

Heaven, Hell and Purgatory:

01
Dante's *Comedy*

and the Forgotten Truth

—
of Apocalyptic Dreamworlds

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According to Jacques Derrida, symbolic languages of apocalypse lay bare a more general structure of crisis in the way we use language and signs. In principle, he argues, this structure of crisis allows for any language game to be inscribed into an apocalyptic context. Our attempts to make sense of the world we inhabit are, so to speak, permanently at risk. With Derrida, the last book of the Bible can therefore be read as an 'exemplary revelation' of a 'transcendental structure'.¹ Having developed through the Middle Ages into the symbolic language of heaven, hell and purgatory and then culminating in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the powerful symbolism of biblical apocalypticism is more than a remnant of naively pious projections. Instead, we might say that whoever encounters it will not be able to shed it.

It is extremely remarkable that even postmodern Catholics distrust this type of symbolic language. For example, *Dies Irae*, a product of the generation before Dante, was banned from the requiem in the 20th century, because it was regarded as an expression of 'negative spirituality'.² The medieval image of God as judge was downplayed in favour of the Christian longing for a forgiving God. However, there is no forgiveness without what Walter Benjamin called the 'striking violence' of a God who does not judge by charging up guilt against atonement, but rather by exposing the inanity of the conformist hypocrites who are the true enemies of life.³ In Derrida's view, the act of forgiving can take place only in response to something unforgivable: 'Forgiveness exists only [...] where there is something unforgivable. This means that the act of forgiving has to announce itself as an act of impossibility. It only becomes possible in doing something impossible'.⁴

Without the unpredictable power of a judging God, the symbolic language of humanistic gestures of reconciliation would turn into nothing but a tool of strategic power. It was for good reasons that in early Christianity neither the Gospels nor the apostolic letters were considered a hermeneutical key to the New Testament. Instead, this role fell to the last book of the biblical canon: Saint John's Apocalypse,⁵ a labyrinth of criss-crossing voices, divine missions, angels, and messengers, in which one can never tell who is speaking or writing and who is authorising and dispatching the messages.⁶ Entry into God's kingdom could be

reached neither via the authority of apostolic charismatics nor through a series of well-organised narrations about a philanthropic itinerant preacher. Instead, it could be accessed via a sequence of messages which come over the reader 'like a thief' (Apoc. 16:15; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Matt. 24:42f.; Luke 12:39f.); in other words, through a spiritual reading practice that pushes the reader towards answering God's call on the basis of his or her own responsibility.

This is precisely where we can find the philosophical core of apocalyptic language games which resist any kind of deconstruction. They stage language's awakening from the night of sanctimonious commonplaces and a kind of rationality that is hostile to life: 'I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful...', it says in the introduction to the Apocalypse of Saint John (Apoc. 3:1-2).⁷

Postmodern societies tend to defer the moment of 'crisis', which forces us to take a stand and make a decision in favour of life. As a result, the task of criticism, of sorting out the sheep from the goats, is left to the demonic logics of religious fundamentalists. It was already Dante who created a monument to this kind of scepticism when he made the character of Belacqua appear in the ante-purgatory (*Purgatorio*, Canto IV). The former lute-maker from Florence seeks shelter behind a rock, keeping out of sight of the heavens, head between his knees, in keeping with his usual habit of postponing the moment of truth. We encounter a whole host of radicalised successors to this archetypal figure in the proto-postmodern works of Samuel Beckett.⁸ His tormented characters have made their home in the lukewarm space between good and evil. They do not even know where they are and for how long they will stay there. In this state of detachment, the liberating gaze of Beatrice is as unlikely to make an appearance as is Godot – this is what distinguishes Beckett from Dante.

Contrary to this trend, Derrida's later works feature more and more signs that our scepticism towards the language of crisis of earlier periods cannot endure. This is precisely what imbues Dante's tripartite scheme of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* with such enduring relevance. The need to act asks of us nothing

short of the impossible.⁹ In Dante's case, of course, this act is limited to compensating for the powerlessness of the exile by writing an apocalyptic story of conversion which poetically anticipates the moment of truth.

To what extent might this mystagogic-poetic practice be reinvented in a late modern context? The hermeneutic key to Dante's exercise is found in the final Cantos of the *Comedy* – the very part which seemed the most boring to modern readers from the Romantics up to post-modern revenants of Belacqua (such as Romeo Castellucci). However, Heinrich Heine's suspicion that the medieval order of hell, purgatory and heaven, that resulted in lulling the people with the 'ancient holy lullaby' (*Eiapopeia vom Himmel*),¹⁰ might turn out to be short-sighted. Dante's ambitious project of using literary means in order to evoke the medieval pilgrimage towards the divine contemplation of God speaks a different language; and it does so even where it uses the allegory of 'heaven'. But let us first turn to the apocalyptic sources of Dante's conversion narrative.

THE DIVINE COMEDY'S MAIN APOCALYPTIC FEATURES

The language of apocalypse is the language of dreams. This is what differentiates it from the language of rationality. The rules of logical coherence are applied only rather freely. For example, Dante complains about the harshness of divine punishment ('For I who saw it hardly can admit it', *Inferno*, Canto XXV, 46); but shortly thereafter, he is pleased to see 'the vengeance which, concealed, Makes sweet thine anger in thy secrecy?' (*Purgatorio*, Canto XX, 94). Dante has little concern for the *tertium non datur* (law of the excluded middle), nor does he bother to engage in self-censorship when it comes to curbing his aggressions and to polishing his choices of words and images along the lines of Petrarch's Renaissance aesthetic. If you will, the keyboard of apocalyptic visions has no delete button. It therefore does not come as a surprise that the Renaissance and its aftermath perceived the style of the *Divine Comedy* as strange. Dante does not shy away from lending his voice to the anger of his characters,¹¹ nor does the emerging sense of decorum and good taste of the bourgeois age prevent him from calling priests pigs. He goes as

far as letting impertinent sinners raise their hands against God in the utmost vulgar gesture of 'fuck you' ('Lifted his hands aloft with both the figs, Crying: "Take that, God, for at thee I aim them"' [*Inferno*, Canto XXXV, 1]).

Dante's appropriation of the dramaturgy of apocalyptic dream sequences reaches far into the text's own gestures and imagery. Starting with Canto XVII, he refers back to Saint John in a very explicit manner.¹² Already in the first Canto, the experience of a personal crisis – alluded to be of suicidal proportions (*Purgatorio*, Canto I, 58) – morphs into an allegorical landscape. In it, the poet's inner self is turned outward, taking the form of undergrowth populated with demonic beasts and monsters. The imagery of this landscape is archetypal and surreal.¹³ As soon as Virgil enters the scene, however, this nightmarish language of existential crisis – which is not least a crisis of meaning – blends with another vision of crisis, namely one of historical and political proportions, in which the fate of the Roman Empire is at stake. We witness a blurring of lines between reality and fiction and a superimposition of documentary precision onto archetypal phantasmagoria, rendering futile any attempt to classify the text generically.

The literary model for such writing is the Apocalypse of Saint John itself. Like the *Divine Comedy*, it 'wavers allegorically'¹⁴ between the symbolic-spiritual and the historical-political, between the personal experience of conversion and political prophecy (in doing so, it can be compared to the modern fantasy genre). Similar to Saint John's canonical text, Dante's pilgrimage towards the contemplation of God features events of both microcosmic-individual and macrocosmic-universal dimensions. Already the forest in which the author awakens at the beginning of the *Inferno* is 'both inside and outside',¹⁵ standing for a biographical as well as more universal event of cosmic-political magnitude. Dante employs this stylistic feature of apocalyptic writing till the very end. When Virgil exits the stage and Beatrice takes the lead at the end of the *Purgatorio*, she functions both as a mirror to Dante's erotically charged redemption fantasy and as a focal point of a political interpretation of the universe. Henry VII makes an appearance as seminal historical figure, but his future return is more than doubtful. Instead, Cantos XXXII and XXXIII of the *Purgatorio* stage the

arrival of the beloved according to the apocalyptic model of the Second Coming of Christ who is reflected in Beatrice's eyes as a mythological griffin.¹⁶

Once again, this is Dante's method of dissolving the logic of binary oppositions. The individual and the universal, the private and the public, the minute recording of seemingly insignificant details and the cosmic gaze to the stars all collapse into one.¹⁷ In opposition to the modern cliché of medieval order, this subversive trait conflates the contingent and the necessary. Vacillating between archetypal symbolism and efforts to historicise its prophecies, the *Divine Comedy* pre-empts any attempt at classifying its literary disposition.¹⁸ Given their incompatibility with the rules of literary convention, the literary visions of the *Comedy's* journey through the heavens force the reader into a precarious position of hermeneutic indecisiveness: the decision about the meaning (or its lack!) of what he has read rests with him alone. The crisis of set patterns of interpretation creates the very space of the *event* of meaning.

According to Ronald Herzman, Dante's dream-like language of apocalypse finds its most condensed expression in the image of Saint Francis of Assisi in Canto XI of the *Paradiso* – a terse synthesis of Bonaventura's *Legenda Major* as re-narrated by the ironically chosen Thomas Aquinas. The historical figure of Saint Francis appears as the angel of the sixth seal (Apoc. 6:12; 7:2) who directly precedes the end time and restores the Church. The (materialised) image of the stigma-carrying mendicant of La Verna coincides with the vision of an ancient sealed document and instructs us in an exemplary fashion on how to read Dante's cosmic exercise: 'Each character and event a document written by the hand of God'.¹⁹

Read in this light, Dante's exercise is exemplary for what Derrida, following Freud, has called the 'scene of writing'.²⁰ Dante anticipates the moment of decision while at the same time operating with strategies of distortion and defamiliarisation which undermine the power of sound judgement to discern between what is real and what is fantastic. Once again, these strategies refer the reader back to nothing but himself. There is

nothing descriptive in the manner in which Dante's dreamscape reaches its reader via the medium of the author; it is, instead, performative. Dante's multimedia travelogue, interlaced with images, songs, tastes, with bad stench and enchanting fragrances, presents itself to the reader as an apocalyptic 'Come!' Derrida reminds us of this basic tenet of apocalyptic writing when comparing Saint John's Apocalypse with a labyrinth wherein the 'Come' rings out repeatedly, 'engaging perhaps in the place in which *Ereignis* [no longer can this be translated as event] and *Enteignis* unfold the moment of appropriation'.²¹

For this reason, Georg Friedrich Hegel's influential interpretation of the *Divine Comedy* in part three of his *Lectures on Aesthetics* is as illuminating as it is misleading. It is illuminating to the extent that it zeros in on the critical issue of the decisive moment. In Dante's dreamscape, each encounter aims at discovering the universal in the particular, the permanent in the contingent: 'Here, in the face of the absolute grandeur of the ultimate aim and end of all things, everything individual and particular in human interests and aims vanishes, and yet there stands there, completely epically, everything otherwise most fleeting and transient in the living world, fathomed objectively in its inmost being, judged in its worth or worthlessness by the supreme Concept, i.e., by God'.²² As Erich Auerbach wrote: 'For Dante became what he was and is, the Christian poet of an earthly reality preserved in transcendence, in a perfection decreed in divine judgment [...]'.²³ However, Dante does not present the 'passions and sufferings' of individuals as 'solidified into images of bronze', as Hegel would have it.²⁴ His particular mode of writing undermines the view of the permanent and well-ordered with a counter-movement which uses strategies of defamiliarisation to historicise what seems to be permanent. In so doing, he ties everything back to the expectation of a revelation of meaning in some future event.

THE SECRET AND THE PUDENDA

In the framework outlined above, it comes as no surprise that, in Dante, deviations from the alleged norm of medieval order are the rule rather than the exception. Already the basic composition

redemptive purgatore

divine light

of the first part of the *Comedy* upsets the horizon of expectation of its contemporaries to a degree which both confirms and deconstructs modern myths about the well-ordered medieval world view. Contrary to the more representative depictions of hell by Giotto in the Cappella Scrovegni in Padua, or in the cupola of the Battistero di San Giovanni in Florence, Dante's inferno is not a formless chaos in which evil shows its violent nature. It is, rather, tiered and nuanced. One is almost tempted to call it well ordered, were it not for Dante's micro-taxonomy that undermines any sense of scholastic order at the very same time.²⁶ Why, for example, are seduction and adulation punished more severely than lust and greed? Why is the teacher Bruno Latini, whom Dante describes with such tender admiration, in hell?²⁶ Why is Cato, the heathen, suicide, and enemy of Caesar, made guardian of the redemptive purgatory, while Dante throws Caesar's other enemies Brutus and Cassius, along with Judas, into Satan's throat (*Paradiso*, Canto I; *Inferno*, Canto XXXIV)? And how does Ripheus, an unbaptised character from the legend of Troy, get to live in paradise? Why is Francesca da Rimini, depicted as a thoughtful, sensitive, sympathetic and noble lover, whose fate makes Dante break down with compassion and sorrow, in the second circle of hell (*Inferno*, Canto V), when elsewhere he does not hesitate to let voluptuaries, sodomites and prostitutes ascend to purgatory or even paradise (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXVI, *Paradiso*, Cantos VIII and IX)?

Such inconsistencies appear to be neither random nor constructed. At nearly any unexpected turn of Dante's dreamscape, the marvelling pilgrim is tempted to shout: 'Naturally! – but why?' The answer to this question is left to the reader who frequently reacts with irritation. There is no better proof for this irritating trait of Dante's poetics than the split reaction of his readership over the centuries. Already Petrarch perceived the 'rhymes both rough and stridulous' (*Inferno*, Canto XXXII, 1) of the *Inferno*, along with Dante's perverse talent to indulge in vulgar, bawdy and scatological talk, as insufferable. Goethe still saw Dante's punitive fantasies as repulsive.²⁷ It was not until the Romantics, such as Shelley and Blake, that the *Comedy's* grotesque and unsavoury sides were greeted with enthusiasm.²⁸ Dante's audacity to claim the position of divine judge for himself, as the one who

separates the sheep from the goats, is still considered highly questionable despite the hesitations of modern theologians to accuse him of heresy for this reason. Beginning in the Middle Ages, the Catholic magisterium believed itself to hold the authority for canonising eminent believers; but even the autocratic popes did not claim for themselves the mandate for sending individuals to hell. Dante seems to disregard this orthodox rule just as much as the rule of *tertium non datur*. On the one hand, he takes a decisive stand against using the wrath of God for political ends, such as anathematising opponents of papal policy (*Purgatorio*, Canto III, 103ff.). Yet on the other, he does not shy away from placing friends and foes in heaven, hell and purgatory and from canonising his beloved Beatrice. The outrageousness of this sense of entitlement was certainly noticed at the time: Dante figures as judge, while God, the angels, and the devil carry out his sentence.²⁹

We are, of course, at the threshold of the Renaissance. Dante's is not the consciousness of a medieval person. He intervenes in history with an unprecedented political sense of mission.³⁰ Unlike Western modernity, and much more so than his late medieval contemporaries, Dante is fully aware of the apophantic-negative roots of medieval theology. God's being and doing is beyond our grasp. The darkness of divine light manifests itself solely through effects and refractions within the history of salvation and creation. Consequently, God's existence is as much beyond doubt as is the truthfulness and goodness of his being – the problem of theodicy simply does not exist. 'And you, O mortals! hold yourselves restrained in judging' (*Paradiso*, Canto XX, 130ff.) announces the mystical eagle of justice in Jupiter's heaven to the pilgrim who pleads for a tribunal for greedy popes. What Dante, the unrelenting questioner, wants to know 'so deeply sinks in the abyss of the eternal statute what thou askest, from all created sight it is cut off' (*Paradiso*, Canto XXI, 91ff.).³¹ He still knows that no creature may anticipate God's judgment. This is what distinguishes his thought from the allegedly enlightened, yet anaemic philosophy of modern theorists of theodicy. Satan – the first theorist of theodicy in all of the history of creation – had misjudged that; he falsely assumed that God would be accountable for the judgment of creation; but, on the contrary, it is that every judgment made by creation must answer to the unknowable

judgment of God (*Paradiso*, Canto XIX, 46–48). It is not we who are the judges, but God. That, of course, makes the enormity of such a demand more irritating still. Does Dante violate the biblical commandment 'Thou shalt not judge'? Even Romano Guardini, whose admiration for Dante knew no bounds, confessed toward the end of his life: 'I admit to having no real answer to this question'.³²

Derrida's aporetic writings may help us at this juncture; they instruct us to pose the counter-question. If we were to paraphrase the key question of Derrida's engagement with the tradition of apophatic theology in relation to his older, apocalyptic writing, we could summarise this counter question with the rhetorical question: How can we not judge?³³ How can we *not* judge considering the rubble of history? How can we *not* judge, knowing that even Derrida, who dreamed in his essay on apocalypse of an 'apocalypse [...] without the last judgment',³⁴ could not resist the temptation to pass judgment on the 'rogues' of the early 21st century?³⁵ How can we *not* judge the ones we love and hate, both near and far? Do we not do so incessantly in any case?

It would seem that Dante had no qualms about exposing himself at this most intimate point in his nocturnal fantasies. Towards the end of his journey to the hereafter, he even pokes fun at those keeping their cards close to their chests. For example, he admonishes himself via his ancestor Cacciaguیدا: 'A conscience overcast or with its own or with another's shame, will taste forsooth the tartness of thy word; but ne'ertheless, all falsehood laid aside, make manifest thy vision utterly, and let them scratch wherever is the itch' (*Paradiso*, Canto XVII, 121ff.).

It is once again Derrida who calls this most basic and most disturbing trait of apocalyptic writing to our attention. In his essay on the Apocalypse of Saint John, he remarks in passing that the word ἀποκαλ,πτω which the Septuagint aptly uses to translate the Hebrew verb *hlg*, possesses alongside its religious meaning a profane one as well.³⁶ It not only signifies religious epiphanies, but also the unveiling of body parts – of genitals/pudenda, for instance: 'Apokekalymmenoi logoi are indecent remarks. So it is a matter of the secret and the pudenda'.³⁷

When reading the *Comedy* in light of this apocalyptic tradition, it becomes clearer where modern readers fall prey, knowingly or unknowingly, to the treacherous logic of Hegel's view of the *Comedy*. Dante's dreamscape does much more than colour the Greek cosmos of ideas with the fate of individuals, which would then replace Plato's philosophical abstractions with the petrified 'being-for-itself' of individual fates. At the very latest, the moment of Dante's first reunion with Beatrice makes clear that his mystagogic religious exercise cannot be reduced to philosophical idealisations (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXXI). In such a way, one can compare the *Comedy* to the *Confessions*, in which Augustine assumes the position of both sinner and leader of souls. In both cases, what is fleeting and transient flows into the same figure of meditation which, seeking the permanent in the ephemeral, also does something quite different: it transposes what is permanent onto an individual process of catharsis and conversion, one that is distorted through opposing sentiments, tears and embarrassing revelations.³⁸

To be sure, Dante pushes toward a perspective that finds the permanent in the ephemeral by warranting the judgment of individual fates. At the same time, however, Dante is a successor to the apocalyptic Saint John. His cosmic exercise speaks the language of the aged man who, all by himself in the earthly paradise, follows the chariot of Christ 'walking in sleep with countenance acute' (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXIX, 133). In the visions of this old man, he could read that even Plato's cosmos of ideas is fleeting. 'And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together' (Apoc. 6:14).³⁹ This passage comes immediately after the opening of the sixth seal which, in Dante's *Comedy*, is associated with the stigmata of Saint Francis.

THE ALEATORY CONFUSION OF APOCALYPTIC TEXTS

What is the relationship between these intertextual variations of a (both awkward and sublime) apocalyptic language on one side, and the canonical status of Saint John's Apocalypse on the other? Where could Dante, an orthodox Christian, find the audacity to add his own apocalypse to the last book of the biblical canon?⁴⁰ Derrida's essay on the Apocalypse provides an illuminating answer to this question as well. Towards the end of his text,

Derrida reminds us that the book with the seven signs, the Apocalypse of Saint John, was written 'within and on the backside' (Apoc. 5:1). The inscription of the founding text of Christian apocalypses spilled outside the book's cover.⁴¹

The biblical Apocalypse is not a discrete book. It is at the same time younger and older than the biblical canon. Not only does it draw upon the ancient prehistory of symbolic crisis scenarios and writes over older apocalyptic traditions such as the Books of Daniel and Ezekiel,⁴² but its internal, iterative structure also provides an innate capacity for extension. Derrida calls this capacity the aleatory, unforeseeable character of occidental apocalypses. They are prone to chance, a tendency that can be traced all the way to Hölderlin's *Patmos* ('But where danger is, grows the saving power also'), to Heidegger's tireless attempts to continue this poem and into the 21st century.⁴³ We can compare this to a religious exercitium whose repetitions (repetition of visions, plagues, hymns, repeated announcements of the end, etc.)⁴⁴ serve as introductions to apocalyptic writing, marking the last book of the Bible not as the end of the biblical canon, but instead as the beginning of a literary series. This series presents variations on (and at times perversions of) the theme when New Testament and Apocalypse appear with 'shifts of accent, lines skipped or moved out of place, as if they reached us over a broken-down teletype, a wiretap in an overloaded telephone exchange'.⁴⁵

Paradoxically, this comparison of the last book of the biblical canon with a broken telegraph may even draw on the exact wording of the final 'canonical dictate' of the Apocalypse of Saint John by threatening anyone who might dare to add anything to the 'prophecy of this book' (Apoc. 22:18f.; Deut. 4:2) with infernal punishment. Among the figures known to be prohibited since antiquity, only insertion and deletion of textual elements are mentioned here. This means that the Apocalypse does *not* prohibit permutation or substitution. Given that we are dealing here with the most elementary strategies of defamiliarisation and distortion in Freud's language of dreams – viewed by Derrida as the most essential scene of writing – this omission is hardly accidental. According to Freud, substitution and permutation are the two basic syntactic operations generating metaphors and

metonymies in a dream.⁴⁶ In a way, this allows us to read Saint John's omission of substitution and permutation as an opening up of the canon. It hands over the letter of the biblical text to the visions of artists, prophets, philosophers, politicians and poets who in turn receive the Gospels and the Apocalypse in transposed and distorted contexts and who then try to revive the same ideas by different means – from Augustine, Saint Francis, Joachim of Fiore through Dante, Hölderlin and Heidegger all the way to 21st-century Africa.

THE CHRISTIAN TRAITS OF THE DIVINE COMEDY

Dante's *Comedy* deserves its reputation as the most important synthesis of the medieval *Lebensgefühl*, its structure of feeling. And yet, its micro-structure does not support the modern cliché of the well-ordered medieval world view. So what do we make of Dante's teleology and the hierarchical macro-structure of hell, purgatory and heaven erected on top of it? This is the moment to recall the rift between Dante's Christian apocalypse and modern-Jewish, indeed postmodern, variations on the theme. Despite some tendencies to the contrary, Derrida's postmodern apocalypse mistrusts the moment of decision; Derrida imagines this moment as a radically future event. As in the tradition of Jewish messianism, we live in a time of adjournment; the arena of history is wholly provisional.⁴⁷

This future-oriented tradition had a certain afterlife in the Christian West in horizontal-millennial readings of the apocalypse, starting with north-African Christianity during antiquity (Tertullian, Victorinus of Pettau, Lactantius). Mediated by Joachim of Fiore (1130–1202), this tradition culminated in the millennialism of the late Middle Ages (Peter John Olivi, Ubertino of Casale) whose influence on the modern period – stretching from Hegel up to the myth of the Third Reich – cannot be overstated. It is this rather dubious heritage of late medieval apocalypticism that explains Derrida's scepticism regarding the moment of decision.⁴⁸ We can distinguish between two traditions of interpreting apocalyptic texts: historical, essentially literal readings, with a focus toward the future; and spiritual readings that highlight the archetypal and timeless moments of apocalyptic texts. Church father Origen is considered the founder of this

tradition of archetypes that can be traced all the way to C.G. Jung. One sometimes includes in this camp the tradition of the High Middle Ages which dates back to Ticonius and Augustine, although it presents more of a synthesis of the historical and archetypal traditions. Augustine, in *The City of God*, distinguishes between two kinds of resurrection.⁴⁹ The first resurrection, from the soul's death of sin, is identical with baptism and access to the new life of the Church as the body of Christ; this resurrection points in the direction of the timeless traits of the apocalyptic drama of decision-making; in other words, the decision is always made right here and right now. The second one corresponds with the resurrection of the body on Judgment Day when the souls of the dead will finally realise the full potential they were destined to acquire in their earthly lives. The horizontal dimension becomes apparent once again in this future-oriented perspective, although Augustine counteracts it with his radical scepticism towards knowing the future.

The emphasis of medieval theology is without a doubt on the presentist-vertical dimension with its focus on the here and now; this does not mean, however, that we are dealing here with a static metaphysical system of interpretation along the lines of Hegel's caricature of Dante. Medieval thought focuses rather on the liturgical presence of Christ to which Dante alludes in Canto XXX of the *Paradiso* (Canto XXX, 10f.),⁵⁰ or, more precisely, to the patristic conception of the Church as the mystical body of Christ (*corpus mysticum*).⁵¹ Church liturgy marks the place of intersection between the eternal liturgy of the 'holy city, new Jerusalem' (Apoc. 21:2) and the historical moment of the church's congregation (*ecclesia*) following the historical figure of Jesus. This coming-together of heaven and earth, God and Man combines three different branches of the Church: the *ecclesia militans* of the present, the suffering and hoping Church (*ecclesia patiens, ecclesia expectans*) of those in the purgatory, and the triumphant celestial Church (*ecclesia triumphans*) which knows no temporal limits. Past, present and future are united in their focus on the eternal Now of the liturgical presence of Christ. As a consequence, both perspectives on the apocalyptic drama, one looking toward the future, the other to the present, can be chosen. In the Canto cited above, for example, Dante provides a visionary

anticipation of the Last Judgment. In the immutable movement of the eternal present, it has always already taken place.⁵² Therefore, the liturgical presence of Christ makes it possible to antedate future events already in the present.

But where is the moment of decision to be located? The moment of separation of sheep from the goats? As Erik Peterson has claimed with regard to the biblical sources and the early Christian notion of the Church, the only thing that matters is the encounter with the envisioned, incarnated, resurrected Christ making an appearance in the liturgical assembly of the Church.⁵³ Precisely therein lies the difference from the Jewish tradition. In Judaism, the judgment comes at the end of a process of conversion; in the Christian tradition, the moment of truth is here and now. The future Judgment Day, the Apocalypse more narrowly conceived, will only reveal (*αποκαλύπτω*) those who have taken seriously the call to make a decision and who have ignored or made light of it. The decision allows for no deferral; it is as if it has already taken place, even when we can have no more than an intuition of its actual content.⁵⁴

It is in the here and now where one must side with the kind of life that can withstand the rest of God's omnipotent, all-revealing gaze. It happens in the liturgical praise of God and the saints who awaken in us praise and, by doing so, crack open fallen man's self-centred nature. Hence the fundamental significance of poetic praise in the *Paradiso*⁵⁵ which is intensified by Dante's reunion with Beatrice, his 'God bearing image'.⁵⁶ The true Church of God, in the sense of Augustine's *civitas dei*, is the assembly of those willing in the here and now to forget themselves in their dedication to the praise of God and who will remain true to the decision they made. Dante already draws our attention to this decisive point in Canto IV, when he banishes the great scholars of the pagan world (including Virgil) into an Elysium, albeit one which spares them the torment of hell. Their existence may be venerable, yet they suffer from a lack of understanding of fundamental truths: it is the 'right manner of adoring' God that ultimately matters (*Inferno*, Canto IV, 23ff.) and it is only God's praise that lends true insight to the believer (*Paradiso*, Canto XIV). It enables him to see God in all creations, since everything has been created in God's image. As Guardini explains: 'The

human face that makes an appearance in the final vision of the second circle of the Trinity basically is "the" content of the poem and retroactively bestows meaning onto its entirety'.⁵⁷ The question of whose life may stand the test of God's judgment, however, is another matter entirely. Only Judgment Day will reveal who belongs to the Church of the Blessed, who has narrowly failed to reach his final destination, and who has rejected life by leading the life of a hypocrite without at all partaking of the fullness of life available only through Christ. The mystical body of Christ is not a set of juridical rules designed to reward conformists or to tie salvation to purely superficial gestures. Those solidly occupying the grounds of the institutionalised laws may end up on the outside – and vice versa – keeping in mind that Church father Justin (unlike the zealot Augustine) considered unbaptised worshippers of the Logos such as Heraclites and Socrates Christians.⁵⁸ Dante rests upon this orthodox tradition when he redeems the unbaptised heathens Ripheus and Cato while sending straight to hell five of the six popes he lived to see.⁵⁹

As in Walter Benjamin's work cited above, the Last Judgment is not about creating a balance sheet of sin and expiation. The goal is rather to convict the hypocrisy of evil of its utter inanity. The devil is God's double, says Michel Foucault, rather unoriginally.⁶⁰ Already in the Middle Ages, the devil was considered God's monkey.⁶¹ Dante relies on this tradition when portraying the devil as a frozen, three-faced counter-image of God's Trinitarian fullness. Satan has no regard for the copyrights of the Reformation age of Gutenberg; there are no rational criteria by which to secure our righteousness. But that does not prevent us from following the example of the seer of Patmos by engaging in divination and anticipating the moment of truth. The mirage of God is lifeless because it is loveless. Here, prophets, seers, exorcists and saints are in a position to provide help due to their ability to detect differences that do not exist in academic modes of inquiry.

BEATRICE'S SMILE

In full accordance with the medieval apocalyptic tradition, Dante's *Comedy* focuses on the here and now of the moment of truth; at the same time, however, it has the character of an *itinerarium* in the style of Bonaventura. In keeping with the tradition

of medieval mystagogy and its literary counterpart, the courtly novel (invoked by the first verses of the *Comedy* with their motifs of paths and forests)⁶², this road map consists of three steps: purification, illumination and unity with God.

In the beginning, Dante faces a mysterious mountain. In the movement toward conversion, however, the road to salvation first leads downward. The grace of salvation is granted only to those who have learned to look down into the infernal abyss of their souls. Following the scene in the forest, Dante meets great historical figures on his pilgrimage through hell (purification), purgatory (illumination) and heaven (unity with God). Their faces, however, also serve as mirror images of his own soul – from the lovable but unredeemed face of Francesca (*Inferno*, Canto V) which Dante throws to the ground, to the uplifting gaze into the mysterious face of Christ (*Paradiso*, Canto XXX, 40ff.).

The crucial mediator between the passages that are more accessible to the modern reader, i.e., the historical and documentary parts of the first two parts of the pilgrimage, and the more abstract and contemplative passages of Dante's heaven, is the figure of Beatrice. When confronted with his first reunion with the historical figure of his early love, Dante turns to his pagan guide Virgil. Virgil, however, is no longer able to follow at this crucial juncture (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXX, 22ff.). After all, Beatrice's eyes reflect Christ and therefore serve as a reminder of what, according to Dante at least, Virgil never possessed and of which Dante temporarily and culpably lost sight: the divine grace to rejoice in the beauty of creation in a state of selfless love (*Purgatorio*, Cantos XXX–XXXI).

Beatrice then speaks a few words of warning. Dante, with bad conscience, agrees with her, without however being able to utter as much as a simple 'yes' – Beatrice's face turns him into a stammering child. When Dante matures into a grown-up again upon this first reunion, his regained sense of responsibility is not that of the Kantian subject; rather, it is one belonging to a creature that is born to be free and that has never lost its innocence.⁶³ After all, children have one thing in common with God's children who were reborn in Christ: they are neither bound by ends and duties, nor restricted by the clear demarcation between dreams and

reality.⁶⁴ Dante's newly awakening childhood restores his appreciation for the liturgy's calm and contemplative serenity. There is no more purpose, only the meaningful present of the being-as-gift which has to be neither earned nor fought for. Shortly before this, Virgil has bid his farewell with the enigmatic words, 'Take what pleases you to be your guide' (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXVII, 131). The encounter with Beatrice reveals to Dante the playful seriousness of his regained freedom.

Thus, the gaze up to the stars bears out the contemplative sense of the world's symbolic weight on the level of a 'cosmic liturgy'.⁶⁵ Dante's gaze to heaven, like his astronaut's gaze back to 'this globe such that I smiled at its ignoble semblance' (*Paradiso*, Canto XXII, 133ff.), is real in a spatial sense and yet differs from the paranoiac gaze of a modern, distanced observer. Stars and Beatrice's smile have one thing in common: God's being manifests itself in ephemeral concreteness; and this chance concreteness is indicative of his unchanging being. Dream and reality, visible and invisible things mesh together and reveal the meaning of the lived moment.

The symbol for the synthesis of unmediated expression and sober reflection is the smile.⁶⁶ Each of Beatrice's smiles brings Dante one step closer to reconciliation with himself: 'To the divine delight which shone upon me when to her smiling face I turned me round' (*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 88ff.). When everything that appears to be spread across our temporal universe ultimately condenses into one single point (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 79ff.), then the regained simplicity allows for tentative insight into the dialectically unmediated oneness of dream and reality in the mystical contemplation of God. After all, Dante also recognises in the abstract simplicity of the divine point the Trinitarian tie of divine love through which God smiles at himself: 'O Light Eterne, sole in thyself that dwellest, sole knowest thyself, and, known unto thyself and knowing, lovest and smilest on thyself!' (*Paradiso*, Canto XXIII, 121ff.).⁶⁷

In this context it will not come as a surprise that, in the end, the face of the Redeemer incarnate enters into the threefold circular movement of the Trinitarian laughter – the same face that Nietzsche's Anti-Christ would still associate with the rolling

wheel of an innocently playing child: 'Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea',⁶⁸ says Zarathustra. The face of Dante's Christ icon says the same. It belongs to someone who has not lost sight of the playful innocence of God's self-sufficient fullness even in moments of the most desperate misery.

The symbolism of this kind of mystagogic ascendancy is no longer meaningful for us since, in the aftermath of the Reformation, even Catholics had forgotten the West's liturgical-spiritual heritage.⁶⁹ The final Cantos of the *Divine Comedy* have a visionary character; however, they are not engaging in an esoteric experiment, but rather seek to give us a foretaste of the mystical spectacle of God (*visio dei*, 1 Cor. 13:12). During Dante's lifetime, this vision still had a clearly defined space: contemplation.⁷⁰

A FORETASTE OF VISIO DEI: DANTE'S 'HEAVEN'

The dots of human longing (*Purgatorio*, Canto XVII, 19–111) for the ideal and good therefore do not connect in a parallel universe populated by immortal souls. Modern atheists such as Ludwig Feuerbach and Richard Wagner still had knowledge of the fact that the 'soap bubbles of the world of the future' was an invention of the modern bourgeoisie.⁷¹ There is no space for soap bubbles in Dante's symbolic-realist universe. God's glory does not manifest itself in a parallel universe, but in the 'Empyrean', the *primum mobile* which, according to Dante, can never be pinned down, either on a spatial or on a temporal axis. The Empyrean is both infinite sphere and unextended point.⁷² What appeared to be temporally and spatially separate throughout the pilgrimage exists there in complete unity and in perfect harmony – what comes apart in our creation coalesces into the blossoming life of a rose.⁷³

As a consequence of recognising his unity with God, the Christian pilgrim is also united with his brothers and sisters. In the end, however, these are only poetic transcriptions of a truth that can only be seen and understood in the mode of contemplation. Dante makes this abundantly clear. When he seemed to encounter the souls of the dead during his ascent towards the contemplation of God, these were only figurative manifestations of an ecstatic and transcendent reality beyond time and space. 'To speak thus

is adapted to your mind, since only through the sense it apprehendeth what then it worthy makes of intellect' (*Paradiso*, Canto IV, 40ff.).

THE FREEZING POINT OF THE UNIVERSE: DANTE'S HELL

The symbolic opposite of this poetic scenario of heaven is the exact reverse of its contemplative constellation. For this reason, the notion of 'sin' does not primarily refer to moral wrongdoing. Rather, it circumscribes a habitual lack of orientation: the desperate attempt to cut ties with God which has become the sinner's second nature.⁷⁴ Sin is nothing more than a symptom; it betrays Adam's irrational fear of losing himself in the marvelling praise of the divine fullness of life. This is also the reason for the perverse intentness of Dante's sinners to cross the Acheron, the river in hell. Their fear has turned into a paradoxical desire (*Inferno*, Canto III, 112).

Following this logic, God's name is not mentioned a single time in the *Inferno*. The language of those who call God by his name express the joy of receiving – a joy lost to those living in hell. This is consistent with the Augustinian tradition in that evil is a consequence of Adam's *superbia*, i.e., of the narcissist desire to have full control over oneself, to be 'autonomous'.⁷⁵

Envy and hatred are the most elementary symptoms of this compulsion to control. They reveal the inability to receive life in the context of interpersonal relationships (one that cannot be grasped through rational reasoning, but rather gives itself away freely) with gratitude. Typical for such a perverted attitude towards life is the pathos-ridden pride of Ugolino at the beginning of Canto XXXIII of the *Inferno*. The unfathomable hatred of the traitor against his avenger, the Archbishop Ruggieri, turns him into stone. His inability to forget blocks the path towards being sympathetic towards the calling of his innocently suffering children.⁷⁶

Dante's mercilessly realistic ontology of evil follows this path when depicting the devil at the end of Canto XXXIII. Modernity re-mythologised evil in the wake of the Romantic rebellion against the moralising cult of virtue, as put forward by post-Reformation

Christianity, with Milton's *Paradise Lost* serving as its founding document.⁷⁷ For this reason, the ambiguity of evil is considered sexy to this day. From De Sade via Tarantino to postmodernity's evening television, modern evil is seen as an appealing option. Dante's cosmology has as little regard for this soap bubble as for Immanuel Kant's postulating heaven. His theory of the satanic can be compared only to Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Deutschlandtrilogie*: evil is impotent, mechanical, monotonous and lacks imagination; it is the sheer negative (privation) of life which gives itself up freely. When Dante crosses the river Lethe towards the end of the *Purgatorio*, he leaves his habitual feelings of hatred behind. Hell is the opposite of this blissful forgetting: the waters of Lethe are frozen under Satan's monotonously rising and falling wings.⁷⁸ The fallen three-faced angel is just alive enough to chew mechanically on the traitors Judas, Brutus and Cassius.

It goes without saying that God's name does not appear in this frozen world, and yet, the divine fullness of life is present in a depressing manner. After all, the paradox of evil consists in its ontic impossibility: 'And since we cannot think of any being standing alone, nor from the First divided' (*Purgatorio*, XVII, 91–111). Hence resentment, hence the inability to forget. Divine light is omnipresent; it shines like bright daylight in even the darkest of hell's abysses. The Psalmist knew this already when he wrote: 'If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. [...] If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day' (Ps. 139:8, 11–12).

This ontological paradox explains the phantom-like yet corporeal character of the Dantesque torments in hell.⁷⁹ When one is forced to disregard the difference between what is animated and what is dead in an effort to keep God at bay, mourning the loss of the spiritual centre of life becomes indistinguishable from physical pain. The evil subject resembles the petty bourgeois from Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*: it has lost the ability to distinguish between the pain suffered as a result of a lost love from the bellyache caused by spoiled fish.

THE INDEFINABLE 'IN-BETWEEN': DANTE'S PURGATORY

The evil subject turns pathetically only around itself; the redeemed creature turns around God's fullness of life. By contrast, purgatory moves like a spiral, which symbolises the space between the impermanence of marking time in our unredeemed life and the eternal moment of the contemplation of God.

For this reason, it would be misleading to follow Luther and Jacques Le Goff in defining purgatory as a third space.⁸⁰ Strictly speaking, not even eternal life holds the status of a spatially distinct afterlife. It fulfils itself in the eternal now, which has neither beginning nor end. This now, however, may reverberate in the world of those who survive in a more or less uneasy afterlife. What folds into a seamless now in the contemplation of God then splits into past, present and future in the way we perceive time. In this manner, the traces left behind by the dead in our physical and spiritual world can have an impact.

In life, nothing happens that does not echo in the resonating cavern of the universe; and what we do frequently creates an echo as well. The medieval individual was not yet protected against such resonances; he was open and permeable, at the mercy of the spirits of his environs.⁸¹ Nor was it thought to be in any way desirable to seek immunisation against such resonances. After all, the desire for deliverance was tantamount to the desire to rid oneself of those shells that seal the individual off from God and his surroundings (cf. *Purgatorio*, Canto II, 118ff.; XI, 121ff.).

The orthodox prayer for the dead is a logical consequence of this musical understanding of life.⁸² The articulation of love, friendship and intercession as manifest in the rite provokes the dead to remember the past and to rejoice in the higher beatitude of superior beings without resentment and envy.⁸³ Lingering feelings of envy and hatred, by contrast, prevent the dead from accepting the lives they led as part of a harmonious and well-ordered whole.⁸⁴

The prevailing mood in the spiralling circular movement of the dead in Dante's purgatory is one of hope and joy, although it cannot yet manifest itself in all its impulses. For that to happen, the intercession of the living is required. And even then will the unfulfilled potentials of the lives they lived only become actualised

in the Last Judgment, at the point when the earthly life's fickle flow calms down and when the enduring core of their souls is united with the traces of their historical and physical existence.

At the end of the purifying ascent through this intermediate world, Dante sees the processes of creative forgetting (the waters of Lethe) and of grateful remembrance (the waters of Eunoe). Nobody has described the dynamics of these processes of contemplative abstraction in more fitting terms than William Wordsworth in his poem *Tintern Abbey* (1798). The poet returns to the place of his childhood and, for the first time, sees his whole life laid bare, in complete harmony with alert memory, with vivid volition, and sober reason (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXV, 76ff.):

01.

*These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration [...]
That serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on, –
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.⁸⁵*

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- 1 Jacques Derrida, 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy' in: Harold Coward et al. (eds.), *Derrida and Negative Theology*, Albany: Statue University of New York Press, 1992, p. 57.
 - 2 Annibale Bugnini: *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990, pp. 773f.
 - 3 See Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence' in: Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *Selected Writings* vol. 1, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1996, pp. 249ff.; for Derrida's critical reading of this text, see 'Force of Law. The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' in: Drucilla Cornell (ed.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 4–67. For a discussion of Derrida's reading of Benjamin, see Anselm Haverkamp (ed.): *Gewalt und Gerechtigkeit. Derrida-Benjamin*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994.
 - 4 'Es gibt nur Vergebung [...] wo es Unverzeihbares gibt. Was so viel bedeutet wie, dass das Vergeben sich als gerade Unmögliches ankündigt muss. Es kann nur möglich werden, indem es Unmögliches tut.' Jacques Derrida and Michel Wieviorka, 'Jahrhundert der Vergebung. Verzeihen ohne Macht – unbedingt und jenseits der Souveränität' in: *Lettre International* 48 (2000), pp. 10–18. [No English translation available] For a sustained discussion of this paradox with regard to Derrida's reading of the Apocalypse and of Benjamin, see Johannes Hoff, 'Fundamentaltheologische Implikationen der Apokalyptik. Annäherung an den Begriff der Offenbarung ausgehend von Derridas dekonstruktiver Lektüre der Apokalypse des Johannes' in: *Theologie der Gegenwart* 45 (2002), pp. 42–51.
 - 5 Cf. Gerbern S. Oegema: *Zwischen Hoffnung und Gericht. Untersuchungen zur Rezeption der Apokalyptik im frühen Christentum und Judentum*, Neunkirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999, pp. 165–84, 360.
 - 6 'As soon as one no longer knows who speaks or writes, the text becomes apocalyptic.' Derrida, 'Apocalyptic Tone', p. 57. For an interpretation of the meaning of the messenger and guide in Dante, see Romano Guardini: *Dantes Göttliche Komödie. Ihre philosophischen und religiösen Grundgedanken (Vorlesungen)*, Mainz: Matthias-Günewald-Verlag, 1998, pp. 275–331.
 - 7 See Derrida, 'Apocalyptic Tone', pp. 65–67, 74f.; Ulrich B. Müller: *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Gütersloh/Würzburg, 1984, pp. 93f., 125,

282; Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza: *Das Buch der Offenbarung: Vision einer gerechten Welt*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994, pp. 67f., 74, 106f. On Dante und Derrida see Francis J. Ambrosio: *Dante and Derrida: Face to Face*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007. Ambrosio's reading of Dante focuses on Derrida's 'aporia of forgiveness' without giving much thought to Derrida's reading of the Apocalypse of Saint John. The following reception of Derrida puts his negative thinking in brackets, based on a radicalised notion of the poststructuralist *epophé*, which I have discussed elsewhere in greater depth: Johannes Hoff, 'Mystagogy Beyond Onto-theology. Looking back to Post-modernity with Nicholas of Cusa' in: Arne Moritz (ed.), *A Companion to Nicholas of Cusa*, Leiden: Brill, 2013.

8 Cf. Michael Robinson, 'From Purgatory to Inferno: Beckett and Dante Revisited' in: *Journal of Beckett Studies* 5 (1979), pp. 69–82.

9 Cf. Derrida, 'Force of Law', pp. 26–27.

10 Heinrich Heine: *Germany, a Winter's Tale*, trans. Jakov Rabinovich, Invisible Books, 2007, p. 9.

11 Dante Alighieri and Kurt Flasch: *Commedia und Einladungsband. I. Commedia. II Einladung, Dante zu lesen*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer – third Kindle edn., 2011, vol. II, loc. 8563ff. For those who read German, I have kept the author's references to this edition whenever he uses them ('loc.' refers to the Kindle edition cited above. The author cites Kurt Flasch's translation of the *Divine Comedy* and makes sporadic references to Robin Kirkpatrick's English translation: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, London: Penguin – Kindle edn., 2012). My translation follows Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's translation (*The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Electronic Classics Series of Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

12 Cf. Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno*, Canto XVII, note 4f. (loc. 14057).

13 'Wo geht [...] schon so zu, dass ein Ungeheuer herabstürzt und nicht ankommt?' ['Where, after all, does a monster fall without ever hitting ground?'] Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, p. 89.

14 Hoff, 'Fundamentaltheologische Implikationen der Apokalyptik', pp. 50f. On the genre of fantastic literature see Tzvetan Todorov: *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975, pp. 24–74. On the apocalyptic traits of the *Comedy*, see also Ronald B. Herzman, 'Dante and the Apocalypse' in: R.K. Emmerson (ed.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992, pp. 398–413.

15 Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, p. 275.

16 Cf. also Herzman, 'Dante and the Apocalypse', p. 412. Unlike Flasch in his 'Einladung, Dante zu lesen', Herzman rejects modern attempts to project Dante's historical-realist position in the first book of the *De Monarchia* back into the *Comedy* – and does so with sound reason. Similarly, he also rejects Kenelm Foster's argument (for which Flasch also has sympathies) that *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* deal with our fate on earth, while the *Paradiso* would be about our celestial destiny. See Kenelm Foster: *The Two Dantes, and Other Studies*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. Instead, Herzman argues, the dramaturgy of the *Divine Comedy* would have the character of 'a poem of conversion [...] ending in the vision of God face to face' (Herzman, p. 403).

17 Cf. Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Introduction* (loc. 492–503).

18 Schelling's interpretation of Dante does more justice to this trait of the *Comedy* which is immune to genre classifications, although he disregards the apocalyptic sources of Dante's text. Instead, he reads it as an anticipation of his own metaphysics of absolute individuality. Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling, 'Über Dante in philosophischer Beziehung' in: Peter Sloterdijk (ed.), *Schelling. Ausgewählt und vorgestellt von Michaela Boenke*, Munich: Diederichs, 1995, pp. 258–68. For a comparison with Hegel see Dante Alighieri and Flasch, *Commedia und Einladungsband*, vol. II; loc. 11174–11247.

19 Herzman, 'Dante and the Apocalypse', p. 407. On Dante's explicit references to Saint John, see Rebecca S. Beal, 'Beatrice in the Sun: A Vision from Apocalypse' in: *Dante Studies* 103 (1985), pp. 57–78.

20 Cf. Derrida, 'Apocalyptic Tone', p. 57; and Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in: *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978., pp. 246ff.

21 Derrida, 'Apocalyptic Tone', p. 65; see also pp. 64–68, 80ff; and Hoff, 'Fundamentaltheologische Implikationen der Apokalyptik', pp. 46–51.

On the meaning of the apocalyptic 'Come' see also Jacques Derrida: *Parages*, Paris: Galilée, 1986, p. 116.

22 Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel: *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975, vol. II, p. 1103.

23 Erich Auerbach: *Dante – Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Mannheim, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 63.

24 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, pp. 1103f.

25 Cf. Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Introduction*, loc. 214–27; and Canto III, notes 1–9 (loc. 13595). *Introduction*, loc. 533ff.; and loc. 684–701; *Inferno*, Canto V, note 88f. (loc. 13694); *Purgatorio*, Canto I, note 31

- (loc. 14754ff); and *Paradiso*, Canto XX, notes 37–72 (loc. 17349ff.).
- 26 Cf. *Inferno*, Canto XV, 100ff. The suspicion among medieval intellectuals that Latini was guilty of sodomy cannot be substantiated.
- 27 Cf. Dante Alighieri and Flasch, *Commedia und Einladungsband*, vol. II, loc. 6651.
- 28 On the reception history, see Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Introduction*, loc. 552–620; and Dante Alighieri and Flasch, *Commedia und Einladungsband*, vol. II, loc. 11127–11173.
- 29 ‘Das Ungeheure dieses Anspruchs fiel damals auf: Dante Urteilt, Gotte, Engel und Teufel führen seinen Spruch aus.’ Dante Alighieri and Flasch, *Commedia und Einladungsband*, vol. II, loc. 7682.
- 30 Cf. Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, pp. 414–431.
- 31 Cf. Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, pp. 449–52.
- 32 Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, 426.
- 33 Cf. Jacques Derrida, ‘How to Avoid Speaking: Denials’ in: Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (eds.), *Derrida and Negative Theology*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 73–142; also Johannes Hoff: *Spiritualität und Sprachverlust. Theologie nach Foucault und Derrida*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999, pp. 286–89.
- 34 Derrida, ‘Apocalyptic Tone’, p. 66.
- 35 Cf. Jacques Derrida: *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- 36 Cf. W. Baumgartner, ‘hlg’ in: *Hebräisches und aramaisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, Leiden, 1958, pp. 182f.; and T. Holtz, ἀποκαλύπτω in: H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Cologne, 1992, 2nd edn., pp. 312–18.
- 37 Derrida, ‘Apocalyptic Tone’, p. 26.
- 38 On the meaning of the rhetoric of conversion for the entire construct of the *Confessions* see Denys Turner: *The Darkness of God. Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, pp. 50–73; on the subject of the *pudenda* of Saint Augustine, cf. Johannes Hoff, ‘Der Heilige Augustinus. Über die Erfindung des abendländischen Christentums in Afrika’ in: *Die Zeit* (53; Schlingensief-Feuilleton, 2009), pp. 30–32 (<http://www.zeit.de/2009/53/Schlingensief-Christentum?page=all>. Accessed 30 September 2013). On the intertextual relationship between the *Comedy* and the *Confessions* with regard to Dante’s *The Banquet* (1.2,13–14): Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio*, Canto XXX, notes 61–63 (loc. 16155ff.).
- 39 In all phases of his thought, Derrida appears to be inspired by this tonality of biblical apocalypticism. His very first publication, an extensive commentary on Husserl’s third supplement to his ‘Crisis’, states in response to his phenomenological teacher’s noematic theory: ‘No doubt [he] would admit that a universal conflagration, a world-wide burning of libraries, or a catastrophe of monuments or “documents” in general would intrinsically ravage bound cultural idealities’. Jacques Derrida: *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., First Bison Book Printing, 1989, p. 94.
- 40 The following paragraph is paraphrasing Hoff, ‘Fundamentaltheologische Implikationen der Apokalyptik’, pp. 117–19.
- 41 The words of Apoc. 5:1 are modelled after the description of a scroll in Ezek. 2:10: ‘...and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe’. Cf. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, pp. 153f.
- 42 Here, Dante also follows in the footsteps of his model Saint John. Cf. *Inferno*, Canto XIV; *Purgatorio*, Canto XXIX; *Paradiso*, Canto IV, 29.
- 43 Cf. Derrida, ‘Apocalyptic Tone’, pp. 56–58.
- 44 Cf. Erhardt Güttgemanns, ‘Die Semiotik des Traums in apokalyptischen Texten am Beispiel von Apokalypse Johannis’ in: *Linguistica Biblica* 59 (1987), pp. 7–54, here pp. 25f.; Schüssler-Fiorenza, ‘Das Buch der Offenbarung: Vision einer gerechten Welt’, pp. 55ff.; Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, pp. 31–73, here p. 54.
- 45 Derrida, ‘Apocalyptic Tone’, p. 61.
- 46 Cf. Sigmund Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; on the ‘canonical dictate’ of the Apocalypse: Güttgemanns, ‘Die Semiotik des Traums’, pp. 20, 39ff.
- 47 Cf. Gershom Scholem: *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York: Schocken Books, 1971.
- 48 Cf. here and on the following: Bernard McGinn, ‘Introduction: John’s Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic Mentality’, in Richard Kenneth Emmerson (ed.): *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1992, pp. 3–19; see also the following essays in the same volume: Aula Frederiksen, ‘Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse’, pp. 20–38; Robert E. Lerner, ‘The Medieval Return of the Thousand-Year Sabbath’, pp. 51–70; Daniel E. Randolph, ‘Joachim of Fiore: Patterns of History in the Apocalypse’, pp. 72–88. On the late medieval and modern reception history of Christian apocalypticism, see Schüssler-Fiorenza, ‘Das Buch der Offenbarung: Vision einer gerechten Welt’, pp. 26–28, 30–33, 157; and Art Konrad, ‘Apokalyptik/Apokalypsen, VI. Mittelalter’, in: *TRE III*, pp. 275–80.
- 49 Derrida shares this scepticism with his Catholic contemporary Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). Cf. Joseph Ratzinger: *Die Geschichtstheologie des hl. Bonaventura*, Munich, 1959.
- 50 Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, XXII, 30.
- 51 Cf. Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio XXX*, notes 10–21 (loc. 16117ff.).
- 52 Cf. Henri de Lubac: *Corpus mysticum. Eucharistie und Kirche im Mittelalter. Eine historische Studie*, trans. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Einsiedeln, 1969.
- 53 ‘Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul and perfecta possessio.’ Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius: *Philosophiae Consolatio*, ed. L. Bieler, Turnhout: 1957, V, 6.4; see also: Johannes Hoff: *The Analogical Turn. Re-thinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013, pp. 133ff. (forthcoming).
- 54 Cf. Erik Peterson: *Der erste Brief and die Korinther und Paulus-Studien*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, Würzburg: Echter 2006, pp. 48–50; also, Erik Peterson: *Ekklesia. Studien zum altchristlichen Kirchenbegriff*, ed. Barbara Nichtweis and Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, Würzburg: Echter, 2010.
- 55 For this reason, the modern tendency to elevate Hegel’s notion of God’s self-revelation to the status of a key concept of Christian theology is very problematic. Johannes Hoff, ‘The Rise and the Fall of the Kantian Paradigm of Modern Theology’, in: Conor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism*, London: SCM-Press, 2010, pp. 167–96.
- 56 Cf. Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio*, Canto XX, note 19f. (loc. 15728); *Purgatorio XIX*, note, 16f. (loc. 16046ff.); and *Paradiso I*, note 1f. (loc. 16345).
- 57 Cf. Charles Williams: *The Figure of Beatrice. A Study in Dante*, London: Faber and Faber, 1943.
- 58 ‘Das sich in der Schlussvision offenbarende Menschengesicht im zweiten Kreis der Trinität ist im Grunde “der” Inhalt der Dichtung und

- von dorthier erhält rücklaufend das Ganze seinen Sinn.' Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, p. 330.
- 59 Cf. Justin Martyr, *The First and Second Apologies*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Leslie William Barnard, New York: Paulist Press, 1997, I, 46. Dante repeatedly deals with the embattled theological question of whether the unbaptised can reach heaven. However, he does not hesitate to place them in heaven whenever his poetic intuition calls for it. See *Inferno*, Canto IV, 34ff.; *Purgatorio*, Canto III, 40ff.; VII, 25ff.; XXI, 18; XXII, 67ff.; *Paradiso*, Canto IV, 67ff.; XIX, 70ff.
- 60 Namely Nicholas III (1277–80; *Inferno*, Canto XIX, 70–71), Boniface VIII (1294–1303; *Inferno*, Canto XIX, 52–57, *passim*), Clement V (1305–14; *Inferno*, Canto XIX, 82–87), John XXII (*Paradiso*, Canto XVIII, 133–36), and (presumably) Celestine V (1294, *Inferno*, Canto III, 59–60). See Dante Alighieri and Flasch, *Commedia und Einladungsband*, vol. II, loc. 6970ff. Only a few popes reach purgatory, among them Martin IV, who died in Vernaccia in 1285 after an excessive consumption of eels (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXIV, 22–24). Only the unnamed logician Peter of Spain (John XXI, 1276–77; *Paradiso*, Canto XII, 34–35) reaches heaven directly.
- 61 Cf. Michel Foucault, 'Das Trugbild Gottes' in: Pravu Mazumdar (ed.), *Foucault*, Munich, 1997, pp. 134ff.
- 62 Cf. Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, p. 377.
- 63 Cf. Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Introduction* (loc. 321ff.).
- 64 On the Christian notion of 'maturation' as 'an event within childhood', cf. John Milbank, 'Fictioning Things: Gift and Narrative' in: *Religion & Literature* 37, no. 3 (2005), pp. 1–35.
- 65 'Sie sind weder durch Zwecke und Pflichten gebunden, noch durch die Unterscheidung von Innenwelt und Umwelt, Wirklichkeit und Traum eingeschränkt.' Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, pp. 225; 351; 467ff.
- 66 See Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenners*, Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1961.
- 67 Cf. among others *Purgatorio*, Canto XXI, 103ff.; XXII, 1ff.; *Paradiso*, Canto VII, 10ff.; XIV, 67ff.; XV, 55ff.; XXI, 1ff.; XXVII, 1ff.
- 68 Kirkpatrick translates this passage as follows: 'You, knowing, love and smile on your own being.' By contrast, Flasch, more prosaically, speaks of a 'Lachen' [laugh].
- 69 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common, Penn State University, 1999, p. 35. Cf. 'The Antichrist' in *ibid.*, aphorisms 29 and 41.
- 70 Western modernity took little notice of Dante's theory that 'For evermore the man in whom is springing thought upon thought, removes from him the mark, because the force of one the other weakens' (*Purgatorio*, Canto V, 15). It was not until the 20th century that the contemplative roots of Christianity were rediscovered: 'The call to meditation, for the early Fathers of the Church, was a call to purity of heart and that is what innocence is [...]. Meditation leads us to pure clarity – clarity of vision, clarity of understanding and clarity of love – a clarity that comes from simplicity'. John Main: *The Way of Unknowing. Expanding Spiritual Horizons Through Meditation*, New York: Crossroads, 1990, pp. 19f.
- 71 Cf. Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, p. 388; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 382–415.
- 72 Cf. Ludwig Feuerbach: *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 15; and Ulrike Kienzle: *...dass wissend würde die Welt! Religion und Philosophie in Richard Wagners Musikdramen*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005, pp. 30–33.
- 73 According to Dante, the Empyrean is both a sphere surrounding all of the universe and an unextended point in God's mind (*Paradiso*, Canto XVII, 109–20). Cf. Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, pp. 133, 419–21.
- 74 Cf. *Paradiso*, Canto II, 19–51; XXX, 100ff.; XXXIII, 79–96.
- 75 On the habitual character of sin as ossified misconduct, cf. *Inferno*, Canto XI.
- 76 On the incompatibility of medieval, Augustinian notions of freedom with modernity's latently gnostic (Kantian) concept of autonomy, cf. John Milbank, 'Darkness and Silence. Evil and the Western Legacy' in: John D. Caputo (ed.), *The Religious*, Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2002, pp. 277–300.
- 77 For a deconstruction of the tendency in classical modernism to see Ugolino's desperation as an act of heroism (still visible in Kurt Flasch), see Robin Kirkpatrick and Vittorio Montemaggi, 'Theology and Literature: Reflections on Dante and Shakespeare', in Zoe Lehmann et al. (eds.), *Theology and Literature after Post-modernity*, London/New York: T & T Clark, 2014 (forthcoming).
- 78 Cf. Terry Eagleton: *On Evil*, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 120f.
- 79 Cf. Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie*, p. 237.
- 80 For this reason, Dante gives those who live in hell phantom-like bodies (cf. *Inferno*, Canto III, 31f.).
- 81 Jacques Le Goff: *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. For a critique, cf. Brian Patrick McGuire, 'Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change' in: *Viator* 20 (1989), pp. 61–84.
- 82 Cf. here Charles Taylor: *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
- 83 According to Dante, the Cross holds the musical universe together (cf. *Paradiso*, Canto XIV, 82–126; *Paradiso*, Canto I, 73ff.).
- 84 Dante illustrates this serene attitude towards the beauty of earthly hierarchies with the example of Jacob (Gen. 25), who was given preference over his elder brother based on the colour of his hair alone (cf. *Paradiso*, Canto XXXII, 49ff.; III, 67ff.; and VI, 112ff.).
- 85 'Brother, our will is quieted by virtue of charity, that makes us wish alone for what we have, nor gives us thirst for more.' *Paradiso*, Canto III, 67ff.
- 86 William Wordsworth, *Auswahl aus seinem Werk: Englisch und Deutsch*. www.william-wordsworth.de. Accessed 30 September 2013.