

# DANTE'S DIVINE COMEDY

## AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN RELIGION

FLORENCE, ITALY – MAY 18-25, 2025



A study of the Divine Comedy for all levels of awareness, from beginner to familiar. Limited to 25 participants.



### READING DANTE TODAY

In the very first line of Dante's *Commedia*, the poet tells us that the journey he now begins is not peculiar to him alone; the journey is not his, but rather "ours." Life and Death are for everyone. Love is for everyone; Justice is for everyone; Poetry is for everyone; Hope is for everyone. Dante is for everyone:

Many know the story of Dante the medieval pilgrim, who undergoes a mid-life crisis when he realizes he is lost and bewildered. He is told that the only hope of finding his way again is to learn to speak with the dead by journeying through their own realms, seeing their faces, attending to their life stories, and then deciding: Who are you? Who do you wish to treat as your neighbor? Which story do you want to tell about yourself and hear repeated back to you by others – forever?

Part of our study will include Dante's place in time, the dynamic *sitz im leben* of the late 13th and early 14th centuries in Tuscany. It existed on the heels of the Black Death, bubonic plague that had decimated 60% of the entire population. Yet it was also witness to the lively emergence of perspective in art, first imagined by Cimabue and achieved with the brilliant compositions of Giotto and Duccio of Siena. Dante is universally acclaimed as one of humanity's greatest poets; his words are gripping, and the vitality of his images have become the bedrock of both Christian preachers and popular moral imagination.

But there is a problem, isn't there? Dante wrote in 14th century Italy. But we cannot read the poem now as he wrote it then, even if we know Italian well as a language and understand clearly what his own personal convictions were about religion, politics, psychology and the human imagination. What if your view of reality is fundamentally different from his in important ways?

What if, for example, you do not believe in an afterlife of punishments and rewards, at least not literally? What if, despite Dante's keen eye for recognizing the tangles and

struggles of moral choices, the worm of doubt still nags you? If one is to trouble oneself at all about human freedom and responsibility, should conscience not be honored unconditionally as its own reward, a value in itself regardless of consequences in this life or any other? Both Plato and Aristotle thought precisely that, but each struggled to imagine the outcome of a life lived virtuously simply for its own sake. Like every Christian, indeed like all the children of Abraham, Dante saw in scripture a hope that seems missing in humanistic philosophy and ethics, a hope born of Love. The Christian Gospels offered the story of a man who preached hope to those who were neither heroes nor saints, a hope offered to sinners as “forgiveness,” the “good news of salvation.” To read Dante’s *Commedia* with understanding, one must learn to read it as an extension of the original Gospels, but one told on the authority of the poet’s personal experience in a liminal dimension rather than that of ecclesial tradition alone. In this way, the *Commedia* represents the advent of a personal religion, pointing toward the transformation of contemporary Christianity through a return to the Gospel proclamation of mutual acceptance and its prophetic vision of the dignity of all persons, both human and divine, in the gift of freedom in which one must love their neighbor – where all are responsible to all, for all: “in the Love which moves the Sun and all the other stars.”

Our time together in this pilgrimage is intended to help explore Dante poem as questions for human freedom to explore together and for human responsibility to decide personally so as to keep hope alive, for ourselves in compassionate companionship with every other human being.

### SCHEDULE

Sunday, May 18, 2025 – arrival, evening welcome reception at the Orto dei Medici Hotel

Monday, May 19, 2025 — morning class at the Medici del Orto, afternoon tour

Tuesday, May 20, 2025 — morning class, afternoon free, pre-prandial, Orto dei Medici

Wednesday, May 21, 2025 — morning tour, afternoon class

Thursday, May 22, 2025 — morning class, afternoon free, pre-prandial, Orto dei Medici

Friday, May 23, 2025 — morning tour, afternoon class

Saturday, May 24, 2025 — morning class, afternoon free, evening group farewell dinner

Sunday, May 25, 2025 — departure

## **TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

**The tour is sponsored and organized by Gladdening Light Inc, a spiritual arts nonprofit, and The Renaissance Company, LLC (hereafter the “Organizers”).**

The cost of the tour is **\$3,975.00** per person. **All rates are exclusive of airfare.** Prices include hotel accommodations, double occupancy; depending on availability, some single rooms may be available at an additional fee of \$1,225.00. Breakfast each day in the hotel, the welcome reception on the first evening and the farewell dinner on the final evening are included. **All other meals are at the expense of participants.** Program entrance fees and guided tours by the leaders are also included.

Ground transportation and hotel accommodations prior to the official start of the tour at the hotel or after its conclusion are the separate responsibility of each participant. Those who wish to book additional accommodations before or after the start of the program should contact the hotel directly.

**Participants are urged to make reservations using the reservation form at their earliest convenience to guarantee a place on the tour, as space is limited. A deposit of \$975.00 per person is due with the registration form. The deposit covers the cost of the hotel room block until final payment and is non-refundable after September 30, 2024, except in the case of tour cancellation by the Organizers due to insufficient enrollment whereby all deposits will be refunded.**

## **CANCELLATION POLICY**

**Cancellation for any reason after final payment, due no later than on February 21, 2025, or no-show at the start of the tour will result in forfeiture of the full cost of the tour. The Organizers reserve the right to make exceptions at its sole discretion.**

**The Organizers strongly recommend that participants purchase trip cancellation insurance from a reputable vendor of their own choosing.**

**All tours are offered on condition of sufficient enrollment. If the offer of a tour must be withdrawn at any time due to insufficient enrollment, all deposits and payments will be refunded, and this will constitute full satisfaction of all claims by participants on the Organizers.**

## **RESPONSIBILITY**

The Organizers and its representatives act only as agents in making arrangements for hotels, transportation, sightseeing, restaurants or any other services in connection with the itinerary, and they will exercise reasonable care in making such arrangements. However, they do not assume any liability whatsoever for any injury, damage, loss, accident or delay to person and property due to any act of default of any hotel, carrier, restaurant, company, or person rendering any of the services included in the tour.

The tickets, coupons, tariffs, rules, or contracts currently in use by any carrier, hotel, restaurant or other rendering service shall constitute the sole contract between such contractor and the tour member. Baggage and personal effects are the sole responsibility of the owners at all times. Further, The Renaissance Company, GladdeningLight and its representative agents accept no responsibility for any damage or delay due to sickness, pilferage, labor disputes, machinery breakdown, quarantine, government restraints, weather, or any other cause beyond their personal control.

The right is reserved to cancel or change itineraries or substitute services without notice, and to decline to accept any tour member at any time. No carrier shall be responsible for any act, omission or event during the time passengers are not on board its own conveyance.

In view of the statutory or contractual limitations which may apply to personal injury or property damage losses, the purchase of accident and baggage insurance is strongly recommended, as is trip cancellation insurance.

Finally, the Organizers bear no responsibility whatsoever for any travel arrangements made by individual travelers that do not form part of the published itinerary. Extensions of stay, hotel accommodations beyond those indicated in the program, early arrivals or departures, hotel charges not included in the basic room rate including but not limited to telephone, beverages and meals, and hotel services, and all other arrangements undertaken at the initiative of individual participants are their sole responsibility. No change can be made in group plans or schedules to accommodate such arrangements.