

Dante's medieval masterpiece still pierces hearts seven centuries later

One of Western civilisation's greatest literary works, penned by Italy's most distinguished poet, has stood the test of time to be essential reading in the modern world, according to Italianist Professor John Kinder.

The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri is considered by historians and linguists alike as one of the most important poems of the Middle Ages, as well as the greatest literary work published in the Italian language.

A years-long student of Dante, Professor Kinder, who is an expert in Italian language and culture and author of the first digitised version of the history of the Italian language, believes the Divine Comedy transcends times.

Completed in 1320, the poem is divided into three parts, Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, in what Professor Kinder describes as "an exploration of the human heart".

"Dante is searching for a way of making sense of things – his own life, the world around him and the belief systems he has inherited," Professor Kinder said.

"He asks the Big Questions and offers answers that provoke us out of our modern complacency."

Professor Kinder will break open the Divine Comedy and its relevance to the modern world in an event to commemorate the 700th Anniversary of Dante's death.

Il Sommo Poeta: A Commemoration of the 700th Anniversary of the Death of Dante Alighieri will be hosted by Australian Catholic University in conjunction with the Italian Cultural Institute on March 25, marked by the Italian government since 2020 as National Dante Day in honour of the esteemed poet.

The Consul General of Italy, Andrea De Felip, and the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Sydney, Lillo Guarneri, will be presenting for this important event.

Special copies of Divine Comedy printed in 1820 will also be on display.

Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, Lillo Guarneri, said the Western world was indebted to Dante's brilliance.

"Dante's greatness lies in his versatility and, on the occasion of Dante Day 2022, this symposium will certainly contribute to rediscovering and highlighting the debt that Western and other cultures owe to his works," Mr Guarneri said.

"After seven centuries, Dante speaks to our Heart and Spirit, and propels them into a dimension acutely needed nowadays."

Within the Catholic Church, Dante has also been revered as an exemplary apologist.

In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI called the Divine Comedy "a treasure of Catholic teaching" that also inspired the Pontiff's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), while Pope Francis has called Dante Alighieri 'a profit for hope and a witness to the innate yearning for the infinite present in the human heart.'

ACU Vice-President, Fr Anthony Casamento csma, said the Divine Comedy was quintessential reading for students and staff of not only a Catholic university, but all those interested in western culture.

"The Catholic university is, at the heart, bound to the cause of truth about the nature of God, man and nature," Fr Casamento said.

"This without a doubt was also at the heart of Dante's poems, particularly the Divine Comedy, which explores the nature of the human person and love.

"Australian Catholic University is delighted to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the death of one of the greatest poets of all time."

Professor John Kinder will give the keynote at *Il Sommo Poeta: A Commemoration of the 700th Anniversary of the Death of Dante Alighieri*:

Dante's Divine Comedy: a medieval masterpiece and our modern search for meaning

Friday 25th March

1.30pm to 5.00pm AEDT

ACU North Sydney Campus

Ramsay Lounge, Caroline Chisholm House

Level 11, 33 Berry Street, North Sydney

Professor John Kinder is available for interview.

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