

The idea of rebirth in dante alighieri's vita nuova

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Dante in his minor work "Vita Nuova" writes about the love he feels for Beatrice. It is fitting that this work be named "Vita Nuova" because, in Italian, "Vita Nuova" means new life. When a person is in love, the feeling of love brings a renewed sense of vitality and energy. It is as if the person in love has died and been born anew.

As I have mentioned, "Vita Nuova" was written to tell the story of Dante's love for Beatrice. The name Beatrice means "the one who gives beatitude". It is no surprise then that in reading the "Vita Nuova" I find that there is a parallel in the pure, spiritual, and virtuous love Dante feels for Beatrice and the way that divine love of God is discussed in the New Testament.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3: 3). In St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Paul writes "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2: 20). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22: 37).

Taken together, these verses of the Bible indicate that to be a Christian means to let go of any attachments that could impede loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind; to completely remove one's old life that was without God and embrace a new life that is totally enveloped by God.

Without accepting and living this new life, one has no hope of seeing the Beatific Vision of God.

This sort of imagery parallels that which Dante brings forth in the sonnet included in the XVI chapter of the "Vita Nuova": "For Love's attack is so precipitous that life itself all but abandons me: nothing survives except one lonely spirit allowed to live because it speaks of you" (Dante 608) This sonnet makes it clear that the joy of accepting a new life in love cannot be separated from the pain of losing one's old life. All that was important in the old life, all that one was attached to in the old life, is rendered insignificant. Love itself moves to kill and remove anything that is in its way except for "one lonely spirit, allowed to live" because it speaks of that which is loved.

In this sonnet, Beatrice takes some divine quality where one could lose his life by just looking at her. She is so pure and above the sinfulness of this world that those who are unworthy should not dare lay their eyes upon her: "With hope of help to come I gather courage and deathly languid, drained of all defenses, I come to you expecting to be healed; and if I raise my eyes to look at you, within my heart a tremor starts to spread, driving out life, stopping my pulses' beat" (Dante 608)

In looking at Beatrice, Dante believes that he will be strengthened and the feeling of his old life dying will slow down or cease to be. Instead, the sight of pure and exalted Beatrice continues and quickens the death of his old life. This again invokes this Biblical idea of dying in Christ and being born again.

Often, the process of conversion and of falling in love with Christ is painful. Many of those who convert to God turn to Him expecting that He will make the conversion easier or, better yet, that he will allow them to keep some of the attachments of their old life. Instead, looking toward God only inspires

that they become more radical in being born again and only speeds up the death of old attachments.

I don't believe that it is a coincidence that Dante's love for Beatrice parallels so closely to new life in Christ. The same way that Christ inspires us to seek to improve ourselves and reach Paradise, Beatrice inspires Dante to improve himself and strive to seek Paradise.

The "Vita Nuova" is, in a way, a testimony that while pure and virtuous love is not easy, it is worth the pain and struggle if only for the object of affection. In the case of Dante, all the pain he endured through the dying of his old life was well worth it, in order to be able love Beatrice more fully.