



Dante and the Blessed Virgin

Ralph McNerny

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Dante and the Blessed Virgin is distinguished philosopher Ralph McInerny's eloquent reading of one of western literature's most famous works by a Catholic writer. The book provides Catholic readers new to Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (or *Commedia*) with a concise companion volume. McInerny argues that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the key to Dante. She is behind the scenes at the very beginning of the *Commedia*, and she is found at the end in the magnificent closing cantos of the *Paradiso*. McInerny also discusses Dante's *Vita Nuova*, where Mary is present as the object of the young Beatrice's devotion.

McInerny draws from a diverse group of writers throughout this book, including Plato, Aristotle, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, and George Santayana, among others. It is St. Thomas, however, to whom McInerny most often turns, and this book also provides an accessible introduction to Thomistic moral philosophy focusing on the appetites, the ordering of goods, the distinction between the natural and the supernatural orders, the classification of capital vices and virtues, and the nature of the theological virtues. This engagingly written book will serve as a source of inspiration and devotion for anyone approaching Dante's work for the first time as well as those who value the work of Ralph McInerny.

"Dante was a literary genius with a profound understanding of St. Thomas Aquinas and the *philosophia perennis* that structured and permeated the *Divina Commedia*. Who better to help us get beyond the (brilliant) surface to the depths of Dante than the most literarily genial of Thomas' twentieth (and twenty-first) century disciples, the indefatigable Ralph McInerny? Dante needed guides, from Vergil to Beatrice, to reach the summit of *Paradiso*. Fortunately, we have Ralph McInerny to accompany us on the same journey."

--Fr. Joseph Fessio, S.J., Founder and Editor, Ignatius Press

"Weaving together poetry, philosophy and theology, Ralph McInerny shows that 'the Blessed Virgin Mary is the key to Dante.' Starting with the *Vita Nuova* and the beginning of the *Divine Comedy*, this becomes ever more explicit throughout the great poem, till the magnificent closing cantos of the *Paradiso*. The book is beautifully written, making sense of every step, however complex at times, of the great journey to the gate of heaven described by Dante in the *Commedia*, drawing on Scripture, on Aquinas, on philosophers like Aristotle, on a medley of modern and contemporary writers, with immense learning, always worn lightly and made easily accessible. Dominant are themes that concern everyone, such as love or happiness, are treated with freshness and clarity so the reader is made to feel he or she is discovering them anew. The total effect is joy induced by the incredible wealth of content of this little book and by the light it sheds on so many vital issues." --Thomas De Koninck, Laval University

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