[Christian Thought Expressed Through Poetry] CVSP 202/205

***THE DIVINE COMEDY* : Dante's Vision of Human Existence**
(Faith Seeking Artistic Embodiment)

PROLOGUE

1. ***Dante Alighieri*** (1265-1321) : Florentine : the story of his **conversion** presented in **artistic creation**

2. ***Virgil*** : guided tour through ***Hell-Purgatory-Terrestrial Paradise (Eden) -Celestial Paradise (Heaven)*** : ***Beatrice***

3. Similar to ***Aeneas*'** trip to the "underworld" : **journey of discovery and enlightenment** : the **meaning** of man, life, history, society, the universe

4. ***H - P – H* :** states of **soul** and **society**
a) ***Hell*** : despair, stagnation, absolute **isolation**
b) ***Heaven*** : bliss, total fulfilment, perfect **communion**
c) ***Purgatory*** : **preparation** for Heaven: purify, cleanse, **restore the soul** to its **o original innocence**
- 'St. Peter's Gate' : the sacrament of **repentance and reconciliation**

5. ***Purgatory*** : **Hope -** development **-** willing **- roots** of sin purged : **fellowship**
Hell : **Despair -** stagnation – resentful **- fruits** of sin experienced : **isolation**

6. **Allegorical Method of Interpretation**
a) **an event** is full of **meaning**
1. **literal** : **historical concreteness**
2. **mystic** : three **other** meanings:
a. **allegorical** : second **historical event** which will reveal **fuller meaning** of the literal event (**figural** interpretation of history)
b. **moral** : personal-social **behavioral** implication
c. **anagogical***:* **ultimate perspective** and implication of the event
b) Dante's example : the "Exodus-event"
c) Compare Aristotle's four "causes" (aspects) : to **fully know a thing**

7. Apply this method to ***The Divine Comedy*** : **five areas of interest** : condition of the **soul** , condition of **society** , linear **history** personal and human , **love** as the force that moves the cosmos , the **view of man** as harmony of reason and faith

I. The **condition** of the **soul** and **society**

H - P – H : '**Play out'** for us the '**fulfilment'** of earthly actions, choices, decisions, so that we can **experience** clearly the **true essence** and **consequent 'world'** of various '**sins'** and '**virtues'**: a **guide to personal and social behaviour**

***Hell**	:	"flesh" (self-indulgence)	:	Earthly City
Heaven** (Purgatory**)	:	"spirit" (unselfish love)	:	Heavenly City

II. HISTORY: Personal and Humanity : **linear**

A. **Figural** interpretation :
1. historical events are organically inter-related (**linear**)
2. figure-fulfilment: two **historical** events
3. **first** event can only be **fully known** from the **perspective** of the **second** historical event: **both** events are **unique**
4. examples: Moses - Christ - Last Judgment

B. Compared with **mythological** approach :
1. full meaning of an **event** to be found in eternal, **static**, **recurring** pattern, archetype, **abstract idea** which it expresses
2. example : Moses and Christ

C. **Linear** and **cyclical** views of History :
a. linear: **human choices**, actions etc. have ultimate, **unique decisive** significance: **human dignity** and **responsibility**
b. cyclical: life and historical action become **trivial** in **ultimate significance**: endless repetition

D. **Restatement** of major aspects of **figural**, **linear** interpretation of History

E. ***The Divine Comedy*** *:* the enactment of Dante's **conversion -experience** (**personal history**): recapitulates the basic pattern of **Human History :**
1. ***Hell***: his past; ***Purgatory***: conversion / return to **innocence** ; ***Heaven***: his future fulfilment
2. Paradise (Eden) - Fall - Covenant and Prophets - Redemption - Last Judgment
3. The various **stages of Man : innocent-fallen-redeemed-glorified**

III. LOVE: natural, rational, divine

A. Mid-way point of the journey**: centrality** of love
B. Love is **universally present,** active (17:91-92)
***C.** **Natural love** (17:94 and 18:58-60)
D**. **Rational love:* movement-of-the-spirit (17:95-111 ; 18:32)
E. Rational soul: Aristotle (18:13ff)
F. Rational love: guided by Reason, free (18:43-75)
G. Loving in the **proper order** (17:97-9)
H. **Misguided love**: basis of structure of ***Purgatory*** (17:100-102)
1. love **perverted (pride, envy, wrath)**
2. love **defective (sloth)**
3. love **excessive (avarice, gluttony, lust)**
I. **Evil** as misguided love : Augustine
J. **Free Will** as quality of rational love and reason (18:60-75)
1. **the true cause of 'hell'** in man and society
2. example of **Pope and Emperor** (16:52-114 , esp.103-112)
***K.** **Divine love :** fulfils rational love (18:47-8 and 73-75)
1. gracefulness , ease, unself-conscious **('free')**
2. gives **right direction**
3. **humility** protects from **pride**
L. ***H-P -H*** **:** seen as **expressions of the movement of love : misguided : *Hell* ; true : *Purgatory* and *Paradise***

IV: DANTE'S VISION OF MAN: Harmonious blend of Rational Man **and** the Man of Faith, Grace, Love

Artistic unfolding of 'reason' and 'revelation': ***H - P - H***

A. Beatrice **sends** Virgil: **reason** a **servant** of **grace**, not an autonomous, self-sufficient guide for human fulfillment (1:52-3)

B. Virgil: master in ***Hell***
fumbles in ***Purgatory*** (1:83 and 92-94)
disappears at ***Terrestrial Paradise*** (Eden) (30:49)

C. Virgil and Cato: **DUTY**, not **LOVE** is governing 'spirit' (ethos) :
self-conscious (not 'free') : (J,W,C,S-M)---(F,H,L) : '7'

D. ***Limbo :*** neither "damned" nor "saved": **organic fulfilment** of reason and natural virtue **unaided** by Grace (3:34-45)

E. Beatrice: the "complete" guide
Virgil: "limited" guide (but **guide nevertheless**)

F. Dante's attempt to "locate" the **legitimate power of reason**

G. Final restatement of Dante's 'vision'

H. **Compare** with Augustine, Aquinas, Al-Ghazali, Ibn-Tufayl , Ibn-Rushd …

EPILOGUE
***** Existential** focus : **this-worldly** rootedness :

1. Use of **vernacular** instead of Latin
2. **Dimensionalism**: ***H - P - H*** as aspects of human existence
3. The **two ends** of life : **political concern** : secular and sacred , temporal and spiritual **harmony** (source text No. 3)
4. ***The Divine Comedy:*** **the artistic expression of his life- experience,** not **pure imagination or speculation**

SOURCE TEXTS

1. *THE JOURNEY OF LIFE*

"And like a pilgrim who is travelling on a road where he has never been before, who believes that every house which he sees from afar is a hostel, and finding that it is not directs his belief to another, and so from house to house until he comes to the hostel; **even so our soul, so soon as it enters upon the new and never-yet-made journey of life**, directs its eyes toward the goal of its supreme good, and therefore whatever it sees that appears to have some good in it, it thinks to be it. And because its knowledge is at first imperfect, through having no experience or instruction, little goods appear great to it... And so we see little children intensely longing for an apple, and then going on further, longing for a little bird, and then further on longing for fine clothes, and then a horse, and then a mistress... And this comes to pass because in none of these things does he find that for which he is ever searching."

(Dante, *Convivio,* IV, 12)

2. *THE HARMONIOUS UNION OF FAITH + REASON, OF SPIRITUAL + TEMPORAL*

"**Providence**, then, has set **two ends** before man to be contemplated by him; the blessedness, to wit, of this life, which consists in the exercise of his proper power, and is figured in the ***terrestrial paradise***, and the blessedness of eternal life, which consists in the fruition of the divine aspect, to which his proper powers may not ascend unless assisted by the divine light. And this blessedness is given to be understood by the ***celestial paradise***. Now to these two as to diverse ends it behooves man to come **by diverse means**. For to the first we attain by the teachings of **philosophy**, following them by acting in accordance with the **moral and intellectual virtues**. To the second by **spiritual teachings** which transcend human reason, as we follow them by acting according to the **theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity**. Now albeit these ends and means are made plain to us, the one **by human reason**, the other **by the Holy Spirit** (which has revealed the truth that is beyond our nature, but yet needful to us, by means of the prophets and sacred writers and by Jesus Christ the Son of God co-eternal with the said Spirit, and by his disciples), yet would **human greed** cast them behind were not men, like horses going astray in their brutishness, held in the way by bit and rein. Wherefore man had **need** of a **twofold directive power** according to his twofold end, to wit, **the supreme pontiff**, to lead the human race, in accordance with the things revealed, to eternal life; and **the emperor**, to direct the human race to temporal felicity in accordance with the teachings of philosophy."

(Dante, *De Monarchia,* III, 16)