



## PRESS RELEASE

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### *Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York Celebrates the Genius of Dante, the Great Italian Poet Who Unified Italy through Language Dante 700!*

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*

The Italian Heritage and Culture Committee - New York, Inc. (IHCC-NY) celebrates the genius of Dante Alighieri, the great medieval poet and philosopher. On the afternoon of March 25, a reading of excerpts from the *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*) will be presented at the Dante Statue at Dante Park, positioned in front of Lincoln Center at 63rd Street and Broadway. The John D. Calandra Institute, CUNY, will be the site of a Dante symposium later in the day.

The New York events follow the Italian government's designation in 2020 of an annual national day dedicated to the poet, known as the "Father of the Italian language," as proposed by the Italian Minister of Culture, Dario Franceschini. March 25th is thought to be the date for the start of the journey in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. This anticipated the 2021 700th anniversary of Dante's death with numerous commemorative events among educational and cultural institutions, including the Dante Societies, in Italy and worldwide.

Dante's importance includes his being the first to use the Florentine vernacular in a major literary work, rather than in Latin, which had been accessible to only the well-educated. Dante set a precedent that later Italian writers, such as Boccaccio and Tasso, followed. This was an incredible act, which enabled a wider audience among the populous, and, even more importantly, established his Italian as the accepted national language, unifying the people of Italy across diverse regions and dialects.

His *Divina Commedia* with Dante's journey through *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, guided first by Virgil, the ancient Roman poet, and then by Beatrice, his idealized love, takes the reader through his epic philosophical poem, considered to be the greatest poem of all times.

Of note, the journey of Dante's sculpture in New York mirrored the arduous journey throughout the *Divina Commedia*, through the *Inferno*. Initiated by Carlo Barsotti, Editor, *Il Progresso*, created by the Sicilian sculptor Ettore Ximenes, and funded by NY Italians, the artwork faced several controversies, including its non-acceptance by the NY Mayor, Parks Commissioner, Municipal Arts Commission and a divided Italian community. It languished first on the docks in Hoboken, NJ, and then in storage for almost a decade, waiting for its redemption to be on public view. Ultimately resolved, it was dedicated in 1921, but only through the perseverance of its creators and Italians in NY and Rome.

In saluting the efforts of the IHCC's Dante Day Planning Committee spearheaded by its chairman Uff. Mico Delianova Licastro, to honor Dante, Comm. Joseph Sciame, president/chair, stated: "This first and early celebration of Dante in New York City was well thought out and appreciation is extended to the IHCC Board of Directors, who annually help create such events in enhancing heritage and culture. In 2021 with Dante, there is no better thematic honoree!"