

Dante and christian beliefs of the afterlife



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Inferno is the first part of Dante Alighieri's poem, Divine Comedy, which tells of a journey of Dante through hell, purgatory, and heaven guided by the ancient Roman poet Virgil. Inferno is about the experiences Dante faced on his journey of the soul towards God as he travels the nine circles of hell to reach heaven. In the poem, hell is depicted as the realm for those who have disobeyed the spiritual values for cruel and violent actions against fellow human beings.

Through punishments, the poem serves an allegorical purpose and depicts how one suffers from committing such sins to redemption and eventually salvation. Allegory poems depict both the literal and symbolic meaning. Dante uses allegory in the poem and describes his struggles through the dark forest to salvation, and uses poetic justice in the form of contemporary, historical and mythological figures. The allegory used in the poem depicts the struggles a man goes through in his journey for redemption through Purgatorio and eventually to salvation through Paradiso.

In Canto I, there are various Christian beliefs that demonstrate the consequences the humankind faces after committing sin. Dante describes how he finds himself confused in a dark forest as a result of his sins. The poem reads in the midway of this our mortal life; I found me in a gloomy wood, astray/Gone from the path direct. Dante was 35 years old when he wrote this poem, and he illustrates this by saying that midway through his life because most readings of the book of Psalms depict the life span of human kind to be 70 years old. He finds himself in a dark forest because he has gone astray from salvation and this is the punishment for doing so. The poem does not illustrate whether the forest is real or just another example of

the allegorical and symbolic forest. Dante illustrates how confused he is because he has strayed from the right path of life and now the punishment is so harsh on him, that forest, how robust and rough its growth/ which to remember only my dismay/ renews, in bitterness not far from death. He regrets the life he has been living and now seeks redemption.

Hope and faith are restored on him when he sees a mountain with light shining above it and hopes he can climb the mountain for redemption; he states in the poem that, I looked up and saw its shoulders brightened with the rays of that sun that leads men rightly on every road. However, as he tries to climb the mountain, he first sees a leopard leaping in front of him, but determined to climb the mountain, he continues trying, and then sees a lion coming on his path followed by a wolf, and, behold, almost at the start of the slope, a light, swift leopard with spotted coat. It would not turn from before my face, and so obstructed my path, that I often turned, in order to return. The three animals represent the three sins of violence and animosity, lack of self-control and finally, fraud and malice. These three animals make him turn around to the dark forest and stops climbing the mountain. Dante is saved by the Roman poet Virgil from this misery.

In Canto II, Dante meets Virgil after losing hope and hopes that he will be his savior in his journey, and he states, Have pity on me, whoever you are, whether a man, in truth, or a shadow. Virgil explains how he has been sent by Beatrice, the girl that Dante loves and deems to be an angel from heaven, who represents divine love to come rescue him. Symbols of compassion (Virgin Mary), grace (Saint Lucia) and contemplative life (Rachel) are depicted in this Canto. Dante follows Virgil in the journey to the underworld.

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In Canto III, Dante passes through the gates of hell with a phrase that implies all hope should be abandoned forsake all hope, all you that enter here. Here, Dante meets the souls of those who never took sides in life but were only concerned with themselves. They are continually stung by wasps and hornets, and this symbolizes the sting of their guilty conscience from their sin. These people live miserable lives as they are cast out by Heaven and denied entry by Hell and Dante asks, Master, what is this I hear, and what race are these, that seem so overcome by suffering?. Dante and Virgil then meet Charon, the Hell's boatman who transports the dead into the underworld, and is very hesitant to take the living into the underworld, Woe to you, wicked spirits! Never hope to see heaven: I come to carry you to the other shore, into eternal darkness, into fire and ice. And you, who are there, a living spirit, depart from those who are dead. Virgil guides Dante through the nine circles of Hell.

The circles represent the wickedness of human beings on earth and how Satan is forever held in bondage of suffering. The sinners for each circle face punishments for their crime in what he refers to as poetic justice. The first circle is the limbo where Virgil resides and represents the people who are unbaptized and do not recognize the existence of Christ. These people represent that group that did not sin but rather refused the existence of Christ, they are the non-Christians adults and the unbaptized babies, they had no sin, yet, though they have worth, it is not sufficient, because they were not baptized, and baptism is the gateway to the faith that you believe in. They are punished by living in a deficient form of heaven for their

ignorance of God, however, just like Noah, Moses, Abraham, David among others was saved from the limbo, they too can be saved.

The second circle is the circle of lust, where those who are overcome by lust and sexual love are punished by the violent hellish storm that never stops. Lust in this circle led to the sins of adultery, and for cases such as Dido and Cleopatra, it led to a violent death. The third circle represents those who are swayed by voracious appetite and commit the crime of gluttony. They are punished by the constant icy rain which makes them grovel in the mud. The fourth circle represents the greedy people in society who are swayed by the material greed. They are punished by jousting heavy weights in their chests. Dante in his poem illustrates that, here, too, I saw a nation of lost souls/ far more than were above: they strained their chests against enormous weights, and with mad howls rolled them at one another.

The fifth circle depicts the wrath faced by the wrathful and the sullen. The wrathful are forced to fight each eternally on the surface of the river while the sullen lay is gurgling under the river. Here, the poem allegorically reveals the punishment for sins that neither philosophy nor the nature of human kind can understand and it states in part, Now, son, see the souls of those overcome by anger, and also, I want you to know, in truth, there are people under the water, who sigh, and make it bubble on the surface, as your eye can see whichever way it turns. The sixth circle is for the heretics who claim that the soul died with the body and failed to believe in God and the afterlife and they are punished in the flaming tombs. They are locked in the burning tombs since they did not believe in Hell.

The seventh circle is for violence, O blind desires, evil and foolish, which so goad us in our brief life, and then, in the eternal one, ruin us so bitterly, and it is divided into three sections. First, violence against neighbors that includes the war makers, murders and the tyrants and are punished by being immersed in a river of boiling blood and fire symbolizing the blood they took from their neighbors. The second section of this circle is the violence against self which includes people who committed suicide or even attempted to commit suicide, and they are punished by transforming their souls into gnarled thorny trees fed by birds or the Harpies that have women faces. The last section is for violence against God, art, and nature and includes the blasphemous and the sodomites where they are punished by the burning sand and hot flames falling from the sky. This symbolizes how those who go against the will of God never find peace and live in a very uncomfortable life.

The eighth circle is that which punishes those who committed fraud and Dante describes it as the place in Hell. They include the flatterers, simonists, seducers, sorcerers corrupt politicians thieves, hypocrites, counselors of fraud, falsifiers among others and each of them were severely punished. Panderers and seducers are forced to march eternally in opposite directions just as they used seduction to force others to incline to their will. Flatterers who used their language to commit fraud are plunged in excrement, and he quotes one them saying, the flatteries, of which my tongue never wearied, have brought me down to this. Simonists represent the group that bribed for power in the Catholic Churches and are punished by being placed upside down in holes. The sorcerers and false prophets have their heads twisted so that they cannot see what is in front of them because of their false

prophecies of the future. The corrupt politicians were placed in sticky pitches that represented their dirty and corrupt deals. The thieves are constantly attacked by lizards and snakes, and their human identity keeps undergoing various transformations and always subject to theft. The sowers of discord have their bodies torn apart as they divided people by their division among people while the fraudulent councilors are entrenched in their individual pyres. The falsifiers who consist of the impersonators and counterfeiters have their bodies and minds rotting in diseases.

The last circle represents those who were punished for treachery. From the first circle Limbo to the last circle treachery, Dante documents the punishments of sinners from all walks of life, either as people in authority such as politicians to the very low class in society. These circles represent the seven deadly sins committed by human kind. The punishment depicted in these circles fits the sins committed, and the poem illustrates the realm of Satan and the Christian perception of sin.

Through the use of allegory, contemporary, historical and mythological figures and poetic justice, Dante impacts hugely on the Christian beliefs of the afterlife and the live in hell. Through imagery of the poem, Dante depicts a very horrifying life one has to face for living a sinful life. The use of the first person narrator in the Inferno helps the reader associate with the struggles of a man in his journey for salvation and how it feels to go through the midlife crisis. Dante's Inferno also shows how the society views Satan as being inferior to God and how the decisions we make in life determine our fate in the afterlife, for instance, repentance and acknowledgement of God by following His will will guarantee us salvation in the afterlife while the sinful

life we lead will lead us straight to the wrath of hell. Dante also goes into detail by differentiating the levels of sin by illustrating the different types of punishment described in each circle for the different sins committed. The poem describes the fundamental religious beliefs the society today deals with and the concept of punishment. Hope for salvation is displayed by the fact that Dante sees the light at the end of his journey and understands his own heart and what it takes to be saved from the sinful life.