

Winter 2015 History & Heritage -- #1

Death of Dante --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 221-229)

This event, the passing of the medieval era's magisterial poet (d. 1321), coincided with "a time of troubles" spelling doom for the "Age of Faith"? It was a century of wars, plague, the collapse of feudalism before mighty monarchs and commercial interests, and the descent of free Italian cities into chaotic dictatorships. Most troubling to the poet, the glorious medieval synthesis—faith and reason, theology and philosophy, church and state, Christianity and civilization—was breaking apart.

The Divine Comedy --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 221-229)

This poetic trilogy, Dante Alighieri's magnum opus, ranks with Virgil's *Aeneid* among Western literary treasures? The masterpiece can be read on two levels, according to the poet's own estimate: directly, it addresses the state of souls in the afterlife; indirectly, the moral paths men freely choose which end, fittingly, in blessing or cursing. Thus, in keeping with the medieval ideal of synthesis, Dante illumines the connections between heaven and earth, between men as they are in time and will be in eternity.

Renaissance Humanism --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 221-229)

This historic movement in W. Europe, beginning around 1400 in Italy, boasted a rebirth of civilization after centuries of alleged medieval underachievement? The movement gained momentum when Constantinople fell to the Turks (1453), spurring westward migration of Greek scholars who in turn revived interest in classical letters. Thus, what was reborn was first a fascination with ancient pagan geniuses, but also a higher estimation than medievals granted of man's mental and moral powers.

The Dignity of Man --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 221-229)

This grand oration, delivered by the Italian nobleman Pico della Mirandola in Rome in 1486, stands as the quintessential manifesto of Renaissance humanism? God, said Pico, had vested man not merely with mind and spirit but free will, by which he may "fashion [himself] in whatever shape [he] shalt prefer," whether "brutish" or "divine." Like his fellow humanists, Pico concedes too much to fallen man's moral ability, underestimating the ever present reality and power of original sin.

Pico della Mirandola --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 221-229)

This Italian scholar (1463--1494), the epitome of the Renaissance humanist, disturbed Rome in 1486 with his challenge to debate any of his publicly posted 900 questions? Young, rich, handsome, and cocky, the nobleman on the same occasion (Rome, 1486) delivered his oration *The Dignity of Man*, a tribute to man's near-angelic status and his often heroic exertions of mind, spirit, and will. He was accused of heresy by one pope (Innocent VIII) and cleared of guilt by another (Alexander VI).