

# Dante's inferno

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Dante Alighieri's poem, the *Inferno*, attempts to perfect the concept of Divine Justice. Main Christian religious ideals and Dante's political views and past encompass the concept of Divine Justice. Dante, born in 1265 in Florence, Italy, belonged to a family intensely involved in the political scene at a time of upheaval and unrest. Dante augmented his political standing by holding several public offices at a time of political unrest, and further, exiled from Florence.

Dante's political beliefs and past reflect the essence and spirit of divine justice in the *Inferno*. At the opening of Canto III, inscribed at the gate of Hell, reveals it as a place constructed by Divine Justice, Omnipotence, and Love. "Through me the way into the suffering city... Justice urged on my high artificer; my maker was divine authority, the highest wisdom, and the primal love..." (21). This inscription sets a religious tone, and implies that justice would be substantiated by strict doctrinal Christian values.

While *The Inferno*, a strongly religious poem influenced by Christian morality, Dante incorporates his political ideals in his attempt to define Justice. Dante places numerous political figures through out the different levels of Hell. Farinata, the leader of the Ghibellines in Florence, the party that opposed Dante's Guelphs resides in the sixth level of Hell. Another Guelph, Brunetto Latini, Dante's teacher at his university and a sodomite, resides in the seventh circle of Hell.

Also, in the Seventh circle of Hell, Dante reveals his disdain for Florence, when he talks to three Florentine souls, expressing that arrogance reigns the damned city, "Newcomers to the city and quick gains have brought excess

and arrogance to you, o Florence” (147). Dante reveals the corrupt political nature of Florence by placing numerous Florentine souls in Hell. More importantly, Dante reveals the epitome of injustice through the corruption and turmoil of Florence.

While religion, a guiding force behind Dante's vision of divine justice, Dante's political views came to contradict important Christian doctrine and the Catholic Church. In the Eighth circle of Hell, Dante expresses his greatest criticism of the Catholic Church by placing Pope Nicholas III. Dante shows the Pope no pity, “ stay as you are, for you are rightly punished,” (173) and further scorns all corrupt churchmen, “ I'd utter words much heavier than these, because your avarice afflicts the world: it tramples on the good, lifts up the wicked. (173) Dante suggests a key factor to achieving justice, a separate but equal Church and state. In the ninth circle of Hell, Dante places the still living, Florentine souls Bocca degli Abati and Fra Alberigo, as traitors against their guests. Dante illustrates the worthiness of their punishment and the corruption they have caused in Florence, Ah, Genoese, a people strange to every constraint of custom, full of all corruption, why have you not been driven from the world?

For the foulest spirit of Romagna, I found one of you such that, for his acts, in soul he bathes already in Cocytus and up above appears alive, in body. (309) Dante expresses the intensity of the corruption in Florence, and demonstrates this by placing two Florentine souls in one of the worst levels of Hell. More importantly, by placing these souls in Hell prior to their physical death, Dante greatly contradicts orthodox Christian doctrine. More

contradictory, in the absolute lowest level of Hell, Dante places Brutus and Cassius, who murdered Julius Caesar, next to Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ.

Dante equalizes both Caesar and Christ as benefactors. Just as Christ represents the perfect manifestation of religion, Caesar embodies the perfect manifestation of secular government. While Judas should clearly experience harsher punishment, based on Christian morality, he only experiences a slightly worse punishment than Brutus and Caissus. Clearly, Dante's vision of morality unites both politics and religion. Dante's political past with Florence immensely influences his writing in *The Inferno*.

Dante repeatedly places Florentine souls in Hell, and further elaborates his political views and ideals, most notably, his view of a separate but equal Church and state. In the final level of hell Dante patently unites his political and religious views of moral justice by showing Lucifer and three greatest sinners of all time—Judas, the betrayer of Christ, and Cassius and Brutus, the betrayers of Julius Caesar. The incorporation of political ideals with religious ones encompasses Dante's view of divine morality.