entanglement of the Papacy”. Duffy, *Saint and Sinners*, 159.

⁷⁰⁰ Powicke, states that Celestine was “ignorant of the intricacies of papal business, too old and dreamy to shape resolute policy, he longed for solitude”. Powicke, ‘Boniface VIII’, 309. According to Michael Goodich, He was also ignorant of Latin. Michael Goodich ed., *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 169

abdication. Benedict Caetani⁷⁰¹ was among those who was consulted as he was a lawyer, and had served as a papal legate and cardinal.⁷⁰² Caetani also assisted Pope Celestine in the writing of his abdication speech.⁷⁰³ This subsequently led to speculation surrounding the legitimacy of the resignation, as Celestine may have been misled by Caetani. Questions and rumours arose over whether Boniface might even have tricked Celestine into resigning. This opinion was promoted mostly by the Colonna family, old Roman rivals of the Caetani family. On the basis of their concerns with the validity of Celestine's resignation, they opposed Caetani's pontificate as Boniface VIII⁷⁰⁴ and even drew up a declaration on 9-10 May 1297 to state that Boniface was not the legitimate pope.⁷⁰⁵ With Celestine's resignation and Boniface's appointment, the Colonna family may have feared that the Papacy would give the Caetani family extra leverage in their old political rivalry. There is, however, no evidence to support this claim or the claim that Boniface had tricked, influenced or misled his predecessor; nevertheless this allegation spread amongst the pope's enemies and is still discussed today.⁷⁰⁶ On Christmas Eve 1294, the cardinals had reached their decision: Benedict Caetani, or Pope Boniface VIII, would succeed Celestine V. It is unclear why this election, compared to the previous one, was so

⁷⁰¹ Pope Boniface VIII.

⁷⁰² Joan Ferrante, 'Boniface VIII, Pope', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 122-124; 122.

⁷⁰³ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 159.

⁷⁰⁴ David Bruce, *Dante's "Divine Comedy": A Retelling in Prose* (Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu Press, 2012), 113.

⁷⁰⁵ David Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2003), 105.

⁷⁰⁶ Celestine was in danger, as concerns for his successor grew in relation to his legitimacy as Pope. Also there was a determination to avoid a schism from the "outraged 'spiritual' element in the Church" who thought Celestine was the key to reforming the Papacy. Celestine was captured by Boniface's men and brought to a cell, near the castle of Fumone, where he was kept as a prisoner in miserable conditions. On May 1296, he died at the age of ninety. Rumours then began to spread that Celestine was killed and that Boniface was responsible. Powicke, 'Boniface VIII', 311; Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 159.

swiftly concluded, but the cardinal's choice of pope was extremely different to the last.

3.8.2 The Man Behind The Title Of Pope

New Lucifer on the papal throne,
blasphemous tongue that has poisoned the world.
... I'd be ashamed to mention some of the vices you're accused of.⁷⁰⁷

Boniface seemed to make enemies easily. According to Joseph R. Strayer, Boniface was a vulnerable man because of his inability to control his temper,⁷⁰⁸ and, even before he became pope, he was known for using violent and vulgar language,⁷⁰⁹ e.g., calling the masters of the University of Paris "fools and pedants"⁷¹⁰ while serving there as a papal legate. According to Joan Ferrante, he was "arrogant"⁷¹¹ and an "irascible aristocrat".⁷¹² Eamon Duffy confirms these descriptions, stating that he was a "mysterious man, proud, ambitious, fierce".⁷¹³ During his time in the Papacy, Boniface contributed to the advancement of academic studies. He founded the university of the city of Rome and gave strong support to the University of Salamanca.⁷¹⁴ According to Powicke, Boniface was a great business man, "dignified and noble in appearance".⁷¹⁵

⁷⁰⁷ "Lucifero novello a sedere en papato, Lengua de blasfemia, ch'el mondo ai 'nvenenato." Antonio Morena, *Politically-Committed Writing and Mystical Lyricism in Jacopone Da Todi: Plange La Ecclesia. Italica*, 89/4, (2012), 429–441. www.jstor.org/stable/23474966. Accessed Wednesday 5 December 2018.

⁷⁰⁸ Joseph R. Strayer, *The Reign of Philip the Fair* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 259. According to Powicke, "When he was not dominated by arrogance or passion, he could adjust himself to circumstances. 'the coarse-mouthed bully' could 'disappear for the moment in the skilful lawyer'". Powicke, 'Boniface VIII', 321.

⁷⁰⁹ Strayer, *The Reign of Philip the Fair*, 260.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 260.

⁷¹¹ Ferrante, 'Boniface VIII, Pope', 122.

⁷¹² Ibid., 122.

⁷¹³ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 160

⁷¹⁴ Walter Ullmann, 'Boniface VIII and his Contemporary Scholarship,' *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 27/1, (1976), 58–87; 59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23957445>. Accessed 17 September 2022.

⁷¹⁵ Powicke, 'Boniface VIII', 321.

He was “a canonist expert in explaining the meaning of terms and expounding the equitable rules of law”.⁷¹⁶ He had “all the qualities of a very great pope save personal holiness and self-restraint.”⁷¹⁷ During his Papacy, Pope Boniface was accused of sodomy and heresy.⁷¹⁸ His belief in the Papacy cannot be underestimated. For example, he codified canon law, re-established the Vatican archive and library and declared the first Jubilee in 1300, where a vast number of pilgrims, including Dante, flocked to the holy city of Rome.⁷¹⁹ This was an attempt by Boniface to re-establish the public prominence of the Church and raise some much-needed funds.

John M. Najemy states that it is “tempting to use the fact of the exile and Dante’s own emotional reaction to it as a way of explaining his harsh critique of his own city.”⁷²⁰

Although his exile was tragic and painful for him, it was also a crucial and foundational experience. For Robert M. Durling, Dante’s views convey a sense of having been chosen to witness the truth of the social and political events of his time and to combat “the spirits of wickedness in the high places”⁷²¹ without fear of the consequences.

Dante was not the only poet of that time to use poetry as a way of expressing fury at the simoniacal Boniface VIII. Jacopone da Todi (1230-1306), a Franciscan friar who allied himself with the Colonna family who had challenged the pope’s legitimacy,

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 321.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 321.

⁷¹⁸ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 161. These accusations were most likely generated by the French crown and civil society.

⁷¹⁹ Pope Boniface, on the 22 of February proclaimed in his first bull, ‘*Antiquorum habet fidem*’, the “availability of a plenary indulgence to all, confessed and penitent, who visited the basilicas of the Apostles Peter and Paul during that centenary year”. In the Old testament Leviticus 25: 8-19, the year of Jubilee was “sacred”. It was the year of “liberation of all inhabitants of the land” and where debts were cancelled. Mark Balfour, ‘Jubilee Year’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia* 542-543; 542.

⁷²⁰ Najemy, ‘Dante and Florence’, 236.

⁷²¹ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno*, Volume I, 552.

catalogued Boniface's crimes in his laud 83.⁷²² Jacopone brands Boniface the "New Lucifer" and describes how his blasphemes are poisoning the world.

3.8.3 Pope Boniface and Italian Civil Society

Pope Boniface VIII wanted to advance both his family's and the Church's influence spiritually, socially and politically, and fought against any person or faction who tried to diminish the power and influence of the Papacy.⁷²³ He was in favour of the Black Guelphs and supported their claim for political dominance in Florence.⁷²⁴ Since European politics at the time was deeply influenced by Florence, Boniface manipulated and exploited the political instability and fractiousness of Florence for practical, social and political advantage.⁷²⁵ He offered and gave political and religious security to any person who supported and aided him in his aspirations and covetous quest for power in Florence, and consequently excommunicated those who opposed him and his ambitions.

3.8.4 Pope Boniface and King Philip IV

Boniface VIII, as the chosen leader of Western Christianity, believed he held authority over the temporal leaders, which led him to interfere in political society. Boniface conducted a bitter dispute with the King of France, Philip 'le Bel'; neither wanted to be

⁷²² "O papa Bonifazio, molt'ai iocato al mondo." Antonio Orena, 'Politically-Committed Writing and Mystical Lyricism in Jacopone Da Todi: Plange La Ecclesia.' *Italica*, 89/4, (2012), 429–441; 429. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23474966>. Accessed 22 of September 2022.

⁷²³ Ferrante, 'Boniface VIII, Pope', 122-124.

⁷²⁴ Reynolds, *Dante*, 31. "He suspected the White Guelphs of anti-Papal ambitions and determined to support their opponents, the Blacks".

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43 and 44.

controlled by the other, and each wanted control over the other's dominion.

According to Joseph R. Strayer, "it is fair to say that Philip's policies caused problems for the clergy."⁷²⁶ The disagreement arose over the right of the French king to tax the clergy. In 1294, a war ensued between Philip of France and Edward of England. It was almost impossible to avoid taxation in order to fund the war between the kings. Each respective king expected financial aid from the clergy, to support the war. According to canon law, the Catholic Church was exempt from taxation, and such taxation was illegal without the Pope's consent. Since the taxation was not authorised, Pope Boniface tried to enforce that legislation by attempting to restrict the king's right to tax the French clergy, effectively cutting off a very important source of royal income. On the 5 February 1296, Boniface issued the bull, *Clericis Laicos*, to which King Philip responded by stopping the movement of gold and valuables to Italy. This was an opportunity for the pope's enemies, especially the Colonna family. The French King arrested a French bishop, despite the provisions of canon law that a bishop can be tried only by the pope. Boniface ordered the French bishops to Rome for consultation, however, the French King refused them permission to travel. This could be seen as a deliberate act of defiance on the part of the King against the Church, to show that he did not regard himself as being bound by canon law.

3.8.5 Unam Sanctam

As a response to Philip's actions, in 1302, Boniface VIII produced the famous bull *Unam Sanctam*. This is the most explicit claim to power by the Catholic Church in the

⁷²⁶ Strayer, *The Reign of Philip the Fair*, 238.

fourteenth century. It is a declaration about the unity and structure of the Church and government,⁷²⁷ answering the cosmological and ecclesiological questions regarding the universality of the Church. Here, Boniface claimed that all authority was based on the Church,⁷²⁸ claiming absolute power by divine right. *Unam Sanctam* also contained a strong statement about the impossibility of salvation outside of the Church:

“Therefore, we declare, state, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff”.⁷²⁹

As Kantorowicz rightly points out, Boniface, through the *Unam Sanctam*, probed the notion of the mystical body of Christ to “its strength and efficiency by using it as a weapon in his life-death struggle with Philip the Fair of France.”⁷³⁰ *Unam Sanctam* was met with powerful counter-reaction. Figgis notes that Boniface, in *Unam Sanctam*, “strained the medieval theory of Papal domination to breaking point”.⁷³¹ In September 1303, King Philip of France sent his army to arrest Pope Boniface in the papal residence at Anagni in Italy. Boniface was captured and taken prisoner for three days, during which he did not eat or drink. Finally, local people united to free Boniface; he would, however, never regain his previous authority.

⁷²⁷ Ullmann, ‘Boniface VIII and his Contemporary Scholarship’, 59.

⁷²⁸ Ernst F. Henderson, ed., *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1903), 435-437.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 195. “The term corpus mysticum, has no biblical tradition and is less ancient than might be expected ...originally had liturgical or sacramental meaning, took on a connotation of sociological content ... (in a) sociological sense ... Boniface VIII defined the Church as “one mystical body the head of which is Christ”. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 195-196.

⁷³¹ Furedi, *Authority*, 143.

3.8.6 Dante's Response To *Unam Sanctam*

Dante's response to *Unam Sanctam* can be found within *De Monarchia* and is continued and developed fully in *The Divine Comedy*. *De Monarchia*⁷³² is divided into three sections. The first displays the ways in which peace may be obtained. Dante insists on a sole Monarch to establish the presence of a Universal Empire,⁷³³ thereby harmonizing "opposing princes and factions, and to judge with justice all temporal questions."⁷³⁴ The history of the papal and imperial struggle led Dante to believe that the Empire is essential in establishing peace and stability for the common good of the world. Therefore the only way to achieve universal peace was through a single Monarch ruling over an Empire, stabilizing an otherwise-chaotic temporal world; Dante's ideal society was the Roman Empire of the classical era.⁷³⁵ The second and third divisions defend the right of the Roman people to the office of Monarchy.⁷³⁶ However, it is Dante's political message, found within the third division, where relations between the Empire and Papacy are discussed, that most concerns this section of my thesis.

⁷³² The date of its writing and initial inception is uncertain; all that is known, is that it was in all probability written prior to *The Divine Comedy*. David Dean Brockman, *A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Dante's The Divine Comedy* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 29.

⁷³³ Meaning that the Emperor is the political authority which regulates 'humana civilitas', or "the civil order of mankind ... [which] geographically it extends over the whole world". Davis, *Dante and the Empire*, 258.

⁷³⁴ "Dante's passionate plea for peace arises amid the uninterrupted turbulence and strife of the never-to-be-pacified Italy of his day" Henry, ed., *De Monarchia of Dante Alighieri*, 17-18.

⁷³⁵ Brockman, *A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Dante's The Divine Comedy*, 31. "Unrealistic through this ideal might be, it greatly facilitated Dante's philosophic arguments for an Empire that was the earthly reflection of a monotheistic cosmos". Kay, 'Empire', 339.

⁷³⁶ Dante argues that Rome is the heir of his universal government and the Romans were the chosen "people for such an office". *Mon.* 4. 10. The Roman people won this authority by "divine providence," virtue and hereditary right. Book II and Book III "The Roman people were by nature ordained for Empire". *Mon.* 2. 7.

In section three of *De Monarchia* Dante outlines the two separate chief governmental elements, the spiritual and the temporal. Dante explains that the Papacy and the Empire are both from God, and are intended for the good of humanity. Although they have different functions in the temporal realm, neither one surpasses the other in authority or in their right to exist. Dante discusses the relations between Empire and Papacy, and responds to the papal curia's "rhetorical abuse"⁷³⁷ in its claim to power and authority. For Dante, the authority of the Monarch is derived directly from God, and not through the pope. For Dante, the Papal claim to secular power goes against the Christian way of life; the pope's mission is both "separate and distinct"⁷³⁸ from a Monarch's duty. Therefore, a clear division of power should be acknowledged between ecclesiastical authority and temporal political authority. "The temporal power receives from the spiritual neither its existence, nor its strength, which is its authority, nor even its function taken absolutely."⁷³⁹ Boniface proclaimed that "there is neither salvation nor remission of sins"⁷⁴⁰ to be found outside the Church. He also proclaimed the necessity for "every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff"⁷⁴¹ in order to receive salvation. *Unam Sanctam* is focused on the way in which authority is exercised in the form of jurisdiction over the temporal and spiritual realm. It is based on the 'two swords' biblical text found in Matthew and Luke.⁷⁴² In *Unam Sanctam*,⁷⁴³ Boniface interprets the Lukan text to claim that when the Apostles are speaking to Christ about two swords, he is speaking of the "spiritual and the

⁷³⁷ Anthony K. Cassell, 'Monarchia', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 616-623; 619.

⁷³⁸ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 44.

⁷³⁹ *Mon.* 3. 4.11.

⁷⁴⁰ Henderson, ed., *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, 435.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.* 437

⁷⁴² Luke 22:35-38 "'Lord, here are two swords'. He said to them, 'That is enough!'. Matthew 22:21.

⁷⁴³ Eamon Duffy contends that the *Unam Sanctam* "was largely made up of a tissue of quotations from great theologians like Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas." Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 162.

material”⁷⁴⁴ sword and he claims that the spiritual is to be administered by the priests and the material by the temporal rulers, albeit “at the will and sufferance of the priest”.⁷⁴⁵

Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: ‘*Put up thy sword into thy scabbard*’ [Mt 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the former is to be administered *for* the Church but the latter *by* the Church; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest.⁷⁴⁶

Dante’s response to Boniface’s ‘two swords’ argument, can be found in book three, chapter nine, “Argument from the two swords”.⁷⁴⁷ Here, he examines and rejects Boniface’s argument in a detailed examination of the passage from Luke. Dante prefers the interpretation of the text in which Christ was speaking of two swords which his twelve disciples needed in order to spread Christianity, and warns them of the “persecution and contempt the future should bring.”⁷⁴⁸ Therefore, the two swords do not refer to the spiritual and temporal realms of authority:

The meaning of Christ is clear enough here. He did not say “buy or procure two swords,” but “twelve”; for it was in order that each of the twelve disciples might have one that He said to them “He that hath no sword, let him buy one.”⁷⁴⁹

De Monarchia, specifically book three, sets out Dante’s political position regarding the role of the Papacy in temporal affairs. It was a debate that had troubled the Catholic Church for centuries.⁷⁵⁰ In *De Monarchia*, Dante felt duty bound to report and reveal the truth, as he saw it, of the corruption, greed and violence which plagued his

⁷⁴⁴ Henderson, ed., *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, 436.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ *Mon.* 3: 9. 1-19.

⁷⁴⁸ *Mon.* 3: 9. 3. 4.

⁷⁴⁹ *Mon.* 3: 9. 3. 4.

⁷⁵⁰ Dameron, ‘Dante and the Papacy’, 129.

beloved Church. We see this striving for truth continued⁷⁵¹ in his *Divine Comedy*, where in doing so, he passes judgement and criticisms on the most revered institutions of the time:

There remains, then, the controversy with those only who, led by a certain zeal for their Mother the Church, are blind to the truth we are seeking. And with them, confident in that reverence which a loyal and loving son owes to father and mother, to Christ and the Church, to the Shepherd and all those who profess the Christian religion, I enter in this book into combat for the preservation of truth.⁷⁵²

The Church authorities were aware of Dante's *Monarchia* and his critical message was not well received. Guido Vernani, a Dominican called the poem "a poisonous vessel of the father of lies, covered with false and fallacious beauty, by which the author, with poetic phantasms and figments and the eloquence of his words, his siren songs, fraudulently leads not only the sick and ignorant but even the learned to destroy the truth which might save them".⁷⁵³ As a result, Dante's works were prohibited by the Florentine Dominican chapter in the year 1335 and, between 1554 to 1881, the whole of *De Monarchia* was placed on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵¹ Another example of the continuation of the arguments put forward in *De Monarchia*, can be found in *Paradiso* Canto 6. It's main theme is the "need to establish the temporal power, the Roman Emperor, in order to create the conditions in which Christianity can flourish." There is also mention of the Emperor Justinian, who reformed Roman law. "Urged by Love I now feel, purged the laws of everything superfluous or vain." This reform gave the people a sense of proof "that only Rome could properly govern the world." Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 52.

⁷⁵² *Mon.* 3. 3. 13.

⁷⁵³ Musa, *Dante's Inferno*, 368.

⁷⁵⁴ "List of prohibited books". This was a list of books and publications that were deemed heretical or inappropriate by the Catholic Church. Catholics were forbidden to read or print these books. "the Catholic Church instituted the banning of books at the First Council of Nicaea (325) when the heresies of Arius were condemned and his works proscribed." Jonathon Green and Nicholas J Karolides, *The Encyclopedia of Censorship* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 257.

3.8.7 Pope Boniface and Dante

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's first mentioning of the defamed pope is in Canto 19. A hint is given by the simoniac Pope Nicholas, that the next sinner to enter the circle is Pope Boniface VIII, "Are you here already, Boniface?",⁷⁵⁵ who will then be pushed down by Clement V. Nicholas accidentally mistakes Dante for Boniface VIII and is heavily criticised by Nicholas.⁷⁵⁶ It is worth noting that Dante began writing his *Divine Comedy* in the year 1306.⁷⁵⁷ However, Dante begins his journey on Good Friday in the year 1300, thereby condemning Boniface VIII before his actual death on 11 October 1303.⁷⁵⁸ This is highly significant, both politically and theologically, as Dante exposes Boniface for his actions and denies him the chance to repent of his sins while he is still living, thereby deeming him irredeemable.

The political situation and the divisions in Florence were distressing to Pope Boniface. He suspected that the White Guelphs had "anti-papal ambitions,"⁷⁵⁹ and as a result, he vehemently supported the Black Guelphs. In 1301, Charles of Valois, the "landless,"⁷⁶⁰ and brother of King Philip of France, landed in Florence and was appointed by Boniface as a "peacemaker" (*sotto nome di paciario*) of Tuscany.⁷⁶¹ Charles's aim was to support the Black Guelphs in their struggle against the White Guelphs for ultimate power in Florence.⁷⁶² In the same year, Dante, after excelling in the office of a Prior⁷⁶³ of

⁷⁵⁵ *Inf.* 19. 53.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19. 50-60.

⁷⁵⁷ Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 23.

⁷⁵⁸ Powicke, 'Pope Boniface VIII', 328.

⁷⁵⁹ Reynolds, *Dante*, 46.

⁷⁶⁰ Kleinhenz, eds., *Medieval Italy*, 144.

⁷⁶¹ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 278.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 278.

⁷⁶³ Dante was among seven (or six) priors of Florence and was elected in 1295. Their duty was to govern the city. For Mazzotta, Dante in 1300, between 15 June and 15 August, "his career reached its pinnacle".

Florence, where he had demonstrated impressive leadership and knowledge, was chosen to be among three diplomats who were sent to appeal to Boniface in Rome. The diplomats' mission was to ask Boniface to act as a mediator between the two political parties.⁷⁶⁴ The mission was also intended to persuade Boniface to reverse his decision of convincing the King of France to enter Tuscany.⁷⁶⁵ Completely oblivious to Boniface's political agenda, Dante was detained in Rome at the same time as the Black Guelphs returned from exile to the city of Florence. The Black Guelphs seized control and defeated the White Guelph government with the help of King Philip IV's army of five hundred knights led by Charles of Valois.⁷⁶⁶ On the 27 January 1302,⁷⁶⁷ Dante was declared guilty of several contrived and fabricated charges⁷⁶⁸ and condemned to two years in exile from Florence. That same year, on the 10 March, the Black Guelphs seized all of Dante's property and condemned him to death by burning at the stake if he returned to Florence.⁷⁶⁹

3.9 Dante's Death

Dante never returned to his beloved city. As he drew near to the end of his life, in the period 1312-21, Hollander believes that Dante enjoyed a period of great happiness.⁷⁷⁰

Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 18. According to Dameron, "In May or June of 1300, either just before or during Dante's term, the priorate banished the leaders of both factions in an effort to quell the disorder and appear politically balanced." Dameron, 'Dante and the Papacy', 129.

⁷⁶⁴ Zimmerman, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, xiv.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., xiv.

⁷⁶⁶ Dameron, 'Dante and the Papacy', 129.

⁷⁶⁷ James Robinson, *Joyce's Dante: Exile, Memory, and Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 43.

⁷⁶⁸ Zimmerman, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, xiv.

⁷⁶⁹ "He would be burned alive at the stake." Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sin*, 8.

⁷⁷⁰ Hollander, *Dante*, 6. It was in the City of Ravenna that Dante wrote his epic, *The Divine Comedy*. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 498.

He stayed in the court of Cangrande della Scala in Verona,⁷⁷¹ before settling in the city of Ravenna as the guest of Guido Novella da Polenta. He went to Venice in August 1321, as an ambassador concerning a dispute between Ravenna and Venice, where several Venetian sailors had been killed.⁷⁷² They were unfortunately ill received by the Venetians and were forced to make the journey back to Ravenna over swamp lands rather than by sea. This would be Dante's last journey; he contracted fever, presumably from a mosquito bite,⁷⁷³ and died on the 14 September 1321⁷⁷⁴ after sunset,⁷⁷⁵ effectively putting "the final punctuation mark to the works of that great spirit."⁷⁷⁶

3.10 Conclusion

This historical exploration was necessary to set the scene for the following chapters, in which some of the dialogues and events that Dante presents in his *Divine Comedy* appear. This chapter provided an insight and overview into the life and works of Dante Alighieri and into the Church of his day and contemporary social relations. It also examined Pope Boniface's life prior to and during his time in the Papal office. These important events and experiences all contributed to the formation of Dante's views and his understanding of the world within which he lived. The formation of his

⁷⁷¹ *Par.* 17 76-81. These lines are evident of the esteem Dante held for Cangrande. Mazzotta states that Dante returned to Verona on the 20 January, 1320 in order to deliver his "Quaestio de aqua et terra," which explored medieval cosmology. Mazzotta, 'Alighieri, Dante', 20.

⁷⁷² Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri, His Life and Works*, 208.

⁷⁷³ Hollander, *Dante*, 7.

⁷⁷⁴ Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri, His Life and Works*, 209. Dante was fifty six years and four months when he died. His death was recorded as an important event by Giovanni Villani.

⁷⁷⁵ Santagata, *Dante, The Story of his Life*, 666.

⁷⁷⁶ Hollander, *Dante*, 7.

political, religious and philosophical views, found in *La Vita Nuova*, *Convivio* and *De Monarchia*, combine and are manifested in *The Divine Comedy*. Therefore, these texts were incorporated into this section in order to provide background material for the study of *The Divine Comedy*, and to show their intrinsic importance for an understanding of Dante's context. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante uses theology to critique the political, allowing for reflection on the governmental and ecclesiastical realms thereby demonstrating the truth of Hollander's remark that politics is "everywhere in the poem"⁷⁷⁷ and that it is "far from being the purely religious text that some of its readers take it to be."⁷⁷⁸

Dante's lived experience was the inspiration that informed and shaped his political and theological commitments. Throughout this thesis it will be shown that Dante continually draws from personal experiences and political affiliations along with his strong Christian beliefs,⁷⁷⁹ and combines these elements to create his *Divine Comedy*. As Stanley Benfell rightly observes, *The Divine Comedy* is an event, where truth is allowed to emerge.⁷⁸⁰ The next chapter will map Dante's hermeneutical horizons.

⁷⁷⁷ Hollander, *Dante*, 6.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁷⁹ Dante within *The Divine Comedy* endeavours to attain a higher sense of morality and a better understanding of the world within which he lived, while at the same time, also discovering himself.

⁷⁸⁰ Stanley V. Benfell, 'Dante's Interpretive Journey, William Franke', 87.

Chapter Four: A Mapping of Dante's Hermeneutical Horizons



Fig. 8

4.1 Aim

Dante's poetry has interdisciplinary reach, as his work deals with politics, philosophy, theology, eschatology, history and mythology. Therefore, there must be a mapping of

his hermeneutical horizons and his method. Dante's poetry is an inherently revealing medium. As noted in chapters one and two, there are four "sign-posts"⁷⁸¹ for understanding Dante's work and to guide the reader. In line with Sayers' "sign-posts", this section will examine *The Divine Comedy* as an allegory, by interpreting the poem through its political, literal, moral and mystical concerns.

4.2 Agenda

This chapter probes and analyses the way in which Dante can be read. It answers questions surrounding universal peace, human failure, eternal destiny and Dante's understanding of God, human happiness and the way in which to pursue a virtuous life. As this thesis argues that Contrapasso is the theological technique which reveals Dante's political theology, attention is needed to the question of how Contrapasso is applied to the poem with examples from the text.

4.3 Introduction

In his inspiring and creative body of work, Dante thrills his readers with his dramatic imagery, his linguistic abilities, his knowledge of mythology and politics, his grasp of human flaws and triumphs, his moral compass and his sense for the mystical. As noted above in chapters one and two, Sayers examines Dante's three levels of interpretation, – allegorical, moral and mystical – and names these: 'The Way of the City' which applies to the social, historical and political situation of people; 'The Way of the Soul' which involves a person's moral pathway found in the experience of the 'common

⁷⁸¹ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, xiv.

Christian' and the 'Way of Contemplation' which concerns "that immediate apprehension of the divine which is enjoyed by those who have the gift."⁷⁸² These three interpretive ways run parallel at every point in the poem and must be taken into consideration throughout. These three ways, inevitably, become one 'Way', the way to God. This section will examine and expand on these allegorical 'Ways' in order to establish Dante as a political philosopher and a theologian, and so establish his credentials as a political theologian.

As noted in chapter three, above, Dante's writing reflects an amalgamation of philosophy, theology and politics that was present in Florence in the 1290s, in the legacies of Thomas Aquinas, of Augustine and of St. Bonaventure. Dante widens his scope to incorporate politics, Florentine culture, Greek mythology and philosophy by evoking the works of Aristotle and of the Neo-Platonists. As Alison Morgan correctly notes, Dante, "is the first Christian writer to combine the popular material with the theological and philosophical systems of his day".⁷⁸³ Dante's poetic skills enabled him to produce a work that excites and enlightens its readers, allowing them a better understanding of Dante, of themselves, and of the social, economic and political situation of medieval Florence.

4.4 The Active Life and the Contemplative Life

The active life and the contemplative life represent two ways of pursuing a virtuous life. In this, Dante follows Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as when he states that;

Be it known, in this life we may have two felicities, according to the two diverse paths,

⁷⁸² Ibid., 104.

⁷⁸³ Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 103.

the good and the best, which lead us thereto; the one is the active life, and the other contemplative. Which latter (although by the active life we arrive, as was said, at a good felicity) leads us to the best felicity and blessedness, as the Philosopher proves in the tenth of the Ethics.⁷⁸⁴

And again:

Ineffable Providence has thus designed two ends to be contemplated of man: first, the happiness of this life, which consists in the activity of his natural powers, and is prefigured by the terrestrial Paradise; and then the blessedness of life everlasting, which consisted on the enjoyment of the countenance of God, to which man's natural powers may not attain unless aided by divine light, and which may be symbolized by the celestial Paradise.⁷⁸⁵

In the *Convivio*, Dante states that "Christ affirms"⁷⁸⁶ this in the Gospel of Luke while speaking to Martha about her sister Mary, who was "sat down at the Lord's feet ...[while] Martha [was] distracted with all the serving."⁷⁸⁷ He states that Christ's response supports the argument that although the active life was good, the contemplative is better;

'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her'.⁷⁸⁸

In *Purgatorio* 27, Dante the pilgrim dreams about the biblical figures of Leah and Rachel, who are the daughters of Laban in Genesis and wives to Jacob.⁷⁸⁹ In this purgatorial dream, Dante uses the medieval Christian interpretation of Leah and Rachel⁷⁹⁰ to represent both the active life and the contemplative life;

In a dream I seemed to see a lady,

⁷⁸⁴ *Conv.* 4. 17. 8-9.

⁷⁸⁵ *Mon.* 3. 16. 4. 5-8.

⁷⁸⁶ *Conv.* 4. 17. 9.

⁷⁸⁷ Luke 10. 39.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10. 41-42. Angela G. Meekins also identifies and associates this model with the two greatest commandments found in Matthew 22:37-4. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

⁷⁸⁹ Genesis. 29-30.

⁷⁹⁰ Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 615.

Young and lovely, passing through a meadow
As she gathered flowers, singing:

‘Let anyone who asks my name know I am Leah,
And here I move about, using fair hands
To weave myself garlands.

‘To be pleased at my reflection I adorn myself,
But my sister Rachel never leaves her mirror,
Sitting before it all day long’.⁷⁹¹

Leah is a symbol of the active life and Rachel is a symbol of the contemplative life.

Dino Cervigni observes that many commentators believe that both Leah and Rachel – the active life and the contemplative life – are an embodiment of Matelda, rather than of Beatrice. Their justification is found in Leah’s words: “to be pleased at my reflection I adorn myself”, understood as her embrace of contemplation. Whilst understanding this stance, I disagree; their appearance in this dream prefigures both Matelda and Beatrice respectively. As mentioned above I consider that Dante used the generally accepted medieval Christian interpretation of Leah and Rachel.⁷⁹² Leah is depicted as singing and gathering flowers, while Rachel “never leaves her mirror”. The mirror is a symbol to remind readers that we are all created in ‘*imago dei*’, that God created the universe and that “the mind of God functions as a mirror, to which the souls in Paradise as well as those on Earth who choose the path of mystical contemplation all have recourse.”⁷⁹³ Dante makes it explicitly clear that Beatrice is at “Rachel’s side”⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹¹ *Purg.* 27. 97-105.

⁷⁹² Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 615.

⁷⁹³ Angela G. Meekins, ‘Contemplative Life’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 217-218; 218. “For the humble and the mighty up here in this life gaze into the mirror in which before you think them, thoughts shine clear”. *Par.* 15. 61-63.

⁷⁹⁴ *Inf.* 2. 102.

in the celestial rose in the *Inferno* 2, and again in *Paradiso* 32, “Rachel sits with Beatrice”⁷⁹⁵ and is placed opposite St. Benedict, the great contemplative.

The contemplative life is the Christian way of living a joyful life, “in which the desire to love and know God through contemplation and prayer excludes most active concerns and temporal occupations.”⁷⁹⁶ Dante maintains the Aristotelian notion that contemplation is of things eternal and universal; unlike Aristotle, however, as Etienne Gilson says; “the intellect of the contemplative man is indeed his intellect, but it is an intellect too feeble to attain its object without the divine light of Revelation that transcends it.”⁷⁹⁷ Dante’s view on this is explicitly identified in *Conv.* 3.15, where he states that the highest intentions of contemplation “transcend out intellect”⁷⁹⁸:

Where be it known that in a certain sense these things dazzle out intellect, inasmuch as they affirm certain things to be which our intellect many not look upon, to wit God, and eternity and first matter.⁷⁹⁹

Dante follows Aristotle in believing that all individuals “aim at happiness and the good life”.⁸⁰⁰ The active life is considered the ‘good’ road to happiness, which consist of virtuous actions and “manual or intellectual labour”.⁸⁰¹ In *Conv.* 4. 17, Dante discusses the moral virtues which, to him, are associated with the active life: courage, temperance, liberality, munificence, consciousness of greatness, proper pride,

⁷⁹⁵ *Par.* 32. 9. Rachel is the only women among the Jews named in the *Inferno* who Christ saved from Limbo. Joan M. Ferrante, ‘Rachel’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 737.

⁷⁹⁶ Meekins, ‘Contemplative Life’, 217. Ernest H. Wilkins, interprets Dante’s meaning of contemplative life as “the nature of God as manifested in all his works, immediate and secondary” Ernest H. Wilkins, ‘Dante’s Scheme of Human Life.’ *Studies in Philology*, 18/4, (1921), 412–418; 416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4171809>. Accessed 26 April 2023.

⁷⁹⁷ Etienne Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, trans. David Moore (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1968), 138.

⁷⁹⁸ *Conv.* 3. 15. 5. “The contemplative life is the happiest”. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 194.

⁷⁹⁹ *Conv.* 3. 15. 5-6.

⁸⁰⁰ “All human activities aim at something good”. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.

⁸⁰¹ Meekins, ‘Contemplative Life’, 217.

serenity, affability, frankness, good disposition and justice.⁸⁰² For Dante, it is associated with the political and civil life. “The root foundation of the imperial majesty is in truth the necessity of human civility; which is ordained for a certain end, to wit the life of felicity”.⁸⁰³ Dante engaged in the civil and political life of his society both during and after his exile. Therefore, it is fitting now to discuss Dante’s active life.

4.5 The Way of the City

4.5.1 Dante’s Political Philosophy

According to Sayers, *The Divine Comedy*, “being interpreted, shows us the way of the *polis*: we may call it ‘the Way of the City’ or perhaps ‘of the Empire’”.⁸⁰⁴ Dante insists that “if the present world has gone astray, the reason lies, and should be sought, in you.”⁸⁰⁵ He implies that the restoration of a society begins from within the individual person. The purging of the soul’s sins; pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth, are all the contradicting moral vices found in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,⁸⁰⁶ which must first occur before the establishment of moral and just institutions. Here we see echoes of Aristotle’s *Politics*, “man without virtue is most savage, the most unrighteous, and the worst in regard to ... gluttony ... the virtue of justice is a feature of the state.”⁸⁰⁷ Each individual has an end goal, and this goal is to live happily, “man may live in felicity, which is that whereto man was born.”⁸⁰⁸ In order for a society to function correctly, it must recognise its ultimate aims or purpose, that is to live in a

⁸⁰² *Conv.* 4. 17. 4-7.

⁸⁰³ *Conv.* 4. 4. 1.

⁸⁰⁴ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 104-105.

⁸⁰⁵ *Purg.* 16 82-83.

⁸⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books III-V.

⁸⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, 61.

⁸⁰⁸ *Conv.* 4. 4. “Legislation is needed if the end is to be attained”. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 198.

state of happiness. However, this state itself is then achieved by the maintenance of peace by the virtuous action of justice.

In the *Convivio*, Dante states that “Man is by nature a social animal,”⁸⁰⁹ who “lives in a society because he is a social being”.⁸¹⁰ Dante insists that the individual requires;

Companionship of home and household for his completeness ... likewise a household requires a district for its completeness ... since the district cannot satisfy itself in everything, needs must there be a city for its satisfaction. And further the city requires for its arts and for its defence to have mutual relations and brotherhood with the neighbouring cities; wherefore the kingdom was instituted.⁸¹¹

Discord and wars arise between kingdoms due to the “desire to acquire more territory.”⁸¹² Dante’s remedy is a universal Monarchy which will unite the kingdom, the district, the family and ultimately the individual, allowing the individual to live a happy and flourishing life;

One single principedom having one prince; who, possessing all things and not being able to desire more, shall keep the kings contented within the boundaries of their kingdoms, so that there shall be peace between them, in which peace the cities may have rest, and in this rest the district may love one another and in this love the households may receive whatsoever they need, and when they have received this, man may live in felicity.⁸¹³

Within *De Monarchia* Dante continues and expands on this argument in favour of a universal Monarchy in order to obtain and sustain peace for the “well-being of the world”.⁸¹⁴ In section one, Dante elaborates with the authority of Aristotle, that since

⁸⁰⁹ *Conv.* 4. 4. 1.

⁸¹⁰ Rolbiecki, *The Political Philosophy of Dante Alighieri*, 59. From this we can conclude that Aristotle not only had a pervasive influence with regards to philosophy in the Middle Ages as he refers to him simply as ‘the Philosopher’, but will also play a significant authoritative role within his works.

⁸¹¹ *Conv.* 4. 4. 1-2.

⁸¹² *Conv.* 4. 4. 2.

⁸¹³ *Conv.* 4. 4. 3-4.

⁸¹⁴ *Mon.* 1. 2.1. “Universal peace is the best of those things which are ordained for human happiness.” Pertile, ‘Introduction to *Inferno*’, 88.

the individual and society are ordained for one end, there must be rulers and those who are ruled.⁸¹⁵ Dante considers the household where a *pater-familias* teaches the family to “live rightly”,⁸¹⁶ the neighbourhood which needs governing for “protection of persons and property”⁸¹⁷, the city which must be ruled to “insure comfort and sufficiency in life”⁸¹⁸ to secure proper civil life and finally the individual kingdom which promises “greater tranquillity,”⁸¹⁹ if, however, the inhabitants of the kingdom fail in their duties, then this will bring about “desolation”.⁸²⁰ Dante therefore stresses how, since the human world is ordained for one end, it “becomes obvious that for the well-being of the world there is a needed Monarchy, or Empire.”⁸²¹ This insistence on a sole Monarch to establish the presence of a universal Empire is to harmonize “opposing princes and factions, and to judge with justice all temporal questions.”⁸²²

As stated in chapters one and two, above, in Italy at the time of Dante, political power and religious power co-existed; the governing political authorities, i.e., the state/temporal (*regnum*),⁸²³ ruled by an Emperor, and the ecclesiastical authorities, i.e., the Church which is governed by the pope (*sacerdotium*). In the *Unam Sanctam*, Boniface VIII claimed that “all authority was based on the Church,”⁸²⁴ through absolute

⁸¹⁵ *Mon.* 1. 5. Aristotle, *Politics*, 406.

⁸¹⁶ *Mon.* 1. 5. 2

⁸¹⁷ *Mon.* 1. 5. 2. 4

⁸¹⁸ *Mon.* 1. 5. 2. 4

⁸¹⁹ *Mon.* 1. 5. 2. 5

⁸²⁰ *Mon.* 1. 5. 2. 5

⁸²¹ *Mon.* 1. 5. 3

⁸²² “Dante’s passionate plea for peace arises amid the uninterrupted turbulence and strife of the never-to-be-pacified Italy of his day” Henry, ed., *De Monarchia of Dante Alighieri*, 17-18.

⁸²³ According to Hans Kelsen, “Christianity and antiquity dominate almost exclusively the terrain of the medieval doctrine of the state, diametrically opposed poles, the only possible ones between two conceptions, one which affirms the state in all its force, the other denies it”. Kelsen, *Lo Stato in Dante*, 58.

⁸²⁴ Henderson, ed., *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, 435-437.

power or divine right. In *De Monarchia*, Dante's response to the *Unam Sanctam* is clear; the authority of the Monarch is derived directly from God, not through the pope. The papal claim to temporal power is against the Christian way of life, and Dante considered that the pope's mission is both "separate and distinct"⁸²⁵ from the Monarch's duty. Ferrante notes that in *Paradiso*, in the sphere of Jupiter, the souls of the just kings and Emperors appear in the eagle.⁸²⁶ Above them, in Saturn,⁸²⁷ Dante places monastic leaders, men who chose "to leave the world in order to serve God and who, even when they were forced to deal with the world, refused political power in it."⁸²⁸ She explains that if Dante were to put good popes within this sphere, it would have implied "supremacy of papal authority over imperial".⁸²⁹ She argues that the position of the monastic leaders above the temporal leaders shows Dante "acknowledging the precedence of spiritual values over temporal".⁸³⁰ Dante cared deeply about both temporal and ecclesiastical governance and "considered them both necessary to sustain the kind of ordered and stable environment that facilitated the pursuit of virtue in this life and salvation in the next".⁸³¹ The pope's mission on earth is both "separate and distinct"⁸³² from the Monarch's duty. Similar to the relationship between philosophy and faith, which will be discussed further in this chapter below,

⁸²⁵ Ferrante *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 44. "The temporal power receives from the spiritual neither its existence, nor its strength, which is its authority, nor even its function taken absolutely." *Mon.* 3. 4.11.

⁸²⁶ In *Par.* 20. 8, "The emblem of the world" is considered the eagle. The eagle is a symbol for Dante of the Universal Empire.

⁸²⁷ Saturn is associated with temperance, one of the four cardinal virtues.

⁸²⁸ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 255-256.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁸³¹ Dameron, 'Dante and the Papacy', 126.

⁸³² Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 44.

both can work together harmoniously and this is demonstrated by Dante in *Paradiso* and his *Convivio*.

As noted, the history of the papal and imperial struggle led Dante to believe that the Empire is essential in establishing peace and stability for the common good of the world. Therefore, the only way to achieve universal peace was through a single Monarch ruling over an Empire “controlling the greed and aggressions of individual cities and princes,”⁸³³ and thereby stabilizing an otherwise-chaotic temporal world. However, unfortunately for Dante, his unrealistic utopian political vision is based on unrealistic dreams, desires and nostalgia. Davis summarises his political theory by saying that it “rests on memory and desire, memory of an alleged golden age under Augustus, a universal peace that Dante believed existed only once in human history, and desire for a saviour, evidently Augustus, who would restore this unique and vanished order to the modern world.”⁸³⁴

4.5.2 Virgil’s Significance in *The Divine Comedy*

It is difficult to overstate the impact of Virgil’s *Aeneid* on the Western intellectual tradition. It was the most widely read poem in antiquity, with its impact surviving the fall of the Roman Empire and the emergence of Christianity, when it was committed to memory by many Christian monks. The Trojan hero Aeneas travels to the depths of hell to meet the shade of his father; this journey provided Dante with inspiration for his hell. Like *The Divine Comedy*, the *Aeneid* is a philosophical and political epic.

⁸³³ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 44.

⁸³⁴ Davis, ‘Dante and the Empire,’ 263.

Dante's Catholic beliefs, together with his admiration for what he imagines to be a Roman way of life, strongly influenced his construction of *The Divine Comedy*. For Dante, Virgil represents reason and wisdom. Our first introduction to Virgil is in Canto 2, the prologue to the *Inferno*. Dante's rescue from suffering begins, allegorically, in a dark wood, where he is unable to find the right path. He is rescued by a shade named Virgil, who reveals that he has been sent by Beatrice.⁸³⁵ Surprisingly this pagan poet Virgil serves as Dante's guide on his journey through the Christian afterlife of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.

By using Virgil as his guide, Dante connects his own work with the rich cultural and political legacy of Rome, while also positioning himself as a worthy successor to the poetic tradition to which Virgil belonged. Cassata explains the significance of Dante's choice of Virgil to guide him through hell, as both showing the reader who it was that Dante the poet read for guidance and bringing Virgil to life in the world of the poem.⁸³⁶ Together they travel through the depths of the *Inferno* and encounter the souls who are beyond any hope of redemption.

Day was departing and the darkened air
Released the creatures of the earth
From their labour, and I, alone,
Prepared to face the struggle –
Of the way and the pity of it –
Which memory, unerring, shall retrace.⁸³⁷

⁸³⁵ *Inf.* Canto 1. 113.

⁸³⁶ Letterio Cassata, 'The Hard Begin', in Mandelbaum, Oldcorn and Ross, eds., *Lectura Dantis, Inferno*, 9-25; 10.

⁸³⁷ *Inf.* Canto 2.1-9.

Their journey commences as the sun is beginning to set and as most earthly creatures are settling down to rest; by contrast, Dante the pilgrim is about to embark on a challenging and enduring journey. Dante the poet is humbly enthusiastic in his initial response to Virgil,⁸³⁸ but is also filled with doubt as he can recall only two other men who had travelled into the afterlife, St Paul, the “chosen vessel”,⁸³⁹ and Aeneas the hero of the *Aeneid*, who was rewarded with a prophecy of the future glory and success of Rome.

I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul.
Neither I nor any think me fit for this.
And so, if I commit myself to come, I fear it may be madness
You are wise, you understand what I cannot express.⁸⁴⁰

This passage could be taken ironically; Dante appears not to hold himself in the same esteem as those men who have journeyed to the afterlife and back, whose missions were sanctioned by God.⁸⁴¹ He fears he may never return from the afterlife. However, this is not what Dante the author thinks, as he has journeyed through hell and back, and is now only recounting his experience. Therefore, he could be considered as a “new Aeneas” and a “new Paul”.⁸⁴²

At this point Virgil reveals that he has divine love and grace on his side, having been sent from Paradise by a trio of holy women, Beatrice, the Virgin Mary and St. Lucia, to help Dante on his travels. Dante is instantly filled with courage and affection and

⁸³⁸ Ibid., Canto 1. 130-136.

⁸³⁹ Acts 9:15 and 2 Cor. 12:2-4.

⁸⁴⁰ *Inf.* Canto 2.32-35.

⁸⁴¹ It should be noted here that Dante here is alluding to Paul’s journey to Heaven while he was still alive; II Cor. 12:4. He is also alluding to Aeneas’s journey to the underworld. Aeneas travelled to the depths of Hades with his guide Sibyl to visit his father Anchises.

⁸⁴² Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 38.

agrees to follow Virgil wherever he leads. Virgil leads Dante down the steep path to the gates of the *Inferno*,⁸⁴³ and thus begins the descent to Hell.

O how compassionate was she to help me,
How courteous were you, so ready to obey
The truthful words she spoke to you!
Your words have made my heart
so eager for the journey
That I've returned to my first intent.⁸⁴⁴

Book six of the *Aeneid*, serves as the model for Dante's underworld. Aeneas and his fleet finally arrive in Italy, landing in Cumae. Cumae is home to the Sibyl, a priestess of Apollo who sees the future. He consults the Sibyl, pleading with her to allow him to travel to the underworld to see his father Anchises; in return he will make the required sacrifices and build a "great shrine in our kingdom"⁸⁴⁵ of Latium for Sibyl. The "great god"⁸⁴⁶ Apollo speaks through the Sibyl and tells Aeneas that he will achieve his fate. In order to travel to the underworld, he must first bury the body of Misenus, his companion who had drowned, and then find a golden bough from a tree in the forest. Once found, Aeneas must pluck this "golden foliage"⁸⁴⁷ as Proserpina, queen of the dead, has ordained this as an offering that must be made to her. Aeneas appeals to his mother, Venus; "if only the golden bough would now show itself ..." ⁸⁴⁸ to which she responds, sending doves to guide him; "Be my guides".⁸⁴⁹ Aeneas seizes the golden branch and carries it into the cave of Sibyl. In the underworld, they meet shades on the banks of the river Acheron, which dead souls must cross to enter. Like Dante later,

⁸⁴³ "These words, dark in hue, I saw inscribed over an archway" *Inf.* 2. 10-11.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Canto 2. 133-140.

⁸⁴⁵ 6. 71. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 117.

⁸⁴⁶ 6. 80. *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁴⁷ 6. 141. *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁴⁸ 6.188. *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸⁴⁹ 6.193. *Ibid.*, 120.

Aeneas poses questions to his guide Sibyl and stops to talk to souls such as Palinurus, who had drowned “while watching the stars on the recent crossing from Libya”.⁸⁵⁰ These souls are ferried across the river by the “terrible Charon in his filthy rags”.⁸⁵¹ In *The Divine Comedy*, Virgil and Dante are guided across the river Acheron by Charon, the demonic ferryman, to the edge of Hell, “into the blind world.”⁸⁵² In the *Aeneid*, Charon challenges Aeneas’s right to enter as “this place belongs to the shades,”⁸⁵³ but the golden bough allows them to pass. Similar to the *Inferno*, each type of soul has its own area. For example, the “foul”⁸⁵⁴ and slimy marshes around the river Styx hold the souls of the tragic dead; “a great weeping and wailing”⁸⁵⁵ can be heard from infants, suicides and those killed by false charges, together with those who had been the victims of unhappy and cruel love. Aeneas takes the road that leads the way to the walls of great Dis, towards Elysium where his father is.

After encountering both Greek and Trojan heroes, Aeneas leaves the world of the damned behind along with the golden bough, which he placed at the door in offering to Proserpina. Aeneas and the Sibyl then enter the fields of Elysium, where Aeneas finds Anchises. Elysium is similar to Dante’s Limbo, even though it is considered to be Virgil’s form of Paradise, where the souls are waiting to rise again, to be reborn.⁸⁵⁶ In

⁸⁵⁰ 6.339. Ibid., 124.

⁸⁵¹ 6.299-300. Ibid., 123.

⁸⁵² *Inf.* 4.13.

⁸⁵³ 6.390. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 126.

⁸⁵⁴ 6. 417. Ibid., 126.

⁸⁵⁵ 6.427. Ibid., 127. Cerberus, a three-headed hungry guardian of the underworld is also present in Dante’s *Inferno*. Dante locates Cerberus in the circle of Gluttony.

⁸⁵⁶ The souls in Limbo have committed no sin, but are placed here because they were either unbaptised or existed before Christ, and Virgil himself is among those who dwell here. Virgil explains to Dante that Jesus Christ (or ‘Mighty Lord’), after his resurrection, ‘took’ a number of Old Testament characters to Heaven, such as Adam, Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, Rachel among a few others. Virgil explains in *Inferno* and in *Purgatorio* that “not worshipping God duly, means lacking faith, and so also the other

Canto 15 of *Paradiso*, where Cacciaguida⁸⁵⁷ is reunited with Dante, the scene explicitly evokes the same images found in the *Aeneid*'s encounter between Anchises and Aeneas. Dante even explicitly mentions Anchises' reunion with his son in Elysium and compares it to his reunion with Cacciaguida.

With such affection did Anchises' shade reach out,
If our greatest muse is owed belief,
When in Elysium he knew his son.⁸⁵⁸

In the *Aeneid*, Anchises describes historical figures who will come after Aeneas. He points out Romulus, Julius Caesar and Rome's ruler at the time of Virgil, Caesar Augustus.⁸⁵⁹ Like Dante throughout the whole of *The Divine Comedy*, Virgil in book six skilfully amalgamates past, present and future tenses of people and events, all of which would have been known to the readers of their respective times. In both, finally, through the "Ivory"⁸⁶⁰ "gates of sleep"⁸⁶¹, Aeneas and the Sibyl journey back to world of the living, where Aeneas is reunited with his ship and his comrades.

Virgil appears in Dante's poem as refracted through the explicitly Christian concerns of his theology and his political philosophy. Virgil's *Aeneid* is a clear example of political propaganda honouring the Emperor Augustus. In Dante's interpretation of the *Aeneid*, God chose Aeneas to create the city of Rome, and to establish both Empire and Church:

two theological virtues of hope and charity, which require faith. Faith would be understood to be faith in Christ. John Marenbon, "Virtuous Pagans, Hopeless Desire and Unjust Justice." George Corbett and Heather Webb eds., *Vertical Readings in Dante's Comedy: Volume 1*, 1st ed. Open Book Publishers (2015), 77–96; 80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt17w8gx0.11>. Accessed 26 June 2023.

⁸⁵⁷ I.e., Dante's great-great-grandfather.

⁸⁵⁸ *Par.* 25-27. "O sanguis meus"; O blood of mine." This is also a direct reference to the *Aeneid* when Anchises sees Aeneas in Elysium.

⁸⁵⁹ And by whom *The Aeneid* was commissioned by.

⁸⁶⁰ 6. 899. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 140.

⁸⁶¹ 6.984. *Ibid.*, 140.

both of these established – if we would speak
the truth – to be the sacred precinct
where successors of great Peter have their throne.
On this journey, for which you grant him glory,
He heard the words that prompted him
To victory and prepared the Papal mantle.⁸⁶²

Such an interpretation as this is decidedly absent from Virgil's epic poem, as Dante intertwines additional political and the ecclesiastical interpretations. The mention of "the vessel of election/the chosen vessel"⁸⁶³ reminds readers of another source of Dante's inspiration, the Bible. Dante's uniting of pro-imperial politics and Christian virtues is clear and explicit.⁸⁶⁴

What is notable is that, although Dante glorifies Virgil⁸⁶⁵ not only as a poet but as a philosopher, he also points towards the limitations of his central character. This might have been a deliberate choice by Dante, as he must reassure both himself and his reader, "that he has not gone overboard in his affection"⁸⁶⁶, as Virgil was just a "wise guide who understands all that an extremely intelligent pagan can understand".⁸⁶⁷ Warren Ginsberg notes the theological and philosophical issue at stake – "Philosophy is beneath faith,"⁸⁶⁸ a contrast given personal and poetic embodiment, since "Virgil is equated with reason and Beatrice with revelation."⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶² *Inf.* Canto 2. 21-24 140.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, Canto 2.28 and Acts 9:15.

⁸⁶⁴ This supports Nichols' and Hollanders' claim that Dante ended his career as a philosophical Ghibelline as here we see Dante's pro-imperial politics coming to the fore along with what he thought the Ghibellines lacked, a "religious vision that he personally saw as the foundation of any imperialist program." Hollander, *Dante*, 6.

⁸⁶⁵ Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, xxxiv.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxv.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

⁸⁶⁸ Warren Ginsberg, 'Reason', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 738-740; 739.

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 743. This equating of Virgil with reason, is also emphasized by Raymond V. Schoder; Virgil "is throughout presented as a symbol of natural reason". Raymond V. Schoder, 'Virgil in The Divine

Before they enter the garden of Eden, Virgil says;

No longer wait for word or sign from me.
Your will is free, upright, and sound.
Not to act as it chooses is unworthy:
Over yourself I crown and mitre you.⁸⁷⁰

By Virgil's own authority and within his own realm of philosophy and reason, Virgil crowns Dante. This could be seen as an allegory for reason being autonomous, yet linked to revealed truth and faith.⁸⁷¹ Fasni intriguingly proposes that the "crown" signifies Dante's political active life within the temporal realm, and the mitre represents his spiritual mission. Kantorowicz rather ambitiously claims that this "coronation"⁸⁷² was an "intellectual and moral baptism by transference,"⁸⁷³ with Virgil as the Baptist. Although disagreeing with Kantorowicz's depiction of Virgil crowning Dante as a "baptism by transference"⁸⁷⁴, I do consider it an investiture. More convincingly, Hollander states that by crowning Dante, Virgil is metaphorically bestowing on Dante the ability to rule himself morally, as he lacks the ability to make Dante a pope or Emperor. "As the world, were it only better governed, would be ruled by two powers, Emperor and pope... under its two prime authorities".⁸⁷⁵

Comedy.' *The Classical Journal*, 44/7, (1949), 413–22; 15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3293504>. Accessed 16 June 2022.

⁸⁷⁰ *Purg.* 27. 139-142.

⁸⁷¹ Ginsberg, 'Reason', 740.

⁸⁷² Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 491.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁸⁷⁵ Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 617. Reason itself is a gift from God, reason "enables man to understand his own inadequacy and the need for Divine Grace to achieve salvation". Payton, *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's Inferno*, 25. For Kantorowicz, the "royal and sacerdotal dignities bestowed with this crowning are "intellectual and moral". Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 492. "He invests Dante as an individual with the dignitas, or office of man "which never dies." Kahn, 'Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies*,' 92.

4.6 The Way of Contemplation

4.6.1 Beatrice and the *Vita Nuova*

John A. Scott points to the traditional medieval role of women and to how Beatrice's role in *The Divine Comedy* is revolutionary; he quotes Ferrante; "Beatrice's role in the *Comedy* was one 'specifically forbidden to women by major theologians, as priest, as confessor and teacher of theology' ... [his] portrayal of Beatrice not only as his teacher but as a supreme authority who goes so far as to accuse churchmen on earth propagating untruths".⁸⁷⁶ Although Dante's treatment of women and gender within *The Divine Comedy* is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the significance of the role Beatrice plays for Dante cannot be underestimated in relation to theology and philosophy, and certainly cannot be reduced to simply two sentences as Scott has done. Although I agree with his statement, it merits unpacking at a far greater length.

In his *Convivio*, Dante states that "the philosopher says at the beginning of the First Philosophy, all men naturally desire to know."⁸⁷⁷ As Rik van Nieuwenhove notes, "Medieval theologians were desirous for God."⁸⁷⁸ And, as William Franke further notes, "throughout its tradition, Christian theology has underlined the fact that all talk about God is also inevitably talk about human beings and the world."⁸⁷⁹ From the outset it is important to point out that within *Paradiso*, the final image of God cannot be articulated by Dante, as he, a mortal man, lacks the ability to express in words the

⁸⁷⁶ Scott, 'The Unfinished *Convivio* as a Pathway to the *Comedy*', 42.

⁸⁷⁷ *Conv.* 1. I .1. Hollander, *Dante*, 46.

⁸⁷⁸ Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*, 2.

⁸⁷⁹ Franke, *Dante and the Secularization of Religion Through Literature*, 2.

inexpressible.⁸⁸⁰ Like Dante's inability to communicate this experience, the reader's imagination also lacks the depth necessary to grasp the Divine. As a reader, this not only adds to the dramatic effect of the text, but also emphasises how overwhelmed Dante the pilgrim was to 'see God'. He was not only enjoying the beatific vision, he was "quite seriously in-formed by what God is."⁸⁸¹ Convincingly, Ulrich Leo states that the essential difference between the *Convivio* and *The Divine Comedy* is that Dante had "submitted himself to the limits of mortal man, limits established also in the *Comedy*, in accordance with Thomistic doctrine", ⁸⁸² and these limitations can be seen in the final beatific vision. "In the *Convivio*, he did not try to see anything beyond natural limits. In the *Commedia*, on the other hand, it has been granted the poet to overcome, in an ecstatic rush, those human restrictions".⁸⁸³

Allegorically, the third signpost for understanding Dante's work is the mystical. Mysticism is both a religious and philosophical "tendency which believes in spiritual apprehension of truths beyond understanding... [and that] union of the soul and mind with God was a possible and achievable goal during their lifetime".⁸⁸⁴ According to Angela Meekins, Western mysticism originated with "Plato's ideas and forms, and in his concept of the individual soul ...which were later expanded into a mystical, philosophical system by Neoplatonists... Christian mystics ... sought knowledge of God

⁸⁸⁰ Echoes of 2 Cor. 12:4 are apparent here again; Paul "was caught up into Paradise and heard unspoken words, that no human being can speak." According to Kearney, in the medieval imagination, particularly in the writings of Bonaventure, there are doubts about the limitations of the human imagination and insists that imagination, can "never reach truth on its own ... it is merely one step on the journey towards truth". Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 127.

⁸⁸¹ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae*, 60.

⁸⁸² Leo, 'The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante's Rereading of the *Aeneid*', 197.

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸⁸⁴ Meekins 'Mysticism', 634.

through direct and personal experience of the divine.”⁸⁸⁵ Dante, within *The Divine Comedy*, undergoes a transformational mystical journey of purification to attain a mystical union with God. What will become clear in this section is that, in *The Divine Comedy*, the figure of Beatrice, is a mystical metamorphosis of the Beatrice from the *Vita Nuova*. Dante’s love for Beatrice is the inspiration for his salvation, and here Dante is following the mystical system that requires that “the mystic’s entire intellect and will be directed towards God.”⁸⁸⁶ Kantorowicz explains that through Dante’s “baptism”⁸⁸⁷ in *Purgatorio* 27, he became the “likeness of Adam [which is] the purely human model of man’s perfection and actualization.”⁸⁸⁸ He continues to say that Dante is also baptised here, in the likeness of Christ with the promise of future “co-citizenship with Christ, a fellow Roman after being crowned by the Roman Virgil.”⁸⁸⁹ Through Beatrice’s love, Dante himself “becomes more godlike and comes to ‘know’ God”,⁸⁹⁰ thereby entering into unity with God morally, intellectually and spiritually.

The personification and relation of female figures with theology was used in traditional medieval lyrics which “might speak of women’s power to influence for good – might even identify them with stars or angels”.⁸⁹¹ Beatrice was a historical figure and it is clear from Dante’s *Vita Nuova* and *The Divine Comedy* that she is to be considered a real character within his afterlife,⁸⁹² who possesses the active function that leads

⁸⁸⁵ “[as] Neoplatonism ... was compatible with Christian beliefs.” Ibid., 634.

⁸⁸⁶ Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 634. Dante states within the *Convivio*, that the intellect is instilled within us by God. “She existed in the divine though, which is intellect itself”. *Conv.* 3. 16.

⁸⁸⁷ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 492.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., 491 and 492.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 492.

⁸⁹⁰ Meekins, ‘Mysticism’, 634.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁹² *Purg.* 30.39.

people to salvation. His inclusion of his contemporary historical figure Beatrice is not conventional for his era. Biblical women “were often read as figures of the Church – and some as the new covenant, or contemplative life.”⁸⁹³ Here we see Dante breaking with traditional thirteenth century culture.

As I noted above, for me, the *Vita Nuova* can be viewed as Dante’s early expression of his philosophical and theological tendencies. In this book, we see Dante as a naturally spiritual man who sought deep interpretation so as to find meaning in his experience. Dante comes to a momentous decision within the *Vita Nuova*, namely, to dedicate his full attention to serving and praising Beatrice. He explicitly states that he had a vision in which he saw things that made him resolve “to say no more about the blessed one until [he] would be capable of writing about her in a more worthy fashion,”⁸⁹⁴ which he is “striving as hard as [he] can”⁸⁹⁵ to attain. He hopes to write of her:

That which has never been written of any other woman. And then may it please that One who is the Lord Graciousness that my soul ascend to behold the glory of its lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory gazes upon the countenance of the One who is through all ages blessed.⁸⁹⁶

There is a shift between the silent figure of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* and the “supreme authority”⁸⁹⁷ and “teacher”⁸⁹⁸ found within *The Divine Comedy*. She is a vision who then turns to action. Ferrante rightly observes that Virgil frequently refers to Beatrice’s role as theology within *The Divine Comedy* and quotes *Purg.* 6.44-46,

⁸⁹³ Joan M. Ferrante, ‘Beatrice’ in Lansing ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 89-95; 92.

⁸⁹⁴ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 84.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁹⁷ Scott, ‘The Unfinished Convivio as a Pathway to the Comedy’, *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 113 (1995), 31–56; 42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166505>. Accessed 17 May 2023.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., 42.

Purg. 15. 76-78 and *Purg* 18. 46-48 as examples.⁸⁹⁹ For Dante, Beatrice – whose name means she who blesses – is Dante’s own private theology in the *Vita Nuova*. She will come to represent the Divine Agape⁹⁰⁰ and within *The Divine Comedy*, Dante transforms his private theology and the “theologizing of love”,⁹⁰¹ into a public discourse, thereby allowing his readers to view her as he has always seen her, divinely inspired and the epitome of divine love and grace.⁹⁰² Love is at the heart of Dante’s divine cosmic-theological realm.⁹⁰³ Edmund G. Gardner, author of *Dante and the Mystics*, favours this view of Beatrice and appeals to St. Bonaventura’s famous definition of mysticism: “the stretching out of the soul into God by the desire of love”⁹⁰⁴, to affirm that this mystical theme is foreshadowed in the *Vita Nuova* and comes to realisation in *The Divine Comedy*.

The *Vita Nuova* serves as a prelude to *The Divine Comedy*, and therefore, our starting point must be where Dante left off in the *Vita Nuova*. Giuseppa Mazzotta rightly considers Beatrice the creative force of Dante’s imagination.⁹⁰⁵ In our interpretation, Dante now feels worthy to discuss the “blessed one.”⁹⁰⁶ Mazzotta observes that Dante confronts the limitations of memory in *La Vita Nuova* and “seeks to transcend those

⁸⁹⁹ Ferrante, ‘Beatrice’, 92. The relationship between Beatrice and Virgil will be discussed further in relation to the question: Is philosophy subordinate to Grace?

⁹⁰⁰ The highest form of love. Her name “signifies her function”, Jason Aleksander, ‘Dante’s Understanding of the Two Ends of Human Desire and the Relationship between Philosophy and Theology.’ *The Journal of Religion*, 91/2, (2011), 158–187; 158. <https://doi.org/10.1086/658107>. Accessed 19 April 2023.

⁹⁰¹ Allen Mandelbaum states that for Dante, Beatrice was the “essential presence in Dante’s mythologizing and theologizing of love.” Mandelbaum, ‘Dante in His Age’, 2.

⁹⁰² This transition from the *Vita Nuova* to *The Divine Comedy* is also one from lyrical love poetry to a didactic reform orientated poetry.

⁹⁰³ What is most significant about Dante’s ‘theologizing’ of love is the fact that within *The Divine Comedy* Dante reflects on a significance insight into the nature of God and his love for humanity.

⁹⁰⁴ Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics*, 12.

⁹⁰⁵ Mazzotta, ‘Alighieri, Dante’, 16.

⁹⁰⁶ As noted above Dante swore “to say no more about the blessed one until [he] would be capable of writing about her in a more worthy fashion”. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 84.

limits and strains for a mode of vision no longer that of mere reminiscences of the past.”⁹⁰⁷ Dante achieves this in *The Divine Comedy* and holds Beatrice to be the mirror image of divine love and the bridge to his salvation. Ferrante notes that his journey towards Beatrice is also his journey towards God.⁹⁰⁸ She is the lady “who does not separate the lover from God, but leads him to God,”⁹⁰⁹ assuming the persona of the epitome of divine love. On this, I disagree with Regina Paki who states that “reducing Dante’s love for Beatrice to a sanitized and etherealized pathway toward dyadic love between God and Dante risks reducing the entire period’s intellectual and philosophical capacity for contradiction, complexity and indeterminacy”.⁹¹⁰ Although acknowledging her argument that the Middle Ages and *Divine Comedy* contain multitudes of nuances pertaining to modernity and that *The Divine Comedy* is a complex text with contradictions, to ignore its specifically and explicitly theological aspect, as Beatrice embodies theology and deem this a “cliché”⁹¹¹, is to undermine the unique and skilful process of how Dante imaginatively expresses his theology through his poetry. Scott and Ferrante correctly note, albeit transiently on Scott’s part, that Beatrice;

Does not hesitate to correct the writings of philosophers or theologians ...[for example] Plato on souls returning to the stars (*Par.* 4.22), Gregory the Great on the orders of angels ... Thomas Aquinas ... on mediated creation (*Par.* 20), on secondary creation of the elements (*Par.* 7), and on the memory of angels (*Par.* 29). Beatrice also discourses on universal order, free will ... divine justice and revenge, and God’s reason for creation. And she does all this in a heaven filled with learned doctors, several of whom argued for Paul’s injunction against women speaking or teaching.⁹¹²

⁹⁰⁷ Mazzotta, ‘Life of Dante,’ 7.

⁹⁰⁸ Teodolinda Barolini, ‘Dante and the lyric past,’ in Jacoff, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 14-35;21.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁹¹⁰ Regina Psaki, ‘Teaching Dante, Beatrice, and Courtly Love in The Divine Comedy’, in Kleinhenz and Olson, eds., *Approaches to Teaching Dante’s Divine Comedy*, 80-87, 82.

⁹¹¹ Ibid., 81.

⁹¹² Ferrante, ‘Beatrice’, 92.

This interpretation emphasises not only the triumph of Dante's own theology, but also his revolutionary portrayal of Beatrice as a "supreme authority", a "teacher" and also as a woman with an essential function within his poetry. By 'theologizing' love, Dante divulges his understanding of mysticism.

4.6.2 Dante's idea of God in *The Divine Comedy*

In Dante's final verse of *Paradiso*, we see three significant elements, all of which pertain to human knowledge of God;

Here my exalted vision lost its power.
But now my will and desire, like wheels revolving
With an even motion, were turning with
the Love that moves the sun and all other stars.⁹¹³

God is the creator of the universe. Dante is influenced by the Aristotelian notion of 'causes' and by Aquinas's five ways.⁹¹⁴ The first essential element is similar to that of Aquinas: Dante believes that the end of a moral life is a direct vision of God,⁹¹⁵ thereby satisfying every desire and will of the "intellectual creature"⁹¹⁶ to know God. Like Augustine, these interior motions in Dante, desire and will, move in harmony with God. Secondly, 'Love' for Dante, is God, the unmoved mover. God is the mover of the

⁹¹³ *Par.* 33. 145.

⁹¹⁴ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae*, 34; Kirkpatrick, 'Paradise', 671.

⁹¹⁵ Robert Hollander, *Inferno*, 641. Dante himself in his letter to Cangrande, Letter XI, states that "true blessedness consisteth in knowing the source of truth". To support this, Dante quotes from the Bible, "This is true blessedness, that they might know thee, the true God" and from Boethius, "To see Thee is our end". Alighieri, Letter XI, 'To Cangrande Della Scala', 216. *Par.* 33. 145. Brian Davies *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae*, 157. Hagman believes that Dante's final vision of God, represents the summit of his entire journey and must be a "major key to the understanding of the entire *Commedia*". Hagman, 'Dante's Vision of God', 2. Thomas Finan, states that it is here, in the final vision of God, that imagination breaks down. "We are in the domain of mystical experience." Finan, 'Dante and The Religious Imagination', 67.

⁹¹⁶ SCG 2,46-101. Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's, Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 169.

sun and stars, thereby leading our intellect to arrive at the “first cause of change that is not itself changed by anything, which is what everybody takes to be God.”⁹¹⁷ In a letter to Cangrande, Dante himself speaks about the ‘One’, the unmoved mover, the “First or Beginning, which is the cause of all things; therefore, all things that exist, with the exception of that One, receive their being from something else”.⁹¹⁸

Dante poetically shows the many ways in which one can represent the nature of God through his presentation of the Trinity. The motif of the number three is present throughout his *Divine Comedy*, enforcing the imaginative patterns of Dante’s work. For example, Dante’s rhyme scheme *Terza rima*, operates using three stanzas, and so recalls the Trinity. The structure of *The Divine Comedy* itself symbolizes the triune nature of God; it is divided into three sections, with *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* containing thirty-three cantos.

The *Inferno* itself is far removed from the warm light of God, hence Cocytus, is frozen over; it is a lake of human tears.⁹¹⁹ On the gates of the *Inferno*,⁹²⁰ Dante reads the

⁹¹⁷ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae*, 37. According to Kearney, the medieval Christian philosophers understood ‘being’ in terms of causality. Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 141. The medieval conception of Being is consequently understood as a creative and procreative “lineage of descent in which we should read the allusions to Jacob, Joseph, Rachel, etc., in several of the medieval accounts of the holy vision”. Ibid., 140. For example, Dante within *Purgatorio* 27, dreams of the two biblical sisters Leah and Rachel. These daughters of Laban appear in Genesis and according to the Hollanders, are interpreted to represent, “respectively, the active life and the contemplative life”. Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 615.

⁹¹⁸ Alighieri, Letter XI, ‘To Cangrande Della Scala,’ 203. For Aquinas, beginning to reflect on God does not start with “a preconceived and full-bodied notion of God...God primarily begins by nothing that there is a need causally to account for things... He is concerned to note ways in which God is unlike things in his created order... God is simple” Philip McCosker and Denys Turner, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Summa Theologiae* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 90-91.

⁹¹⁹ John Ahern, ‘Amphion and the Poetics of Retaliation’, in Mandelbaum, Oldcorn and Ross, eds., *Lectura Dantis, Inferno*, 413-424; 417.

⁹²⁰ “These words, dark in hue, I saw inscribed over an archway.” *Inf.* 2. 10-11.

harrowing words which stress divine justice, the nature of hell and “the everlasting nature of the punishment which it inflicts”.⁹²¹ The inscription reads;

Through me the way to the city of woe,
Through me the way to the everlasting pain,
Through me the way among the lost.
Justice moved my maker on high.
Divine power made me,
Wisdom supreme and primal love.
Before me nothing was but things eternal,
And eternal, I endure.
Abandon hope entirely, you who enter here.⁹²²

Here, divine power, supreme wisdom and primal love are echoes of the persons of the Holy Trinity, respectively as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.⁹²³ Also, within the final canto of the *Inferno*, there is a possible distorted analogy drawn with the Holy Trinity.⁹²⁴ Satan appears with three heads, one yellow, one red and one black. Each head is chewing on the worst sinners of all, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus Christ, and Brutus and Cassius who both betrayed Julius Caesar.⁹²⁵ In life, these souls gave themselves to Satan; in the afterlife they now receive direct punishment from him in the City of Dis. This perhaps symbolises how the once divine love from God, has been replaced by hatred and evil.

As for the other two, whose heads are dangling down,
Brutus is hanging from the swarthy snout –
See how he writhes and utters not a word! –

⁹²¹ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 14.

⁹²² *Inf.* 3. 1-9.

⁹²³ *Purg.* 3. 36. The Trinity is: “one Substance in three Persons”. It should be noted here that God is not called a ‘person’. “The word person was never applied to God in the Middle Ages” and would have been seen as Heresy. The members of the Trinity were called, *personae*, “faces” or “countenances”. “Persona here means a special characteristic of divine ground, expressing itself in an independent hypostasis”. Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (London: SCM, 1968), 190. For Aquinas, the three divine persons are “equally divine. So, he thinks, they share a nature”. McCosker and Turner, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Summa Theologiae*, 86.

⁹²⁴ Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 45.

⁹²⁵ This animal-like creature described by Dante, echoes the warning about Satan in 1 Peter 5:8; “keep sober and alert, because your enemy the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour”.

and from the other, Cassius, so large of limb.⁹²⁶

In *Paradiso*, there are nine heavenly spheres. The number nine itself is not significant; it is, however, divisible three times and thus can be seen to echo the Trinitarian nature of God.⁹²⁷ In *Paradiso* 24.139, Dante mentions the Trinity, which he sees as being attested by scripture, “through Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms”.⁹²⁸ The lines following are reminiscent of a creedal formula. Here Dante explicitly states what he believes in;

I believe in three eternal Persons. I believe,
These are a single Essence, at once threefold and one
So as to allow agreement both with ‘are’ and ‘is’.⁹²⁹

He proceeds to explain why:

The profound truth of God’s own state of which I speak
Is many times imprinted in my mind
By the true instructions of the Gospel.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁶ Canto 34. 64-69.

⁹²⁷ Mark Musa states that the number nine “is always associated with Beatrice so that all may understand that she is a miracle whose root is the miraculous Trinity”. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, xxi.

According to Dante himself in the *Vita Nuova*, the number three was in ‘such harmony’ with Beatrice. She departed this earth ‘during the first hour of the ninth day of the month, and if one reckons in the Syrian manner, she departed in the ninth month of the year.’ The “number three is the root of nine, as we plainly see that three times three is nine. Therefore, if three is the sole factor of nine and the sole factor of miracles is three, that is, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who are three in One, then this lady (Beatrice) is accompanied by the number nine so that it may be understood that she was a nine, or a miracle, whose roots, namely of the miracle, is the miraculous Trinity itself.” Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 61.

⁹²⁸ *Par.* 24.139. In *Par.* 13.55-57, Dante describes God as, a “living Light”, a “shining source”, and “Love”.

⁹²⁹ *Par.* 33.

⁹³⁰ *Par.* 33.

4.7 The Way of the Soul

4.7.1 Contrapasso

Another revealing element about Dante's understanding of the nature of God is Contrapasso. As noted, allegorically, Contrapasso is concerned with the moral actions and behaviour of a person during their life on earth.⁹³¹ Contrapasso is a continuation and intensification of the life lived on earth. Dante uses Contrapasso as a literary device to explore the connection between discourse about God and contemporary society including the implications of human actions. It is also one of the signposts to guide the reader in understanding *The Divine Comedy*, hence 'the way of the soul'.

4.7.2 Examples of Contrapasso

Let Justice roll like water.⁹³²

Even though *Inferno* Canto 28 provides the only mention of Contrapasso, Dante provides multiple examples throughout *The Divine Comedy* to demonstrate the mechanism of poetically expressed divine justice in operation. Arguably, another element of Contrapasso is its irony. Irony appears in *The Divine Comedy*, particularly in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, as role reversal. For example, in *Inferno* Canto 13, the middle ring of the seventh circle⁹³³ consists of souls who were violent against themselves, the

⁹³¹ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, xiv.

⁹³² 'And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' Amos 5:24-25.

⁹³³ The seventh circle contains three rings, each of which holds the souls of those who were violent, either against others, themselves or property. As previously noted in Chapter three, above, Paget Toynbee believed that Dante contemplated taking his own life after the death of Beatrice. Hollander also seems to believe this and supports his argument by stating that the repetition of the words, "bewildered and lost", "seems deliberate and perhaps invites us to consider the possibility that the lost soul whom we met in *Inferno* 1, was in some ways himself suicidal". Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 250.

suicides. This region is represented as a tangled wood of bushes. These souls are trapped in the form of bushes and trees; they did not respect their bodies in their mortal lives and therefore they do not re-join their bodies in the afterlife. The suicides, deliberately and through free will, separated themselves from the bodies which God had created for them.⁹³⁴ These souls cannot speak unless hurt; they can only groan. They are tormented by harpies, who eat the leaves that grow on the trees and bushes, leaving wounds through which the bush or tree is able to speak. A shade who had hanged himself within his own home, makes himself known to Dante, explaining that he is also from Florence and attributes the difficulties in Florence to its change of patron. The poet Petrus de Vineia, or Pier della Vigna, is also present within this circle (his name translates as Peter of the Vineyard), having been condemned to remain here after committing suicide following his political disgrace. Pier speaks, boasting of how he once possessed the key to the Emperor Fredrick II's heart.⁹³⁵ This key could be a reference to Saint Peter at the gates of Heaven and holding the keys to Heaven. "Various court documents refer to Pier as the keeper of the keys of the Emperor, as the rock upon which the imperial church is founded, as the pastor given command to feed the sheep of the Empire".⁹³⁶ Pier had been chief advisor to Fredrick, until he was

⁹³⁴ *Inf.* 13. 94-105. "When the ferocious souls desert the body after it has wrenched up its own roots, Minos condemns it to the seventh gulch. It falls into the forest, in a spot not chosen, but flung by fortune, helter-skelter, it fastens like a seed. It spreads into a shoot, then a wild thicket. The Harpies, feeding on its leaves, give pain and to that pain a mouth." Dante follows Christian values and principles of his time and viewed suicide as a sin without any hope of redemption. For Augustine, for instance, the sin of suicide was 'monstrous' since life is a precious gift from God that must be protected; to reject one's body in life, was to reject God himself. Thomas Aquinas also held a similar view and stated that suicide was "the worst sin an individual could commit because it left no time for repentance and was contrary to natural law." Jennifer M. Scerer and Rita J. Simon, *Euthanasia and the Right to Die: a Comparative View* (Maryland: Maryland Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 3.

⁹³⁵ Fredrick II Hohenstaufen (Holy Roman Emperor 1220-1250). *Inf.* 13.58. Cornish states that keys are a symbol of "authority conferred". Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 100.

⁹³⁶ William A. Stephany, 'Pier della Vigna's Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: The 'Eulogy' of Fredrick II and Inferno 13', *Traditio*, vol. 38, (1982), 193-212; 195. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27831114>. Accessed 21 June 2023.

slandered in the imperial household with an insinuation that he had betrayed the Emperor. In the *Inferno*, Pier is quick to defend himself, asserting that he is a just and moral man. Cornish confirms Piers' innocence by arguing that in hell, "he is not punished for treachery, or even fraud,"⁹³⁷ it was his suicide that condemned him to the middle ring of the seventh circle of the *Inferno*. However, his innocence could also be a reason why he was placed here instead of the ninth circle.

Another form of irony appears in *Inferno* Canto 5, where those souls "who make reason subject to desire"⁹³⁸ reside. The Contrapasso for these sinners is to be blown around by hurricane-like winds, like their earthly experience in which they allowed their lust and passion to blow them off their feet. A critical point to note is Dante's vocabulary in this canto. He uses the word "calm"; these sinners, however, are anything but "calm". They are unable to pause; they lack self-control, and this emphasizes Dante's idea and use of Contrapasso. The language used in this canto displays the destructive process of desire. The result is an allegorized ironic episode of the weakness of the will. Also, the passionate and repetitive use of the word "love" is similar to that of a lyrical love poem.

Francesca di Rimini and her lover Paolo are condemned to this circle, as desire brought about their undoing. Francesca was born in the city of Ravenna and was married to a man called Gianciotto Malatesta who was crippled.⁹³⁹ Francesca fell in love with Gianciotto's brother Paolo. The guilty pair were caught by Gianciotto around the year

⁹³⁷ Cornish, *Believing in Dante*, 93.

⁹³⁸ *Inf.* 5.39.

⁹³⁹ Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 106.

1285,⁹⁴⁰ and in a rage, he killed them both. At the beginning of Francesca's reflective speech, she seeks sympathy for their lost love and a naïve Dante feels pity for these souls: "Since you show pity for our grievous plight".⁹⁴¹ This line is worth noting, for its presupposition that being an autonomous person means taking responsibility for one's conduct on earth.⁹⁴² Francesca's revealing rhetorical repetition of "Love" at the beginning of each tercet, reinforces her belief that it was love which moved them to commit this sin, and not the fault of the actors themselves, thereby seeking to remove blame from herself. However, Dante's pity for Francesca is a revealing moment, as it could be considered a sign of Dante's own "wavering moral disposition".⁹⁴³

4.7.3 Sin and Redemption

In the *Convivio* Dante takes Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as his starting point; "As saith the Philosopher in the beginning of the First Philosophy, 'All men by nature desire to know.'"⁹⁴⁴ The medieval idea of God concerns itself with three specific points: the idea of God as the first cause, the intellect and the will. Within his *Divine Comedy*, Dante explores the nature of God and the ways in which God can manifest different relationships with human beings and with a wider society.⁹⁴⁵ A revealing example of the nature of God is the three forms of relationship explored throughout the poem;

⁹⁴⁰ Durling and Martinez, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* Volume I, 98.

⁹⁴¹ *Inf.* 5.91-93.

⁹⁴² Consequently, humans are, as Jean-Paul Sartre says, "condemned to live as if we are free." Belliotti, *Dante's Deadly Sins*, 81.

⁹⁴³ Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 112.

⁹⁴⁴ *Conv.* 1. 1. 1.

⁹⁴⁵ I agree with Charles T. Davis and W. H. V. Reade, who contends that Dante operated with 'a coherent conception of what he took to be God's providential plan.' Charles T. Davis, 'Dante's Vision of History', *Dante Studies*, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, no. 118, (2000), 243-259; 243. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40166561>. Accessed 13 May 2021.

creation, sin and redemption. The poetic structure and geography of Dante's afterlife is also a revealing element in relation to Dante's understanding of the nature of God and of God's relationship with humankind. For instance, the further down the soul is in the *Inferno*, the closer the sinner is to Satan, and the further from God in *Paradiso*. The sinners in the *Inferno* are so far removed from God that even prayer is not heard; "If the King of the universe were our friend we would pray that He might give you peace".⁹⁴⁶ However, before delving into sin and redemption, it is worth answering the questions surrounding the judge of the damned in *Divine Comedy*. Does Satan play a role in their condemnation?

4.7.4 The Fallen Angel and the Judge of the Damned

God's antipode is Satan, the ultimate sinner who is placed in the final circle of the *Inferno*. This positioning of Satan is apt; Satan is a fallen angel, therefore there is no deeper place for him to fall. We are reminded of his once angelic qualities by the mention of Satan's "mighty"⁹⁴⁷ wings and of how he was once "so fair of face".⁹⁴⁸ For some, Satan is the one who brings evil into the world and attempts to seduce us away from God. The devil has been given many names, but the one most popular appears to be the Satan, "The great dragon, the primal serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had led all the world astray".⁹⁴⁹ The word Satan was used in the Old Testament specifically to designate one who acts as or is an adversary.⁹⁵⁰ What is significant here is that Satan is not the judge of the *Inferno*. For Dante, Satan was a fallen angel whose will played a vital role in his downfall. Justin Martyr (100 – 165 CE) believed that God

⁹⁴⁶ *Inf.* 5. 91-92.

⁹⁴⁷ *Inf.* 34. 46.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34. 18.

⁹⁴⁹ Rev 12:9.

⁹⁵⁰ Job 1-2.

has nothing to do with evil and it is “neither created nor desired by God”.⁹⁵¹ It is through their misuse of free will, which will be discussed below, that angels and people “fall into sin”.⁹⁵² Satan is being punished, along with all the other sinners within the *Inferno*, for attempting to overthrow God and because of his betrayal has been hurled from Heaven.⁹⁵³ Satan is static, frozen in his sin. He is not capable of any action other than chewing on Judas, Brutus and Cassius.

Nor is judgement exercised by the Mythical King Minos who ruled over Crete.⁹⁵⁴ His role is to assign each soul its proper place in the *Inferno*, which he does at the borders of the second circle. His tail curls around himself a number of times to indicate to which circle of the *Inferno* the sinner must go. Therefore, justice may appear to be at the hands of King Minos; his role, however, to use Pertile’s term, is “administrative”.⁹⁵⁵ Minos knows where to place the sinners because of the nature of the sins they committed and the real choices they made on earth. Their sinful behaviour was not willed by God, but by the individual themselves. Hence, hell is an intense inversion of their earthly existence, and *The Divine Comedy*, specifically the *Inferno*, explores the universal need to see justice administered to the wicked.

⁹⁵¹ A. Davids, ‘Justin Martyr on Monotheism and Heresy’, *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis/ Dutch Review of Church History*, 56/1, (1975), 210–234; 217. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24007215>. Accessed 23 May 2023.

⁹⁵² A. Davids, ‘Justin Martyr on Monotheism and Heresy’, 217.

⁹⁵³ “In *City of God*, Before Adam ever makes his fateful choice of flesh over spirit, renegade angels abandon the heavenly chorus, fall into self-obsession, and make for hell, the internal counterpart of God’s celestial city.” Satan ... stands for absolute sin stands in for the absoluteness of sin itself.” “deserter angels”, Satan chief among them turn from the light of God and enter into the darkness of their separate selves”. Wetzels, ed. *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide*, 167-168, 176.

⁹⁵⁴ King Minos was considered a just ruler.

⁹⁵⁵ Pertile, ‘Contrapasso’, 220.

4.7.5 Sin

4.7.5.1 Original Sin

Within Augustinian tradition, we cannot understand divine grace without first grasping the wide-ranging impact of original sin. We learn of Dante's understanding of original sin from the poet himself in *Paradiso* 7.

Sin alone is what enslaves him,
Making him unlike the highest good
So that he is illumined by its light but little,
'never returning to his privilege
Unless he fills the void created by his fault
with penalties fit for his sinful pleasure.
Your nature, when it sinned *in toto*
In its seed, was separated
For these privileges and from its Eden.⁹⁵⁶

Original sin denotes the congenitally corrupt state of the human race, due to Adam and Eve's transgressions in the garden of Eden.⁹⁵⁷ At the time of Dante, this was one of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity.⁹⁵⁸ Marshall discusses the Augustinian heritage of original sin within the Middle Ages by connecting four assertions that expressed Church teaching;

1. Sin began with Adam and all had sinned in Adam.⁹⁵⁹
2. Procreation transmits original sin; "Our first parent"⁹⁶⁰; "So the wicked seed of Adam fling themselves."⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁶ *Par.* 7. 79-87. Augustine in his *Confessions* states that God is the "greater and chiefest good". Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 113.

⁹⁵⁷ Adam and Eve were the first human beings according to the Bible. Genesis 2-5 Their names first appear in; Genesis 3. 20 and 4.25. According to Wallace W. Marshall, the human race sustained 'four wounds' in the fall; weakness, ignorance, malice and concupiscence. Marshall, 'Dante and the doctrine of original sin a theological gloss on Purgatorio XVI, 80-105 and Paradiso XXVII,' 28.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁶⁰ *Inf.* 4. 56.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3. 115.

3. Since all are born in sin and are therefore bonded to it until the grace of God intervened.⁹⁶²
4. Baptism is not a guarantee for salvation, but is still essential,⁹⁶³ “They did not sin. Though they have merit, that is not enough, for they were unbaptized, denied the gateway to the faith that you profess”.⁹⁶⁴

4.7.5.2 Sin as Weakness Of The Will

Paul J. Contino makes an excellent observation in relation to how God could have created the eternal realm of the *Inferno* if he forgives everyone. The answer is simple; through divine love God gave humanity a choice through their own free will. The souls on earth must use their intellect to make good choices that lead to God. St Thomas Aquinas’ teacher, St Albert the Great, in his *Super Ethica*, discussed the relationship between sin (*peccatum*) and the will. He declares that “choice is an act of one power, which is called free agency, which is a power different from both reason and will, but taking part in both of them”.⁹⁶⁵ As human will can often be weak, many people choose the evil path which strays away from God. The notion of free will in Dante’s *Inferno*, is,

⁹⁶² Marshall, ‘Dante and the doctrine of original sin a theological gloss on Purgatorio XVI, 80-105 and Paradiso XXVII,’ 24.

⁹⁶³ Ibid., 24. A baptised Christian, has begun the process towards salvation. According to Oliver-Thomas Venard OP, “Aquinas combines a ‘positive’ conception of sacraments as perfecting humans, with a ‘negative’ conception of sacraments as remedies against ignorance, weakness, and other consequences of sin. Sacramental grace entails both healing (purification from sins) and exaltation (the perfecting of the soul with gifts pertaining to divine worship)... sacraments heal the defects caused by sin. In any case, ‘all sacraments are necessary for salvation in some manner’, some for salvation only, and others for its perfection”. McCosker and Turner, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Summa Theologiae*, 285.

⁹⁶⁴ *Inf.* 4. 34-36. These are the souls in Limbo. They endure no physical pain, but are incessantly chasing after nothing and sighing as a response to the spiritual grief they are experiencing. They have a strong, hopeless and desperate desire for God, salvation and redemption.

⁹⁶⁵ Matthias Perkams believes that Albert the Great, in linking choice and free agency, was following Philip the Chancellor who also made this connection in 1220 in his *Summa De Bono*. “Here Albert would also have read that free agency is a faculty of both reason and will”. Tobias Hoffmann, Jorn Muller, and Matthias Perkams, eds., *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 75-76.

according to Sayers “The drama of the soul’s choice,”⁹⁶⁶ and she explains how sin can be seen as a fatal choice, “a choice that sets in motion vast irresistible retribution.”⁹⁶⁷ In effect, by this logic, the souls choose the *Inferno*. Thomas Aquinas believed that a fallen angel must be “evil due to will and not to nature”.⁹⁶⁸ Dante adopts a similar view; much depends on the will of the person. They can decide to carry on down an evil road, away from the highest good, which is God. For Dante, following Augustinian thought, the problem concerning human nature involves human will, morality and freedom.⁹⁶⁹ Dante believes in human autonomy and free self-determination. Being an autonomous person means that one is responsible for one’s conduct and actions on earth.⁹⁷⁰ Through Dante’s existential lesson in *The Divine Comedy*, readers are taught that humans themselves, through free will and motivation, define and shape the choices and actions they make in life, whether that be for good or for evil. The will of a person is a vital element in Dante’s *Inferno*, as it is the soul’s choice to do as he or she wishes in the hope that they will choose the path to God. Weakness of the will highlights the need of a just Hell, as wilful wrong doing is contrary to the will of God, and in the *Inferno*, sinners receive the perfect form of punishment. Therefore, the human problem is that of our sinfulness.

⁹⁶⁶ Sayers, *Introduction to The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine –Cantica 1: Hell (L’inferno)*, 11. The notion of free will and freedom is also found in Augustine, *Librum arbitrium*. Roger Haight, S.J., *The Experience and Language of Grace* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1979), 47.

⁹⁶⁷ Sayers, *Introduction to The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine –Cantica 1: Hell (L’inferno)* 11.

⁹⁶⁸ Edward Cook, *The Deficient Cause of Moral Evil According to Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Paideia and the Council for research in Values and Philosophy, 1996), 133.

⁹⁶⁹ Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, 56.

⁹⁷⁰ Consequently, humans are, as Jean-Paul Sartre says, “condemned to live as if we are free.” Belliotti, *Dante’s Deadly Sins*, 81.

4.7.6 Redemption

Redemption is understood to be liberation from one state to another.⁹⁷¹ With regards to *The Divine Comedy*, it is liberation from the realm of suffering and sin, to one of forgiveness and eternal life. Purgatory is deemed a transitional realm where the souls who have been saved will purge their sins before entering Paradise.⁹⁷² Dante, within his *Divine Comedy*, must take the difficult route to salvation in Heaven, with the help of his guides Virgil and Beatrice. It is noticeable that this route did not depend upon securing absolution from the papacy through the indulgences⁹⁷³ which were granted by Pope Boniface in honour of the Jubilee of 1300.⁹⁷⁴ Dante makes clear his conviction that the pope does not have the divine authority to absolve sins. This is explicitly mentioned within *Inferno* Canto 27, in the eighth ditch;

One may not be absolved without repentance,
nor repent and wish to sin concurrently –
a simple contradiction not allowed.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁷¹ Francis Schussler Fiorenza, 'Redemption', in Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), 836-851; 837.

⁹⁷² Paul J. Contino observes that Dante's Purgatory is deeply respectful of human freedom; "grace grants the soul's desire to rehabilitate through penitential suffering and communal prayer, until the soul itself feels free and ready for Heaven". Paul J. Contino, 'Teaching the Theological Dimension of Dante's Comedy', in Kleinhenz and Olson, eds., *Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine*, 140-148; 142.

⁹⁷³ Indulgences or 'pardons'. "The Church could commute a person's duty of penance into the performance of certain acts, such as praying at specific shrines, participating in crusades, or giving money for spiritual causes. By helping pay off the debt in life, indulgences reduced what remained to be paid in Purgatory after death; in the case of plenary indulgences, such as that of the year 1300, the punishment was entirely cancelled for those who were contrite and had confessed their sins". Peter Armour, 'Purgatory', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 728-731; 730.

⁹⁷⁴ This is interesting in and of itself, as Dante began his journey of repentance towards salvation, on Holy Thursday, April 7. Also on the same day, "Pope Boniface VIII appeared on the newly rebuilt balcony of St. John Lateran in Rome to bless townspeople and pilgrims arriving for the Jubilee of that year – the dramatic first Jubilee in what would be a long tradition of Roman Jubilees.". Jo Ann Heppner Moran Cruz, 'Dante, *Purgatorio* 2, and the Jubilee of Boniface VIII.' *Dante Studies*, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, no. 122, (2004), 1–26. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166636>. Accessed 30 June 2022.

⁹⁷⁵ *Inf.* 27. 118-120.

Guido da Montefeltro, leader of the Ghibellines in Romagna, a deceitful warrior, a turncoat, a snitch, and a cheat is present within this ditch.⁹⁷⁶ To atone for his sins, Guido joined the Franciscan Order. Pope Boniface, however, offered religious and political security to anyone who supported him: “the Great Priest – the devil take him!”⁹⁷⁷ and coaxed Guido out of retirement to wage war on innocent families by stating that all his sins henceforth would be forgiven;

‘Let not your heart mistrust:
I absolve you here and now if you will teach me
how I can bring Praenaste to the ground.
I have the power, as well as you know, to lock,
And unlock Heaven, because the keys are two
For which the pope before me had no care.’⁹⁷⁸

In eternity, however, Boniface’s absolution proved invalid, resulting in Guido’s damnation.⁹⁷⁹ Guido is considered by Dante as an evil counsellor of fraud.⁹⁸⁰ “A warrior I was, and then a corded friar.”⁹⁸¹ From this single line, we see Guido’s review of his own life. He went from bad to good, to bad again, blaming the leader of the ecclesiastical community, Boniface, for improper guidance. In so doing, Dante emphasizes the ethical and moral hindrances which prevent a society from achieving a

⁹⁷⁶ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 124.

⁹⁷⁷ *Inf.* 27. 70.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27. 100-105. Dante uses images and metaphors from Matt. 16.19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven”.

⁹⁷⁹ Pope Boniface is a prevalent character throughout the *Inferno* as he is Dante’s political and religious enemy and this canto is a prime example of Dante’s hatred for this Pope.

⁹⁸⁰ *Inf.* 27.39 Guido enquires about Romagna, and whether it is at peace or war, to which Dante replies that his city is not in a state of war at that present time: “Still, no open warfare have I left behind”. But Dante is quick to note that war is always in the minds or hearts of the rulers in Romagna, implying that Romagna is politically unstable. *Ibid.*, 27.37-40. Dante indulges Guido with all the specifics details about the politics of his region. For example, he speaks of Forli’s defeat of the French and Cesena’s struggle for independence.

⁹⁸¹ *Inf.* 27. 67

completely perfect state and the dangers that occur when there is a “lack of a strong central authority.”⁹⁸²

From *Paradiso* Canto 7, we learn about Dante’s understanding about the nature of God and of humankind’s relationship with God, together with the reasons why, Dante believed, God chose the cross for humankind’s redemption and thereby restored “man to the fullness of his life”⁹⁸³ and “enabling man to rise again”.⁹⁸⁴ As noted above, Dante pursues his enquiry “from within”. We do well to keep in mind the urgent imperative voiced by the poet: “If the present world has gone astray, the reason lies, and should be sought, in you.”⁹⁸⁵ Dante’s redemptive journey began when he first encounters Virgil in the dark wood, and ends in *Paradiso*. The poet begins his journey in a state of ignorance, and emerges, in *Paradiso*, with knowledge of the self and of the Divine.

Sayers offers readers of *The Divine Comedy* an important insight into the doctrine of *Purgatorio* which involves its Thomistic elements.⁹⁸⁶ She provides the analogy of damaging a friend’s teapot in a fit of anger, wickedness or sheer carelessness. Since the teapot was not yours, your friend is able to make a claim against you – if she does not forgive you, or if you do not express guilt or remorse, she may bring you to court. In the case of Purgatory, “God is the friend, and He is always ready to forgive: and the

⁹⁸² Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 45. Through Paradise he shows us the benefits of a well-functioning, structured Empire.

⁹⁸³ *Par.* 7.106.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.116.

⁹⁸⁵ *Purg.* 16 82-83.

⁹⁸⁶ She quotes S.T.I., II Q87, A.7. Sayers *Introductory Papers on Dante; The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 79.

sinner is penitent”.⁹⁸⁷ Sayers further develops this analogy: if you go to your friend and confess your sinful feelings and “the guilty act to which it led; you say how dreadfully sorry you are, and you beg her to forgive you, and promise that you will try to make it up to her in future,”⁹⁸⁸ then that is you making an act of penitence “confession, contrition and atonement”.⁹⁸⁹ Such an act elevates you from your guilt, and thereby you “have purged the *culpa*”.⁹⁹⁰ This however does not fix the broken teapot, so you might offer to pay for the teapot, this “act of compensation”⁹⁹¹ is “purging the *reatus*”⁹⁹² and must be sincere.⁹⁹³

For Sayers, Canto 7 of *Paradiso*, provides one of the “noblest statements of Atonement doctrine”⁹⁹⁴ proving God’s generosity to humankind. God, by becoming incarnate and suffering on the cross, accepted the “*culpa*” and purged the “*reatus*”.⁹⁹⁵ This in turn led to God repairing the separation between humans and Godself, thereby repairing Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden and satisfying both justice and mercy.

It was expelled from Eden
 Because it turned away from truth and life.
 If, then, the penalty exacted by the cross
 Is measured by the nature He assumed,
 No other ever sung so justly.
 Yet it is also true that there was never done
 So great an outrage with regard to Him who suffered,

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁹¹ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁹² Ibid., 79.

⁹⁹³ Brian Davies quotes S.T. 3a, 85,4 “Penance is a virtue seated in the will”. Penance “requires genuine sorrow for sin on the part of the penitent. This virtue is a disposition to grieve over past sins, to make satisfaction for them, and to avoid committing more sins”. Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae*, 344-345.

⁹⁹⁴ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 79.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid., 82.

Having taken on that nature.⁹⁹⁶

Since Jesus was also fully human, this is considered justice; yet it was also an injustice because he was fully divine.⁹⁹⁷ However, only he was capable of this “single act”⁹⁹⁸ and “God wanted this to be the very way for our redemption”,⁹⁹⁹ thereby satisfying mercy.

Christ and Adam were not burdened with original sin. Kantorowicz believes that it was within “man’s own power to recover the purity of the first man, to re-enter the garden of Eden, and finally return to the Tree of Knowledge and undo the effects of first fruits.”¹⁰⁰⁰ He further notes that his pilgrimage through *Purgatorio* is the purification of Dante, in a philosophical sense,¹⁰⁰¹ emerging from *Purgatorio* as a “new Adam-like”¹⁰⁰² being, who is also reborn morally and ethically, who is now “free, upright, and sound.”¹⁰⁰³ Dante is baptized and cleansed through heavenly fire,¹⁰⁰⁴ thereby returning to the original status of Adam before the fall.¹⁰⁰⁵

4.8 Is Philosophy Subordinate to Grace?

Roger Haight correctly observes that the term “grace” is “simplistic”¹⁰⁰⁶, yet it remains the most complicated word in Christian experience and language. The term “grace”

⁹⁹⁶ *Purg.* 7. 38-45.

⁹⁹⁷ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 82.

⁹⁹⁸ *Purg.* 7. 46.

⁹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 56-57.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 485.

¹⁰⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹⁰⁰² *Ibid.*, 485.

¹⁰⁰³ *Purg.* 27, 140.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Par.* 27.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 489

¹⁰⁰⁶ Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, 6. The word grace, equates to the Latin word gratia. And to the Greek charis. The New Testament authors used the word charis “to render several Hebrew

refers to many different Christian experiences, including revelation, healing, salvation, redemption; essentially, grace can be associated or applied to every Christianly interpreted experience. In this section, grace will be considered primarily to refer to divine love and salvation, stressing the poet's presentation of Christ as divine love and the mediation of grace in human existence. When Christ died on the cross, therefore, he redeemed humanity and humanity gained eternal salvation. Within *Paradiso*, grace is presented almost as an operation whereby a person is moved by God towards eternal and shared divine life. All souls who turn to God can be saved. "Salvation signifies an infusion of grace in an individual soul, conditioned by its faith, a divine act that brings the soul into a state of eternal bliss after death,"¹⁰⁰⁷ "to soar beyond the human cannot describe".¹⁰⁰⁸ These lines describe a shift from a purely human state and experience, towards resituating life experience as part of eternal salvation and a movement towards the grace of God. In his letters to Cangrande, Dante affirms this very point: *The Divine Comedy*, in its moral meaning is; "the conversion of the soul from the sorrow and misery of sin to the state of grace".¹⁰⁰⁹

The symbol of grace within *The Divine Comedy* appears in the form of Beatrice; "I am made such by God's Grace"¹⁰¹⁰ The "reinstallation"¹⁰¹¹ of Beatrice as "lady"¹⁰¹² in

words conveying meanings reducible to three main ideas: condescending love, conciliatory compassion and fidelity".

¹⁰⁰⁷ Rebecca S. Beal, 'Salvation', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 761-762; 761.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Par.* 1. 70.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Carpenter, *Dante Alighieri: A Translation of Dante's Eleven Letters*, 193.

¹⁰¹⁰ *Inf.* 91-93. That your affliction does not touch, nor can these fires assail me". According to Hollander "no soul in purgation or in grace in heaven has thought for the condition of the damned." Hollander ed. *The Inferno*, 41.

¹⁰¹¹ Hollander, *Dante*, 121.

¹⁰¹² *Inf.* 2. 76.

Canto 2 suggests that Lady Philosophy¹⁰¹³ cannot take the place of divine grace.¹⁰¹⁴ For example, when Beatrice makes her climactic entrance in *Purgatorio* 30, it is revealed that she is now going to be his guide through *Paradiso*. Virgil could only take Dante so far, through the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. As a pagan, he has not and will not experience salvation through Christ; he cannot understand the mysteries of Heaven, thereby “leaving us bereft”.¹⁰¹⁵ Allegorically, here we see that reason or “Lady Philosophy” as Virgil, disappears at the moment that Beatrice, divine grace or faith, arrives. “Beatrice symbolizes the power of grace which Virgil lacks.”¹⁰¹⁶ As noted above in chapter three, Dante admits in his *Vita Nuova* that his “eyes had wandered”¹⁰¹⁷ to another, *Donna Gentile*, Noble Lady or Lady Philosophy. In chapter thirty nine, Dante is “ashamed”¹⁰¹⁸ that he had been “possessed for some time contrary to firm reason”¹⁰¹⁹ by his “evil desire”.¹⁰²⁰ Beatrice in *Purgatorio* 30, charges Dante with turning his back on her and following earthly pursuits or the active life, instead of contemplation;

Once I had reached the threshold of my second age,
When I changed lives, he took himself from me
And gave himself to others.

When I had risen to spirit from my flesh,
As beauty and virtue in me became more rich,
To him I was less dear and less than pleasing.

He set his steps upon an untrue way,
Pursuing those false images of good
That bring no promise to fulfilment.¹⁰²¹

¹⁰¹³ Dante within his *Convivio*, mentions Boethius frequently.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Inf.* 2. 31-142

¹⁰¹⁵ *Purg.* 30. 49

¹⁰¹⁶ Payton, *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's Inferno*, 26

¹⁰¹⁷ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa, 79

¹⁰¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79

¹⁰¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰²¹ *Purg.* 30. 124-132.

And again, in *Purgatorio* 33;

The school that you have followed
And see if what it teaches you follows well my words,

and see that your way is as far from God's
As that highest heaven, which spins the fastest,
Is distant from the earth.¹⁰²²

Dante cannot remember committing these sins, as he was submerged in and drank from the Lethe in *Purgatorio* 31, which wiped away his transgressions against Beatrice.

This submersion in the river Lethe is considered an act of atonement which washes away his sin, thereby absolving him. His response, "As far as I remember I have not ever estranged myself from You"¹⁰²³, affirms to the reader and to Beatrice that he did commit those sins. These sins that Beatrice charges Dante with, can be traced to the *Convivio*. We see Dante diverting his attention from his preoccupations with Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* to Lady Philosophy. Although Dante's attention will soon be brought back to Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy*.

Hollander alludes to the debate surrounding Lady Philosophy, specifically concerning how the readers of *The Divine Comedy* "find the writer of the *Comedy* and the champion of the Lady Philosophy frequently at odds"¹⁰²⁴ I do not assume that Dante at any time rejects Lady Philosophy in *The Divine Comedy*, on the contrary, Dante holds Lady Philosophy in high regard, and this is due her influential presence within *The Divine Comedy's* construction as discussed above.

¹⁰²² Ibid., 33. 86-90.

¹⁰²³ Ibid., 33. 91-92.

¹⁰²⁴ Hollander, *Dante*, 121.

Also, in *Purgatorio* 30, Beatrice is quick to reprove Dante when Virgil departs from him, “do not weep.”¹⁰²⁵ However, I believe that Dante in the canto is not stating that philosophy is subordinate to faith. This is subtly emphasised within the next line; “do not weep yet”.¹⁰²⁶ Philosophy is a worldly power and like most things, will ultimately break down before God; “Earthly wisdom is pale in reflection of the true glory of God’s wisdom which, however, exists only in and of God.”¹⁰²⁷ Arguably, however, both can work harmoniously, and this is demonstrated by Dante throughout *The Divine Comedy*¹⁰²⁸ and within Dante’s third book of the *Convivio*. In the *Convivio*, Dante uses Aristotle’s moral teaching, that human good consists in “activity in accordance with virtue, in a perfect life”.¹⁰²⁹ He cries out “to folk to follow her, telling them what are her benefactions; namely, that by following her everyone becomes good”.¹⁰³⁰ Philosophy for Dante, “is mother of all origins... she existed in the divine thought, which is intellect itself, when he made the universe.”¹⁰³¹ He states that philosophy is: A loving exercise in wisdom and this exists supremely in God, since in him is the highest wisdom and the highest love and the highest actuality ... [therefore] the divine philosophy then is of the divine essence ... she is most noble because divine essence is most noble and she is in him in perfect and true fashion, as though in eternal wedlock.¹⁰³²

In *Paradiso* Canto 26, Dante proclaims that;

Both philosophic reasoning
And the authority that descends from here

¹⁰²⁵ *Purg.* 30. 56.

¹⁰²⁶ *Ibid.*, 30. 56.

¹⁰²⁷ Payton, *A Modern Reader’s Guide to Dante’s Inferno*, 29.

¹⁰²⁸ “Lady Philosophy ... in a sense is represented by the ancient philosophers gathered in Limbo and by the philosophic discourse we hear spoken by such authorities as Virgil, Marco Lombardo, and Thomas Aquinas”.

Hollander, *Dante*, 122.

¹⁰²⁹ *Conv.* 3. 15. 130.

¹⁰³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3. 15. 132-140.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*, 4. 15. 157.

¹⁰³² *Ibid.*, 3. 12. 99-106.

Made me receive the imprint of such love.”¹⁰³³

Here we have a reconciling of theology with philosophy in *The Divine Comedy* and an affirmation that philosophy is also a means of arriving at the truth along with God’s grace. A quotation frequently used by the poet and theologian Charles Williams’ encapsulates this insight into Dante’s reliance on ancient wisdom, “This also is Thou; neither is this Thou”.¹⁰³⁴

4.9 Conclusion

It was necessary in this section to examine *The Divine Comedy* as an allegory by interpreting the poem through the political, literal, moral and mystical concerns. By doing so I have provided the foundations for the next chapter, in which will be revealed how this combination of elements enables a critical reflection on the political. In the next chapter, particular focus will be placed on Dante’s exposure of the Catholic Church’s flaws and the corruption within his society which can be found in *The Divine Comedy*. It will further emphasize Dante’s connection between theology and social critique, in constructing the cosmo-theological vision of *The Divine Comedy*, and so indicate the content of Dante’s political theology.

¹⁰³³ Par. 26. 25-27.

¹⁰³⁴ Grevel Lindop, *Charles Williams: The Third Inkling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 109.

Chapter Five: A Mapping and Analysis of Dante's Political Theology



Fig. 9

5.1 Aim

This chapter will demonstrate the connection drawn by Dante between theology and social critique. Dante appeals to the critical and creative imagination in constructing *The Divine Comedy*. This study will show how the amalgamation of his theology and poetry creates the conditions for a critical analysis of the political structures of his Florentine society, within *The Divine Comedy*.

5.2 Agenda

As a case studies chapter, this section answers questions which relate to the way in which Dante uses Contrapasso to express his political theology. Through an analysis of

selected cantos, it will ask questions pertaining to his political theological agenda and demonstrate that it is inspired by his circumstances and by his literary, philosophical, political and theological influences. This chapter will also ask the important question of whether *The Divine Comedy* presents a plea for reform and if so, to whom.

5.3 Introduction

The Divine Comedy is a perfect combination of fantasy, revelation and interpretation. As established in the previous chapters, Dante's approach requires multi-disciplinary investigation, and it was necessary, therefore, to map the possible social, political and theological landscape to create the foundations for this chapter. It is within his turbulent political, social and theological context that Dante formulates his critique. In the previous chapters, Dante's theology was considered in some detail, as it shapes his analysis and criticism of the governing political authorities and ecclesiastical organisations. This chapter demonstrates how Dante expresses his theology throughout *The Divine Comedy*, and how he brings sins and virtues alive before the mind's eye. It will become evident that Contrapasso emerges as the vital component in demonstrating Dante's political theology. Allen Tate observes that "no writer had held in mind at the one time the whole of *The Divine Comedy*".¹⁰³⁵ Therefore, this study will specifically focus on Dante's condemnation of the medieval Catholic Church, by focusing on principal passages from *The Divine Comedy*, to demonstrate Dante's connection of theology with social critique.

¹⁰³⁵ Allen Tate, 'The Symbolic Imagination: A Meditation on Dante's Three Mirrors.' *The Kenyon Review*, 14/2, (1952), 256–277; 256. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4333324>. Accessed 15 September 2022.

Dante works in his form of imagination to articulate a cosmo-theological vision, with an inbuilt critical reflection on the political. This critical reflection comes in two forms of expression. The first form appears within *The Divine Comedy* in his use of Contrapasso to critically reflect on the governing political authorities and on the ecclesiastical organisations of his day. Contrapasso, as highlighted in chapters one and two, is Dante's form of divine justice and is a "narrative stroke of genius".¹⁰³⁶ Contrapasso is integrated into the poem, allowing the reader to progressively learn about the afterlife, the sinners, the penitents, "how moral progress can be realized"¹⁰³⁷ and to discover a person's relationship with God. This constitutes the literal, moral and mystical signposts that run at parallel levels at every point in the poem, as indicated by Sayers.¹⁰³⁸ Dante uses Contrapasso, particularly within the *Inferno*, to punish sinners. To support this, Canto 19 of the *Inferno* is chosen as an example to demonstrate Dante's critical and creative imagining of an alternative world, in which divinely sanctioned accountability takes concrete shape. What will emerge is Dante's criticism of the Catholic Church in his era and of its current leader, Pope Boniface VIII.

The second form of expression will demonstrate Dante's striving for change in a stagnant Italian society, by examining *The Divine Comedy* as an articulation for reform of the Church. The Church, for Dante, had fallen into disarray due mainly to corruption, avarice and power-hungry figures of authority. As a result, Dante the didactic poet makes the world of *The Divine Comedy* his own social and political

¹⁰³⁶ Barolini, 'Why Did Dante Write the Commedia?', 5.

¹⁰³⁷ Antonio Illiano, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 50-51; 51.

¹⁰³⁸ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, xiv.

responsibility. As a devout Catholic, for Dante to set himself against the Church was no small matter. His reform-orientated attitude throughout his *Divine Comedy* is a testament to his commitment for change within the Catholic Church. Sayers rightly asserts that, for Dante, a reform of society and of citizens, must come from a “recognition of error, repentance, and the purging off of evil states of mind,”¹⁰³⁹ and therefore reform must come from within. Dante, in *The Divine Comedy* shows the Italian city of Florence for what he considers it has become; a condemned corrupt society which he depicts as the *Inferno*. In *Purgatorio*, Dante gives the reader the remedies to counter the traits found in the *Inferno* to motivate those currently living in sin to change their ways and repent. In *Paradiso*, Dante’s idea of an ideal society appears in the form of imperial Rome, thereby providing an ideal framework to strive towards and establishing the political signpost indicated by Sayers.¹⁰⁴⁰

To support the claim that *The Divine Comedy* is Dante’s plea for reform, this chapter will focus on how Dante envisages condemnation, redemption and reform, drawing examples from *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. This approach supports the view that through Dante’s use of Contrapasso and his imaginative abilities, he created a body of work which reflects critically on the governing political authorities and the ecclesiastical organisations of his time, thereby establishing a political theology.

¹⁰³⁹ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 114.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv.

5.4 Political theological critique in *The Divine Comedy*

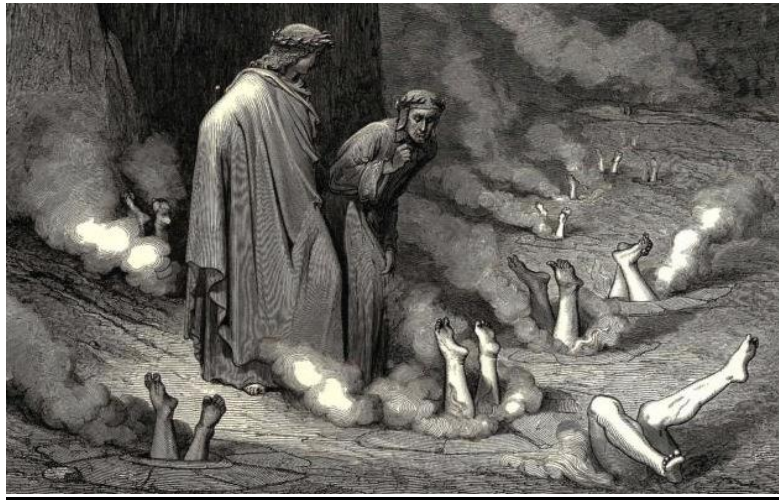


Fig. 10

5.4.1 The Critical and Creative Canto XIX

In *Inferno* Canto 19, Dante continues his argument in favour of the separation of powers, while also exposing the greed and corruption of the Church. He saw that the sacredness of the Church was becoming compromised by its attempts to seek its own advantage in the current political context, by its reliance on contemporary political expedients, thereby leading to widespread instances of greed, corruption, deceit and fraud, which Dante considered unbecoming of a pope. He places these ecclesiastical leaders in the tenth ditch of the eighth circle, along with the simoniacs. Dante skilfully expresses his own opinions and his distaste for simony, as it displays corruption within Dante's beloved Church. Foster considers Canto 19 an anticlerical act of war and deems it a "fighting Canto."¹⁰⁴¹ Dante's need to adhere to his civic and spiritual duty, which is to report the truth of circumstance in the afterlife, is apparent in this canto as

¹⁰⁴¹ Foster, 'The Canto of the Damned popes: Inferno XIX,' 47.

he is willing to critique the popes for leading their followers down the wrong path, away from their ultimate goal, God.

When reading Canto 19, we see Dante's divinely approved rage emerge against simoniac popes. He makes it clear to the reader that the cause of the Church's failures to fulfil its divine mandate is these "Ravenous wolves in shepherd's clothing"¹⁰⁴² who wedded the Church to politics and who chose money and power over God, righteousness and morality, and who refuse to acknowledge their offences committed on earth.¹⁰⁴³ Foster correctly notes how, in Canto 19, Dante, is "not merely objecting to the spiritual distortion involved in putting sacraments up for sale ... or rather he is denouncing in this particular priestly sin the deeper and more comprehensive evil that it implies... [of] having lost the sense of her own identity"¹⁰⁴⁴ and so corrupting the principles and moral laws of her faith and community.

The location of these sinners is also worth noting. Joan Ferrante rightly claims that "the most complicated circle in Hell is the eight".¹⁰⁴⁵ The eighth circle of the *Inferno*, or Malebolge, is the sphere of fraud and is comprised of ten ditches, arranged concentrically. Each ditch is populated with sinners who have committed, or were associated with, fraud, cheating and deception. These sinners are placed here because fraud and treachery abuse human reason; they destroy trust and tear the fabric of

¹⁰⁴² *Par.* 27. 55.

¹⁰⁴³ Further preventing human flourishing, the pursuit of the common good of the community and personal happiness. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 76-77.

¹⁰⁴⁴ "For her [the Church's] very nature ... is an aspiration towards an end beyond this present world, towards Christ now risen from the dead and in glory, whereas these Churchmen lived only for mortal and temporal ends". Foster, 'The Canto of the Damned popes: Inferno XIX,' 61.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Joan Ferrante, 'Malebolge (*Inf.* Xviii-Xxx) as the Key to the Structure of Dante's Inferno.' *Romance Philology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Brepols), 20/4, (1967), 456-466; 456.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44940285>. Accessed 17 July 2020.

religious and political communities apart and so violate “the natural bond of love.”¹⁰⁴⁶

Fraud is malicious in its nature and is a sin unique to humans.¹⁰⁴⁷ Fraud and treachery are based on a person’s conscious and deliberate willing of a certain event or action to happen, one that would cause extreme pain and damage; therefore, fraud and treachery violate trust, not only at an individual, but at a social level.¹⁰⁴⁸

But since the vice of fraud is man’s alone,
It more displeases God, and thus the fraudulent
are lower down, assailed by greater pain.¹⁰⁴⁹

This study of Canto 19 will expand on Dante’s connection between theology and social critique and will explore his appeal to the critical and creative imagination in constructing *The Divine Comedy*.

5.4.2 Divinely Sanctioned Justice: Canto XIX

O Simon Magus, o wretches of his band,
Greedy for gold and silver,
Who prostitute the things of God
That should be brides of goodness!
Now must the trumpet sound for you,
Because your place is there in that third ditch.¹⁰⁵⁰

Within the first few lines of Canto 19, it becomes clear that Dante is filled with emotion as he expresses disgust at the sin of simony as a symptom of corruption within his Church. He emphasises that these sinners are rightfully placed within the *Inferno* and deserve their punishment.¹⁰⁵¹ He opens this canto with an apostrophe

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 153.

¹⁰⁴⁷ “To sin intentionally is to sin through malice, and this is to sin against the Holy Ghost”. S.T. 100. 2. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1617.

¹⁰⁴⁸ This is a clear example of Aristotle’s influence on Dante. The behaviour and punishment is distinguished by the degree of incontinence to which the action is pursued.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Inf.* 11. 25-27.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19. 1-6.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19.6. and 19. 97. “Stay there for you are justly punished”.

directed at Simon Magus. As Hollander notes, Dante highlights the distinction between the man named Simon Magus and the apostle Peter, whose name is also Simon.¹⁰⁵² “Nicholas is seen as the follower of Simon Magus, while Dante presents himself as the follower of Simon Peter”.¹⁰⁵³ The Church, and by extension its clergy and popes, are considered the brides of Christ, “brides of goodness!”¹⁰⁵⁴ Dante’s metaphor, in lines 3-4, compares the Church’s actions in buying and selling sacred things, to harlotry.

The tension between reason and pity escalates within the *Inferno*. Pity seems to diminish as the poem progresses, and we become aware that we are witnessing divine retribution, and therefore – for us as readers – to pity the sinners’ torment would be to demonstrate a lack of knowledge and understanding of divine justice.¹⁰⁵⁵ Up until this point, Dante the pilgrim was filled with pity and remorse for souls in Hell.¹⁰⁵⁶ In lines 5.6, we see a new side to Dante as he begins to fully understand and appreciate divine justice. He emphasizes that these sinners are rightly placed within the *Inferno* and deserve the punishments which are bestowed upon them;

O Supreme Wisdom, what great art you show
In Heaven, on earth, and in the evil world,
And what true justice does your power dispense.¹⁰⁵⁷

¹⁰⁵² Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 354. Simon received the name Peter from Jesus, as Peter means “rock”. “You are Peter and on this rock, I will build my Church”. Matthew 16:18 Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He answered “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” replied, “Yes Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him “look after my sheep”. John 21: 15-16.

¹⁰⁵³ Peter is presented as the first Pope. Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 354.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Inf.* 19. 4.

¹⁰⁵⁵ In Canto 20, Dante is reduced to tears at the sight of the sinner and has to be reminded by Virgil not to feel any pity towards these sinners as that would be questioning divine justice. “Are you still as witless as the rest? Here piety lives when pity is quite dead. Who is more impious than one who thinks that God shows passion in His judgement?” *Ibid.*, 20. 27.30.

¹⁰⁵⁶ For example, Francesca di Rimini. As Francesca speaks, Paolo weeps, and Dante feels such pity for them, which was Francesca’s aim, “your torments make me weep for grief and pity” that he faints, “I swooned as if in death. And down I fell as a dead body falls.” *Ibid.*, 5. 91-142.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19. 10-12.

As a punishment for the buying and selling of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the sinners in the third ditch of the eighth circle are flipped upside down,¹⁰⁵⁸ their bodies trapped in holes with their feet set on fire.¹⁰⁵⁹

H.A Mason and William Warren Vernon establish a link between Pope Nicholas the “treacherous assassin,”¹⁰⁶⁰ and those assassins who committed capital punishment and were punished using the “grim method” of *propagginazione*.¹⁰⁶¹ This mode of execution involved placing the criminal upside down in a hole and then slowly filling the hole up with earth. However, Dante himself compares these holes to the baptismal font in Florence.¹⁰⁶² In lines 19-21, Dante the poet breaks with the medieval convention of not speaking of himself and gives an account of his breaking of a baptismal font.¹⁰⁶³ Some have argued that this passage must not be taken literally and should instead be treated metaphorically.¹⁰⁶⁴ According to Charles T. Davis, some of the earliest commentators claimed “that the story was a ‘seal’ documenting Dante’s

¹⁰⁵⁸ I agree with Hollander: this position is “reminiscent of St. Peter’s upside-down crucifixion.”

Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 355.

¹⁰⁵⁹ The flames are symbolic, an inversion of the Pentecostal flames.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Inf.* Canto 19. 50.

¹⁰⁶¹ William Warren Vernon, *Readings on the Inferno of Dante, chiefly based on the commentary of Benvenuto da Imola*, Vol II (London: Macmillan, 1984), 82. Mason, ‘A Journey through Hell Dante’s ‘Inferno’ Re-Visited’, 7-8

¹⁰⁶² *Inf.* Canto 19. 13-18.

¹⁰⁶³ Jacopo di Dante, Jacopo della Lana, Pietro di Dante, Guido da Pisa, Benvenuto da Imola, Franseco da Buti and Anonimo Fiorentino, interpret “battezzatori” as priests standing in the outside fonts around the central one in which they baptise the children, in order to shelter themselves against the crowds on Holy Saturday. Bambagliolio and the author of *Ottimo Commento* take the opposite view and say these fonts were used for baptising.” Davis states that this view is preferable, as “the *Ottimo* was a contemporary acquaintance of Dante and a native Florentine who had actually seen the fonts.” He observed, in a passage printed by Vandelli from MS Vat. Bard. Lat 4103, “that it was still possible to see where Dante had broken one of the fonts to save a boy caught inside it. Measurements of these fonts were made by Gelli before Buontalenti destroyed them in 1557, and since they were only 0.58 m in diameter and 0.725m in depth they would have been very constricting for baptizers ... Garzelli observes that the recently restored baptismal font of Pistoria is very similar in size and shape to the old one in the Florentine baptistery.” Davis, ‘Canto XIX Simoniacs’, 266- 267.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

authorship of the *Comedy*.¹⁰⁶⁵ Other authors believe that, in an attempt to justify his actions, Dante used autobiographical detail as the “truth as a ‘seal’ to undeceive past or future critics.”¹⁰⁶⁶ Spitzer disagrees that Dante used the smashing of the baptismal font to absolve himself, and claims: “Dante means that the exemplary punishment of the simoniacs should be a ‘seal’ to open man’s eyes to the fate of the sinner.”¹⁰⁶⁷

Noakes, on the other hand, claims that “the public vow of adherence to the French king taken in the baptistry and thus in proximity to the font, before Charles of Valois entered Florence in 1302, is what Dante now confesses he broke.”¹⁰⁶⁸ Scott, however, suggests that the account “is intended to encourage men to break the ‘stone of cupidity’ in which the simoniacs and many others are imprisoned.”¹⁰⁶⁹ Similarly, Nolan believes that the account is a symbol of the breaking of the “corrupt and undermined rock of the Papacy”.¹⁰⁷⁰ Here I agree with the interpretation offered by Davis; Dante is telling this story to indicate “that his attack on simony is also an attempt at rescue”.¹⁰⁷¹ Here we see the structural and institutional flaws and forces beyond the individual at play. Dante, appealing to the social imagination, allows his readers to see at first-hand one of the many moral evils which he believed to be a public issue affecting the social structure of the community. Here too we see Dante’s sense of social responsibility, as he calls his readers to understand their personal and civic duty too. In line 20 Dante states that he had a good reason for breaking the baptismal font; it was to save a life. Although his actions might be deemed irreverent and sacrilegious,

¹⁰⁶⁵ Davis, ‘Canto XIX Simoniacs’, 267.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ibid., 267.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ibid., 267.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 354.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Davis, ‘Canto XIX Simoniacs’, 267.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ibid., 267.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid., 267.

his insists that they served a greater cause. Similarly, his poetic assault on sacred institutions was motivated by his desire to save the Catholic Church from itself. By exposing the true crimes of the Church within this canto, Dante urges his readers' souls into activity.

Dante encounters a particular soul, "lamenting with his shanks"¹⁰⁷², who seems to be suffering more than the other souls in this canto. This is Pope Nicholas III,¹⁰⁷³ "In truth I was a son of the she-bear"¹⁰⁷⁴ and "a lawless shepherd from the west",¹⁰⁷⁵ who, with a great greed to advance the "cubs... filled my purse as now I fill this hole."¹⁰⁷⁶ He explains to Dante that other Simoniac popes lie beneath him, and that, with the arrival of the next sinner, Pope Nicholas will be pushed down beneath the new arrival. It is here revealed that the next simoniac pope to enter this circle will be Boniface,¹⁰⁷⁷ as Nicholas hints at the identity of the next sinner to enter the circle with his question; "Are you here already, Boniface?"¹⁰⁷⁸ Pope Nicholas initially mistakes Dante for Pope

¹⁰⁷² Canto 19. 45. Charles Singleton makes a great observation about the wording of this line and Dante's use of the word "zanca". In Acts, Simon Magus was said to have broken his shank and Dante in this Canto states that the soul here is 'lamenting with his shank'. The shank, unlike Simon Magus, is not broken, however, "every Simonist must lament with just that part of his body" Charles S. Singleton, 'Inferno XIX: O Simon Mago!' *MLN*, 80/ 1, (1965), 92–99. www.jstor.org/stable/3042921. Accessed 15 January 2021.

¹⁰⁷³ Giovanni Gaetano Orsini (Pope Nicholas III) was the son of a Roman senator, Matteo Gaetano Orsini and Perna Caetana. The Orsini family were the most powerful families among the Roman nobility. According to Peter Herde, Giovanni Gaetano Orsini or Pope Nicholas III, was neither a canonist or a theologian, "he probably did not receive a formal education". He was created a cardinal by Innocent IV in 1244. During his time as cardinal, he became an expert in international policy. He was elected Nicholas III on the 25 November in 1277. He served as Pope till 1280. Nicholas III died in 1280 near Viterbo, but is buried in Rome. Peter Herde, 'Nicholas III, Pope', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 648-649; 648.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Inf.* Canto 19. 70.

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. 82.

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19. 72.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 19. 50-60.

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19. 53.

Boniface VIII, and refers to the future knowledge known by the sinners, that Boniface would enter this circle in 1303.¹⁰⁷⁹ Pope Nicholas heavily criticises him:

Are you so swiftly sated with those profits
For which you did not fear to take by guile
The beautiful Lady and to do her outrage?¹⁰⁸⁰

The next pope after Boniface to enter this circle will be Pope Clement V. Nicholas states that he himself will have spent more time with roasted feet than Boniface before Clement V arrives.¹⁰⁸¹ Dante charges Clement with the sin of simony for his movement of the papal see, and he also denounces “his role in Philip’s destruction of the Templars” and “his betrayal of Henry VII”.¹⁰⁸² It is important to note that Dante never mentions Clement by name.¹⁰⁸³ He calls him “a lawless shepherd from the west, one even fouler in his deeds”.¹⁰⁸⁴ He compares Clement to Jason, who bought his brother Onias the position of High Priest from the King of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes.

A new Jason shall he be, the one of whom
We read in Maccabees, and even as the king indulged
Jason, so the king of France shall deal with him.¹⁰⁸⁵

¹⁰⁷⁹ “By several years the writing lied to me” Ibid., 19. 54 is a reference to future knowledge expressed by Farinata in Canto 10. “We see, like those with faulty vision, things at a distance ... when things draw near or happen now, our minds are useless, without the words of others we can know nothing of your human state. Thus it follows that all our knowledge will perish at the very moment the portals of the future close”. Ibid., 100-108.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Inf.* 19. 55-57.

¹⁰⁸¹ The foretelling of Pope Clement’s presence in this circle, has been a cause for debate. It raises the question of, how could Dante, if he was writing this canto before Clement’s actual death in 1314, be sure that he would die by this date? According to Hollander, Dante is making the assumption that Clement would die sometime. Clement suffered from ill health therefore it might have been assumed he would die before 1323. More convincingly, Hollander makes the point that Dante “knowingly” refers to his actual death in Ibid., 19. 79-87. It cannot be assumed that Dante wrote each Canto in order. Agreeing with Davis, the natural conclusion is to assume this canto was written after the death of Pope Clement. Davis, ‘Canto XIX Simoniacs’ 267-268.

¹⁰⁸² Durling and Martinez *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno*, Volume I, 300.

¹⁰⁸³ I agree with Rudd, this action taken by Dante to place a living pope in Hell was a courageous and ‘bold’ move. From a historical perspective and agreeing with Rudd, it appears the first draft of canto must have been written around the time of the Avignon Papacy. Rudd, ‘Simple Fraud (The Leopard)(Canto 18-30)’, in Rudd, *Critical Companion to Dante*, 58-88; 73.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Inf.* Canto 19. 82.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ibid., 19 85-87.

Dante the poet describes Dante the pilgrim as a “friar”¹⁰⁸⁶ who is hearing the confession of Pope Nicholas, a “treacherous assassin”.¹⁰⁸⁷ Dante, in turn, “confesses” to Nicholas that he is justly punished and that Dante himself “has neither the power nor the desire to give him absolution.”¹⁰⁸⁸ He reminds Nicholas that Christ did not ask for money from St. Peter before giving him the keys to Heaven, and that the Apostles also did not take or ask for money from Matthias.¹⁰⁸⁹ Dante also takes the opportunity to deprecate Nicholas, as he was said to have been bribed in order to support the conspiracy against Charles I of Anjou.¹⁰⁹⁰ “Stay there then, for you are justly punished.”¹⁰⁹¹ These lines are significant; they highlight Dante’s aversion to the sin of simony as something that destroys the natural bond of God’s divine gifts to humankind. Simony affects the social structure of the community, and the pursuit of the common good by blocking the route to the highest good, which is God.

I would resort to even harsher words
because your avarice afflicts the world,
trampling down the good and raising up the wicked.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid., 19. 49.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid., 19. 50. Vernon says that the monks had to “stoop down” to hear the criminals confessions and for Mason, the pope’s confession could be useful in assisting the reader to take this as “medieval jest”. Vernon, *Readings on the Inferno of Dante*, 82; Mason, ‘A Journey through Hell Dante’s ‘Inferno’ Re-Visited’, 7-8.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Davis, ‘Canto XIX Simoniacs’, 265.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Inf.* Canto 19. 90-96.

¹⁰⁹⁰ This conspiracy led to the massacre of 1282.

¹⁰⁹¹ *Inf.* Canto 19. 97.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid., 19. 103-105.

5.5 Dante's plea for Reform in *The Divine Comedy*

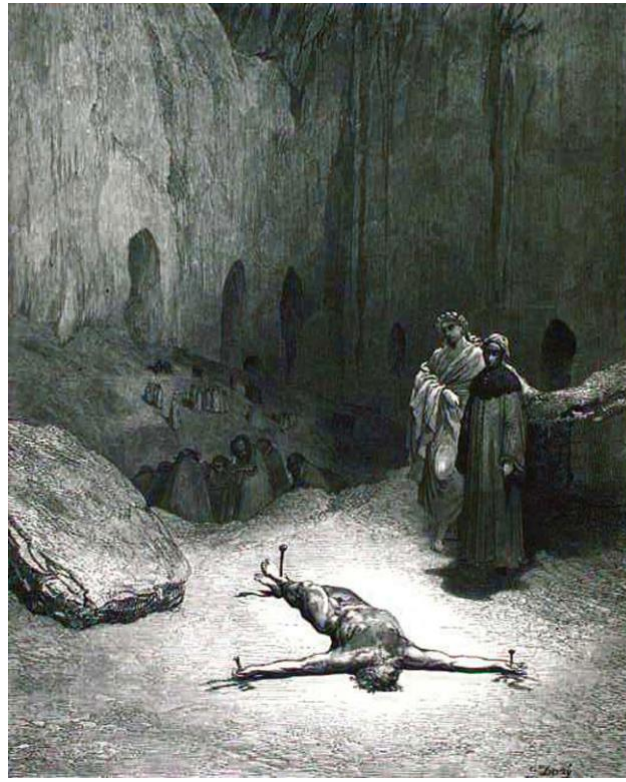


Fig. 11

To give a full canto by canto commentary on the political theology of the entire *Divine Comedy* would be a task beyond this thesis. Therefore, this study will examine two cantos per canticle. The cantos which have been chosen to represent the condemnation of the ecclesiastical institution, are *Inf.* Canto 23 and *Inf.* Canto 3. The *Inferno*, “is a picture of human society in a state of sin and corruption”¹⁰⁹³ and these cantos highlight Dante’s need to adhere to his sense of civic duty by revealing the truth that he has observed of the corruption and greed which has plagued Florence. Dante employs his poetic faculties to amalgamate well-known myths and legends with

¹⁰⁹³ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 114.

Florentine history and the contemporary situation, which together contribute to the formation of his cosmology.

In Canto 3 Dante hears the sounds of hell for the first time. The chaos is so intense that he weeps, horrified. He asks Virgil what all the noise is, and Virgil tells him that this place holds the souls of the neutrals, who chose neither good nor evil. They “intermingle”¹⁰⁹⁴ with the “wicked band of angels”¹⁰⁹⁵ who were “rebellious and not faithful to God”.¹⁰⁹⁶ They cannot enter Hell and were cast out of Heaven. This canto was chosen to explore the character of the unnamed shade Dante encounters. The identity of this particular shade has been the subject of controversy. Scholars have been led to believe it is Pope Celestine V, who resigned from the Papacy, making way for Pope Boniface VIII.¹⁰⁹⁷ This lends credence to the belief that Dante was in favour of a reform of the Church and reinforces the already established critique, in Canto 19, of the Church and its leader at the time of Dante’s journey through the afterlife, Pope Boniface VIII.

Canto 23 was chosen for two main reasons. The first being the placement of Catalano de’ Malavolti or Catalano di Guido di Madonna Ostia (1210-1285), a Bolognese Guelph, and Loderingo degli Andalò (1210-1293), a Bolognese Ghibelline,¹⁰⁹⁸ within

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Inf.* 3. 37.

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3. 37-38.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3. 38-39.

¹⁰⁹⁷ This shade has also been identified as the biblical character Pontius Pilate or the biblical character Esau.

¹⁰⁹⁸ They hear Dante’s Tuscan accent and orders the pilgrim and his guide to stop. According to Hollander, Jovial Friars or Frati Gaudenti, was the popular name given to the “knights of a military and conventual order, called the Knights of Our Lady ... which was (re)founded in 1261 by certain citizens of Bologna under the sanction of Pope Urban IV. The object of this order was to make peace between the contending fractions in the different cities of Italy, and to reconcile family feuds, and to protect the weak against their oppressors”. Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 431.

this ditch. They were commissioned to be impartial rulers of Florence in order to amend its political strife. Friars Catalano and Loderingo, however, were not impartial; their selfishness took control, leading to an even greater political rift on earth and an eternal place in Hell for their hypocrisy. The second reason is that, according to Regina Psaki, Canto 23 is “notoriously”¹⁰⁹⁹ under-examined, and one of the probable causes could be that it does not contain any “memorable personalities.”¹¹⁰⁰ However, Psaki is correct; this canto rewards a “careful reading,”¹¹⁰¹ particularly, in relation to how it depicts the ramifications of hypocrisy, and especially for its inclusion of monastic vocabulary and characters. Finally, the location of this circle is lower than that in which we find those guilty of murder,¹¹⁰² meaning that Dante considered their effects on society “insidious and ultimately more damaging.”¹¹⁰³

The cantos which have been chosen to represent ecclesiastical redemption are *Purgatorio* Canto 26 and *Purgatorio* Canto 19. Sayers states that Purgatory is “comparable to our experience in this world”.¹¹⁰⁴ Ferrante seems to share the view that Dante intentionally made this realm more like peoples’ “earthly existence ... because Dante believes and wants his audience to believe that it can be established here”.¹¹⁰⁵ Ferrante believes that in *Purgatorio* Dante provides the “remedies to

¹⁰⁹⁹ Regina Psaki, ‘Inferno XXIII.’ *Lectura Dantis*, no. 6, (1990), 297–306; 297. www.jstor.org/stable/44806791. Accessed 16 April 2021.

¹¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 297.

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid., 297.

¹¹⁰² Except murders committed by treachery.

¹¹⁰³ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 133.

¹¹⁰⁴ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 74.

¹¹⁰⁵ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 198

counter those traits”¹¹⁰⁶ that are being condemned within the *Inferno*.¹¹⁰⁷ Heaven and Hell are absolute eternal states; they are opposite to one another, yet both share common aspects. Sayers rightly notes how “both have finality and absoluteness”.¹¹⁰⁸ Unlike Heaven and Hell, *Purgatorio* is considered a transitional stage in eternity¹¹⁰⁹; it is a “recognition of error, repentance, and the purging off of evil states of mind”.¹¹¹⁰ In *Purgatorio*, there is no centre, as there is in both Hell and Heaven. Its souls are waiting to be accepted and are learning how to be a “citizens of one true city”.¹¹¹¹ Here Dante explicitly calls his readers to change their actions on earth, by showing that there is real hope for salvation in Heaven after repentance. “O creature who purify yourself, to return in beauty to the One who made you”.¹¹¹² This contrasts starkly with the souls in the *Inferno* who have abandoned hope of seeing God forever, thereby revealing *Purgatorio* as an exercise in redemptive imagination.

Canto 16 has a dominantly political argument. This canto’s opening scene describes a wrathful terrace where the “night (was) deprived of all the stars ... everywhere was overcast with clouds”.¹¹¹³ The physical blindness, experienced and described by Dante, could be an analogy for the mental blindness that violates clarity and is caused by wrath. Dante hears voices singing the *Agnus Dei*; “each one seemed to pray for peace

¹¹⁰⁶ Musa, *Dante’s Inferno*, 368.

¹¹⁰⁷ According to Ferrante, “Man is a social animal whose behaviour is affected by his social setting and whose actions can affect his society”. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 199. Another striking contrast is the communal dimension of realm. The souls work together in the pursuit of moral perfection.

¹¹⁰⁸ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in His Writings*, 75.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ferrante names *Purgatorio* a “society in transition.” Ferrante, *The Political Vision of The Divine Comedy*, 198.

¹¹¹⁰ Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 114.

¹¹¹¹ *Purg.* 13. 94-95. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of The Divine Comedy*, 198.

¹¹¹² *Ibid.*, 16. 31-32.

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 16. 1-3.

and mercy to the Lamb of God who bears away our sins”.¹¹¹⁴ Dante, being mortal, can “cleave”¹¹¹⁵ through the dark veil, an action which is impossible for the shades on this terrace. Dante encounters the soul of Marco Lombardo¹¹¹⁶ on the terrace with the wrathful. In Canto 16, Marco references the main themes of *The Divine Comedy*; God’s justice, humankind’s misuse of freewill, the pursuit of happiness and truth, and the separation of the spiritual from the temporal. Marco claims that during his life he “cherished the ideals of virtuous living that are now utterly neglected,”¹¹¹⁷ and he explains how the cause of moral corruption is a poor regard for free will. He explains that laws are necessary to keep people on the right path. He attributes the responsibility for this to the leaders of the Church, specifically the poor guidance received from the Papacy. Evil on earth is caused by Church leaders seeking to assume control of the temporal sphere, which gives a wrong example to the people who look to the Church for guidance. Dante’s position on the governing political authorities and the ecclesiastical organisations is further emphasised and made explicitly clear.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid., 16. 16-18. *Agnus Dei* is a symbol of Christ’s absolute humility and a Gregorian prayer that “beseeches the Lamb to God to grant the mercy and peace”. John Scott, ‘A World of Darkness and Disorder’, in Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, Charles Ross, eds., *Lectura Dantis, Purgatorio* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), 167-178; 168.

¹¹¹⁵ *Purg.* 16. 25.

¹¹¹⁶ There have been many attempts to identify this character. Commentators such as Frank Ordiway, Girogio Cracco and Hollander lean towards Marco being of Venetian origin. Hollander notes that Cracco points out that there was a Venetian living in Lombardy, who wrote an unpublished chronicle about the province of Venice. “He names himself simply as ‘Marco’ and his text contains a number of concern and phrases that coincide with Dante’s. That Dante allows him as limited identification as he does may indicate that he felt Marco’s fame was great enough that his Christian name alone was sufficient to identify him.” Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 358. Tristan Kay, identifies Marco as a ‘courtier’. Tristan Kay ‘Politics’, 278. Other possibilities include Marco being a member of the venetian Lombardi family. Frank B. Ordiway, ‘Marco Lombardo’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 592. John Scott also points out that in “Dante’s time, ‘Lombardy’ could signify a region covering not only present-day Lombardy but also large tracts of the Veneto and Emilia”. He believes that Marco may have even been “active at the court of Gherardo da Camino, the de facto ruler of Treviso from 1283-1306. Scott, ‘A World of Darkness and Disorder’, 169.

¹¹¹⁷ Scott, ‘A World of Darkness and Disorder’, 169.

Canto 19 opens an hour before dawn on Tuesday¹¹¹⁸ as Dante describes the second purgatorial¹¹¹⁹ dream.¹¹²⁰ In this dream, Dante sees a ‘stammering, cross-eyed, splayfooted’¹¹²¹ woman, with “crippled hands and sickly pale complexion”.¹¹²² As he gazes, her appearance changes into a “sallow face”¹¹²³ with straightened limbs. She loses her stammer and begins to sing that she is a “sweet siren”¹¹²⁴ who captivated the attention of many “mariners on distant seas”¹¹²⁵ and particularly Ulysses with her song.¹¹²⁶ Suddenly, a holy lady appears by Dante’s side and indignantly interrupts the siren. Virgil rips the siren’s garments exposing her belly and “the stench that came from there awoke”¹¹²⁷ Dante. Virgil explains to Dante that she is an ancient witch, the *femmina balba*, hideous yet beautiful, who is dangerous yet alluring and who tempts people away from the highest good.¹¹²⁸ We are reminded of the “good that fails to make men happy, for it is not the essence or true source”,¹¹²⁹ this is deemed the secondary good; money, food and sex.¹¹³⁰ This misogynistic characterisation of the *femmina balba* is contrasted with the holy lady who appears. The holy lady is assumed to be Beatrice and she, according to Hollander, is equated with charity, the source of

¹¹¹⁸ “At that hour when the heat of day, cooled by earth at times by Saturn, can no longer temper the cold of the moon”. *Purg.* 19. 1-3. According to Florence Russo, Saturn can be considered the embodiment of the Golden Age. However, within *Purgatorio* XIX, “Saturn does not seem to have anything to do with the Golden Age” as Dante alludes to it as being a cold planet. Russo, *Dante’s search for the Golden Age*, 47 and 121.

¹¹¹⁹ *Purg.* 19. 8.

¹¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19. 8.

¹¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 19. 8.

¹¹²² *Ibid.*, 19. 9.

¹¹²³ *Ibid.*, 19. 15.

¹¹²⁴ *Purg.* 19. 19.

¹¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. 20.

¹¹²⁶ Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 427.

¹¹²⁷ *Purg.* 19.33.

¹¹²⁸ The *femmina balba* can be considered a symbol of seduction of the secondary. “*Femmina balba*” translates as “stuttering female”. Joan M. Ferrante, ‘Women’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 887-890; 888.

¹¹²⁹ *Purg.* 17. 133.

¹¹³⁰ Secondary good is dissimilar to the primary good as it is ever changing.

“good love”¹¹³¹ that operates against the secondary goods.¹¹³² This is an adequate assumption, as this fifth terrace is dedicated to the punishment of avarice and prodigality. The prodigal and the covetous are purged by lying face down on the ground, looking away from the heavens, as their punishment for always looking towards the secondary good, and away from the highest good.¹¹³³ Pope Adrian V is present on this terrace and this canto was chosen specifically with Adrian V in mind, as he is the first saved pope we encounter. He was pope for only thirty-eight days, however, it was enough for him to realise the vanity of his greed for power. Since Pope Adrian repented before he died, he now purges himself for the deeds committed on earth.

The cantos which have been chosen to represent the ecclesiastical are *Paradiso* Canto 26 and *Paradiso* Canto 27. Dante looked beyond his immediate surroundings and towards an ideal world. It may be easy to classify these cantos as being purely theological in their concerns, as though they neglect worldly concerns.¹¹³⁴ However, it is necessary to insist on the political message found within *Paradiso*. The political imagination of Dante is fully realised within *Paradiso*, where we see a process of

¹¹³¹ Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 427.

¹¹³² *Ibid.*, 427.

¹¹³³ Parallels of this nature can be found in Canto 19 of *Inferno*, where the souls are face down in a baptismal font shaped hole. This inability to look away from secondary good is present in *Par.* 27. “O greed, it is you who plunge all mortals so deep into your depths that not one has the power to lift his eyes above you waves”. *Par.* 121-123

¹¹³⁴ An example of this would be at the beginning of this canto, where Dante relies on the eight earthly ‘foolish cares’ of mortals that he has now been temporarily released from. These ‘cares’ are pointless activities, which consist of law, medicine, priesthood, political power, robbery, civic affairs, sexuality and idleness. These activities are in striking contrast to the joyous gratification which he is now experiencing in heaven. Although this framing of a mundane life by Dante may seem negative, we gain an insight into the professions and activities available to the privileged males of Dante’s time. *Par.* 11. 1-9.

mobilisation towards achieving reform, both for the religious and temporal spheres.¹¹³⁵ Ferrante correctly notes that in *Paradiso* those who sought truth and served God and humankind while on earth, who “serve justice through its highest secular expression are part of the eagle”¹¹³⁶ as they “express their love for God through service to man ... [and] are motivated by the same impulse ... [therefore] they can work in harmony for the same ends despite different means”.¹¹³⁷ *Paradiso* is a city of love, kindness, justice and wisdom, where all its citizens work together to create a better life for one another and fulfil each other’s needs.¹¹³⁸ It is considered the true city of God where Dante presents the reader with an ideal framework to strive towards.

Ferrante observes that there is an “absence of popes as popes”.¹¹³⁹ She gives the example of John XXI, who is presented as more of a scholar than a pope. Most of the souls in *Paradiso* are religious figures who had been leaders or founders of large communities, for instance, Francis, Dominic, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure.

¹¹³⁵ It should be noted here that Dante was a reformer, and also a devout Catholic. His anger is an attempt to return to the roots of Christianity. It come from a place of love for the Church. “He was a reformer only in the sense that he desired that authority remain uncontaminated by the temporalities and that doctrine to be maintained in its integrity.” Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 78.

¹¹³⁶ Ferrante *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 253. The eagle is a place for Kings and Emperors; It is the symbol of earthly power and justice.

¹¹³⁷ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 253, with whom I agree that, the rose is “the heavenly city (30.130), the joyful kingdom (31.25), the just and pious Empire (32.117) whose Emperor is God; it is the model for the political and moral life on earth.” Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 253.

¹¹³⁸ Plato like Dante, was an idealist and “one of the most religious thinkers” within philosophy. Plato moulded this life and “its institutions upon the model of a city not made with hands ‘yonder in the heavens’, leading the individual up a ladder of perfection to another life in which the highest powers will be enlarged and find their true object”. Plato maintained that “the sensible and ‘material’ universe is in some ways the expression or extension of invisible mind or spirit, and that man, by striving towards an ideal of moral and aesthetic perfection, is in some way entering into harmony with the spirit of goodness and beauty that gives reality to whatever exists and dominates its every activity”. Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, 5-9.

¹¹³⁹ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 256.

Ferrante notes how Dante's reasoning indicates his judgement that these souls had avoided worldly temptations and led lives uncontaminated by the temporal sphere, in lives devoted to simply following the teachings of Christ. They did not "attempt to usurp secular political power; indeed, if they discussed the relation between Church and state, as many of them did, they spoke as political moderates, recognizing the rights of the state and warning the Church not to interfere."¹¹⁴⁰ Canto 21 is set in the seventh heavenly sphere of Saturn. It is a perfect example of souls who on earth renounced worldly possessions and removed themselves to a life of contemplation and prayer.¹¹⁴¹ Dante here meets the soul of Peter Damian or Petrus Damiani (1007-1072), cardinal of Ostia and Church reformer. Peter Damian attacked the wealth and corruption of the contemporary clergy, in stark contrast to the poverty and morality which is meant to be practiced by those in positions of ecclesiastical authority. Peter Damian wrote many letters denouncing the wealth of clergy and demanding a renewal of clerical spirituality.¹¹⁴² His dedication to the monastic life, his striving to maintain the dignity of the Church and his critique of the clergy may explain his attraction for Dante. Since Dante was a reform-orientated poet and Peter Damian was a reform-orientated cardinal, this canto encapsulates Dante's plea for reform, and further demonstrates his theological critique of the Church.

¹¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 256.

¹¹⁴¹ The sphere is home to the "cardinal virtue temperance and religious meditation." Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 583.

¹¹⁴² According to George Andrew Trone, his writings consist of 180 letters. For example; the book of Gomorrah denouncing sodomy, *Libre Gratissimus* (1052), which treated the problem of simony. George Andrew Trone, 'Damian, St. Peter', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 245-246; 245.

Canto 27 is polemic, at once political and mystical.¹¹⁴³ Armour notes how this canto is divided into two main parts; the first as Dante ends his time among the fixed stars, and the second as his experience in the Primum Mobile begins.¹¹⁴⁴ This study will focus mainly on his powerful invectives against the Papacy. This canto was chosen as it provides the most striking condemnation of the then pope, Boniface, as articulated by the first pope, St. Peter. St. Peter was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, and according to Madison U. Sowell, Dante would have embraced the tradition that Peter became the first bishop of Rome after Christ's death and resurrection.¹¹⁴⁵ He suffered martyrdom himself in Rome after travelling to Antioch and Corinth from Jerusalem.¹¹⁴⁶

Peter sits in the celestial rose;

To her right behold that ancient father
Of Holy Church to whose care Christ entrusted
The keys to this, the fairest flower.¹¹⁴⁷

Canto 27 opens with the souls of *Paradiso* erupting in song; this experience proves so moving for Dante, that he describes himself as becoming "drunk on the sweetness of their song".¹¹⁴⁸ Dante describes "four torches"¹¹⁴⁹ that "were aflame"¹¹⁵⁰; these are

¹¹⁴³ It is political and polemically due to St. Peter's attack on the Papacy. It is mystical due to the transition of Dante from the fixed stars to the Primum Mobile. Teodolinda Barolini explains that Dante tries very hard to explain what the Primum Mobile is and quotes lines 106-111 "the nature of the universe, which holds the centre still and moves all else around it, starts here as from its boundary line. This heaven has no other where but in the mind of God, in which is kindled the love that turns it and the power it pours down". Barolini believes that "Dante is signalling that we are going beyond the space-time continuum, into the mind of God. Teodolinda Barolini, '*Paradiso 27: The Usurper*', *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2014. <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-27/> Accessed 6 of September 2022.

¹¹⁴⁴ Peter Armour, '*Paradiso XXVII*', *Lectura Dantis*, no. 16/17, (1995), 402–423; 402. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44806615> Accessed 3 August 2022.

¹¹⁴⁵ Madison U. Sowell, 'Peter, St.', in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 683-684; 683.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 683.

¹¹⁴⁷ *Par.* 32. 124-126.

¹¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27. 3.

¹¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27. 10.

¹¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27. 10.

the souls of St. Peter, St John, St. James and Adam.¹¹⁵¹ One of the lights comes towards Dante. It is the luminous soul of St. Peter, who glows from white to red. As he begins his attack on the Papacy¹¹⁵² all the souls go quiet; “duty had imposed silence on every member of the holy choir”.¹¹⁵³ Peter recounts the martyrdom and sacrifices made by earlier popes and describes how the city in which he was martyred has become a place of filth. He describes to Dante how the blood which was shed on behalf of Christ is now being shed for earthly goods. It is within these lines that the most powerful, harshest and bluntest critique of the medieval Catholic Church appears.

5.5.1 Imaginative Condemnation

In the midst of my days I shall go to the gates of Hell.¹¹⁵⁴

Ferrante believes that for Dante, Hell is the least important part of his poem.¹¹⁵⁵ I disagree with her judgement on this: the *Inferno* is equally as important as any other section of the *Comedy*. Words are power; with that power comes a responsibility, and that responsibility –for Dante – was a declaration of truth about his society in imaginative form. In this I agree with Kenelm Foster, who argues that Dante wanted to “express an idea of damnation and to show examples of human beings incurring damnation through the way they lived and the choices they made ways that were evil,

¹¹⁵¹ “Dante had been examined in Faith by St. Peter, in Hope by St. James, and in Charity by St. John before meeting Adam, the father of the human race”. Armour, ‘Paradiso XXVII’, 402.

¹¹⁵² Barolini, asks the readers of this canto to take into consideration “the response of many of Dante’s early readers, who were amazed to find such harshly critical language in Paradise, and in the mouth of an apostle.” She continues to say that Dante’s language within this canto is “extreme and was guaranteed to cause controversial reading”. Barolini, ‘Paradiso 27: The Usurper.’

¹¹⁵³ *Par.* 27. 17-18.

¹¹⁵⁴ Isaiah 38.10.

¹¹⁵⁵ Ferrante, ‘Hell as the Mirror image of Paradise’, 367.

wrong, sinful”¹¹⁵⁶ The *Inferno* is a revelation of traits that Dante believed should be excluded from an ideal society,¹¹⁵⁷ and its importance lies in this prescription. Through his imaginative theological construct, Dante reveals to the reader the current issues plaguing his Florentine society, thereby revealing the hidden dialogue and commentary on the Church and on political affairs at the time.

The opening scene of *Inferno* requires comment, as it sets the scene of the perilous condition in which our protagonist finds himself, and which led him to take the dangerous journey through the afterlife and finally to divine salvation, illuminated by Grace. Dante begins this voyage “Midway in the journey of our life.”¹¹⁵⁸ This contemplative journey of the self begins in the first few lines of his *Inferno*, where the pilgrim finds himself lost – allegorically – in a dark wood, unable to find the right path, as the “straight way was lost”¹¹⁵⁹ which is the virtuous road that leads to God.¹¹⁶⁰ Echoes of Psalm 23 dominate canto 1:13-16.¹¹⁶¹ The darkness of the wood is a prelude to what is in store for Dante in the *Inferno*. The *Inferno* is a realm where the sun never emerges, it makes its first appearance in Purgatory. The darkness of the *Inferno*

¹¹⁵⁶ Foster, ‘The Canto of the Damned popes: Inferno XIX’, 47.

¹¹⁵⁷ “It is only when society has learned to will it’s true end that the joint rule of Church and Empire can be established”. Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante: The Poet Alive in his Writings*, 115.

¹¹⁵⁸ *Inf.* 1.1 Here Dante is implying that he is middle aged, which for him is thirty-five years old following Psalm 90.10; Gk. 89.10, which presents seventy years as an idealised duration of life. “Seventy years is the span of our days”. Many scholars have also pointed out that the opening on this canto is similar to Isaiah 38:10-21. “I thought: I am to depart in the prime of my life... My home has been plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent... I cried for help till daybreak. Like a lion, he has crushed all my bones... you have held back my life from the pit of nothingness”.

¹¹⁵⁹ *Inf.* 1. 3.

¹¹⁶⁰ Echoes of Plato arise again; Knowles writes that many of Plato’s passages, “deal with the pursuit of virtue and with the soul’s destiny of suffering or enlightenment”. Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, 5.

¹¹⁶¹ “Though I should walk in the valley of the shadow of death, no evil would I fear, for you are with me”. Psalm 23. 4; Gk. 22.4. But when I reached the foot of a hill, there where the valley ended that had pierced my heart with fear.” *Inf.* Canto 1:13-16.

mirrors the ignorance and blindness of the lives that sinners led on earth.¹¹⁶² The reader gets the sense that Dante is caught up in concerns with his own morality and vulnerability, “like ours, to sin”.¹¹⁶³ For some commentators, the wood is a reflection of Eden after the Fall.¹¹⁶⁴ For Michele Barbi, the forest represents Dante’s “own moral aberration.”¹¹⁶⁵ For Hollander, the wood does not indicate “sin itself, but human life lived in the condition of sin”.¹¹⁶⁶ For Letterio Cassata, however, the dark wood represents Dante’s “interior wood”.¹¹⁶⁷ It is the wood of political darkness and confusion within which he finds himself.¹¹⁶⁸ This wood of “political darkness”,¹¹⁶⁹ specifically relates to Dante’s disgust with papal corruption (and) of the absence of imperial authority”.¹¹⁷⁰ His relationship with Florence, and with Italy, both of which are blinded by “cupidity,”¹¹⁷¹ “enslaved, abode of misery, pointless ship in a fierce tempest tossed, no mistress over provinces but a harlot!”.¹¹⁷² Cassata, to support his view, quotes Benvenuto da Imola, who states that the forest is “the vicious worldly state ... and he calls it ‘shadowed’ on account of ignorance and sin”.¹¹⁷³

¹¹⁶² This blindness relates to the souls being unable to see that their deeds on earth were a result of their own will and misjudgement. The souls blame others for their mistakes which lead them to this dark place.

¹¹⁶³ Hollander, ‘Dante’s Authority’, 25.

¹¹⁶⁴ “The wood is to be taken ‘historically’ in at least a certain sense, and seems to reflect to some readers, the condition of the Eden Fall”. Cassata, ‘The Hard Begin’, 13.

¹¹⁶⁵ Cassata, ‘The Hard Begin’, 14.

¹¹⁶⁶ Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 13.

¹¹⁶⁷ Cassata, ‘The Hard Begin’, 9.

¹¹⁶⁸ Specifically his relationship with Florentine politics and papal corruption.

¹¹⁶⁹ Cassata, ‘The Hard Begin’, 9.

¹¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁷¹ *Par.* 30.139.

¹¹⁷² *Purg.* 6. 6-78.

¹¹⁷³ Cassata, ‘The Hard Begin’, 14.

Dante the pilgrim, in Canto 1, can see the sun¹¹⁷⁴ at the top of a hill, that “leads men straight, no matter what their road.”¹¹⁷⁵ He attempts to climb to the hill-top, but is prevented by three fierce beasts, a leopard, a lion and a she-wolf who obstruct his way. There are several interpretations concerning these beasts.¹¹⁷⁶ According to Ferrante, Dante uses these beasts to represent vices with two of the three beasts having their “real counterparts in the city of Florence”.¹¹⁷⁷ Ferrante, however, is not denying the beasts’ allegorical significance, rather she is suggesting that the beasts might have had “an immediate contemporary relevance for Dante’s audiences, inviting the identification with Florence”.¹¹⁷⁸ For Mark T. Conrad, “the beasts are allegorical, for his own sins that he is not yet quite ready to give up, things that he cannot quite convince himself are really evil”.¹¹⁷⁹ The leopard, “covered with a spotted pelt”¹¹⁸⁰ could represent duplicity, lust or sensuality. The lion is commonly related to fierceness,

¹¹⁷⁴ The Ptolemaic system, which was accepted in Dante’s era, stated that the sun was one of many planets which revolved around the sun. The sun can be symbolic for reason or philosophy as the sun, like philosophy and reason, opens us up to a bigger and brighter world. *Inf.* 1. 38.

¹¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.18.

¹¹⁷⁶ I agree with John Took, there are similarities between these beasts and the beasts mentioned in Augustine’s *Confessions*. “The anarchic forces of the soul (Conf. XIII.21) ... as in Dante allegorized in the form of the three beasts”. John Took, ‘Dante and the ‘Confessions’ of Augustine.’ *Annali d’Italianistica*, vol. 8, (1990), 360–82; 375. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24004268>. Accessed 17 June 2023. “Restrain yourselves from it. By seeking it the soul dies. Restrain yourselves from the savage cruelty of arrogance, from the indolent pleasure of self-indulgence, and from “knowledge falsely so called”. The wild animals are quiet and the beasts are tamed and the serpents are rendered harmless: in allegory they signify the affections of the soul ...The haughtiness of pride, the pleasure of lust, and the poison of curiosity are the passions of a dead soul”. Conf. 13. 21.30. Agreeing with Albert E. Wingell, *Conf.* 7. 21.27 is also “rich in precedents for the opening of the *Commedia*”. Albert E. Wingell ‘The Forested Mountaintop in Augustine and Dante.’ *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 99, (1981), 9–48; 15. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166300>. Accessed 17 July. 2022. “It is one thing from a wooded summit to catch a glimpse of the homeland of peace and not find the way to it, but vainly to attempt the journey along an impracticable route surrounded by the ambushes and assaults of fugitive deserters with their chief, “the lion and the dragon”. (Ps. 91: 13; Gk. 90: 13) It is another thing to hold on to the way that leads there, defended by the protection of the heavenly army lie waiting to attack. For this way they hate like a torture.” *Conf.* 7. 27.

¹¹⁷⁷ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 66.

¹¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹⁷⁹ Mark T. Conrad, *The philosophy of the Coen Brothers* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 19.

¹¹⁸⁰ *Inf.* Canto 1.33.

violence or anger, and was, according to Dante, “about to pounce – his head held high and furious with hunger”. The she-wolf, who was “all hide and bones,”¹¹⁸¹ is often associated with the sin of avarice.¹¹⁸² Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran Cruz supports this view and believes that the “greedy” wolf represents papal Rome.¹¹⁸³ Conversely, for Cassata, these beasts are symbolic of human sinfulness.¹¹⁸⁴

Since Dante was unable to climb the hill, he returns to the dark wood in distress. Upon his return, Virgil appears before him and reveals he has been sent by Beatrice and offers to help Dante on his journey through Hell.¹¹⁸⁵ Together they will travel through the depths of the *Inferno* and encounter the souls who are beyond any hope of redemption. Virgil leads Dante down a steep path to the gates of the *Inferno*,¹¹⁸⁶ which are marked with the inscription, “Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate” or “Abandon hope entirely, you who enter here,”¹¹⁸⁷ Thus begins Canto 3.

5.5.1.1 *Inferno* Canto III

Dante reads these harrowing words which stress divine justice, the essence of hell and “the everlasting nature of the punishment which it inflicts.”¹¹⁸⁸ Dante is uneasy at the

¹¹⁸¹ *Inf.* 1. 49-51.

¹¹⁸² Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 6.

¹¹⁸³ Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran Cruz ‘Dante, *Purgatorio* 2, and the Jubilee of Boniface VIII.’ *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 122, (2004), 1–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166636>. Accessed 30 June 2022.

¹¹⁸⁴ Cassata, ‘The Hard Begin’, 10.

¹¹⁸⁵ He also makes an obscure prophecy about the coming of a hound, which would kill the she wolf and be the saviour of Italy.

¹¹⁸⁶ “These words, dark in hue, I saw inscribed over an archway” *Inf.* 2. 10-11.

¹¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3. 3-9.

¹¹⁸⁸ Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 14. “Justice moved my maker on high, divine power made me, wisdom supreme, and primal love”. *Inf.* 3. 4-6.

words in front him as it is a reminder to the souls of their final destiny: life, detached from the divine, enduring endless torment, earned from a life of deceit.

Through me the way to the city of woe,
Through me the way to everlasting pain,
Through me the way among the lost.¹¹⁸⁹

Through the gates of hell, there are no stars, no light and no rest. As mentioned above, he encounters those indecisive angels¹¹⁹⁰ known as the neutrals, who did not use their intellect to choose God, and the cacophony that Dante hears corresponds to this.

Since they did not show courage nor motivation to act decisively and to choose God, they are not good enough for Heaven, yet not sufficiently evil for Hell:¹¹⁹¹ as a result, Eugenio N. Frongia deems their act of cowardice to constitute a Thomistic “recusatio tensionis”,¹¹⁹² a refusal to attain goals when those goals are naturally achievable. He further states that if:

Intellectual ignorance and fear of failure are the root causes of cowardice, their effects are the privation of greatness of which a man is worthy. This premise explains the miserable state of these ‘sorry souls’ who live in eternal regret.¹¹⁹³

“The wretched souls of those lived without disgrace yet without praise.”¹¹⁹⁴ As a result, they are now stuck in the vestibule, or waiting area, where they are constantly being stung by insects and are continuously running and chasing banners, as both “Mercy and justice hold them in contempt.”¹¹⁹⁵

¹¹⁸⁹ *Inf.* 3. 1-3.

¹¹⁹⁰ According to Nichols, the *Inferno*, was created to receive the angels who rebelled against God. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. J.G. Nichols, 14.

¹¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁹² Eugenio N. Frongia, ‘The Gate of Hell’, in Mandelbaum, Oldcorn and Ross, eds., *Lectura Dantis, Inferno*, 36-50; 41.

¹¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 41

¹¹⁹⁴ *Inf.* 3. 36-39.

¹¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.50.

The souls in the vestibule, much like most of the sinners within the *Inferno*, all deny their responsibility for inhabiting the *Inferno*, and can neither let go of or come to terms with their fall from grace. They are “wretched souls”¹¹⁹⁶ who “lived without disgrace yet without praise”.¹¹⁹⁷ Dante describes them as a “worthless crew hateful alike to God and to His foes.”¹¹⁹⁸ Dante recognizes the shade of a man who resides here. There has been much debate over who this shade is, and it is here where we see the introduction of Barolini’s “textual Contrapasso” argument where Dante’s deliberate omission of the soul’s name “effectively ensured that all discourse regarding this figure remain hypothetical, shadowed by the text’s contempt”.¹¹⁹⁹ All that is known for sure is that he is a man “who through cowardice, made the great refusal.”¹²⁰⁰ For Dante to have left the shade unnamed, speaks volumes. He scorns this shade, characterising him as a coward, not worth acknowledging by name, which intensifies the shame. By leaving the sinner unnamed Dante also gives symbolic expression to the unworthy life they have lived; a name is unnecessary.

As noted above, many are led to believe that the ‘hermit’ pope, Celestine V is the unnamed shade. In Dante’s opinion, Celestine failed in his duties as pope, which could be a reason why Dante placed him here. It could also be said that Celestine is mirroring Dante within this circle.¹²⁰¹ Celestine gave up his “destined journey”¹²⁰² due

¹¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 3. 35.

¹¹⁹⁷ *Inf.* 3. 36.

¹¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 3. 62-63.

¹¹⁹⁹ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, 35.

¹²⁰⁰ *Inf.* Canto 3.60.

¹²⁰¹ Agreeing with Frongia, throughout *The Divine Comedy*, Dante often mirrors the characters he meets on his journey. Eugenio N. Frongia, ‘The Gate of Hell’, 43.

¹²⁰² *Inf.* 5. 22.

to cowardice. Dante, when called upon to undertake this journey “alone,”¹²⁰³ was initially doubtful and fearful, “your spirit is assailed by cowardice.”¹²⁰⁴ Once, however, Virgil explained that he was sent by Beatrice and reveals that his journey through the afterlife is divinely sanctioned, Dante is prepared “to face the struggles”¹²⁰⁵ down the “deep and savage way”.¹²⁰⁶ Dante’s positioning of Celestine within the vestibule, could be seen as an emotional reaction to Celestine’s resignation from the Papacy. This resignation allowed Benedetto Caetani, Dante’s mortal enemy both theologically and politically, to become Pope Boniface VIII. This resignation led to the poet’s personal and political predicaments, which would justify a place within Dante’s *Inferno*.

Within some circles, Celestine V’s appointment to the papal office was seen as an opportunity for a revitalisation of the Church, providing an opportunity to usher in a new era of Christianity, free from corruption.¹²⁰⁷ Dante might have viewed Celestine’s refusal to remain in his post as a missed opportunity for some much-needed change. Here, we see a perfect example of the Thomistic “*recusatio tensionis*”, referred to by Frongia, in that Celestine was a man with the potential and the capability to strive towards his goal, but chose not to. In the scholarly literature there is a growing unease about this shade being identified as Celestine V. Hollander points to Francesco Mazzoni’s observation of the esteem in which Celestine was held at the time; in 1313

¹²⁰³ Ibid., 2. 3.

¹²⁰⁴ Ibid., 2.45

¹²⁰⁵ Ibid., 2.4.

¹²⁰⁶ Ibid., 2.142.

¹²⁰⁷ Frongia believes that at the time, there was a great expectation of the Christian community for a *papa angelus* or *pastor angelicus*, who would renew the Catholic Church. Frongia, ‘The Gate of Hell’, 43.

Celestine V was canonised by the Church,¹²⁰⁸ and in 1346 Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) defended Celestine's resignation in *De vita solitaria*.¹²⁰⁹

Other scholars and theorists believe this soul to be that of Esau, who appears in the Hebrew Bible and is the elder son of Isaac and Rebecca. Esau gave up his birth-right to Jacob in exchange for food, for fear of dying from hunger. Another theory is that it is the shade of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who washed his hands and refused to pass judgement on Jesus Christ.¹²¹⁰ His indecision leads to his eternal damnation. Whether the shade is that of either Celestine or Pontius Pilate, Dante's views both politically and theologically are reflected within the *Inferno*, and this emphasises how influential the religious and political powers are within his poetry, and how closely they were linked at that time.

5.5.1.2 Inferno Canto XXIII

Canto 23 uncovers hypocrisy amongst the clergy and is a prime example of Dante's imaginative condemnation of the medieval ecclesiastical organisation. As noted in chapter two, above, the hypocrites are located within the sixth ditch. Dante and Virgil arrive at this ditch after being chased by demons.¹²¹¹ At the border of this ditch Dante

¹²⁰⁸ Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 60. Frongia quotes Natalino Sapegno (1901-1990) who states that the presence of Pope Celestine is "unconvincing and not justifiable from a rational and theological standpoint". Frongia, 'The Gate of Hell', 44

¹²⁰⁹ Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, 60. Also known as Francesco Petrarca. Petrarch criticised Dante for putting Celestine in Hell. Frongia, 'The Gate of Hell', 44.

¹²¹⁰ Hollander eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 60.

¹²¹¹ In Canto 22 of the *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil were being escorted by ten demons. These sinners are like dolphins, submerged in a boiling pitch, coming to the surface for some respite. Any sinner who appears at the surface will be pulled up by a demon with a hook like an otter. Dante begins to speak with one of the sinners, Ciampolo, who is in a boiling pitch. Since he is out of the pitch the demons are ready to attack. Ciampolo offers to whistle bringing the other sinners from out of the pitch as a bribe.

sees the hypocrites who walk eternally “weary and defeated”¹²¹², weighed down by cloaks that looked like they were “sewn for the monks at Cluny”,¹²¹³ decorated in gold but lined with lead.¹²¹⁴ The hypocrisy of the clergy is reflected within the irony of Contrapasso. At its simplest, hypocrisy involves saying one thing, but doing another. It can also mean presenting a false public image of oneself, while in private one leads a very different life; hence their cloaks appear luxurious and extravagant, but are made of lead. Dante detected hypocrisy in many aspects of Church life, even within some of the mendicant orders, such as the Franciscan conventuals discussed in chapter three, above, who accepted the “legal arraignments that allowed them to use property”¹²¹⁵ which had been forbidden according to Francis’s original rule.¹²¹⁶ Therefore, the sinners in life were presenting a fraudulent image of devotion, poverty and spirituality, whereas in reality they lived very comfortable lives.¹²¹⁷

As observed earlier, Dante meets the Bolognese friars in this ditch. Both friars were involved in the founding of the Bolognese Confraternity order, Frati Gaudenti in

Ciampolo dives back into the pitch and the demons begin to fight amongst themselves and even fall into the pitch themselves. While this is happening, Dante and Virgil make their escape.

¹²¹² *Inf.* 23. 60.

¹²¹³ *Ibid.*, 23. 62.

¹²¹⁴ According to Jean and Robert Hollander, most of the early commentators refer the cloaks, to the tale of Frederick II, who covered his enemies “with a thick ‘cape’ of lead and placed [them] in a large crucible, under which a fire was set.” Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, 431.

¹²¹⁵ Najemy, ‘Florence’, 398.

¹²¹⁶ “O Tosco, ch’al collegio del l’ipocriti tristi se’ venuto” *Inf.* 91-92. The word “collegio” is translated by Hollander as assembly,” however it could also be translated as “college” which would suggest a religious community.

¹²¹⁷ Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 23:14 could have been a source of inspiration for Dante in relation to false piety.

“Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you as hypocrites do... whenever you pray, do not be like hypocrites... whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy look as hypocrites do.” “Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites”.

1261.¹²¹⁸ Their position in Hell is the result of political failings. Friars Catalano and Loderingo are condemned to this ditch as they were both chosen in 1266 to act as impartial rulers of Florence in order to amend its political strife. Initially, their appointment as chief magistrates, seemed to be an ideal pairing considering they were from rival factions. However, their seeming allegiance to Florence, its community and their anti-factional mission was a ruse. Catalano and Loderingo were not impartial; the Frati Gaudenti had sworn an oath of allegiance to Pope Clement IV and subsequently supported his papal ambitions against the Florentine Ghibellines to gain exclusive political power for the Guelfs in Florence.¹²¹⁹ Their selfishness and blind allegiance took control leading to an even greater political rift. With the help of these two friars, the Guelfs destroyed the place where most wealthy and powerful Ghibellines lived, the Gardingo near the Plazzo Vecchio, thereby earning an eternal place in Hell for their hypocrisy. “O Friars, your evil deeds...”¹²²⁰ After losing the appearance of impartiality, the two friars resigned and, having been banished from Florence,¹²²¹ they returned to Bologna.

Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest who had urged the Jewish people to deliver Jesus to the Romans, and, for Dante, he represents the archetypical hypocrite.¹²²² Similar to

¹²¹⁸ Hollander, eds., *Dante: The Inferno*, 431; Michael Papio, ‘Catalano’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 144.

¹²¹⁹ Papio, ‘Catalano’, 144. Michael Sherberg, ‘Hypocrites’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 495-496; 495. Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, 432.

¹²²⁰ *Inf.* 23.109.

¹²²¹ According to Pina Palma, the historian Villani “also portrays them as hypocrites.” Pina Palma, ‘Loderingo degli Andalo’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 571.

¹²²² Olivia Holmes, ‘Caiaphas’, in Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 134.

Christ, his fate is to be crucified on three stakes; unlike Christ, however, Caiaphas lies naked on the ground, trampled by other sinners.¹²²³

I saw that Virgil marvelled at the sight
of this shape stretched as on a cross,
so ignoble in his eternal exile.¹²²⁴

Chiaacci Leonardi points out that Caiaphas had his own ulterior motive for delivering Christ; it was for the good of the people to save them from the Romans, at the expense of Christ. Oliva Holmes rightly observes that his sin of hypocrisy “assumes more gravity than other forms of the same sin because it had God as its victim.”¹²²⁵ Thus, Caiaphas ostensibly feigned an interest in the common good of the people, thereby justifying his presence within this circle.¹²²⁶

5.5.2 Imaginative Redemption

5.5.2.1 Purgatorio Canto XVI

This canto begins in the smoke of wrath.¹²²⁷ Present in the circle is Marco the Lombard, who explains to Dante why it is that the present world is so corrupt. He enlightens Dante – and the readers – saying that it is not the fault of the “heavens,”

¹²²³ Annas, Caiaphas’s father-in-law, who presided over the council of Pharisees, is also crucified in the same manner. “They took (Jesus) first to Annas, because Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas...It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it was better for one man to die for the people”. John 18: 13-14

¹²²⁴ *Inf.* 23. 124-126.

¹²²⁵ Holmes, ‘Caiaphas’, 134.

¹²²⁶ Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, 432.

¹²²⁷ As mentioned, the physical blindness Dante and Virgil are experiencing, could be an analogy for the mental blindness that violates clarity and is caused by wrath and this ties into the statement made by Marco, that “the world is blind”. *Purg.* 16. 66. This is reminiscent of *Inferno* Canto 1, in the dark wood, which is the darkness and mirrors the ignorance and blindness of the lives that sinners lead on earth. *Purg.* 16. 66 and *Inf.* 1.

but rather a result of free will in our ability to choose right from wrong. Therefore, if the present world “goes astray”¹²²⁸, the cause is therefore “in you.”¹²²⁹

If that were so, free choice would be denied you,
And there would be no justice when one feels
Joy for doing good or misery for evil.
Yes, the heavens give motion to your inclinations.
I don't say all of them, but, even if I did,
You still possess a light to winnow good from evil,
And you have free will.¹²³⁰

Lines 100-105, clearly show the reader the corruption that Dante detected within the medieval Church, and his belief that the fault lay with the men leading it;

The people, then, who see their leader lunge
Only at the good for which they themselves are greedy,
Graze on that and ask for nothing more.
As you can plainly see, failed guidance
Is the cause the world is steeped in vice,
And not your inner nature that has grown corrupt.¹²³¹

I agree with Scott's view that there is no better example of the “indissoluble link between Dante's theology and his political thought”.¹²³² The metaphor of the “rein”,¹²³³ signifies “the laws that must be applied by the Emperor.”¹²³⁴ Laws are needed to guide humans on the right path and it is necessary that a ruler discern these rules.¹²³⁵ Rome, according to Dante, had “two suns that lit the one road and the other,

¹²²⁸ *Purg.* 16. 82.

¹²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16. 83.

¹²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16. 70-76. Dante in letter IX, to the Italian Cardinals, also emphasises the element of free choice. “ye have misused your freedom of choice.” Alighieri, Letter IX, ‘To the Italian Cardinals Dante Alighieri of Florence’, 165.

¹²³¹ *Purg.* 16. 100-105.

¹²³² Scott, ‘A World of Darkness and Disorder’, 171.

¹²³³ “If guide or rein do not deflect its love.” *Purg.* 16. 93. Scott reminds the reader of the passage from *De Monarchia* 3. 15. 9 where Dante states; “like horses, carried away by their bestiality, were not held in check and guided ‘by bit and bridle’”. Scott, ‘A World of Darkness and Disorder’, 171.

¹²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹²³⁵ “Therefore, there was need that laws be set to act as curbs, need for a ruler to discern at least the tower above the one true city.” *Purg.* 16. 94-96.

the world's and that to God".¹²³⁶ These lines are crucial; Dante here is "entering polemically into one of the great political/theological debates of his time, the relative authority of Emperor and pope".¹²³⁷ For Dante the solution was straightforward: the Empire should regulate the temporal world, and the Church the spiritual world. Here Dante is explicitly saying that the Papacy has usurped the Emperor's rightful role, and as a result there is now no-one to apply these laws.

Ferrante considers the thought that a corrupt society disrupts the function of the Church and that "corrupt institutions lead the individual astray"¹²³⁸ thus insinuating that reform must come from within the corrupt ecclesiastical organisation. Russo considers that Dante believed that this ecclesiastical institution is not functioning as God intended it to. Humankind has abandoned the straight path to God, "there is no Justice in the world, indeed injustice reigns supreme."¹²³⁹ Dante laments over the

¹²³⁶ Ibid., 16. 107-108. "For, first, they maintain that according to Genesis God made two mighty luminaries, a greater and less, the former to hold supremacy by day and the latter by night. These they interpret allegorically to be the two rulers – spiritual and temporal. Whence they argue that the lesser luminary, the moon, has no light but that gained from the sun, so temporal ruler has no authority but that gained from the spiritual ruler". *Mon.* 4. 2-4. Hollander states that Dante argues against the hierocrats by stating there were two 'suns'. The hierocrats "warmly supported papal claim to supremacy". Dante argued on the basis of a revision in the hierocrats' central and polemic metaphor (Pope as "sun", Emperor as subordinate "moon"), that the two authorities are both supreme and have their authority independent of one another, both being established by the direct will of God". Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 362.

¹²³⁷ Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 362.

¹²³⁸ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of The Divine Comedy*, 199.

Dante in his letter to the Italian cardinals, emphasises this assertion and scorns the Church for leading their congregation astray. "Ye in truth, who are centurions of the first rank of the Church militant, in neglecting to guide the chariot of the Bride of the Crucified along the well-known course, have swerved from the way ... and ye whose duty it was to give light to the flock following you through the forest of this pilgrimage, have brought it with you to the brink of precipice... by bartering for those things that are priceless ye have made them venal to your dishonour." Carpenter, *Dante Alighieri, A Translation of Dante's Eleven Letters*, 165-166.

Weber states that in medieval philosophy the belief was that "this life... becomes the foundation and, in a certain measure, the material for a higher life, the spiritual life, which is developed in the shadow of the Church and nourished by its words and its sacraments." Weber, *History of Philosophy*, 245.

¹²³⁹ Russo, *Dante's search for the Golden Age*, 93.

Church's taking of the imperial "sword", as a result of which "the one fears not the other".¹²⁴⁰ Subsequently, if the leaders of these institutions act tactlessly, their flock follows, and, inevitably it will "go ill".¹²⁴¹ The failure to distinguish between the rights and responsibilities of both Church and temporal affairs yield negative results.

5.5.2.2 Purgatorio Canto XIX

Ottobono de'Fieschi, or Pope Adrian V, was born in Genoa between the years 1210 and 1215.¹²⁴² According to Sowell, Adrian came from a wealthy and noble family, which owned land between Sestri and Chiavari. His uncle was Pope Innocent IV, who used his position to appoint de'Fieschi as a cardinal in 1251. As cardinal, de'Fieschi served as a papal legate in the papal curia, representing Genoa. He was a successful papal legate and was instrumental in establishing peace in England after the Baron's War (1215-1217).¹²⁴³ Pope Adrian V identifies himself as the successor of Peter¹²⁴⁴ and a Shephard of Rome.¹²⁴⁵ He is placed within the fifth terrace, prostrated among the avaricious. According to Rudd and Sowell, there is no historical evidence to suggest that Adrian committed the crimes attributed to him by Dante. They believe that Dante may have misread an anonymous excerpt from Salisbury's *Policraticus*, which referred to Adrian IV, not Adrian V.¹²⁴⁶

¹²⁴⁰ *Purg.* 16. 112.

¹²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16. 111-114. "If you don't believe me, think of a grain of wheat, for by its seed each plant is known." Hollander links these lines and Matthew 7.16 and 7.20 which challenges and disparages false teachers; "by their fruits you shall know them". Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 362.

¹²⁴² Sowell, 'Adrian V, Pope', 5.

¹²⁴³ Rudd, 'Adrian V, Pope', in Rudd, *Critical Companion to Dante*, 375-376; 375.

¹²⁴⁴ *Purg.* 19. 99.

¹²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. 109.

¹²⁴⁶ Sowell, 'Adrian V, Pope', 5 and Rudd, 'Adrian V, Pope', 375.

Salisbury's *Policraticus*, was written by John of Salisbury in 1159. He was a medieval political theorist and one of the main figures and contributors to the political debates between 1150 and 1180.

Parallels between this canto and Canto 7 of the *Inferno* can be drawn. Canto 7 is the fourth circle of the *Inferno* where the souls of misers and spendthrifts (*avarita*) reside. The misers and spendthrifts are made to push rock and to conduct useless labour in a semi-circle, as fortune is a wheel that cannot be controlled by humans. Here Dante cleverly highlights the political corruption within the Catholic Church by asking the question, “all Clerics?”.¹²⁴⁷ He proceeds to explain that the howling he hears is of those who “were clerics who have no lid of hair upon their heads, and popes and cardinals, in whom avarice achieves its excess.”¹²⁴⁸ Hollander rightly observes that Dante leaves the popes and cardinals in question unnamed, allowing the reader to apply “any number”.¹²⁴⁹

The title of pope was a highly sought-after and powerful position, but not all occupants of the office sought it for primarily pastoral or religious purposes. Christ led his followers to embrace poverty, and therefore – for Dante – it is essentially against the Christian way of life to seek wealth and power. “Lusting after possessions chases away peace.”¹²⁵⁰ Dante’s critique of the Church’s failings is evident in Canto 19 of *Purgatorio*, where Pope Adrian V states;

Just as we failed to lift our eyes on high
Because they were fixed on earthly things,

Christophe Grellard and Frederique Lachaud, eds., *A Companion to John of Salisbury* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1.

¹²⁴⁷ *Inf.* 7. 38.

¹²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7. 46-48.

¹²⁴⁹ “The essential impression left by the poem as a whole is that more popes are damned than saved’. Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander, 142. In contrast to the fourth circle of the *Inferno* where the sinners of avarice are placed for eternity without any hope of salvation, the fifth terrace of *Purgatorio* holds those who repented of their sins and are now being purged.

¹²⁵⁰ Russo, *Dante’s search for the Golden Age*, 95.

So justice here has turned them to the earth.¹²⁵¹
As avarice quenched our love of worthy things,
Wasting our chances to do good works,
So justice here has bound us fast.¹²⁵²

In these lines, Dante shows the reader that the Papacy is “a life full of lies”¹²⁵³ and one of the many moral evils which Dante identified as a public issue.

Learned how heavy
The mantle weighs on one who keeps it from the mud,
Making any other burdens seem a feather.
My conversion, alas, came late-
But when I became the shepherd of Rome,
I discovered a life full of lies.
I saw that there the heart was not at peace,
Nor was preferment possible in that life,
And for this higher state my love was kindled.
Until that moment I was a wretched soul,
Cut off from God, and filled with Avarice.
Now, as you can see, I am punished for that here.¹²⁵⁴

Dante acknowledges that free will allows a person to make a choice; as we learned from Canto 16, however, laws and proper guidance are also needed to help people find the right path to follow. The consequences of avarice by those who are considered leaders of the ecclesiastical institutions, have strong political and social implications. The Catholic Church was supposed to be a beacon of hope in a sea of injustice. It might appear that structural and institutional flaws and forces beyond the individual are at play, however, what is revealed is that it is the men behind the institution, not the institution itself that caused the greed and corruption. Therefore, reform must come from within. This is emphasised in lines 130- 138, where Dante

¹²⁵¹ *Purg.* 19.118-120.

¹²⁵² *Ibid.*, 19. 121-123.

¹²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19. 108.

¹²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19. 103 -114. Here Adrian V refers to the “great mantle”, which is also how Nicholas III identified his position in office in Canto 19 of the *Inferno*.

kneels to Pope Adrian V, out of respect for the “dignity of Your high office”.¹²⁵⁵ This assertion becomes more prevalent within *Purgatorio* Canto 20, when Dante discusses the capture of Boniface by the French King Philip in September 1303. Even though Dante was no admirer of Boniface, he still held the papal office in high regard, and therefore considered that an attack on the pope, was an attack on the sanctity of the Papacy. Dante addresses this capture in *Purgatorio* Canto 20. Surprisingly, in this instance, Boniface is likened to Christ being betrayed by Pontius Pilate;

I see the fleur-de-lis proceed into Anagni,
 And, in His vicar, make a prisoner of Christ.
 I see Him mocked a second time.
 I see renewed the vinegar and gall –
 Between two living thieves I see Him slain.
 I see that this new Pilate is so brutal
 This does not sate him, and, unsanctioned,
 I see him spread his greedy sails against the Temple.¹²⁵⁶

Not only do we encounter Dante’s sense of social responsibility; he calls his readers to understand their personal and civic duty too. Dante in Canto 19 prescribes the mode in which to fulfil that duty; repent and reform.

5.5.3 Imaginative Reform

5.5.3.1 Paradiso Canto XXI

Peter Damian was born in Ravenna around 1007. After the death of his parents, his brother, also named Damian saw that Peter Damian had been neglected and sought to educate him in Ravenna, Faenza and Parma.¹²⁵⁷ Once Peter Damian had completed his studies, he went on to become a teacher, and, at the age of twenty eight, he entered

¹²⁵⁵ *Purg.* 19. 131.

¹²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20. 85-93.

¹²⁵⁷ Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 586. In gratitude to him, he changed his name and assumed his brother’s.

the Fonte Avellana Benedictine monastery in Monte Catria and became abbot in 1043.¹²⁵⁸ As abbot, Peter Damian became an important figure and served many popes, whom he supported in a bid to reform the Catholic Church. As a result, he was created cardinal, albeit against his will; “I was singled out and dragged to that red hat”.¹²⁵⁹ Dante places Peter Damian in the seventh heavenly planet, Saturn. For Dante, Peter Damian represents a model for monastic communities and embodies the contemplative life, yet he is also an example of a priest serving his society for the good of the people. Peter Damien was considered by Dante as the “ideal churchman”¹²⁶⁰ as he had no personal ambitions. Additionally, since he was a contemplative, he was able to “scorn the world because their eyes (were) fixed on heaven”¹²⁶¹ and this is precisely the perspective which “enables one to serve the world best”.¹²⁶²

Ferrante rightly observes that monastic communities do “not retain their purity for long in the fallen world”.¹²⁶³ This point merits expansion. There is a clear pattern within Dante’s *Paradiso* in relation to the founders of these monastic orders and saints: he regards the orders with balance and reverence. None of these ecclesiastical orders are placed above the other; they are equal and are praised equally in *Paradiso*. Each is affirmed— sometimes by one another, sometimes by themselves: for example, in *Paradiso* Canto 11, Aquinas introduces and praises St. Francis; in *Paradiso* Canto 12 Bonaventure introduces and praises St. Dominic. In Canto 21, Peter Damian introduces

¹²⁵⁸ Ibid., 586.

¹²⁵⁹ *Par.* 21. 124.

¹²⁶⁰ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 297.

¹²⁶¹ Ibid., 298.

¹²⁶² Ibid., 298.

¹²⁶³ Ibid., 295.

and humbly praises himself, as does St. Benedict in Canto 22. Most predominantly, however, is the pattern of the creation of these orders and eventual downfall due to corruption and greed.

Peter started his community with neither gold
Nor silver, and I mine with fasting and with prayer,
While Francis with humility established his.¹²⁶⁴

For example, in *Paradiso* Canto 11, with regard to their vows of poverty, Dante observes how the “flock has grown so greedy”¹²⁶⁵ and in Canto 12, he insists on the need for reform or else the “vineyard quickly withers.”¹²⁶⁶ Canto 11 is no different in this regard. Peter Damien discusses how he “readily endured the heat and frost, content in contemplation”.¹²⁶⁷ He then contrasts the Apostles Paul and Peter, who lived in poverty with the self-indulgent greedy clergy of his day;

Cephas came, and the exalted vessel
Of the Holy Spirit came, lean and barefoot,
Receiving their food at any doorway.¹²⁶⁸

Now our modern shepherds call for one on this side,
One on that, to support them, they are so bloated,
And one to go before, one to boost them from behind.
Their fur-lined mantles hang upon their horses' flanks
So that two beasts go underneath one skin.
O patience what a heavy load you bear!¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶⁴ *Par.* 20. 88-90.

¹²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.124.

¹²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12. 86. This analogy if the vineyard continues in *Par.* 27 in relation to Greed. “The will of man bursts into blossom, but the never-ceasing rain reduces the ripening plums to blight the rot” *Ibid.*, 27. 123-126.

Agreeing with Hollander lines 147-148 of *Paradiso*; “Then shall the fleet run its true course and the blossom shall be followed by good fruit”, is a “corrective return to the image of failed fruition”. Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 758.

¹²⁶⁷ *Par.* 21. 116-117.

¹²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 20. 127-129.

¹²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20. 130-135.

This pattern lends credit to the argument that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a plea for reform, powerfully articulated by having religious leaders and community founders to the fore in critiquing the current corrupt state of the clergy.

5.5.3.2 Paradiso Canto XXVII

This critique of the corrupt state of the clergy continues in Canto 27. Dante uses his meeting with the first pope to strongly condemn the current pope in 1300, Pope Boniface VIII. St. Peter laments;

He who on earth usurps my place,
My place, my place, which in the eyes
of God's own Son is vacant.¹²⁷⁰

Dante bluntly presents Boniface VIII as a usurper of the papal office, driving home this claim by Peter's repetition of "my place". The emphasis placed by Peter reveals not only his anger at the Papacy, but most importantly, the magnitude of the position held by the pope. It is a position of leadership, morality and spirituality which should not be taken lightly or for granted. St. Peter further ensures that the pilgrim understands what he means by usurper by stating "of God's own Son is vacant."¹²⁷¹ There are some observations about this accusation that should be kept in mind, and that were raised by V. H. H. Green, Peter Armour and Hollander. Green, Armour and Hollander rightly observe that in the contemporary context, the papal seat was sometimes left vacant for months or years.¹²⁷² Dante's use of the word "usurps", "*ch'usurpa*," particularly stands out. Dante is not suggesting that Pope Boniface's Papacy was illegitimate. As

¹²⁷⁰ Ibid., 27. 22-24.

¹²⁷¹ *Par.* 27. 24.

¹²⁷² Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 743. Armour, 'Paradiso XXVII', 405.

noted above, Dante respected the holy office of the Papacy. Therefore, although Dante recognises Boniface as a pope, he is a bad one who was improperly elected. Hollander reflects on Dante's meaning of the words "usurp" and "vacant".¹²⁷³ He is of the view that Dante may have considered the "Papal See 'vacant' in 1300, and thus felt he could represent Satan's particular pleasure in Boniface's improper stewardship".¹²⁷⁴ Another possible view is that Dante considered the papal seat vacant when there was a simoniac leading the clergy.¹²⁷⁵ This leads towards Barolini's assessment of Bosco-Reggio's claim that Dante believed the papal seat to be "vacant"¹²⁷⁶ only "in the eyes of God's own Son"¹²⁷⁷ and not "in the presence of men".¹²⁷⁸

I agree with Armour, that, in one line, Dante captures this theme of greed and cupidity and contrasts it with the ideals of *Paradiso*. "O riches held in store, exempt from craving".¹²⁷⁹ Armour observes that St. Peter turns from white to red, as though Jupiter would be transformed to Mars, alluding to his transition from joy to anger. This could signify the prelude for St. Peter's attacks on the contemporary Church. Armour justifies this point by stating that red is also the colour of love, shame and blood.¹²⁸⁰ In

¹²⁷³ However, what is likely the case for Hollander, is that Dante is reflecting on the "scandalously long period" between Clement V and John XXII and also on the fact that Boniface's successor moved the papal office to France. Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 743.

¹²⁷⁴ Ibid., 743.

¹²⁷⁵ Ibid., 743.

¹²⁷⁶ *Par.* 27. 24.

¹²⁷⁷ Ibid., 27. 24.

¹²⁷⁸ Barolini, 'Paradiso 27: The Usurper'.

¹²⁷⁹ *Par.* 27. 9. Hollander makes reference to Dante's Convivio Book IV. This desire for earthly goods, cannot exist when the divine is present. "Desire is not something that cannot coexist with blessedness, since blessedness is something perfect and desire something defective". Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander, 742. Armour also makes reference to book IV, and how Dante identifies "one imperfection and danger of earthly riches in the fact that their increase brings avarice". Armour, 'Paradiso XXVII', 403.

¹²⁸⁰ Love for the Church, Beatrice, the virtuous woman, blushes with the shame of others and the shedding of blood for the Church. Ibid., 40-405.

relation to blood, Armour associates this with martyrdom and the shedding of one's blood for Christ.¹²⁸¹ This assertion appears to be correct, as Dante indicates;

If my colour changes, do not be amazed,
for while I am speaking you shall see
the colour of each soul here change aswell.¹²⁸²

This alludes to an anger that is felt by everyone in the fixed stars.¹²⁸³ This also could potentially be a reminder to the reader of their personal and civic duty. That the anger felt in heaven about the corruption of the Church, should also be felt by those on earth.

Has made my tomb a sewer of blood and filth,
So that the Evil One, who fell from here above,
Takes satisfaction there below.¹²⁸⁴

Here St. Peter is reprimanding the Papacy by saying that his place of burial and martyrdom, has become a sewer of "blood and filth"¹²⁸⁵ which has been shed, for earthly goods and power and not for the love of the Church, like St. Peter and the first followers of Christ.

The Bride of Christ was not nurtured with my blood—
Nor that of Linus and of Cletus —
To serve the cause of gaining gold.¹²⁸⁶

¹²⁸¹ Ibid., 403. This shedding of blood also signifies Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

¹²⁸² *Par.* 27. 19- 21.

¹²⁸³ Dante enters the sphere of the fixed stars in *Par.* 22.100-112 and the Primum Mobile in *Par.* 27.97-99

"My sweet lady, with but a single gesture, urged me on to follow right behind them up that stairway ... O glorious stars". "And the power that her look bestowed on me, drew me from the fair nest of Leda and trust me into heaven's swiftest sphere".

¹²⁸⁴ *Par.* 27. 25-27.

¹²⁸⁵ Ibid., 27. 25.

¹²⁸⁶ Ibid., 27. 40-42.

The Bride of Christ image has been mentioned previously in Canto 19 of *Inferno*.¹²⁸⁷

However, rather than being “brides of goodness”¹²⁸⁸ and gaining the “joyous way of life”¹²⁸⁹, they have become “Ravenous wolves in shepherd’s clothing,”¹²⁹⁰ “who prostitute the things of God;”¹²⁹¹ who wage war “against the baptised”¹²⁹² for supremacy; and who use the papal seal for the buying and selling of religious items.

Nor that I become the imprint in a seal
On sale for fraudulence and bribes
So that I blush, in turn, with rage and shame.¹²⁹³

Previously, in Canto 17, Dante states that he fears retelling what he has learned in the afterlife, as it might “discomfort many with their bitterness”.¹²⁹⁴ However St. Peter reminds Dante of his duty to report the truth of what he saw;

And you, my son, for your mortal burden,
Must return below, make sure they hear this
From your mouth, not hiding what I do not hide.¹²⁹⁵

The reason for this reporting is to “serve the world that lives so ill.”¹²⁹⁶ Therefore

Dante’s duty is to “write down”¹²⁹⁷ what he sees “here once you have gone back.”¹²⁹⁸

Thus, in *The Divine Comedy*, Dante gives the reader the gift of truth as he saw it.

Therefore, it is evident that words are power, and that with such power comes a responsibility, and that responsibility for Dante, was truth claimed in imaginative form.

¹²⁸⁷ *Inf.* 19. 4.

¹²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 19. 4.

¹²⁸⁹ *Par.* 27. 43.

¹²⁹⁰ For example, Pope Boniface and Pope Clement. *Ibid.*, 27. 55.

¹²⁹¹ *Inf.* 19. 3.

¹²⁹² *Ibid.*, 27. 88-90 “for all his enemies were Christian, not one of them had gone to conquer Acre, or traffic in the Sultans lands.” *Par.* 27.51.

¹²⁹³ *Par.* 27. 52-54.

¹²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.117.

¹²⁹⁵ *Par.* 27. 64-66.

¹²⁹⁶ *Purg.* 32. 103.

¹²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32. 104.

¹²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32. 105.

5.6 Conclusion

As demonstrated, Dante was acutely conscious of the relationship between his personal experience and the wider society. His *Divine Comedy* is an exercise of a social responsibility to show people the true nature of the society within which they lived, which in turn calls his readers to understand their own personal and civic duties. One of the many reasons why Dante's *Divine Comedy* surpasses its original time and place is that Dante clearly saw the root cause of the issues which plagued his beloved city of Florence; and he sought to educate and dissuade future generations from making the same mistakes as their predecessors. "His relentless self-invention as an unbending prophet of justice and a mythical quester for the divine"¹²⁹⁹ is one reason why "generations of readers have found the story of Dante's life compelling".¹³⁰⁰ According to Reynolds, Sayers saw Dante as the "voice of the present"¹³⁰¹ and that only his words "are out of date"¹³⁰², not the "wrong-doings" he denounced.¹³⁰³ His message was not well received by some of the ecclesiastical authorities of his day, and this is made clear by the "various attacks on it".¹³⁰⁴ However, Barolini claims that "the Church as whole ... was willing to bracket Dante as a poet, a maker of *fictio*."¹³⁰⁵ She claims that he experienced no extreme opposition to *The Divine Comedy*, and that Dante "did not

¹²⁹⁹ Mazzotta, 'Life of Dante', 1.

¹³⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹³⁰¹ Reynolds, 'Fifty Years On', 1.

¹³⁰² Ibid., 5.

¹³⁰³ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁰⁴ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 127.

¹³⁰⁵ Barolini, 'Why Did Dante Write the Commedia?', 3. According to Deborah Parker, many of the early commentators simply denied "the historical reality of the people to who Dante refers. Deborah Parker, *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 31.

succeed in eliciting from the Catholic Church of his time”¹³⁰⁶ much negative attention for *The Divine Comedy*.

Dante linguistically and imaginatively expresses his theology throughout *The Divine Comedy*. He brings sins and virtues alive in the mind’s eye. He does this by using his literary creation Contrapasso to express his political theology, connecting theology with social critique. Those who acted morally, justly and virtuously, in line with Jesus’ teachings earned a place in Heaven and those who acted against these virtues earned a place either in the *Inferno* or in *Purgatorio*. The poet’s judgement allows Dante to analyse and criticise the ecclesiastical organisations of his day. Canto 19 was chosen as it demonstrates how Dante expresses his political theology. He concluded that the Church had lost its way and that its inability to fulfil its divine duty was endangering souls on earth. The sins of avarice and simony emerged throughout the chapter as being the root cause of the issues that plagued Dante’s beloved Church.

As a reform orientated poet, Dante set his sights on social and ecclesial transformation. Clearly he was an advocate for reform and his *Divine Comedy* is a testament to his commitment to change. He does this by showing the reader an ideal framework towards which to strive. In the *Inferno*, Dante shows the corrupt world for what it was, in *Purgatorio*, Dante makes it known that it is not too late to repent, and in *Paradiso*, we see what could be if this transformation was successful in the form of an ideal society. David Lummus is not alone in his correct evaluation of Dante as an example of “how a poet can engage with the world and reform it, through the power

¹³⁰⁶ Barolini, ‘Why Did Dante Write the Commedia?’, 3.

of the poetic imagination".¹³⁰⁷ Therefore, the whole *Divine Comedy* can be seen as a plea for reform of the Catholic Church, thereby demonstrating that he created a body of work which reflects critically on the ecclesiastical organisations of his time, thereby establishing his political theology.

¹³⁰⁷ David Lummus "Dante's Inferno: Critical Reception and Influence" in Patrick Hunt, eds., *Critical Insights: The Inferno by Dante* (New York: Salem Press, 2012), 1.

Chapter Six: Conclusion



Fig. 12

Great fire leaps from the smallest spark.¹³⁰⁸

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter will summarise the key findings of this thesis and discuss its value and contribution. This thesis allowed for a reflection and consideration of the political theological achievement of Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy*. It has outlined Dante's critique of the ecclesiastical authorities in medieval Italy and his plea

¹³⁰⁸ *Par.* 1. 34.

for reform of the Catholic Church. This was done by demonstrating how Dante imaginatively expresses his theology, thereby creating the conditions for a critical analysis of the Catholic Church. As shown, Contrapasso is the vital component which expresses Dante's political theology. Dante's law of Contrapasso invites his readers into the poet's imagining of an eternity in which the workings of divine justice are evident.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

Dante is one of the most significant architects of the religious and political imagination, and his *Divine Comedy* appeals not only to the imagination of his generation, but to future generations, albeit in different imaginative forms. Clearly, Dante was a man ahead of his time and his utterances throughout *The Divine Comedy* are in many ways prophetic. As a didactic poet, he clearly saw the root cause of issues afflicting his society, and he sought to educate future generations away from dangerous error, thereby making the world of *The Divine Comedy* an expression of his own social and political responsibility.

Through Dante the didactic poet, we learn that his medieval city of Florence was falling into disarray, mainly due to corruption, avarice and power-hungry authoritative members of the Church. What emerged from this study, was that the "Bride of Christ",¹³⁰⁹ i.e., the ecclesiastical institution, was not – in Dante's judgement – functioning as God intended. Christians looked to the Church and the Papacy for

¹³⁰⁹ Ibid., 27. 40.

spiritual guidance and its role as an authority figure was to strive for the common good of the people. However, this institution had a wide-range of political, societal, personal and monetary interests, which tended to compromise key elements of the Christian way of life. The fault of the Papacy in failing to fulfil its divine mission had wider detrimental implications for the soul. However, for Dante, this is not the fault of the institution itself; Dante holds the Papacy in high regard, rather he considers it is the fault of the men behind it. It was the popes themselves who were leading their flock astray. They were meant to be leading their congregation on a virtuous path that leads to God, but, rather than being “brides of goodness”¹³¹⁰ and gaining the “joyous way of life”¹³¹¹, they are identified by Dante as “Ravenous wolves in shepherd’s clothing,”¹³¹² “who prostitute the things of God.”¹³¹³ Christ led his followers to embrace poverty, therefore, in Dante’s opinion, it is essentially against the Christian way of life to seek wealth and power: “Lusting after possessions chases away peace.”¹³¹⁴ The consequences of avarice and simony for those who are considered leaders of the ecclesiastical institutions, have strong political and social implications. From Dante’s placing of ecclesiastical leaders in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, we learn that proper guidance is needed from these leaders, in order to help people find the right path to God.

This study has drawn the connection between political theology and Contrapasso.

Through my methodological approach, I have proven that Dante’s political theology is

¹³¹⁰ *Inf.* 19. 4.

¹³¹¹ *Par* 27. 43.

¹³¹² For example Pope Boniface and Pope Clement. *Ibid.*, 27. 55.

¹³¹³ *Inf.* 19. 3.

¹³¹⁴ Russo, *Dante’s search for the Golden Age*, 95.

grounded in the idea of reform for the Catholic Church, specifically of its corrupt clergy. Dante critiques the social situation in Florence by assigning souls to their rightful place, whether that be in the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*, and subsequently punishing or rewarding them for the life lived on earth. Therefore, Contrapasso is integrated into the poem, allowing the reader to progressively learn about the nature of the afterlife. This was demonstrated through the case studies in chapter five. Pope Boniface VIII features regularly, both within this thesis and in *The Divine Comedy* itself, mainly because it was during his pontificate that Dante was exiled from Florence. Boniface thus became Dante's spiritual, political and moral enemy,¹³¹⁵ and this accounts for Dante's willingness to condemn the soul of Boniface to hell. As pope at the time of Dante's journey, Boniface becomes the subject of much scorn in the *Inferno*. His sins of simony while on earth will eventually earn him an eternity in the *Inferno* and a most powerful reprimand from the first pope, St. Peter, in Canto 27. Boniface's placement amongst the simonists in eternity before his eventual death, speaks volumes. It means he was not, or will not, be given the chance to repent, unlike Adrian V, who repented before he died and is now purging himself for his sinful deeds on earth.

Understanding the complex and strained relationship between the Church and the temporal authorities is useful in understanding Dante's political theology. For that reason, chapter three mapped Dante's historical circumstances. It is important to heed the historical footing of this entire narrative so as to contextualize developments in

¹³¹⁵ Rudd, 'Boniface VIII, Pope', in *Critical Companion to Dante*, 400-401; 400.

the political and ecclesiastical history of Dante's Italy. By looking at Dante's historical and social surroundings, dialogues that Dante conducted in *The Divine Comedy* appear in abundance. This helps to reveal some of the motivations behind Dante's social engagement and the extent to which his personal life and his own political circumstances converged in his *Divine Comedy*. For instance, Chapter three viewed Dante's political response in *De Monarchia*, specifically book three, as a direct response to Pope Boniface's bull, *Unam Sanctam*. Boniface sought to exercise papal authority by claiming jurisdiction over the temporal and spiritual realms; Dante, however, believed there should be clear divisions between these realms. *De Monarchia*, as a political text, sufficiently contextualises the poem's political theological message in *The Divine Comedy*.

As a reform orientated poet, Dante set his sights on transformation and his *Divine Comedy* is testament to his commitment for change. In Dante's eyes the Church needs to return to its fundamental roots of poverty as it had become an inversion of its original calling. He also advocated for a universal political Monarch, whose authority would be "free from papal jurisdiction."¹³¹⁶ This would be one way in which Dante believed that universal peace could be possible in his time. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante shows the Italian city of Florence for what he considers it has become; a condemned corrupt society, where the moral cause of corruption is the poor regard in which free will is held, and which he depicts in the *Inferno*. In *Purgatorio*, Dante gives his readers the remedies to counter the traits found in the *Inferno* in an attempt to

¹³¹⁶ Kantorowicz to support this claim, quotes Etienne Gilson, that the idea of a universal Monarch was "borrowed from the Church its ideal universal Christendom and secularised it". Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 457, 471.

motivate those currently living in sin to change their ways and repent. In *Paradiso*, Dante's ideal society provides a model framework to strive towards. Dante shows the good which can come from a well-functioning society, where the maintenance of peace is maintained by the virtuous action of justice. Those who acted morally, justly and virtuously – in line with Jesus' teachings – earned a place in Heaven; those who acted against these virtues earned a place either in the *Inferno* or in *Purgatorio*. This eternal position indicates the damage that can be caused when civil society is malfunctioning with corrupt leaders at the helm, and emphasising how the authority of both pope and Emperor are held to God's standard of humanity. Therefore, Dante's political agenda is apparent in *The Divine Comedy* and it evidently contributed to who was placed where within his cosmic-theological realm. Also, since this research primarily focused mainly on Dante's political theological critique of the Catholic Church, future research could develop the framework established within this thesis to explore further Dante's reform of contemporary political society in favour of a universal empire to unite the "secular other".¹³¹⁷

6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research establishes not only its own findings, but also forms a framework for future research. It has shown that Dante imaginatively expressed his theology through his poetry, and, in his *Divine Comedy*, he created the conditions for a critical analysis of the political structures of Florentine society. Contrapasso proved to be the vital component through which Dante articulated his political theology,

¹³¹⁷ Ferrante *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 50.

revealing that his message is that of the need to reform the “flock (that) has grown so greedy.”¹³¹⁸ Therefore, “If the present world has gone astray, the reason lies, and should be sought, in you.”¹³¹⁹

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¹³¹⁸ *Par.* 11.124.

¹³¹⁹ *Purg.* 16 82-83.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Departure on the Grand Voyage, Inferno Canto 1, by Salvador Dali (1960-64).
<https://www.eamesfineart.com/content/feature/517/artworks-14247-salvador-dali-departure-on-the-grand-voyage-inferno-canto-1-1960-64/>

Fig. 2. *The structure of hell*, “*The Dante Encyclopedia*” ed. Richard Lansing, xxiv

Fig. 3. *The structure of Purgatory*, “*The Dante Encyclopedia*” ed. Richard Lansing, xxv

Fig. 4. *Dante's Universe* “*The Dante Encyclopedia*” ed. Richard Lansing, xxxvi

Fig. 5. *Dante and Beatrice*, by Henry Holiday, (1883)

<https://joyofmuseums.com/museums/united-kingdom-museums/liverpool-museums/walker-art-gallery/dante-and-beatrice-by-henry-holiday/>

Fig. 6. ‘*Portrait of Dante Alighieri*’ by Sandro Botticelli (1495). <https://www.sandro-botticelli.org/portrait-of-dante/>

Portrait of Pope Boniface VIII, by Cristofano dell' Altissimo

Giovio Collection, Galleria degli Uffizi. (C.17th AD)

<https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en/altissimo/portrait-of-pope-boniface-viii-benedetto-caetani-called-bonifacio-viii-1230-1303-giovio-collection/painting/asset/5379457>

Fig. 7 . ‘*Reconstruction of Dante's Florence*’, Museo Casa di Dante.

http://www.worldofdante.org/florence_detail.html

Fig. 8. *La commedia illumina Firenze*, by Domenico di Michelino. Florence's Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. (1456)

<https://www.florenceinferno.com/la-commedia-illumina-firenze/>

Fig. 9. Giovanni di Paolo (1403–1482): Dante and Beatrice encountering the spirit of Cunizza da Romano, (1444-1450).

<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=56954>

Fig. 10. Gustave Doré, *Dante addresses Pope Nicholas III* Canto 19, (1861).

Fig. 11. Gustave Doré, *Caiaphas*, 1890.

Fig. 12. *Allegorical portrait of Dante*, by Agnolo Bronzino, (c. 1530).

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.46156.html>