

The inferno and the perfection of gods justice religion essay



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“The Inferno” was written in the early fourteenth century by Italian politician Dante Alighieri, the book is the first part of the epic poem the “Divine Comedy” and it is followed by “Purgatorio” and “Paradiso”. The book “Inferno”, which is the Italian translation for Hell, narrates the journey of its author through what he believes is Hell, consisting of nine circles of suffering underneath the earth. In his journey Dante is guided through the nine regions by the poet Virgil, who represents Human Reason, each circle in the book represents a different type of sin with a different type of punishment, varying according to the degree of offense they committed in life. In his trip through every one of these circles, Dante realizes and emphasizes the perfection of God’s justice and the seriousness of each offense towards the creator of all life.

Certainly, Dante as a Christian realizes the perfection of God’s justice; he is able to create a connection between a soul’s sin on Earth and the punishment he or she receives in Hell. In Inferno, Dante explains that God created Hell by justice, a specific example of this, might be when he was entering the Gates of Hell, he read on the entrance of the gate the sign that said, “...Sacred Justice moved my Architect I was raised here by the Divine Omnipotence...” (Alighieri Canto III, 5) undoubtedly, attributing the creation of Hell to God and his divine justice, and God’s divine justice is exactly what shapes Dante’s nine circles of Hell and their punishments, depending on the severity of the sin, the soul is sent farther away from God and closer to the Devil.

In addition, Dante is conscious of the qualities of God, first that He is just, according to the Bible in Exodus 34: 7, “...He will by no means clear the

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guilty” also that He is merciful “...For God is love”(Kershaw 1 John 4: 8) and, in accordance with the Bible, it is also stated that God’s Justice is described as fair, when people receive justice, they receive the penalty they deserve, or they are repaid for the damages done to them, in the bible, justice is related to the Law of Moses, which the Lord gave to the people of Israel as a gift for their protection and well being in the Old Testament of the Bible(Justice). Psalms 96: 13 tells us that “...He [God] is coming to judge all people on earth with fairness and truth.”(Kershaw)

No doubt, Dante praises God’s justice in Hell “ O Sovereign Wisdom.... How justly doth Thy power judge and assign!”(Alighieri Canto XIX, 10-13) however, he will still along his journey show pity for the souls,”...how could I check my tears, when near at hand I saw the image of humanity distorted.... Certainly I wept...”(Alighieri Canto XX, 21), and fear to God’s punishments”... and there we saw what fearful arts the hand of Justice knows...”(Alighieri Canto XIV, 17), projecting to the reader an image of a vengeful and cruel God, who was punishing harshly all those sinners, these reactions from Dante makes Virgil scold Dante assuring him that God’s justice is divine and perfect. “ Who is more impious than one who dares to sorrow at God’s Judgment?”(Alighieri Canto XX, 30). Therefore, as consequence of the magnitude of the offenses that are being punished in Hell, it is understandable that Dante depicts Hell as a place of perpetual pain and suffering.

Starting on the Dark Wood, the Perfection of God’s Justice revolves around the entire journey of Dante. In the first circle with all the non-Christian adults in addition to unbaptized infants, Dante depicts the mercy and justice of <https://assignbuster.com/the-inferno-and-the-perfection-of-gods-justice-religion-essay/>

God, many of the great heroes, thinkers and creative minds of ancient Greece such as Homer, Horace and Lucan are located in this circle, although they do not suffer, because of the honor and merits they gained in Earth and Heaven, they are hopeless and cannot gain their way into heaven, yet some of the major figures from the Hebrew Bible, according to Virgil, were liberated by Jesus following his crucifixion.

In the second circle, Dante analyzes the power of love over desire; He describes God as merciful and caring, but God's justice is more important, the lustful are located in this circle, they are the first ones to be truly punished in Hell, the souls are blown about to and fro by the terrible winds of a violent storm, without hope of rest. From the souls that are being punished here, Dante concludes that love should not be confused with sexual desires, even if the line that separates both of them seems really thin. Furthermore in the third circle are placed those that are given out to carnal desires too, the gluttons who are forced to lie in a vile slush produced by ceaseless foul. In this circle Virgil tells Dante that the souls trapped here will not rise again until the Day of the Final Judgment where he also describes God as just and fair "...on which the host shall come to judge all men..." (Alighieri, Canto VI, 90).

In the fourth circle the Hoarders and the Wasters, are being punished according to their sins in the same circle, they are carrying enormous weights, rolling them at one another, then in haste they rolled them back, and start all over again creating a vicious cycle. In this region Dante starts to feel pity for those souls and is shocked for the first time at the power of

God's justice. In the fifth circle are the two forms of anger located, the anger
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that is expressed and the one that is repressed, God's Justice in this region is seen when Filippo Argenti is attacked by the other souls after he tried to grab Dante, much to Dante's liking, and when God sends his angel to open the gates of Dis. Dante learns from Virgil that as the story progresses himself has been less inclined toward pity, and thus the text asserts the infinite wisdom of divine justice, where sinners receive their punishment in perfect proportion to their sin and to pity their suffering is to demonstrate a lack of understanding.

In level six begins a much more serious descent into the realm where the sins turn into more severe and the punishments are harsher. In this area are located the heretics, they are tormented in fiery tombs because of their denial of the soul's immortality when they were alive, showing the reader once more how the seriousness of the offense towards God decides how He proportionally assigns the punishment.

In the seventh circle, are located the violent, these sinners are separated in three forms, given that each kind of violence is different to the creator, one are the violent toward others, for example killing someone, these souls are punished in a river of blood, another are the violent against themselves, these are the ones that commit suicide, they are punished more painfully than the previous sinners, they change into trees and they can only speak if a limb is broken off and they bleed, as in life they sought relief through pain, they are now suffering in Hell and are constantly being hurt seeking relief. The third group of violent sinners, are the violent against God, these souls are the most painfully tormented souls of the group of violent, the

blasphemers, sodomites and the usurers are placed on a burning plain while they are tormented by a rain of fire from heaven ceaselessly.

Consecutively, the eighth circle is basically full of malice and forethought, the majority of the souls that are located in this circle are evil and when they were alive they knew they were being evil, and did nothing to change their ways, therefore the seducers, panderers, simoniacs, fortune tellers and diviners, grafters, thieves, hypocrites, evil counselors, sowers of discords and falsifiers are placed in this level, most of them serve painful punishments, Dante permits the reader to observe the perfection of God's justice, because even when all these souls are in the same circle, they are punished in accordance to the severity of their sins. For instance, the fortune tellers and diviners are permitted to walk only with their heads backwards; the evil counselors are sentenced to walk inside a flaming tongue and the thieves are bitten by snakes and burst into flames until ashes remain, and from the ashes the sinner reforms painfully.

As Dante gradually descends through every level of Hell, he finally finds himself in the ninth circle, this is the last circle and the most evil of all, the traitors and the Devil are located here, Dante divides this level in four regions, the Caina, the Antenora, Ptolomea and Judecca. The Caina is named after the biblical Cain, who was the first son of Adam and Eve, and who killed his brother out of envy (Kershaw Genesis 4 1-17). The second region is Antenora, is named for the Trojan prince Antenor, one of those in favor of returning Helen to the Greeks for the good of Troy, the third zone is Ptolomea, this region is named after the captain of Jericho, Ptolemy, who murdered his guests while they were being honored, and finally the last <https://assignbuster.com/the-inferno-and-the-perfection-of-gods-justice-religion-essay/>

region is Judecca, Dante chooses this name because of Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus the Son of God. In this circle Divine Justice doesn't have exceptions, because whether they betrayed their families, country, guests or the Son of God, they are all encased in ice, however their punishment is proportional, some of the souls are covered up to their necks, others up to their eyes, only Judas is covered up to his head completely in ice.

Nevertheless, we can't evade the fact that God's justice in the "Inferno" is created by a medieval man's intellect, and that his point of view on Divine Justice is influenced by his religious views, however, Dante, during his journey changes his attitude and he finally starts to observe the perfection of God's Justice, he acknowledges how Divine Justice doesn't punish the souls in Hell harshly and cruelly, but the punishment is definitely a mirror of their sins, which ironically creates an eternal torment for the hopeless souls trapped in Hell.

In conclusion, Divine Justice takes many forms in Dante's work, but each punishment is proportional to the seriousness of the soul's crime, Dante started his journey feeling compassion toward the sinners and fearing God's Justice, he descends through the nine circles of Hell, where he reflects, and begins to acknowledge the Perfection of God's Justice. Each of the levels is different; the souls are punished according to the gravity of their offenses toward God, after Dante reaches Cocytus, which is the center of Hell, He continues to the Purgatory. The "Inferno" is only the first part of Dante's Masterpiece "The Divine Comedy", and it is in this journey through Hell

where Dante realizes the perfection of God's justice, he will later experience in Heaven Divine Grace from God himself.

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