

### **Pope Benedict XV, *In Praeclara Summorum*, 1921**

- I. Indeed, while there is no lack of great Catholic poets who combine the useful with the enjoyable, Dante has the singular merit that while he fascinates the reader with wonderful variety of pictures, with marvelously lifelike coloring, with supreme expression and thought, he draws him also to the love of Christian knowledge, and all know how he said openly that he composed his poem to bring to all "vital nourishment." And we know now too how, through God's grace, even in recent times, many who were far from, though not averse to Jesus Christ, and studied with affection the *Divina Commedia*, began by admiring the truths of the Catholic Faith and finished by throwing themselves with enthusiasm into the arms of the Church.
- II. That is his great glory, to be the Christian poet, to have sung with Divine accents those Christian ideals which he so passionately loved in all the splendour of their beauty, feeling them intimately and making them his life. Such as dare to deny to Dante this award and reduce all the religious content of the *Divina Commedia* to a vague ideology without basis of truth fail to see the real characteristic of the poet, the foundation of all his other merits.
- III. Love and tend the noble poet whom We do not hesitate to call the most eloquent singer of the Christian idea. The more profit you draw from study of him the higher will be your culture, irradiated by the splendours of truth, and the stronger and more spontaneous your devotion to the Catholic Faith.

### **Pope Francis, speech given in May 2015, 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dante's birth**

- I. Later Blessed Paul VI, who had the figure and work of Dante particularly at heart, dedicated the very beautiful Apostolic Letter *Altissimi cantus*, at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council — exactly 50 years ago — to him. He pointed out the fundamental features, which are always present in Dante's works, with great sensibility and depth. Paul VI with strength and intensity affirmed that "Dante is ours! Ours, meaning of the Catholic faith" (n. 9). So much so that at the end of the Dante's work, Paul VI clearly stated that "The aim of the *Comedy* is primarily practical and transformative. It does not only seek to be beautiful and morally good poetry but effectively able to change man radically leading him from chaos to wisdom, from sin to holiness, from poverty to happiness, from contemplating the horrors of hell to the beatitude of paradise" (n. 17). He then quoted the important passage from the Poet's letter to Can Grande della Scala: "the purpose of the whole as well as of the part is to bring those living in this life from the state of misery, to lead them to the state of bliss" (n. 17).
- II. Dante is therefore a prophet of hope, a herald of humanity's possible redemption and liberation, of profound change in every man and woman, of all of humanity. He invites us to regain the lost and obscured meaning of our human journey and to hope to see again the bright horizon which shines in the full dignity of the human person. Honouring Dante Alighieri, as Paul VI previously invited us to do, we can be enriched by his experience to pass through the many dark woods still widespread in our land and to complete happily our pilgrimage through history in order to arrive at the goal dreamt of and yearned for by every man and woman: "the Love that moves the sun and all the other stars" (*Par.* XXXIII, 145).