



assist in the correlation of the Bahá'í Faith with current thoughts, as expressed in philosophy and science, following the advice of the Universal House of Justice:

Newly enrolled professionals and other experts provide a great resource for the development of Bahá'í scholarship.

It is hoped that, as they attain a deeper grasp of the Teachings and their significance, they will be able to assist Bahá'í communities in correlating the beliefs of the Faith with the current thoughts and problems of the world.

(SCH 13)

While it is quite obvious that to attempt such an endeavor today surpasses by far the capacity of any scholar, and while the understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation will take one millennium to be fully completed, this paper is a simple beginning to first raise the question, and then to try finding a provisional answer.

In other words, this paper seeks to find the answer which is available today, but which will need to be revised over time as our understanding of the Revelation is relative and progressive according to the beloved Guardian. About the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, he said: "Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final."

(WOB 57) In pointing towards a change in philosophical thinking that has developed after the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, it is hoped that this beginning will open the way to better and more erudite responses in the future.

The new life of the seeker is described by Bahá'u'lláh, when He said:

He will find himself endowed with a New Eye, a New Ear, a New Heart, and a New Mind. (KI 195)

Therefore, this new understanding of "Thy transcendent Unity" requires in the seeker the endowment of a new eye, ear, heart and mind. It needs to be understood, right at the outset of this contribution to the 'Irfán Colloquia, that this "Most Sublime Vision" of Bahá'u'lláh can only be appreciated when the seeker – and that hopefully includes all of us – is "endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart and a new mind."

Bahá'u'lláh's "Most Sublime Vision"

The question is: how can we approach this Vision of Bahá'u'lláh, which He himself described as being "Most Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

Sublime"? The word sublime, used by the beloved Guardian in his translation, has in English the following meanings: inspiring, inspirational, uplifting, awe-inspiring, moving, transcendent,

and magnificent – all of which are fitting description of the new Vision of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

“Awe-inspiring” and “magnificent” indicates the relation of this vision to Bahá, i.e., ‘Glory,’ which is a key concept in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Who's name is translated as the “Glory of God” and it is part of the Most Holy Name of God, “Allah-u-Abhá,” translated as “God is the All-Glorious.”(KA 170)

“Inspirational,” “inspiring” and “moving” indicates the effect this Vision has on the seeker, the person who seeks to find God through Bahá'u'lláh. And the word “transcendent” indicates the total otherness and newness of this Vision. Bahá'u'lláh describes His Vision as ‘most’ sublime, announcing that this Vision has some likeness to these concepts, but is beyond all of the above mentioned attributes.

Describing the effect of this Vision, Bahá'u'lláh stated:

“Were the breezes of Revelation to seize thee, thou wouldst flee the world, and turn unto the Kingdom, and wouldst expend all thou possessest, that thou mayest draw nigh unto this sublime Vision.” (ESW 56) This statement can well be compared to Christ's parable about the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:45-46): “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

It further must be kept in mind that the Vision of Bahá'u'lláh is the cause of the seeker's new ability to understand this very Vision. It moves, inspires, transcends and renews the seeker's capacities. That means that the course of action moving towards understanding this Vision is a circular and continuing process: we have to accept the Vision, and then we will be more and more endowed with the capacity to understand this Vision with our increasingly renewed ear, eye, heart and mind. In a previous paper this writer has described this process under the concept of progressive theology.

This process defies both deductive and inductive logic as we know it. Therefore, this process has to be first developed in this paper in order to understand its subject matter. Another equally important pre-consideration of a move towards this Most Sublime Vision is the fact mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh that our

life has to be more and more consonant with this Vision in order to be able to understand it.

“Purge your hearts from love of the world, and your tongues from calumny, and your limbs from whatsoever may withhold you from drawing nigh unto God, the Mighty, the All-Praised. Say: By the world is meant that which turneth you aside from

Him Who is the Dawning-Place of Revelation, and inclineth you unto that which is unprofitable unto you. Verily, the thing that deterreth you, in this day, from God is worldliness in its essence. Eschew it, and approach the Most Sublime Vision, this shining and resplendent Seat.” (ESW 54)

The same was expressed by Bahá'u'lláh when He admonishes philosophers and scientists:

For God doth not ask you of your sciences, but of your faith and of your conduct. Are ye greater in wisdom than the One Who brought you into being, Who fashioned the heavens and all that they contain, the earth and all that dwell upon it? Gracious God! True wisdom is His. All creation and its empire are His. He bestoweth His wisdom upon whomsoever He chooseth amongst men, and withholdeth it from whomsoever He desireth. (SLH 234)

Furthermore, we have to understand that this Vision can only be perceived by the “unstopped ear of the inmost heart.” (SLH 86)

It is not accidental; it is rather significant and surprising that this new life of the seeker is here described in an unmistakable progression. First is the new ear, which will allow us to hear the Word of God; then the new eye is mentioned, because God’s Manifestation can be seen in the whole world and in our own life after we have perceived the Word of God. The next step in this process is the new heart, which is the place where this Vision can become part of the seeker. The last step is the new mind, a mind that will finally be able to get the picture of this Sublime Vision, so this vision can become a world vision, a view of the world, or, we could say, a new “Weltanschauung.” The terms “hearing of thine heart” for the New Ear (GWB 217), “eye of thine heart” for the New Eye (KI 57), and “understanding heart” for the New Mind (GWB 35), are all expressions revealed by Bahá’u’lláh.

The role of the heart in regards to this Vision is crucial and will be mentioned in another paper. It is just in the last 30 years that the role of the heart in the neurological aspect of the body

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Nine 33

and mind is being researched and the findings are rather surprising. Even in a cursory view into this matter it is clear that the heart’s function was not understood previously in the traditional medical neurology. When the human body is only seen as a mechanical system, the heart is just a pump. The long tradition to attribute to the heart so many more functions was totally ignored and never critically researched.

It needs to be stated right in the introduction that this paper attempts to see the world differently and in a new way. ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá has clearly stated that the Bahá'í Cause is a new beginning, and the newness encompasses everything that is to be discovered in the world. We have a new age, and we need to consider the whole creation as being reborn. For improved clarity, the following statement is broken down according to the topic described:

Now the new age is here and creation is reborn...

Arts and industries have been reborn, there are new discoveries in science, and there are new inventions...

And all this newness hath its source in the fresh outpourings of wondrous grace and favour from the Lord of the Kingdom...

... until the old ways, the old concepts, are gone and forgotten, this world of being will find no peace (SWAB 253)

What is most important about this statement, are these facts:

- This new age will lead to new discoveries in science, industry and in inventions.
- All this newness is caused by, and is an outpouring from, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.
- The peace of this world is dependent on a change of understanding of this new worldview and of forgetting the old understanding.

A new conceptualization of the physical world is also required by the discovery of quantum mechanics, as Einstein has said:

This discovery [i.e., the quantum theory] set science a new task: that of finding a new conceptual basis for all of physics.

34

#### Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

This new age starts in the heart of the believer and is a renewal of the spirit and of the understanding of this world, as Bahá'u'lláh described it in the beginning of His Mission in the Seven Valleys:

Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifice all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God. (SVFV 7)

This principle – that any change starts in the heart and from there will eventually renew the world – defines the structure of the New World Order as initiated by Bahá'u'lláh.

This paper is based on the vision that all that is new and valuable today, in science, art, technology and philosophy, is caused and originated by this Revelation. Consequently, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly stated it, we have to forget the old ways and old concepts, i.e., we have to reconsider our whole way of

thinking and perceiving this world in order to bring this world to peace in the New World Order. While this paper attempts to follow this direction of the Master, it is obvious that this attempt is only a beginning, at best, in this pathway into a new age and new world.

#### Revelation of Unity of God – Religion – World

In this chapter an important question about unity is raised: Is it the same or something different that is understood by the word “unity” in the two different contexts of God and of the world, of the Creator and of the creation? Usually, when we talk about unity or oneness, we uncritically take for granted that we all understand what that means, and that there is only one meaning to these words.

Consider that in the English language the word “unity,” compared with “oneness,” has a slightly different flavor. Both words are derived from the English word “one” or from the Latin word “unus,” which both have the same original meaning in their respective languages.

The definition of these two words in Webster’s Dictionary is not the same. This fact is relevant to this paper and will be presented below.

#### ONENESS

1. The quality or state or fact of being one

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Nine

35

2. Uniqueness, Singleness

Wholeness, Integrity

Harmony, Concord

Sameness, Identity (numerical), Unity, Union

3. Solitariness (archaic)

Unity, on the other hand, is defined more extensively.

#### UNITY

1. The quality or state of being one or consisting of one,

Oneness, Singleness

2. A condition of concordant harmony

Continuity without deviation or change, absence of diversity

3. The quality or state of being made one, unification

A combination of ordering of parts

4. The quality or state of constituting a whole

The totality of related parts, a complex or systematic whole

(Other meanings are related to mathematics, art, drama, and to law, which we will not mention here.)

Obviously the definitions are overlapping, but the emphasis is different. Oneness is the more general and practical term, while unity is used in a more specific and technical sense, which

is generally true for all duplicated words in the English language derived either from Anglo or Latin roots, for example liberty versus freedom. Additionally, Integration is only mentioned under oneness and Unification is mentioned only under unity. The relationship of the whole and the parts is only mentioned under Unity, and the meaning of this relationship is expressed under different subheadings. Furthermore, the word Unity (of Latin 'unus') has many more derivatives in the English language such as, Union, Unit, Unite, Unitarian, and other combined words such as Unification, Uniformity, Universe, Univocal, Unison, Universal, Unipotent, and many more.

In general we will use these two terms interchangeably, but it is important to keep the differences in mind. In the English translation of the Writings the word Unity is more frequently used, for example in the Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, officially translated by Shoghi Effendi, the word Unity is used five times more often than the word Oneness. We

36

Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

have to ask if there are similar differences in the Persian or Arabic languages, or if the difference was made by the Guardian, translating the same words differently into English according to the context. It appears that there are more than two words in the original language; however Shoghi Effendi used the two English words, not in correspondence to the original text, but related to the context.

Contrary to the Bahá'í Writings, Webster excludes diversity from unity, and uses a similar word only as an entry for "unity in variety" as an aesthetic principle related to the fusion of various elements into an organic whole, which definition comes closest to the Bahá'í use of the phrase "unity in diversity."

There are two major reasons why we need to look at this word more closely. One is the social and political use of the concept of unity, which had vast and potentially devastating consequences as it was applied during history and especially during the last century. The different ways of understanding the word unity was propagated by different political movements in the past and is still used today. We have a spectrum of meanings, from uniformity and identity of parts to aggregation of unrelated parts, i.e. from totalitarian dictatorship to extreme and almost anarchic individualism. Later, in the philosophical section, this will be explored more deeply.

The other reason why this word is the topic of this paper is the fact that the Bahá'í Writings distinguish clearly between the word unity as it is used in the created world and the same word when it is applied to the Creator. Without going into details here, we can already conclude that any application of the word

unity to God is false if it implies any relationship to numbers, to multiplicity or any separation of parts, or even any understanding of unity in the way as unity is understood in our physical world.

We have to consider first the different use of the word unity, as applied to God, to the Manifestations and to the world of humanity, as well as to all the religions of God. The separation of the different meanings of the word unity, or oneness, in relation to God has been clearly stated by Bahá'u'lláh when He said in a prayer:

And if I attempt to describe Thee by glorifying the  
oneness of Thy Being, I soon realize that such a  
conception is but a notion which mine own fancy hath  
woven, and that Thou hast ever been immeasurably exalted  
Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine 37

above the vain imaginations which the hearts of men have  
devised. (PM 123)

It follows from this verse that oneness or unity can be understood in different ways, depending if we talk about created oneness, or the Oneness of the Creator, of God. There are ways in which applying the concept of unity or oneness to God is nothing but a vain imagination of the human heart and an attempt to make God an object of human thinking and understanding; in other words, trying to make the unknowable essence of God knowable, thus creating an idol rather than knowing God.

On the other hand, when the word unity is applied to the Manifestations of God, we can follow the words of Bahá'u'lláh: Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest comprehend the allusions made by the Creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry times, called Himself by different names and titles. ... (GWB 22)

When considering the Manifestations we can legitimately talk about distinction, variation and unity characteristics. Here we have a unity that is the unification of variation and of distinctions, a unity that is the sign of creation. As a matter of fact, Bahá'u'lláh expresses this in a prayer:

Thy unity is inscrutable, O my God, to all except them  
that have recognized Him Who is the Manifestation of  
Thy singleness and the Day-Spring of Thy oneness. (PM 57)

It could be said that the Manifestations in their historical plurality are the manifestation of God's unity. They alone give

access to the inscrutable unity of God to those that have recognized them. Clearly it is stated here that the unity of God is unknowable and can only be recognized in the unity of the Manifestations. Only when this unity is accepted, only when it is understood that all the Manifestations are one, can the unity of God be praised. This understanding is prefaced by the following words indicating the role “of the spirit within the innermost chamber of thy heart” in comprehending the Divine inscrutable unity:

O brother! kindle with the oil of wisdom the lamp of the  
38 Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

spirit within the innermost chamber of thy heart, and guard it with the globe of understanding, that the breath of the infidel may extinguish not its flame nor dim its brightness. Thus have We illuminated the heavens of utterance with the splendours of the Sun of divine wisdom and understanding, that thy heart may find peace, that thou mayest be of those who, on the wings of certitude, have soared unto the heaven of the love of their Lord, the All-Merciful. (KI 61)

The unity of God is frequently expressed in the Bahá'í Writings but must be understood in this very specific sense. It is being manifested in the unity of the Manifestations of God. It is not an abstract or philosophical concept that can be manipulated and compared with what can be called created unity. Created unity is always a unity in diversity, or a unity consisting of parts that need to be unified. This unity brings with it forever the philosophical and scientific conundrum: how the relationship of the whole and the parts can be logically described, and how the physical reality of this world is composed. In the philosophical section of this paper this issue will be further developed.

The unity of the world of humanity and the unity of all religions is another principle of the Bahá'í Faith. It is, one could say, the most important, most actual and the most emphasized principle of the Faith, for it undoubtedly is what the world needs most today. Bahá'u'lláh has expressed this need by directing us to the situation of our time, when He said: Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements. (TU 1.4)

It could here be developed how the understanding of the relationship between the whole and its parts affects not only the political and social structures of humanity, but the basic understanding of this world. One could say that the Christian theology in its Platonic or Neo-platonic interpretation

emphasizes the unity and degrades the multiplicity of its parts. Consequently the spiritual is evaluated by devaluating the material.

This is the reason why the Aristotelian solution that gives the whole priority over the parts (form over matter), but considers both as equally real, was so well received in Christian theology since the time of Thomas Aquinas. This is actually a progress in

Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

39

the right direction from the Neo-Platonic understanding that only the whole is real, and everything partial is derived from it as an emanation, an overflow, and therefore less real.

The opposite is happening in modern science and modern philosophy: the material, the parts, the aggregation of the elements of nature in causality are emphasized, and exclusively preferred, without consideration of the value of the whole, this way of thinking devaluates all spiritual aspects of life and deprives the world of enchantment, of value and meaning. As will be pointed out in another paper, this is changing since the findings of quantum mechanics are slowly influencing science. It appears to this writer that the cosmology inherent in the Bahá'í Writings gives us a new and revolutionary way of seeing this relationship. Neither spirit nor matter is devaluated or negated. The unity of the world is deemed as equally valuable as the multiplicity and diversity of things material, and both are seen as elements of the Creation. A problem is only created if humanity finds one-sided attachment either to the spiritual, as in some forms of mysticism and in the attempts to reach God in His unity through meditation, or to the material, in the modern emphasis on physical reality in all materialistic and reductionistic systems of thinking. While this new way of thinking could be developed from the Bahá'í Writings in a thorough analysis of how they see the relationship between the one and the many, the spiritual and the material in all aspects of life, only some samples can be presented here.

The fact that Bahá'u'lláh states that prayer to God and service to mankind are equally valuable presupposes the fact that both the spiritual and the material are created by God and are basically good. Bahá'í spirituality, therefore, needs to be conceptualized on the idea of unity in diversity, and its practical development in the future cannot really be seen today. Shoghi Effendi's description of the future Bahá'í commonwealth is based on similar premises, as will be pointed out below.

What this unity of humanity is and how it should be achieved and protected in the future is a most important question of which the beloved Guardian has said:

World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving.

...The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world

40 Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. (WOB 202)

Describing this unity of the human race and this world commonwealth, Shoghi Effendi depicts many of its features and lays down the principles of its organization. However, he states that the actual structure and the functioning of this world unity cannot be visualized at this point:

Who can visualize the realms which the human spirit, vitalized by the outpouring light of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its glory, will discover? (WOB 205)

#### Unity of the Bahá'í Revelation

This is a principle of the Faith that is not stated as such in the Writings. It is, nevertheless a constituting principle without which the Faith cannot be conceived, and it further includes the unity of all Revelations of God throughout history, which is implied in unity of religion, and is expressed in the Bahá'í principle of progressive revelation.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, clearly pointed out the unity of all the Writings when he made the following statement about the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas of Bahá'u'lláh:

A comparison of their contents with the rest of Bahá'í sacred Writings will similarly establish the conformity of whatever they contain with the spirit as well as the letter of the authenticated writings and sayings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (WOB 4)

This is an explicit statement about the unity of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and it is noted that this conformity is related to whatever the Writings contain, i.e., to all of the Writings, and it extends to the spirit as well as to the letter of the authenticated Writings of the Báb, of Bahá'u'lláh, and of His official interpreters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. John S. Hatcher in his book about the "Art of Bahá'u'lláh" approached this Revelation with the tools of literary criticism. He has adapted these tools to study the context and style of the "Ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Words", stating:

The more intimate we become with the art of Bahá'u'lláh, the more we come to appreciate this context of the Revelation as having continuity and integrity. And the more we come to discover this overall unity to the Revelation, the more we appreciate that no single work can be fully studied apart from this context any more than a single passage can be analyzed out of the context of the work in which it appears.

The concept of progressive revelation expands this continuity of all Manifestations of God throughout history, disregarding their need to bring the Message in accordance to the understanding of their audiences and in consideration of the fact that their words have not always been transmitted to us in their original form.

The unity of the Revelation of the Báb, and of Bahá'u'lláh is rather remarkable, but can be seen only after a meditative involvement in the Writings. It is not a superficial unity; it is an integral and pervasive unity. Even though it includes the obvious and literal meaning, as well as any deeper and spiritual meaning, it also encompasses the different styles of the Writings as Bahá'u'lláh has stated:

At one time We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth-seeker and the mystic, and yet Our supreme purpose and highest wish hath always been to disclose the glory and sublimity of this station. God, verily, is a sufficient witness. (ESW 14)

#### Tabernacle of Unity

Is there?	Praise of Creation	Pathways True of	Tabernacle
of Love	Thyself	of Unity	
Prayer of Bahá'u'lláh		Bahá'u'lláh	
Bahá'u'lláh	Bahá'u'lláh		
the Báb (SVFV 2)		(SVFV 25) (SVFV 27)	Tablet to
(SWB 217)		Zoroastrians	

#### 5.1

Praise	First Fire Lit from Lamp	Creature	Inwardness	Ascent
be God	of Preexistence and	to	(Spiritual)	Lightness,
Singleness (“The fire Thou True One			Heat (To the	
hast kindled in me”)			Spirit)	

He is	First Sun Risen in the	True One	Firstness	Motion
God	Heaven of	to	(Individual)	(Active,
Form)				

Eternity (“From this sun is True One generated, and unto it must return, the light which is shed over all

Vision

thing.”)

All are First Morn Glowed from True One Outwardness Descent (From  
His the Horizon of to (Material) the Spirit)

servants Oneness (“Thou didst Creature

illumine my outer being

with the morning light of

Thy favor”)

All abide First Sea Branched from Creature Lastness Stillness

by His the Ocean of Divine to (Collective) Weight,

bidding Essence (“The water with Creature Density

which Thou hast created (Passive,

me”) Matter) Have

come into

being through

the will of the

Lord of all that

has been and

shall be.

Above is a sample of the unity of the Writings that can certainly be improved upon and changed, but it can give us some understanding of how all the concepts and thoughts, the literal and the spiritual meanings of the texts, can be seen in a unified vision and meditated together.

The first column of the picture is from a prayer of Báb, and it includes the last four statements of this prayer.

The second column is from the introduction of the Seven Valleys of Bahá’u’lláh. Other explanatory verses of Bahá’u’lláh have been added in parentheses to place these terms in context.

The verses directly under the underlined concept are the explanation given in the original text.

The four Pathways of Love are again from the Seven Valleys and do not need much explanation; these verses originally inspired this writer to compare them with the prayer of the Báb, and this conformity was developed in an unpublished paper and in many presentations.

The next column is again from the Valley of Unity and is the topic of a paper by this writer, presented and published in the Lights of ‘Irfán in 2005.

The final column is from a newly translated early Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh and again presents four concepts in harmony with the previous texts. Its importance is explained in the words following these four ideas, where it is said that they “have come into being through the will of the Lord of all that has been and shall be.”

In the picture below, the Tabernacle of Unity is organized in a different way, following the organization suggested by the Seven Valleys and as described in the paper True of Thyself by this writer. Some elements are omitted to make the picture less cluttered and the Bahá'í principles of Prayer, Service, Unity, and Order are added. The organizing elements are what Bahá'u'lláh calls the four stages of man when He wrote:

And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states, and that the nightingale of thine heart on all the branches of the rosetree of existence, whether visible or concealed, should cry out: 'He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden....' (SVFV 27)

The harmony of the Writings is evident in this comparison. It is the Most Sublime Vision of Bahá'u'lláh. Its meaning becomes a proper subject of meditation and allows the believers to immerse themselves deeper into the Ocean of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The unity of the Bahá'í Faith, in itself and in its Writings, is not the whole story; it is rather the primary and present day example illuminating the history of humanity. According to the principle of progressive revelation and the unity of the Manifestations, which are especially developed in Bahá'u'lláh's early and most significant book, the Kitáb-i-Íqán, all Divine Manifestations throughout history and all of their Revelations constitute the Unity of God's Revelation throughout the history of humanity. Speaking about all of the Manifestations of God, Bahá'u'lláh says:

... thou mayest behold them all as the bearers of one Name, the exponents of one Cause, the manifestations of one Self, and the revealers of one Truth, and that thou mayest apprehend the mystic "return" of the Words of God as unfolded by these utterances. (KI 159)

They not only present the unity of God's Revelation throughout history, they all are the Revealers of one Truth, the Truth of God. This unity of all Manifestations and of the Truth of their Revelations was described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who indicated that this understanding is new and has not been mentioned before in any other Revelation:

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has announced that the  
44 Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

foundation of all the religions of God is one; that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. This teaching is new and specialized to this

Manifestation. (BWF 246)

That unity or oneness of truth belongs in the same vision as the unity of all Revelations is here expressed. Yet, according to some postmodern philosophers, there is no unity of truth, and truth is totally dependent on the subjective understanding of the individual expressing it, a concept totally alien to the Bahá'í Revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh clearly applied this truth to all Revelations and mentioned Jesus in this context saying:

... Jesus, the Spirit of God, [and] His proclamation of the unity of God and of the truth of His Message! (GWB 57)

This is a direct reference to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (18:37-38)

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?

We can easily understand the doubtful answer of Pilate, and many post-modernists and modern bible critics would agree with him. While the philosophical question of "what is truth" will not be developed here, it is important to indicate that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has a clear and expressed view of this issue and stands in the tradition of classical philosophy and its claim that human reason has the ability to recognize truth.

Unity of God in Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith

In the following, a lengthy paragraph from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh will be presented because it brings the questions of what unity is and how it has to be understood in a new and surprising focus. We will first quote the whole section, and then discuss it sentence by sentence. Metaphysics and physics of consciousness can facilitate this understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation, if compared to the sacred Writings of the Faith.

He is a true believer in Divine unity who, far from confusing Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

45

duality with oneness, refuseth to allow any notion of multiplicity to becloud his conception of the singleness of God, who will regard the Divine Being as One Who, by His very nature, transcendeth the limitations of numbers.

The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same.

By this is meant that whatever pertaineth to the former, all

His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself.

This is the loftiest station to which a true believer in the unity of God can ever hope to attain. Blessed is the man that reacheth this station, and is of them that are steadfast in their belief. (GWB 165)

The first paragraph clearly distinguishes the Divine unity from all created unity. Created unity cannot be conceived other than as a unity in multiplicity, a unity that forms a whole from the unification of parts, which parts than can be numbered. Therefore, any concept of unity consisting of numbers of parts and elements that form the unit cannot be attributed to the Divine unity. This understanding of unity excludes the Christian concept of the Trinity, as it is usually understood as three-in-one or one essence in three persons.

Even the so-called atom, which means the fundamental part of all matter that cannot be further divided (a-tomos means indivisible, not being able to be divided), has been divided in modern physics, and the last of its parts that are studied have been found, at least in quantum physics, as not being a-toms either, or indivisibles, but are perceived as elements that are on the border between wave and matter, one could say between a spiritual or physical entity, as some interpreters of these studies claim.

In the next paragraph Bahá'u'lláh states something surprising and unexpected. Talking about the essence of belief in Divine unity, He makes a statement that can be easily mis-understood in the sense of the Christian Trinitarian theology, especially if the paragraph before and after this sentence is not understood, and some crucial words are overlooked.

46 Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. (GWB 165)

Let's imagine that this sentence would have been presented in the Council of Nicaea, in 325, where the Trinity Theology was developed, and let's further replace the Manifestation of God with Jesus Christ, who certainly is a Manifestation in the Bahá'í understanding. So the sentence would look like this in this adapted and shortened form:

The essence of belief in Divine unity consists in regarding Him, Jesus Christ, and the Divine Essence as one and the same.

We deliberately left out the fact that Bahá'u'lláh describes the Divine essence as inaccessible and unknowable. Certainly, the followers of Athanasius would have agreed, one and the same is their catchword: “homo-ousios” (of the same substance or essence). The followers of Arius would have protested. “Not the same,” they would have screamed, “only of similar substance, homoi-ousios.” (I am aware that these two words were actually coined later as the battle cry of these two camps.) The emperor, who according to Eusebius, entered the council in his golden splendor, would have agreed as well, even though he later followed the Arian interpretation. We must consider that the emperor got baptized only later on his death bed and that the bishops were probably dressed in simple garments, some of them still carrying the marks of previous persecutions. The council had been called by the emperor, and he allowed the bishops to travel at the government expenses. The bishop of Rome, too old to travel, sent two priests as his representation to this council, which was mainly attended by bishops of the Eastern Roman Empire.

What we left out – the description of the essence of God as being inaccessible and unknowable – and the next sentence of Bahá'u'lláh, if it would have been presented in Nicaea, would probably not have been understood at all at that time. The bishops might have quoted John 6:60 “Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?”

Bahá'u'lláh continued to say:

By this is meant that whatever pertaineth to the former, all  
Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

47

His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself. (GWB 165)

What must be considered is the fact that this sentence does not limit the previous statement but puts it in the right perspective. The context of understanding of this statement is the fact that God is unknowable. So, any sameness or identity between a creature and God can only be in what is knowable and pertains to God, i.e., His Word, or His Will and Command, or, in other words, the Revelations of His Manifestations.

The distinction between unknowable and unknown is usually not taken very seriously. In the Acts (17:23) Paul is reported to talk about an unknown God:

For, as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.  
Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto

you.

At the time of Paul, the idea of a god or gods was a well known and an accepted fact to people in general; only a specific god could have been unknown in Greece. Paul does not raise the question if God can be known; that was not a question that could have been asked at that time, because in the common sense everyone knew about the gods. It is a question of importance today, where atheism and agnosticism is widespread, and was the public policy in a third of the human population not long ago. It took several centuries to develop this question.

At about the 6th century, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, following the Neo-Platonic tradition, developed the “via negative” and affirmed the fact that we know nothing about God. Karen Armstrong calls this an attempt to combine the Semitic and the Greek conception of God.

We may ask: what is unknowable today, where science and technology opened so many ways of knowing things? The only thing that is unknowable in this world is the “personal” and the “subjective” and even science cannot make it known objectively. The crucial issue is human consciousness, the fundament of human personality. We do not know what goes on in anybody’s mind, unless they talk to us. As a matter of fact, even neurobiological studies can only tell us that there is something going on, but not what is going on. Even our knowledge of our own mind is limited by our ability to reflect.

48

Bahá’u’lláh’s Most Sublime Vision

Psychology, with all its tests and clinical evaluations, has to recognize the fact that there is always a substantial part of the person which is unknowable. That’s why the therapeutic process is based on honesty and honest communication with each other, honesty with oneself and honesty of the patient, a virtue the patient has to learn in the process of therapy. That was clearly expressed by the psychoanalyst Loewald’s description of therapy:

Our object, being what it is, is the other in ourselves and ourselves in the other. To discover truth about the patient is always discovering it with him and for him as well as for ourselves and about ourselves. And it is discovering truth between each other, as the truth of human beings is revealed in their interrelatedness.

This is the psychoanalytic description of what the dialogical-personal thinkers called personal versus substantial knowledge. Ferdinand Ebner has formulated this truth in the following way:

What exists as personality, can never and in no way be conceived as existing in the way of a substance. If we make the concept of substance the basis of the

understanding of reality, then we lock out forever any way to recognize that, which exists in the way of personality. To a being of a personality we can only have a 'personal' relation, in the final analysis no other relation as the relation of the 'I' to the 'Thou.' To a substance we can in no way have a personal relation – therefore in our relation to it the 'I' disappears in a sense.

Concluding, it can be stated that God is unknowable in any substantial, scientific and objective way. What we know about God is what He has revealed to us through His Manifestations, so it is an eminently personal knowledge that is expressed in praise and prayer, not in any knowing of what God is.

Therefore, the sameness between God and His Manifestation is not an essential one of "ousia" or substance, as the Council of Nicaea understood it, but a personal one. It is based on the Revelation of God's Will or Word in His Commands, as Bahá'u'lláh so clearly describes this oneness as related to the acts of the Manifestations with the Will of God:

By this is meant that whatever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical  
Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine 49

with the Will of God Himself. (GWB 165)

The mistake, and at that time any other solution might have been even more wrong than the Nicæan Creed, was not in the identification of sameness between God and His Manifestation, but in placing the sameness into the substance, the hypostasis, or the "ousia", or essence of God.

This is still true about Catholic Theology today. Karl Rahner, making a statement in his Theological Dictionary about the Hypostatic Union (as the explanation for the concept of the Trinity is traditionally called), said:

This formulation is the fruit of the great Christological controversies of the first four centuries. These arose of intellectual speculations which unsuccessfully attempted to elucidate the fact, evident in Scripture, that Jesus Christ is true man and true God. ... (p. 218-219)

It is remarkable that even Rahner calls it no less than an intellectual speculation and an unsuccessful attempt. From the point of view of the Bahá'í Revelation it has become clear that this speculation probably was unavoidable, but it could not be successful, because it attempted to understand intellectually what is unknowable and inaccessible, i.e., the essence or substance ('ousia') or nature of God.

That this intellectual speculation has to be unsuccessful, that

the nature of God cannot be conceived or described, was stated by Bahá'u'lláh when He revealed in a prayer:

Every praise which any tongue or pen can recount, every imagination which any heart can devise, is debarred from the station which Thy most exalted Pen hath ordained, how much more must it fall short of the heights which Thou hast Thyself immensely exalted above the conception and the description of any creature. (PM 194)

Islam has totally rejected the concept of Trinity and accused Christians of believing in more than one God, accusing them of Tritheism, a heresy in Christian theology which never reached importance in theology, even though some practices of Christians today are not far away from this way of thinking. For example, there are medieval pictures, which depict God with three heads on one body. This way of depicting the Trinity was condemned by the church as clearly wrong,

What is rather interesting is the fact that in Islam the person  
50 Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

of Muhammad, the Prophet, does not reach the same veneration than Christians give to Jesus. This means that in the Muslim faith it is the Book that attracts the special attention; it is the Qur'an, which has come from heaven through the Prophet. In Christianity, the Book, the Bible, is secondary to Jesus; it tells us about Him, and that is its importance. The emphasis on the human station of Mohammad, the Prophet, can be understood as a reaction to the understanding of Christ's Divinity, as it is expressed in the concept of the Trinity.

In the Bahá'í Faith these two aspects are combined and corrected. Jesus and Muhammad are placed in the same position as all the other Manifestations of God, and the holy Books are equally seen as testimonies of the Revelation of God. It is the person of the Manifestation, as well as His Revelation and His Writings that are the testimony to the truth.

In the Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, (p. 134), Bahá'u'lláh has combined these two traditions in calling the Manifestation the "Living Book," contrasted it with the written Book of His Revelation (the Báb, in His Writings, has used this concept of living book before):

Take heed lest ye be prevented by aught that hath been recorded in the Book from hearkening unto this, the Living Book. (KA 66)

Another verse of Bahá'u'lláh specifically explains how the testimony of the truth of this Revelation is established in the Person of the Manifestation, in His Revelation, and in the resulting Book of His Writings, and how this can be recognized by every soul:

Say: The first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth. This is, verily, an evidence of His tender mercy unto men. He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. (GWB 105-106)

The solution to this age old problem of the Oneness of God, that has caused discord and strife, war and hate between the followers of these two Revelations of God, is the fact explained in the above quoted verse of Bahá'u'lláh, that the essence, the substance, the nature or 'ousia' of God is unknowable and inaccessible. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has formulated this truth revealed by Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

51

Bahá'u'lláh, when He said:

But, that Essence of Essences, that Invisible of Invisibles, is sanctified above all human speculation, and never to be overtaken by the mind of man. Never shall that immemorial Reality lodge within the compass of a contingent being. His is another realm, and of that realm no understanding can be won. No access can be gained thereto; all entry is forbidden there. The utmost one can say is that Its existence can be proved, but the conditions of Its existence are unknown. (SWAB 54)

Bahá'u'lláh describes this complicated issue by affirming that the Manifestation can say "I am God," just like the Christian believes that Jesus is God. Because all of what we know about God derives from the life and Revelation of His Manifestation, Christians and Muslims can say about their Prophet that He is a "Messenger of God," and Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that this is only possible when the human aspect of the Prophet is seen in its "uttermost state of servitude":

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: 'I am God!' He verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His name and His attributes, are made manifest in the world. ... And were any of them to voice the utterance: 'I am the Messenger of God,' He also speaketh the truth, the indubitable truth. ...

And were they to say: 'We are the servants of God,' this also is a manifest and indisputable fact. For they have been made manifest in the uttermost state of servitude, a servitude the like of which no man can possibly attain. (KI 178)

This is nothing more than an explication of the statement of Christ in the Gospel of John (10:30) "I and my Father are one." And later (John 10:37-38) "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him."

To close this excursion into Christian dogma, it appears that at the time of early Christianity the concept of an unknowable God was unconceivable, since everyone was believed to know God. It was a time when the statues of many different gods

52

Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

covered the sanctuaries of the land, and the whole world was conceived as functioning in dependency to these gods. The Jewish belief in one God only, was tolerated by the Romans as peculiar and as a historical tribal idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, the same belief was conceived so aberrant in non-Jews that Christians who shared that belief were called atheists by the Romans. To them, belief in only one God was nothing other than un-belief, a-theism. Christians were persecuted on the Emperor's mandate for such beliefs and put to death for it. How could people raised in this environment conceive of an unknowable God, Who is only known through His Manifestation? So, they had to describe the relationship between Christ and God in their own way, inventing the concept of the Trinity and attributing the same essence, substance, or 'ousia', to both Christ and God the Father. This was a logical and possible unavoidable conclusion taken at the Council of Nicaea and then carried forth into 2,000 years of Christian Theology.

Today, after the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, we can understand that the mistake of their solution was the fact that it is totally incorrect and impossible to talk about essence, substance, nature or 'ousia' of God; God is absolutely unknowable in any such way.

Even today, even among the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, who came from a Christian background, it is quite likely that this issue is not clear, and our understanding of God is not yet what it should be in keeping with the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. We have not consequently followed through with the idea that we do not know and cannot know God in any substantial and objective way, that we cannot even talk about God in this way, or talk about the essence, the substance or 'ousia' of God. On the other hand, we are exhorted, invited and even obligated to know God and love Him, not in a scientific and objective way, but in a personal approach. God has spoken through the Word of the Manifestations to us, and has allowed

us to speak back and praise Him through prayer and service  
The following Verse from a prayer of Bahá'u'lláh can best be  
understood in the same way

Here am I with my body between Thy hands, and my spirit  
before Thy face. (PM 243)

As in Genesis 2:7

Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

53

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the  
ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;  
and man became a living soul.

God formed the body of Adam, so Bahá'u'lláh talks about the  
material body between God's forming hands. The living soul  
was given to Adam through the breath of God, which breath  
comes from the face in the picturesque language of the first  
book of the bible, hence the many allusions to the face or  
countenance of God as a indication of the spiritual aspect of  
man. Here clearly the difference between the material and the  
spiritual of man is described. Without exaggeration we can say  
that the consequences of this understanding will certainly change the  
whole structure and meaning of religion in the future.

Concluding the previous two chapters the following can be  
stated: The difference in the concept of unity between the  
Creator and the creation is important and has to be understood  
in the way this unity is manifested in the Prophets of God. It is  
not their nature or essence; it is their Word, their Revelation,  
and their Message which manifests the unity of God. That  
means that the unity of God can only be seen in the unity of the  
Manifestations with each other and in the unity of their  
individual Revelations, which is the Word of God and originates  
in the Will of God. Any other understanding of the unity of  
God is vain imagination, as Bahá'u'lláh stated in the prayer  
mentioned before.

Consequently, the unknowability of God could be described  
in this way: The essence of God is unknowable, so all that can be  
known about God is what He makes known of Himself. What  
God makes known to humankind is called Revelation, and it is  
known to humanity through God's Messengers, through His  
Manifestations, or biblically through His Word, which was  
incarnated in Christ.

In other words, nothing can be known about God except  
what was revealed through His Manifestations. Secondly,  
God reveals Himself in His creation, which is the place where  
God makes Himself known through His Manifestations in  
another form, as all that was created was created through His  
Manifestation, through His word, as it is said in John 1:1-3 "In  
the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and

the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

54

#### Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

There are three ways of knowing God: through the life of the Manifestation, through the Revelation of the Manifestation, and through the world as being created by the Manifestation. It needs to be remembered that humanity is part of creation, and therefore the knowledge of God is innate to humans as well.

These three ways of knowing God are described by

Bahá'u'lláh:

All knowledge of God comes

1. through the Manifestation, through His life, described as the “Living Book”

Say: God, the True One, is My witness that neither the Scriptures of the world, nor all the books and writings in existence, shall, in this Day, avail you aught without this, the Living Book, Who proclaimeth in the midmost heart of creation: ‘Verily, there is none other God but Me, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.’ (KA 81)

2. and through their Revelation, their written Book:

The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His Glory, and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Divine Manifestation. (TB 156)

3. and all knowledge of God is evident in His creation, because all things were made by the Manifestation:

From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. So potent and universal is this revelation, that it hath encompassed all things visible and invisible. (GWB 178)

#### Overview of a Philosophy of Integral Unity

In a very cursory form we will present the history of the unity concept in philosophy by mentioning the major philosophers and indicating their understanding. Certainly, this topic could be the subject of an extensive monograph, but here only a very short overview of the most important authors will be presented, assuming that the details are known.

B. R. Kadem has described the “Origin of the Bahá'í Concept of Unity and Causality, A Brief Survey of Greek, Neo-Platonic, Lights of ‘Irfán Book Nine

55

and Islamic Underpinnings” and has pointed out the distinctive features of the Bahá'í account. One of the most important

differences is the assertion that the unity concept is attributed to the Manifestation of God, not to God Himself as in the Neo-Platonic and Islamic tradition. Therefore he states

The Bahá'í concept of the unity of being is laden with implications unprecedented in the Greek, Neo-Platonic, or Islamic forbears. The understanding of these implications are therefore now part of the current and future labors of thought for Bahá'í thinkers. (p. 115)

He further states that there is a need to re-think the Neo-Platonic concept of emanation, when used in the Bahá'í context.

In this paper the concept of Revelation of Unity is carried further into the present scientific and philosophical thinking, and only the following very brief reference is made to the historical aspect of this question.

Pre-Socratic Philosophers: Monism versus Pluralism

Parmenides (and in similar way much later Spinoza, and in some ways Hegel): One Reality, Monism. His understanding pervades all of European philosophy, from Plato to the Neo-Platonists, and into the Christian Philosophy by Origin and others, especially in the tractate of the Trinity by Augustine. It further implies an emphasis on unity (spirituality) and distrust for plurality (materiality).

Democritus (and in similar ways modern science): Atomism.

The whole is the sum of its parts, a mechanical, accidental and material universe. Any concept derived from the whole and not the parts is without value and can be neglected; all phenomena can be reduced to their "atoms," and truth can only be found in this reductionistic way of thinking.

Classical Greek Philosophy

Plato: The reality is in the idea; any multiplicity is only a shadow of reality. Neo-Platonism has developed this further and was critical in influencing Christian theology towards the depreciation of the reality of this world

Aristotle: Unity (or Form) and Plurality (Primal matter).

Reality is the unity of form and matter that explains movement and change; Aristotle developed his meta-physic after studies in physics (nature). This understanding was renewed by Thomas Aquinas and became the centerpiece of scholastic philosophy. It

56

Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

is taught in Catholic Universities even today, making Christian philosophy more realistic and directed towards the reality of this world. As a matter of fact, this more realistic understanding was one of the causes of the development of modern sciences.

Modern Philosophy: Idealism versus Materialism

Hegel: Idealism, Unity of Ideals, of the Spiritual, Dialectical process of these ideas verified in the social arena of the ideal

## Prussian State

Marx: Materialism, Economic evolution of World Unity to be brought about by violent revolution, and cumulating in the dictatorship of the proletariat, even though it is predicted to happen with iron necessity. (Before and after Marx, Feuerbach, Darwin and Freud can be counted in the same group.)

The different ways unity and multiplicity were understood is a theme with many variations throughout the history of philosophy. It seems to have come to a harmonious solution only recently, after the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and not without the influence of this Revelation, as was noted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the above mentioned quote:

And all this newness hath its source in the fresh outpourings of wondrous grace and favour from the Lord of the Kingdom. (SWAB 253)

What is the newness in the philosophy of today that relates to the one and the many, to unity and diversity? In a previous paper of this writer, the history of this vision of the "Integral opposition of Unity and Plurality" ("Der integrale Gegensatz von Einheit und Vielheit") was briefly described, and the relevant authors were mentioned. Here the thoughts of Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, as described before, will be more extensively presented as they are important to better understand the concept of unity in the Bahá'í Writings. The Integral Whole is described by Wucherer-Huldenfeld in the following points:

- The Whole relates to the parts integrating or complementing them in a structure of a real synthesis
- The parts, in their internal unity and diversity, are equally original and essential, constituting equally the respective whole, which they build with each other and for each other

Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

57

- The greatest unity of the whole is realized with the greatest independence and freedom of its diverse parts or elements
  - In the whole the parts are "healed" and integrated; through the parts the whole is "healed," it is made whole
  - A dialectic of different conceptions of Unity & Plurality can be developed: Totalitarian dissolution of Plurality versus Radical Plurality (Postmodern Pluralism)
  - From an article on Teilhard de Chardin: Unification differentiates; the more unity the more complexity is possible; unity of spirit and matter: Spirit-Matter
- The drastic change and the newness of this thought are not obvious, unless we consider the social and political application

of it. That is really the topic of Shoghi Effendi's considerations about the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, even though it is not expressed in philosophical statements in his writings. The Guardian does clearly state that all previous social and political forms of political unity are obsolete and that a new form will be developed in the Bahá'í Commonwealth:

“The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.” (WOB 203)

In this brief formulation, which is more extensively described in the Guardian's communication to the American Bahá'ís, it is remarkable that the unity of all nations, races and creeds is combined with a complete safeguard of the autonomy of the individual states as well as with the promotion of the personal freedom and initiative of all individuals.

What is crucial in the Guardian's understanding of unity in diversity is the fact that in this understanding the parts reach their advantage from the whole and the whole has to guarantee the welfare of the parts.

The advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected. (WOB 198)

58

Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime

Vision

Seen from the side of the parts Shoghi Effendi states that any distress to the parts affects the whole; they are mutually dependent, that is, they constitute each other mutually. Neither is prior, neither is more or less than the other.

The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole. (PDC 122)

Philosophically this conception is only possible in the above proposed understanding of the unity of the integral whole. It is remarkable to note that this philosophical thought was only fully developed after the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, even though it happened in a tradition that prepared for this development.

There are many statements in the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith that envision a similar unity, where the parts are equally protected, cherished and found to be essential to the unity, especially the many comparisons of 'Abdu'l-Bahá of the unity of the world and mankind with a flower garden. Here some examples how the diversity and variety of a garden adorns its beauty and increases its perfection.

How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and colour! Diversity of hues, form and shape, enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. (SWA 291-292)

The importance of variety in oneness is emphasized in this sample from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings:

When there is variety in the world of oneness, they will appear and be displayed in the most perfect glory, beauty, exaltation and perfection. (TH 14)

'Abdu'l-Bahá's beauty in the diversity of the garden expresses the new understanding of the relationship between the one and the many, the whole and the parts. It is described as a gift of God and the felicity of the human world in another statement: Therefore, the part is expressive of the whole, for this seed was a part of the tree, but therein potentially was the whole tree.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine

59

So each one of us may become expressive or representative of all the bounties of life to mankind.

This is the unity of the world of humanity. This is the bestowal of God. This is the felicity of the human world, and this is the manifestation of the divine favor. (PUP 16)

The importance of what Shoghi Effendi called the "watchword" of the Bahá'í Faith, "unity in diversity," can hardly be overestimated. Is it not the basis of any future political, sociological and philosophical development which the Bahá'í Writings predict, and is it not the need of our age? This is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh in these words:

Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.

In the Bahá'í Faith the spiritual is not evaluated by devaluating the material; both are valued and equal in their own right. Neither is unity extolled at the cost of diversity and multiplicity. That means that any devaluation of any aspect of God's creation is wrong and alien to this Faith.

A basic difference to previous dispensations, like Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and others, is the value given to the world as God's creation. This value judgment is not placed on the ontological structure of the world, but on the

choices humans make in dealing with the creation. Any overestimation of one aspect over the other is wrong. When the material, the multiple, and the diverse is overestimated, we have materialism and a station of man that is lower than the animal. On the other hand unity – or the spiritual – should not be overestimated either to the detriment of the diversity and the material. Bahá'u'lláh made this clear in the rejection of asceticism and monasticism and of certain forms of mysticism.

Bahá'í Unity is understood as unity and diversity, as variation and oneness, as oneness in multiplicity, which is characteristic for this created world, and neither can be evaluated by devaluating the other, neither can be affirmed by negating the other, yet both are transcended by the inner meaning of the Word of God, as it is stated by Bahá'u'lláh

Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of

60 Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision

limitation and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God. (KI 160)

Bahá'í spirituality, therefore, needs to be conceptualized on the idea of unity in diversity, and the consequences of this new approach cannot be fully understood today, neither can the practical applications in the future be seen in our present world. Shoghi Effendi's description of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is the most that can be said today about this future development. And yet, it can easily be understood that this new vision will bring a revolutionary change to all religions in the future, affecting theology, philosophy and the practical life of all the followers of the world religions. Summarizing we can make the following conclusions.

- God's Unity is transcendent, beyond unity and multiplicity, transcending numbers and comprehension, i.e., unknowable.
- God's Unity is revealed only through the Unity of the Manifestations, their words and laws, expressing God's Primal Will and Word
- Created unity is always "unity in diversity", "oneness in multiplicity"
- Created unity is constituted by the integration of the whole and the parts, which are equal and both original; they are the "same and different" (TB 140)
- The concept of integral unity, or unity in diversity, has implications for the future, and its practical application in

the future Bahá'í commonwealth was described by Shoghi Effendi as far as this is possible today.

— Baha'u'llah's Most Sublime Vision (Used by permission of the curator)