

# Pro-state social philosophy in the works of Dante

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## Pro-state social philosophy in the works of Dante

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), one of the most famous artists in European culture, is best known as author of *The Divine Comedy*. In this book he described a vision of religious and artistic worlds eschatological ideas of Christianity - Heaven, Purgatory and Hell.<sup>1</sup> Dante's work is the link between the ideas of the Middle Ages and the emerging ideas of the Renaissance (and the whole era of modernity). *Treaty Monarchy* (Latin *De Monarchia*) was written in Latin, although Dante has already made some in Italian, such as *Divine Comedy*. Dante Alighieri mean primarily the problem of legitimacy because of the then secular, universal monarchy, which under the rule of the Emperor. *Treaty monarchy* was probably in 1312, during the expedition of Henry VII to Rome, the applicant for the legitimacy of the secular government.<sup>2</sup> This work was condemned in 1329, and since 1554 years the church was on the Index.

The main problems of this work, expressed in his three books of three theses: (1) for the happiness of the world is needed of the temporal monarchy, (2) Roman people gained the right path right to rule, (3) authority of the Roman Emperor is directly dependent on God.

These arguments are framed in opposition to the claims, then the universal Christian church (which is still two centuries before the events of the Reformation). Dante, in particular, take issue with the Bull of Pope Boniface VIII (his pontificate in the years 1294 to 1303). The contents of this document briefly said that the powers that must be subordinate to the spiritual power. Dante Alighieri is set so intellectually in opposition to the papal claim that the powers that be must of necessity be spiritual. Undoubtedly, the position of secular Dante pierces his biographical experience. Italian author came into conflict with the Church, in opposition to the papal influence in Italic Tuscany. This episode ended badly for the author, because he had to go into exile. Thesis that it is temporal and secular authority has supremacy over spiritual authority is treated as an expression of his patriotism, national.<sup>3</sup>

Dante defines the concept of a secular monarchy, "the temporal monarchy, which is also called the Empire (Empire), is the sole power extending to all creatures in time or in all things

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1 Por. Dante Alighieri, *Boska Komedia* [The Divine Comedy], Kraków 2003

2 M. Barbi, *Dante* [Dante], Warszawa 1965, s. 65

3 Ibidem., s. 71-72

subordinate to the extent of time."<sup>4</sup>

Dante takes a similar understanding of the secular state in the context of the Middle Ages, as Marsilius of Padua (c. 1275 – c. 1342). By analyzing the concept of temporal monarchy, Dante Alighieri impressed with the achievements of the Roman Empire in antiquity. This is indeed the ideal of a secular state, which in Dante's work remains unsurpassed standard of building proper, the relationship between a strong state-empire, and subordinated his religion.

Dante also sees here an even older, past political entities, such as the Assyrian empire, Egyptian, Persian (both under the rule of Cyrus and Darius), Macedonian (with the spindle role of Alexander the Great).<sup>5</sup> But all these empires had some "defects". The boundaries of territorial impacts of these countries, although uncommon, they were too small. Duration of these empires was also too ephemeral and transitory. Only the Roman Empire, its size, power and duration of existence, it was by an Italian author, the absolute ideal of a secular monarchy. In the author's historical and philosophical reflections can be seen that Dante has for the great respect the intellectual fortitude and strength during Roman culture. Says: "Roman people gained control in a noble struggle, as evidenced by a certificate worthy of belief."<sup>6</sup> In fact, for Dante's important here is also a kind of secular cult of force, legitimations by God's grace.

Dante, therefore, gives the real political relations that prevail in the history, theological power - claims that prevailing at the time the secular empire, is always of necessity "chosen" by God to the universal rule over all earthly affairs (except of course the ecclesiastical state, which the author treats as "generically different" from the secular state).

Thus, Dante is trying to legitimize the rule of secular monarchy. He says (referring to Aristotle's political science) that it must be only one authority, which acts as supreme judge in the multiplicity of relationships and conflicts between different political entities. „Evil is a multitude of governing, and requires a one ruler."<sup>7</sup> Supreme Emperor, the monarch lay full so the role of the supreme tribunal of justice, the arbitrator in all possible disputes over estates. Should not be allowed to rise independently of the Emperor, the center of power. If these conditions are fulfilled it is possible to universal peace, and the world is free from conflicts.

What if, however, that the highest monarch, who has complete authority has bad intentions or not is a righteous ruler? According to Dante, it is not possible such a situation. He proposes the argument that the monarch has the smallest yet, his own desire of all people, for the simple reason - has all the possible temporal goods, therefore, no longer seek to acquire. „Well, the monarch is not

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4 Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia* [Monarchy]..., op. cyt., s. 30.

5 Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia* [Monarchy]..., op. cyt., s. 65-67

6 Ibidem, s. 68

7 Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia* [Monarchy]..., op. cyt., s. 38

anything you could desire, his power goes to the ocean since.”<sup>8</sup> (Here, however, Dante somehow ignores the idea that a ruler could yet ill to deal with people, and ruled the country since it is not governed according the desire to acquire wealth, but just the fear of losing this property).

The discussion appears in Dante's argument that the monarch, though he be lord of all, it also is a minister and minister of all people. As a man, in fact liberated from lust of possession of goods, is to get a higher good - the good of all people in the secular state. This goal makes the supreme ruler, he thinks and acts differently than the rest of subordinate people. Therefore, do not worry about abuse of secular power, but seek to subordinate the other authorities, especially the church, this one the best, the royal power. According to Dante, for there is no better recipe for harmony and social peace in this world than just one ruler of secular governments. Dante wrote in another work - *The Banquet* - "It is clear that the fit would be a kind of helmsman, who taking into account the different circumstances of the world and ordering various essential duties, he served as the universal and irresistible duty of government."<sup>9</sup>

Treaties can be found in his and other arguments, arguing for the existence of a strong secular power. Aside from the argument that "(...) the temporal monarchy, the empire, is essential to ensure good governance in the world.”<sup>10</sup> Dante, as mentioned, mythologizes the Roman Empire, as the best possible secular country, which happened in history. Looking for the various biblical and exegetical arguments that would convince the fact that this other Member (unfortunately ended in his secular existence) was chosen by God to exercise temporal power. It is believed that the fact that Christ was born under the rule of the empire, and that he died on the cross, condemned by the secular judge - Pontius Pilate, must show that God was accepted and that the secular order.<sup>11</sup>

Otherwise, the Messiah would come into the world in such a country, but for example, would choose the place of birth and death of such a state, which would play the role of supreme religious leader, and a mere hypothetical church-state would be the main theater of life of the prophet. Dante also presented similar ideas in his earlier works. „In the Dante's *Banquet* Roman Empire appeared as an historical ideal state, which the poet does not hide his admiration and praise. The emperor, just as authentic politician. The logical consequence of Dante's political assumptions contained in the *Banquet* is to recognize the needs of one universal monarchy, the supreme authority, standing above all other authorities and ensuring social unity.”<sup>12</sup>

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8 Ibidem. s. 40

9 D. Alighieri, *Il Convivio* [The Banquet], IV, VI, 45-80 w: D. Alighieri, *Tutte le opere di Dante Alighieri* [All the works of Dante Alighieri], red. E. Moore, P. Toynbee, Oxford 1904 za: J. Grzybowski, *Miecz i pastorał. Filozoficzny uniwersalizm sporu o charakter władzy: Tomasz z Akwinu i Dante Alighieri* [Sword and crosier.

Universal philosophical dispute about the nature of power. Thomas Aquinas and Dante Alighieri], Kęty 2006, s. 168

10 Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia* [Monarchy]..., op.cyt., s. 35

11 Ibidem, s. 70-71

12 J. Grzybowski, *Miecz i pastorał. Filozoficzny uniwersalizm sporu o charakter władzy* [Sword and crosier. Universal

