



Dante's *Divine Comedy* with Dr. Louis Markos

Lecture I: The Shape of Dante's Journey

Outline:

In this lesson, Dr. Louis Markos introduces Dante's *Divine Comedy* with a close look at the structure, purpose, and opening imagery of the *Inferno*, highlighting how Dante's descent into Hell is a moral and spiritual journey necessary for ascent to God.

"Midway in our life's journey, I went astray from the straight road and woke to find myself alone in a dark wood." —Dante, *Inferno*

The Dark Wood and the Promise of a Happy Ending

- Dante's journey begins at age 35, midway through life by biblical reckoning.
- He wakes to find himself lost in a dark wood, a spiritual crisis akin to Peter sinking after looking away from Christ.
- The title "Comedy" suggests a happy ending; the darkness is not the final word.
- Astrological and calendrical markers (Good Friday, full moon, vernal equinox, Aries) construct a "perfect Easter," signaling resurrection and hope.

Allegory and the Limits of Self-Reliance

- Dante attempts to climb the hill to salvation but is blocked by three beasts—symbols of sin.
- Allegorically, the sun atop the hill represents God and salvation.
- The beasts force him back, indicating that one cannot reach salvation by human effort alone.
- Virgil appears as a guide, sent by divine grace, to show the proper path.

The Descent Before the Ascent

- Virgil tells Dante he must first descend into Hell, then climb Mount Purgatory before reaching Heaven.



- This mirrors the Christian life: before grace, one must recognize sin and repent.
- The journey also reflects salvation history—from Eden, through the Fall, to the New Jerusalem.

Dante's Geocentric Universe and the Moral Order

- Dante's cosmos is geocentric: Earth is at the center, but not as exaltation—Hell is at the center.
- Medieval people knew the Earth was round; myths about flat-earth belief come from Enlightenment polemic.
- Hell is beneath Jerusalem; Mount Purgatory rises at the antipodes.
- Satan fell to Earth's center; the displaced Earth became Mount Purgatory.

Exiting the Inferno and the Moral Gravity of Sin

- Dante and Virgil descend to Satan at the center, then pass through and begin their ascent.
- Hell's structure reflects moral weight: sins become heavier, colder, and darker.
- This geography illustrates that sin is not just error but a turning away from divine light.