

shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man," Gen. 2:23.²¹ "In this likeness," then, could never have been said had there not already been an archetype of this polarity in God—that is to say, of course, *in principle*, for we are not speaking of a composition *in divinis*.²² The Christian doctrine, moreover, like the Indian, envisages an ultimate reunion of the divided principles, there where "there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one [Skr. *ekī-bhūta*] in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).²³ That is where it is no longer a question of this man or that woman, but only of that Universal Man of whom Boehme says that "this champion or lion is no man or woman, but he is both" (*Signatura Rerum* xl.43).

If it be objected, finally, that all this sexual phraseology is a sort of rhetoric and not to be taken literally, we say that while it is not a matter of rhetoric in any "literary" sense, it is a matter of analogy and symbolism: as is explicit in both passages from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* cited above, it is not a question of a man and a woman in fact, nor of any existence, but of the form of being which is "as if it were (*yathā*) that of a man and woman closely embraced." Our whole intention has been to indicate that an adequate symbolism of this sort has been universally employed in the unanimous and orthodox tradition and, more specifically, within the limits of the present article, to show in what like manner it has been employed in the Hindu and Christian forms of the transmitted revelation.

²¹ "All living creatures, having been till then bisexual, were parted asunder, and man with the rest; and so there came to be males on the one part, and likewise females on the other part" (Hermes, *Ib.* 178).

²² Cf. the *Apocalypse of John* (cited by Baynes, tr., *A Coptic Gnostic Treatise*, p. 14); "The Three, the Father, the Mother, and the Son, the perfect Power"; and ŚA VII.15, "All that is declared to be One. For the Mother and the Father and the Child are this all."

²³ [Gal. 3:28 is cited by St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol.* 193.6 ad 2, in illustration of his own statement, "the image of God belongs to both sexes, since it is in the mind, wherein is no sexual distinction"; *Omne quod generatur, generatur ex contrario*, *Sum. Theol.* 145.1 ad 3.]



Two Passages in Dante's *Paradiso*

It has now for some time been fully recognized that Islamic analogies are of singular value for an understanding of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, not only in connection with the basic form of the narrative¹ but as regards the methods by which the theses are communicated.² And this would hold good, entirely apart from the consideration of any problems of "influence" that might be considered from the more restricted point of view of literary history. It has been justly remarked by H. A. Wolfson that the mediæval Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin "philosophical literatures were in fact one philosophy expressed in different languages, translatable almost literally into one another."³ Again, if this is true, it is not merely a result of proximity and influence nor, on the other hand, of a parallel development, but because "Human culture is a unified whole, and in the various cultures one finds the dialects of one spiritual language,"⁴ because "a great universal line of metaphysics is evident among all pro-

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¹ See Miguel Asín y Pelacios, *La Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid, 1919), and the abridged translation by H. Sunderland, *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (London, 1926).

² Luigi Valli, *Il Linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei "Fedeli d'Amore"* (Rome, 1928); René Guénon, *L'Esotérisme de Dante* (Paris, 1925); *idem*, "Le Langage secret de Dante et des 'Fidèles d'Amour,'" and "Fidèles d'Amour" et 'Cours d'Amour,'" *Le Voile d'Isis*, XXXVII (1932), and XXXVIII (1933). Indian and Zoroastrian comparisons have been made in Angelo de Gubernatis, "Dante e l'India," *Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana*, III (1889), and "Le Type indien de Lucifer chez Dante," *Actes du X^e Congrès des Orientalistes*; and J. J. Modi, *Dante Papers: Viraf, Adamnan, and Dante, and Other Papers* (London, 1914). Many of the problems are bound up with those of the history of the Templars and Rosicrucians.

³ *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Cambridge, Mass. (1934), I, 10.

⁴ Alfred Jeremias, *Handbuch der altorientalischen Geisteskultur* (Berlin, 1929), p. x.

ples."⁵ Without going too far afield in time or space—and one could go at least as far as Sumeria and China—it will suffice for present purposes to say that what is affirmed by Wolfson for Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin will be of equal validity if Sanskrit is added to the list.

In recent years I have repeatedly drawn attention to the remarkable doctrinal and even verbal equivalents that can be demonstrated in mediaeval Latin and Vedic Indian traditional literature, in respect to which, if borrowing were assumed, priority would have to be allowed to the Vedic side; but borrowing is not assumed. As these equivalences are not likely to be familiar to my present readers, a few will be cited here; and striking as they may be, they are merely samples of countless others of the same sort.

We find it said, for example, in connection with the orthodox doctrine of Christ's two births, eternal and temporal, that "on the part of the child there is but one filiation in reality, though there be two in aspect" (*Sum. Theol.* III.35.5 *ad* 3); cf. "His birth in Mary ghostly was to God better pleasing than his nativity of her in the flesh" (Eckhart, Evans ed., I, 1418). And inasmuch as Christ's filiation is in any case a "vital operation from a conjoint principle (*a principio conjunctivo*)," and the "eternal filiation does not depend upon a temporal mother" (*Sum. Theol.* I.27.20 and III.35.5 *ad* 2), it follows that Christ is mothered in eternity no less than in time; the mother in eternity, Eckhart's "Mary ghostly," being evidently "that divine nature by which the Father begets" (*Sum. Theol.* I.41.5c). "That nature, to wit, which created all others" (St. Augustine, *De trinitate* XIV.9)—*Natura naturans*, *Creatrix universalis*, *Deus*, inasmuch as essence and nature are one in Him, in the Supreme Identity, who is the unity of the conjoint principles. Finally, inasmuch as the divine life is uneventful, there is evidently but one act of generation, though there be "two in aspect, corresponding to the two relations in the parents, as considered by the intellect" (*Sum. Theol.* III.35.5 *ad* 3). It is, then, Latin Christian doctrine that there is one generation, but two mothers logically distinguishable. The exact equivalent of this, in the fewest possible words, occurs in the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* I.33, "two wombs, one act of generation (*due yonī ekaṃ mithunam*)." This brief text, on the one hand, resumes the familiar Vedic doctrine of the bir-motherhood of Agni who is *divinātā*—as, for example, in RV III.2.2 and II, "He became the son of two mothers . . . he was quickened in unlike wombs," and RV I.113.1–3, where Night, "when she hath conceived for the Sun's

⁵ J. Sauter, "Die alchinesische Metaphysik und ihre Verbindlichkeit mit der abendländischen," *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozial-philosophie*, XXVIII (1934), 90.

quickening, yields the womb to [her sister] Dawn"—and, on the other, to the derivative dogma of the dual motherhood (or alternatively motherhood and foster motherhood) by which the eternal Avatar is manifested in Vaiṣṇavism, Buddhism, and Jainism, where by a somewhat materialized formulation the divine child is actually transferred from the womb of the spiritual power to that of the temporal power, represented respectively by the queens Devānandā and Tisālā.⁶

In AB III.13, the pattern of the Sacrifice performed in imitation of what was done in the beginning is described as "without beginning or end. . . . That which is its beginning is also its end, that again which is its end is also its beginning, they do not discriminate which is anterior and which posterior," with which may be compared Boetius, *De consolazione philosophiae* I, prose 6, "is it possible that you who know the beginning of all things should not also know their end?"; *Sum. Theol.* I.103.20, "the end of a thing corresponds to its beginning"; Eckhart (Evans ed., I, 224), "the first beginning is because of the last end"; and Dante, *Paradiso* XXIX.20, 30, *nē prima nē poscia . . . sanza distinzione in essordire*.

The definition of a personal as distinguished from an animal nature in AA II.3.2, viz. "A person (*puruṣa*) is most endowed with understanding, he speaks what has been discriminated, he draws distinctions, he knows the morrow, he knows what is and is not mundane, and by the mortal seeks the immortal," while "as for the other cattle, theirs is a valid perception merely according to hunger and thirst, they do not speak what has been discriminated," etc., is as nearly as possible identical with the classical definition in Boetius, *Contra Evtychen* II: "There is no person of an ox or any other of the animals which dumb and unreasoning live a life of sense alone, but we say there is a person of a man, of God, or an angel . . . there is no person of a man if animal or general."

"HE WHO IS" is the principal of all names applied to God," says St. John of Damascus (*De fide orthodoxa* I); so in KU VI.13, "He is to be laid hold of as 'HE IS.'" With respect to the "thought of God," which "is not attainable by argument" (KU II.9), that "His is that thought by whom it is unthought, and if he thinks it, then he does not understand" corresponds to Dionysius (*De mystica theologica* I): "Which not to see or know is really to see and know," and *Ep. ad Caium Mon.*: "If anyone seeing God understood what he saw, he saw not God himself, but one of those things that are God's."

In connection with the Immaculate Conception, St. Thomas (*Sum.*

⁶ For further parallels, see Coomaraswamy, "The 'Conqueror's Life' in Jaina Painting," *JISOA*, III (1935), 132.

Theol. III.32.1 *ad* 1) remarks that while in this case the Spiritus entered the material form without means, in normal generation "the power of the soul, which is in the semen, through the Spirit enclosed therein, fashions the body." This corresponds not only to the brief formulation of RV VIII.3.24, "The Spirit is the father's part, raiment of the body (*ātmā pitus tanūr vāsuh*)," but more explicitly to JUB III.10.5, "It is inasmuch as the Breath-of-life inhabits the expended seed, that he [who is to be born] takes shape (*yada hyeva retas sikṭam prāna āviśaty atha tat sambhavati*)," and Kauṣ. Ūp. III.3, "It is as the Breath (*prānu*) that the Intelligizing Spiritus (*prajñātman*) grasps and erects the body."

Sum. Theol. I.45.10, "Creation, which is the emanation of all being, is from nonbeing, which is nothing (*Creatio, quae est emanatio totius esse, est ex non ente, quod est nihil*)," combined with I.14.8c, "The knowledge of God is the cause of things. For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art (*sicut scientia artificis se habet ad artificiatam*)" and with the doctrine of the Spirit as the animating power in the act of generation, whether human or divine (see above)—all this is represented in a briefer formulation of the *Rg Veda*. Thus RV X.72.2: "The Master of the Spiritual power like as a blacksmith with his bellows welded all these generations of the Angels; in the primal aeon, being was begotten from nonbeing," where "Blacksmith"⁷ (*ḥarmāra*, "maker," "workman"), like Tvaṣṭr (the "Carpenter,"⁸ who in the *Rg Veda* "hews by intellect [*manasā takṣati*]," in the sense of the Scholastic *per verbum in intellectu conceptum*, predicated of the artificer in *Sum. Theol.* I.45.6c) and Viśvakarman ("All-maker," later the patron aspect of deity with respect to the crafts and worshiped as such in their lesser mysteries), corresponds to *Deus sicut artifex* in Scholastic imagery; and "welded with his bellows" (*samadhamat*) alludes to the "blast" of the Spirit, the animating Gale (*vāta, vāyu*) by which the Son himself is "aroused" (Agni, *vātajātah*, RV I.65.4, VI.6.3, etc.) and "made to blaze" (*dhamitam*, RV II.24.7), "when Vāta blows upon his flame" (RV IV.7.10), "that Gale, thy Spiritus that thunders through the universe" (*ātmā te vātah*, etc., RV VI.18.7.2), "Vāyu, spiration of the Angels, whose sound is heard indeed, though his form is never seen" (RV X.168.4).

⁷ This image of the Master Blacksmith with his bellows admirably illustrates *Sum. Theol.* I.1.50: "Spiritual truths are fittingly taught under the likeness of material things."

⁸ It is by no means without good and sufficient reasons that Jesus was called the "Son of the carpenter," for, indeed, there is a "wood" of which the world is wrought by the Master Carpenter.

The most general Scholastic definition of sin, of any kind, is as follows, "Sin is a departure from the order to the end" (*Sum. Theol.* I.1.21.10 and 2 *ad* 2), and in connection with the artistic sin, St. Thomas goes on to explain that it is a sin proper to the art: "if an artist produce a bad thing, while intending to produce something good; or produce something good, while intending to produce something bad." In KU II.1.1, he who chooses what he likes most (*preyas*) rather than what is most lovely (*śreyas*) is said to "deviate from the end" (*hīyate arthāt*); in ŚB II.1.2.6, if a certain part of the rite is wrongly done, "that would be a sin (*aparādhi*)," just as if one were to do one thing while intending to do another; or if one were to say one thing while intending to say another; or if one were to go one way while intending to go another."

In *Sum. Theol.* I.103.5 *ad* 1: "These things are said to be under the sun which are generated and corrupted according to the sun's movement," and III (Supp.) 91.1 *ad* 1: "The state of glory is not under the sun." In ŚB II.3.3.7, "He who glows [the Sun] is this Death [an essential name of deity *ab intra*]" accordingly, all creatures below Him are mortal, but those beyond Him are Angels (or "Gods") who are alive; and X.5.1.4, "Everything hitherward from the Sun is in the grasp of Death (*mṛtyu-nāptam*)."

There may also be cited a pair of examples of earlier origin on the European side. Matt. 10:16, "*prudentes sicut serpentes, et simplices sicut columbae*," corresponds to RV X.63.4, *ahimāyā anāgasah*. Again, whereas in Gen. 2:21-22 God "took one of his [Adam's] ribs, . . . And the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman," and 3:20, "Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living," so also in the *Rg Veda* the name of Manu's daughter is the "Rib" (*par śur ha nāma mānavā*), who under another name, Īḍā, is the mother "through whom he [Manu] generated this race of men" (ŚB I.8.1.10), Manu being in the Hindu tradition the archetype and progenitor of men in the same way as Adam in the Hebrew tradition, the condition of incest in both formulations depending on the "blood relationship" (*jāmitra*) of the original parents.

A single Islamic example may be added. Whereas St. Augustine, *Confessions* VI.11, has, with reference to created things, "A being they have, because they are from Thee: and yet no being, because what Thou art they are not," and *Sum. Theol.*, I.44.10, "All beings apart from God are not their own being, but beings by participation," we find in Jāmī, *La-*

⁹ *Aparādhi* derives from *aparādhi*, defined by Monier-Williams as "to miss one's aim."

wā'ih XIII, "Earth lacks true Being, yet depends thereon—'Thou art true Being."

Not merely could other doctrinal and verbal parallels of this sort be cited almost *ad infinitum*¹⁰—e.g., in connection with such matters as Exemplarism,¹¹ Transubstantiation, and Infallibility—but similar equivalencies could be even more easily demonstrated in the domain of visual symbolism,¹² a mode of communication that even more than verbal symbolism is the characteristic idiom of traditional metaphysics. For example, there has often been brought out the common valency of the Christian rose and Indian lotus as representations of the ground of all manifestation, the support of being when it proceeds or seems to proceed from being to becoming. The case of musical form is the same: "An example of the tenacity with which the music of a cult survives is afforded in the West by Catholic church music which, deriving from Jewish temple singing, stands apart from the quite different art-music of today, like an erratic block. There are similar instances in the East, such as those of the Indian Sāmaveda melodies, and in Japan the singing of the No dramas, which even in the late courtly and profane environment in which we hear it, has preserved its original liturgical significance" (Robert Lachmann, *Musik des Orients*, Breslau, 1929, pp. 9-10). It is, in fact, the case that even the "secular" music of India, where nothing, indeed, can be defined as wholly secular, has preserved that quality of endlessness which is predicated of the liturgical chant in a passage from the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* cited above and which is equally recognized in Christian plainsong.

The commonly accepted formula of the existence of a gulf dividing Europe from Asia is thus fallacious in the sense that while there is a division, the dividing line is traceable not between Europe and Asia normally considered but between mediaeval Europe and Asia, on the one

¹⁰ Single parallels might be referred to "coincidence," which is merely to substitute description for explanation. It, however, we believe with St. Augustine (*De diversis quaestionibus* LXXXIII.24) that "Nothing in the world happens by chance" (a proposition with which the scientist will scarcely quarrel [nor the theologian, for whom "if God did not govern by mediate causes, the world would be deprived of the perfection of causality," St. Thomas]), three explanations, and only three, of repeated and exact "coincidences" are possible: There must have been (1) a borrowing on the part of the later source, (2) a parallel development, or (3) a derivation from a common anterior source.

¹¹ Cf. Coomaraswamy, "Vedic Exemplarism" [in this volume—ED.].

¹² Cf. J. Baltrusaitis, *Art sumérien, art romain* (Paris, 1934), and Coomaraswamy, "The Tree of Jesse and Oriental Parallels," *Parnassus*, VII (1935).

hand, and modern Europe on the other: in general and in principle, whatever is true for mediaeval Europe will also be found to be true for Asia, and vice versa.

As regards the bearing of all these parallels on the validity of Christian doctrine and exegesis: from the Hindu point of view, the natural consequence of collation will be to evoke the consideration, "Christian doctrine, judged by Vedic standards, is also orthodox." The converse recognition, that "Vedic doctrine, judged by Christian norms, is also orthodox," might be, and *a priori* should be, expected, but given the Christian assumption not only of a knowledge of the truth (which may be freely granted) but also of an exclusive possession of this knowledge (such as Hindus neither claim for themselves nor grant to any others), all that can be predicted for the moment is an acceptance of Vedic data as "extrinsic and probable arguments" (*Sum. Theol.* 1.1.3 *ad* 2), just as St. Thomas himself, in fact, made use of Aristotle, and just as St. Jerome, in discussing the superiority of the virgin to the married estate (*Adversus Jovinianum* 1.42), actually invoked the doctrine of the "Gymnosophists of India, amongst whom the dogma is handed down that Buddha, the head of their teaching, was born of a virgin from her side."

So far as the comparisons that have been so extensively made as between Christianity and Buddhism (in which field St. Jerome seems to have been the pioneer, though the case of Jehoshaphat = Bodhisattva must also be borne in mind), or Neoplatonism and Buddhism, are in question, it must be remembered that although the parallels are real, nevertheless deductions as to derivation or influence are insecurely founded, inasmuch as the Buddhist doctrines are themselves derivative, and Christian and Neoplatonic analogies with pre-Buddhist texts can be presented in greater number and with greater cogency. For instance, all of the details of the Buddha's nativity, not excluding the detail of laral birth, are, in fact, already traceable in the Vedic nativities of Indra and Agni, respectively types of the temporal and spiritual powers, often combined in the dual Indrāgnī, king-and-priest. We maintain, in other words, the relative independence of the Christian tradition at any one time, whether that of Dionysius or that of Dante, at the same time that we relate all orthodox teaching, of which the Vedic expression itself is merely a late expression, to one common and (as may be added, though this is not essential to the presently restricted argument) ultimately superhuman source. The problems are not essentially, but only accidentally, problems of literary history.

Enough has now been said to indicate the principles involved, and perhaps to convince the reader that it may not be unreasonable to look in Sanskrit as well as in Islamic texts for parallels to or even explanations, but not necessarily sources, of particular idioms of thought employed by Dante, none of whose ideas are novel, though he clothes the traditional teaching in a vernacular form of incomparable splendor, *splendor veritatis*. The two passages chosen for comment are selected not because of their special importance, nor because they can be more easily paralleled than very many others, but as having presented particular difficulties to commentators relying only on European sources. *Paradiso* xxvii.136-138 reads:

*Costi si fa la pelle bianca nera,
nel primo aspetto della bella figlia
di quel ch'apporta mane e lascia sera.*

In P. H. Wicksteed's version: "So blackeneth at the first aspect the white skin of his fair daughter who bringeth morn and leaveth evening." We remark first the parallel in Eckhart, Evans ed., I, 292: "The soul, in hot pursuit of God, becomes absorbed in him, . . . just as the sun will swallow up and put out the dawn"; [and *ibid.*, p. 365: "Atoned with her Creator, the soul has lost her name, for she herself does not exist; God has absorbed her into him just as the sunlight swallows up the Dawn till it is gone"]. The *Paradiso* text has been called "a difficult and disputed passage," although in any case it is admittedly the Sun who, in line 138, "bringeth morn and leaveth evening." Eckhart's words already indicate that the "daughter" must be Dawn. It is true that in Classical mythology, Dawn is the sister rather than the daughter of the Sun, but it is just here that the Vedic tradition will be of help. For while Dawn is sometimes there the sister of the Sun or Fire (RV vi.55.5 and x.3.3), she is typically and constantly the daughter, as well as the bride, of the Sun, who is called her "ravisher" (*jāra*). She is, indeed, from the Hindu point of view, the same as Dante's "virgin mother, daughter of thy son" (*Paradiso* xxxiii.1); the Mother of God, of Christ, by whom "all things were made" (John 1:3), "for by him were all things created" (Col. 1:16), and as thus the Mother of all things, one with Eve in the same sense that Christ is one with Adam. It is, indeed, precisely as the Magna Mater, *die eine Madonna* (Jeremias), that Uṣas, Dawn, otherwise known as Sūryā (the Sun "goddess," as distinguished from Sūrya, the Sun "god"), becomes the bride of the Sun in the endless *Liebesgeschichte des Himmels* (E. Siecke).

Vedic references to these events and especially to Dawn's destruction by her lover, the Sun, who follows after her in hot pursuit (the converse of Eckhart's formulation cited above), are innumerable. In the famous hymn of RV x.189, commonly employed as an *oratio secreta*, the Serpent Queen (another of the names of Dawn and Mother Earth) is "She who moves within the luminous spheres, She as his Voice (*vāc*, fem.) is given to the Winged-Sun; when He suspires, then She expires (*'asya prāṇāt apānātī*)."

Dawn's glorious hour is very transient; "A virgin uncontrolled, She cometh forth, foreware of Sun and Sacrifice and Fire" (RV vii.80.2), but no sooner has the Sun caught up with her than He and She shine out together (vii.81.2); no longer shining privately with her own radiance, but clothed with the Sun, She now "shines forth in the bright eye of her Seducer" (1.92.11). It is often Indra as the Sun that is spoken of as "striking down the chariot of Dawn" (x.73.6), who thus becomes Indrāñi, the Queen of Heaven, but without distinction of King and Queen.

This is, furthermore, a purification, for anterior to her procession, Dawn has been a "footless snake,"¹³ ophidian rather than angelic, Night being related to her sister Dawn as Lilith to Eve. It is precisely to this ophidian nature that She dies when She proceeds, her Assumption then following his Ascension. Drawn through the nave of the solar Wheel, She as Apālā ("Unguarded" in the sense "unwedded") is given a sunny skin in place of her old snake skin (viii.91), and made "fit to be fondled" (*saṃśliṣṭikā*; *Sātyāyana Brāhmaṇa* cited by Sayana). There Heaven and Earth are embraced (*saṃśliṣyasaḥ*, JUB 15)¹⁴—which is not a "myth" within the current anthropological misunderstanding of the word, but a union (*mithuna*) to be realized "within the heart's void (*hṛdayākāśa*)" by the true Cognostic (*saṃvit*) and is the "supreme beatitude" (*paramo hy eṣa ānandah*, ŚB x.5.2.11), Dante's *piacere eterno* (*Paradiso* xviii.16).

And all this is significant from the point of view of the interpretation of our Dante text, for it has been suggested that the Sun's *bella figlia* is Humanity, the Sun being "father of each mortal life" (*Paradiso* xxii.116) and man "begotten of man and of the Sun" (cf. *De monarchia* 1.9 and 6-7). There is no antinomy here, for as we have seen, Dawn and Mother

¹³For a more detailed presentation see Coomaraswamy, "The Darker Side of Dawn," 1935.

¹⁴This is in William Blake's sense the "Marriage of Heaven and Hell," all the earthly properties by which individuation is determined being "hells," as is explicit in JUB 19.26; cf. S x.5.

Earth, in the same sense as Adam and Eve—i.e., seminally—are all men, Everyman,¹⁵ and Everyman is the Church, the Bride of Christ. To be united with Him, Humanity, the Church, must be transformed—in Vedic language, must shed her serpent skin and put off evil. Just this is described, not only in the story of Apālā, but again in that of the marriage of Sūryā (RV x.85.23–33), where the Bride puts off her scaly *krityū* (“potential”) form, evil and inglorious, and in a most felicitous (*sumangalī*) likeness (“fairest of all fair forms,” as the *Sātyayana Brāhmaṇa* describes the once reptilian Apālā) “assumes her Lord as doth a Bride” (*ā jāyā viśate patim*, RV x.85.29). And this is said as nearly as possible in the same way by St. Bonaventura of the Marriage of Christ with his Church: “Christ will present his bride, whom he loved in her baseness and all her foulness, glorious with his own glory, without spot or wrinkle” (*Domínica prima post octavum epiphaniae* 11.2).

We have presented the tradition as to Dawn in some little detail in order to remind the reader how dangerous it is, in connection with writers of this caliber and with such preoccupations as Dante’s and Eckhart’s, who are not belle-lettrists,¹⁶ though each is the “father” of a language, to attribute to individual poetic invention or artistry what are really technical formulae and symbols with known connotations. At the very least, our Vedic citations suffice to give a consistent meaning to Dante’s and Eckhart’s words. Both are always aware of much more than they tell; as Dante himself forewarns the reader, “mirate la dottrina, che s’asconde sotto il velame degli versi strani” (*Inferno* ix.61). It must also be remembered that the illustration of Christian doctrine by means of pagan

¹⁵ It will not be forgotten that from the Scholastic point of view, Humanity is a form that has nothing to do with time; not the humanity of “humanism,” but a creative principle informing every man, and according to which he must be judged. Thus, Thierry of Chartres speaks of the *forma humanitatis* which *numquam perit*, and St. Thomas says that “humanity is taken to mean the formal part of a man” (*Sum. Theol.* 1.3.3). [“God assumed manhood and not man” (Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer ed., p. 250).]

¹⁶ Eckhart, “All happiness to those who have listened to this sermon. Had there been no one here, I must have preached it to the poor-box”; “work as though no one existed, no one lived, no one had ever come upon the earth” (Evans ed., I, 123 and 308). Dante, “The whole work was undertaken not for a speculative but for a practical end . . . the purpose of the whole and of this portion [*Paradiso*] is to remove those who are living in this life from the state of wretchedness and to lead them to the state of blessedness” (*Epistle ad Can. Grande* 15, 16); BG 11.47, “Be thy property in works by no means in their fruits,” and 111.9, “This world is enchained by works, save they be directed to the Sacrifice; so do thy work unto this end, without concern.”

symbols was not only from the mediaeval point of view quite legitimate, but even persisted in permitted practice until comparatively modern times, of which an example can be cited in the work of Calderón.¹⁷ It is not unreasonable, then, to suppose that both Eckhart and Dante were acquainted with traditional doctrines—perhaps initiatory and only orally transmitted, or perhaps only not yet traced in extant documents—such as have been cited above apropos of *il somma sol* and *bella figlia*.

Our second passage occurs in *Paradiso* XVIII.110–111:

. . . da lui si rammenta
quella virtù ch'è forma per li nidi.

In Wicksteed's version, supplying only the capital, this is, “from Him cometh to the mind that power that is form unto the nests.” It should be hardly necessary to point out that “form” must be taken here, in its usual Scholastic and exemplary sense, to be “essential form” (as when it is said that “the soul is the form of the body”) and not in the modern vernacular sense of “actual form” or shape. Now, quite apart from the parallels to be cited below, it may be remarked that nests imply birds, and that both imply trees, and that “birds” is traditionally a designation of the Angels, or intellectual substances, wings denoting independence of local motion, and the “language of birds” that of “angelic communication”;¹⁸ or “birds” in a more general way may stand for the quick (in all senses of the word) as distinguished from the inanimate and immobile. From this point of view, which is, in fact, the right one, “nests” will be the habitations of the Angels and other living beings amongst the branches of the Tree of Life, “nest” will signify the phenomenal—bodily or otherwise individually appropriated—environment of the soul, and the “power that is form unto the nests” will be His who made Man in his own image and likeness. Nevertheless, the passage has been regarded as obscure; the comments made by Wicksteed and Oelsner,¹⁹ who ask, “But why *nests*? Are the nests the heavens, nestling one within the other?” etc., are particularly devious, perhaps because in discussing the Jovian M of verses 94–96, although they recognize that the likeness of a bird is intended, they do

¹⁷ Cf. René Allar, “Calderón et l'unité des traditions,” *Le Voile d'Isis*, XL (1935), 407 ff.

¹⁸ RV vi.9.5, “Intellect is the swiftest of birds.” Cf. René Guénon, “La Langue des oiseaux,” *Le Voile d'Isis*, XXXVI (1931), 667 ff.

¹⁹ Temple Classics Edition, *Paradiso*, p. 227.

not realize that it is precisely the likeness of an eagle that is meant—that is, the likeness of God himself, here “exemplified” by Jove—and consequently fail to see that the “nests” are those of beings in that same image.

All that has been said above is explicit in the Vedic tradition, where, moreover, of the two words for “nest,” *nīdu* and *kuḷāyu*, the former at once recalls Dante’s *nidi*. The general significance of “nest” is defined in PB XIX.15.1: “Nest is offspring, nest is cattle [“great possessions,” “realized potentiality”], nest is dwelling.” In RV 1.164.20–22, there occurs the image of two Eagles who comradesly occupy the Tree of Life and are the dual aspect of the Deity, who on the one hand sees all things²⁰ and on the other eats of the fig;²¹ and the image of others perched below, “who chant with ever-open eyes their share of life²² (*anṛtasya bhāgam animeṣam . . . abhi svaranti*), taste of the honey, and beget their children,” but of whom “none can reach the summit of the Tree who knoweth not the Father, the great Herdsman of the Universe.”²³ But inasmuch as He whose being is Contemplative (*dhīrah*) has also “made his home in me that am made ready here (*mā dhīrah pākam arāviveśa*),” we find him elsewhere spoken of not only as “nestless”²⁴ (*anīdah*, RV x.55.5, Śvct.

²⁰ The Sun is Varuṇa’s eye, with which He surveys the whole universe (RV, *paśīm*); none can even wink without His knowledge (RV vii.86.6); He counts the winking of men’s eyes and knows all that man does, thinks, or devises (AV iv.16.2, 5), which knowledge on His part is speculative (*viśvam sa vedo varuṇo yathā dhīyā*, RV x.11.1). Cf. Luke 12.6–7, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered”; Heb. 4.12–13, “For the word of God . . . is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight”; *Sum. Theol.* 1.24.16c and ad 2, “God has of Himself a speculative knowledge only . . . [in which] He possesses both speculative and practical knowledge of all other things.”

²¹ Luke 7.34, “The Son of man is come eating and drinking”; Deut. 4.24, “God is a consuming fire.” Agni the Heavenly Sced, the Spiritus, the Winged Sun “Who from here below soared unto Heaven . . . is the greediest of eaters” (RV 1.163.6–7). God’s “eating” is our Life, for thereby the Spiritus is clothed in flesh, becoming *anna-maya*.

²² As also RV vii.21.5, “Seated like birds, O Indra, we raise our song to Thee”; cf. *Paradiso* xviii.76–77, “So within the lights the sacred creatures flying sang.”

²³ Cf. *Paradiso* x.74, “He who doth not so wing himself that he may fly up there,” for which numerous Sanskrit parallels could be adduced—e.g., PB xiv.11.3, “Those who ascend to the top of the Great Tree, how do they fare thereafter? Those who have wings fly off, those without wings fall down,” and similarly, JUB iii.13.9.

²⁴ Matt. 8.20, “the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”

Up. v.14), but also as the Swan (*haṃsa*) who by the Breath of Life protects his “lower seats” (*avarāṇa kuḷāyam*, BU iv.3.12), whose own “perch is as it were a bird’s” (*sadanaṇa yathā veh*, RV iii.54.5–6): “nestless” and “nested” corresponding to the nature of the Deity who is “One as he is yonder” and also “manifoldly present in his children” (ŚB x.5.2.16–17), whence he is spoken of as Nṛṣad “Seated in man,” Nṛcakṣus, “Having regard for man,” and Vaiśvānara, “Common to all men.”²⁵

The “lower nests,” however, are not merely those of the individual substances in the sense explained above, but are at the same time every sacrificial altar, whether concrete or within you,²⁶ on which the sacred Fire is kindled, and it is in these senses that “the Deity, abandoning his golden throne, hastens to the Falcon’s seeming birthplace, the seat by speculation wrought” (*īyeno na yonirṣa sadanaṇa dhīyā kṛtam hiranyayam āsadam deva esuti*, RV ix.71.6), where the Falcon, is as usual, the Fire; the birthplace, as usual, the Altar; the lap of Mother Earth, the Mother’s womb; and the aspect of Deity (*deva*) referred to as hastening is that of Soma, sap of the Tree of Life, the “Wine” of life, and willing (*krīluh*) Sacrifice.²⁷ We find accordingly an elaborate symbolism of the Altar, which is the “lower throne” of Deity, in this very likeness of a bird’s nest, and even that the Altar is completed in such a manner as to be manifestly like a nest, as, for example, in AB 1.28, where the Priest, invoking the sacred “Fire and the Angelic Host to be seated first on the birthplace rich in wool” (represented by the “strew,” these words being taken from RV vi.15–16), proceeds with the formula “Making an anointed nest for Savitr” (the Sun as “Quickener”) and, in fact, prepares “as it were a nest with the enclosing sticks of *pītudāru-wood*, bdellium, tufts of wool, and fragrant grasses,” and all of this is really a representation of the nest of the Phoenix, in which the life of the Eagle, the Fire, is perpetually renewed.

It remains only to add what is already implied in the words “by speculation wrought” (*dhīyā kṛtam*, cited above, *dhī* in Vedic Sanskrit being

²⁵ Cf. Coomaraswamy, “Vedic Exemplarism.”

²⁶ On the kindling of Agni “within you,” see ŚB vii.4.1.1 and x.5.3.3.

²⁷ Partaken of by way of transubstantiation: “Men fancy when the plant is pressed, they drink of very Soma, but of Him the Brahmans understand by Soma, nonetheless tastes who dwell on earth” (RV x.85.3–4). “The Nyagrodha is parabolically King Soma; parabolically the temporal power obtains the semblance of the spiritual power, by means of the priest, the initiation, and the invocation as it were” (AB vii.31). The only approach to Him is by way of initiation and ardor (ŚB iii.6.2.10–11); cf. Gen. 3.22, “lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.”

used synonymously with *dhyānu* = *contemplatio*), that the kindling of Agni in his lower nests, where until kindled He is merely latent—in other words, the bringing of God to birth who else remains unknown—while it is effected symbolically in the ritual of Sacrifice or Mass, is effected by “him who understands it (*ya evam vidvān*),” the Comprehensor thereof (*evamvit*), the Gnostic (*jñānin*), “in the empty space of the heart (*hṛdayākāśe*),” “in the bare room of the inner man (*antar-bhūtasya kṣhe*);” it is an interior darkness that is illuminated. “No man by works or sacrifices attains to Him who quickeneth for ever” (RV VIII.70.3), but only those in whom a last death of the soul has been effected and who, when they stand before the gates of heaven and face the question, “Who art thou?” are qualified to answer not with any personal or family name, but in the words, “This *who* that I am is the Light, Thyself”—only these are welcomed with the benediction, “*Who* thou art, that art I, and *Who* I am, That art thou: proceed” (JUB III.14), nothing then remaining of the individual, whether as to “name” or “likeness” (*nāmarūpa*), but only that Spiritation (*ātman*) that seemed indeed to have been determined, and participated, but is in fact impartible.²⁸ One thus freed, entering through the midst of the Sun (“I am the Way . . . no man cometh to the Father, but by Me,” John 14:6; “Only by knowing I Him does one pass over death, there is no other Way to go there,” VS XXXI.18), “the gate through which all things return perfectly free to their supreme felicity” (Eckhart, Evans ed., I, 400), becomes a “Mover-at-will” (*kāmarūrin*) whose will, indeed, is no longer his own, but confused with God’s. “That is his proper form, who hath his will,²⁹ the Spirit is his will, he hath no will, nor any want” (BU IV.3.21); “he goes up and down these worlds, eating what he will, and assuming what likeness he will” (TU III.10.5); just as in John 10:9, “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture,” and more explicitly again in the *Pistis Sophia*.

We have sketched above a summary outline of the implications of the symbol “nest” in the Vedic Gnostic tradition. It is true that Dante’s use

²⁸ “The fastidious soul can rest her understanding on nothing that has name. She escapes from every name into the nameless nothingness. . . . These are the blessed dead . . . buried and beatified in the Godhead. . . . In this state we are as free as when we were not; free as the Godhead in its non-existence” (Eckhart, Evans ed., I, 373, 381–382). “I would go down unto Annihilation and Eternal Death, lest the Last Judgment come and find me Unannihilate, and I be seiz’d and giv’n into the hands of my own Selfhood” (Blake).

²⁹ Cf. *Paradiso* XXII.64–65, “Ivi è perfetta, matura ed intera ciascuna disianza”

of the word should have been understood either from other passages (e.g., *Paradiso* XXIII.1–12, where Beatrice herself is compared to a bird that rises from its nest at dawn to greet the sun), or by comparison with Biblical texts such as Matt. 7:20 cited in a footnote above; but at the same time, and just as in connection with the Sun, it may be taken for granted that Dante, whose knowledge of Christian and Pagan symbolism is so extensive and so accurate,³⁰ was more than well aware of all the technical meanings of the symbols he employs—“technical,” because such terms are neither employed by way of ornament, nor are they explicable at will, but belong to the vocabulary of a consistent parabolic language.³¹ We think that it has been shown that the references of an exponent of orthodox Christian principles, writing at the end of and, as it were, resuming all the doctrine of the Middle Ages, can actually be clarified by a comparison with those of scriptures that were current half the world away and three millenniums earlier in time; and that this can only be explained on the assumption that all these “alternative formulations of a common doctrine (*dharma-paryāya*)” are “dialects of the one and only language of the spirit,” branches of one and the same “universal and unanimous tradition,” *sanātana dharma*, Philosophia Perennis, St. Augustine’s “Wisdom uncreate, the same now as it ever was, and the same to be for evermore” (*Confessions* IX.10).

³⁰ Cf., for example, the metaphysically technical description of the Three Worlds in *Paradiso* XXX.28–36, and the treatment of *il punto* in XIII.11–13, XVII.17–18, and XXVIII.16, 25–26, and 41–42, for all of which the Indian parallels could be adduced; “in punta dello stelo, a cui la prima rota va dintorno. . . . Da quel punto dipende il cielo, e tutta la natura” (XII.11–12 and XXVIII.41–42) corresponding, for example, to RV 1.35.6, *ānim na rāhyam amṛtā adhi tasthuh*.

³¹ Clement, *Miscellanies* VI.15, “Prophecy does not employ figurative forms in the expressions for the sake of beauty of diction”; *Sum. Theol.* I.1.100, “Whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property, that the things signified by the words have themselves a signification.” Étienne Mâle aptly referred to the language of Christian symbolism as a “calculus.”