

Now as for man—in Genesis we read that man is the creation of God. Bahá'u'lláh writes that “The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness.”³ And again He says, “From among all created things He hath singled out for His special favor the pure, the gem-like reality of man, and invested it with a unique capacity of knowing Him and reflecting the greatness of His glory.”⁴

To know God, and to reflect His glory, should therefore be the aim of Man, and that this task is not beyond our possibilities is evident because God has created us for this very purpose. Because there is a way of knowing Him, we are not to consider that man can directly contact the Incomprehensible, or that the created thing can know its Creator. The finite can never comprehend the infinite, nor can a lower plane comprehend a higher one—for instance a stone representing the mineral kingdom, or a tree representing the vegetable kingdom, can never understand man representing the human kingdom.

The manner in which man acquires knowledge of God, the Unknowable Essence, is through an Intermediary, or Mediator, for God from the beginning of time has provided mankind with His Manifestations to serve as “vehicles for the transmission of the Grace of Divinity itself”—in other words to serve as a channel through which man may be enabled to know Him. The theory of an intermediary between man and his Creator exists in all great religions today. Each points to a mediator as receiving from God the “light of divine splendor” and thence distributing it over the human world. The Jews look to Moses and the Christians to Christ. For others it is Buddha, or Muhammad, or Zoroaster. In this day the Bahá'ís recognize in Bahá'u'lláh this same station as Intermediary between God and man.

Now the very nature of an intermediary immediately suggests to us a dual relationship, because it brings to us two extremes in relation to each other. Anything that might have but a single relationship could not be an intermediary, and so a Manifestation of God, serving as mediator between God, the Unknowable Essence, and Man, His Creation, must needs have a relationship with both the finite and the infinite. In other words he must have a divine relationship, and also a human relationship.

Considering first the divine relationship, or the relation of the Manifestation to God Himself, we have the following words of Bahá'u'lláh, “The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. These sanctified Mirrors, these Daysprings of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose.”⁵ Bahá'u'lláh further tells us “These Tabernacles of holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect

the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are made manifest.”⁶

Thus the Intermediary, or the Manifestation, as we shall call Him, in the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “appears out of the realm of the spirit in the noble form of the human temple” and is thus “made manifest unto all men.”⁷ They impart unto the world the mysteries of God, by expressing to man the attributes of God. That God should reveal His attributes through His Manifestation rather than His Essence can be understood because it is not possible for God to reveal to man that which man cannot understand. Man cannot understand the nature of fire, but he does understand its attributes, such as heat and light, and in this manner he obtains a knowledge of fire. Likewise God’s attributes, expressed by His Manifestations, become our only means of knowing God, the Unknowable. The attributes of God, which Bahá’u’lláh has enumerated as knowledge, power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy, wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are not realities in themselves and we can in no way consider them as independent existences. Detached from substance these attributes do not exist, because they are not substance, merely adjectives. So knowledge, power, sovereignty, dominion, mercy, etc., are not God, but only His attributes. They are not the Supreme Essence, and in recognizing them we have no cognizance of the Essence itself, only of Its attributes. And so God in His mercy has created for man an Intermediary or Manifestation, reflecting His attributes to man, and so perfectly do they fulfill this mission that Bahá’u’lláh states, “From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the light that can never fade.”⁸

So as we assume the Manifestation perfectly reflects God’s attributes we naturally consider that He is God. We speak of Him as God, in similar manner as we speak of light in reference to either the light or the lamp. The lamp, which is really the vehicle which transmits the light, is often called a light, and the Manifestation which is the “vehicle which transmits the grace of divinity” likewise is considered God. This conclusion is therefore legitimate, and while the followers of Moses, of Jesus, and Muhammad, do not all consider their prophet in this light, it is interesting to note that here in the western world, the largest single division of Christianity does regard Christ as God.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in London in 1911, He was asked, “Is the Divine Manifestation God?” and His answer was, “Yes, but not in Essence.”⁹

In the passages quoted from *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá’u’lláh speaks of the Manifestations as “Mirrors of Sanctity, expressing the central Orb of the Universe.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá again and again when speaking of the

Manifestations of God described them in similar fashion, as Mirrors reflecting the light of the Divine Sun, and this picture so thoroughly covers the subject that every one should attempt to visualize His illustration.

Let us imagine a mirror placed in a room in such a position as to reflect the light of the sun. The mirror is to represent the Manifestation of God and the sun is to represent God, or the Divine Essence. A person might then say that he saw two suns; one in the sky and one in the mirror, a statement that could not be disproved. And yet we know that the sun in the sky and the sun in the mirror are one, and the appearance of the two suns can in no way refute the singleness of the heavenly sun. The sun of the heavens is considered the Divine Essence, but we cannot say this of the sun in the mirror. So then, we can say, the Divine Manifestation is God, but not in His Essence. The light is the same, but the Mirror is not the Sun.

The Sun we see in the mirror is a perfect reflection of the attributes of the Heavenly Sun. If we had a giant mirror so placed as to reflect the sunlight directly into a room, we could flood it with sunshine so perfectly that those inside would experience every sensation or attribute of the sun, as perfectly as though they might be outside. The light would be just as blinding, and the radiation just as definite. However those in the room would be receiving those sensations through an intermediary, the mirror, and not directly from the Sun.

This illustration might be carried even farther, by giving the mirror a name. Suppose it were named Moses, to demonstrate the relationship between God and the Jews. And then suppose other mirrors were brought forth which might be named Christ, Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh. Now each of these four mirrors would reflect the same light, yet none of them would be the sun. In this manner all of the Manifestations of God have the same relationship to God, and in this sense they are one, yet each has His own individual identity.

It would be interesting at this point to study each of the Manifestations of God in order to demonstrate how marvelously each is endowed with God's attributes. However, this is a large subject which could not be covered properly in a few moments. Nevertheless, regardless of how well we know the life and teachings of Moses, of Jesus, of Muhammad, of the Báb or of Bahá'u'lláh, we are at least familiar enough with them to realize that when we think of God's attributes, such as knowledge, power, dominion, we can visualize them practically all reflected in Their lives. Should some certain quality not visibly appear in any one of these Divine Beings, it would not necessarily mean that He did not possess that quality; for Bahá'u'lláh states that all of these brilliant Beings are endowed with all the attributes of God though all may not appear outwardly.¹⁰ We can readily realize how reasonable this statement is, for in our daily lives we continually discover in even our most intimate friends qualities that they possess which outwardly are not apparent. For instance, a man may have amazing strength, but due to his occupation or mode of living, he is never called upon to display it, and the world may not recognize that such a quality existed in him. And so we could not truthfully say that a Prophet of God did not possess a certain attribute of God

just because that attribute was not outwardly visible to the world.

The thought might come to us at this point, as to whether or not the teachings of Christ, or of Muhammad, show evidences of the relationship which Bahá'u'lláh states exists between God and His Manifestations, such as we have already discussed.

First turning to the Bible, we find in the Gospel of St. John countless references to the relationship of Jesus to God, some of which we will quote. We have the following words of John, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."¹¹ This verse was quoted before to show the relation of God to His creatures, but it also indicates that the knowledge of God is possible only through His Manifestations.

Then, where we find the Jews desiring to kill Jesus because He not only had broken the Sabbath but had said that God was His Father, apparently making Himself equal with God, we have the reply of Jesus, as follows, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."¹² In the light of the explanations which Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have given us, these words of Jesus become easier for us to understand. If the Jews had understood His explanation they would have known that Jesus only claimed equality with God in the sense that He reflected His attributes. He made no mention of His Essence, but did state that He could do nothing of Himself; only that which He saw His Father do.

After Jesus foretold that Judas would betray Him and it became necessary for Him to comfort His disciples, we remember Philip coming to Him, saying, "Lord, shew us the Father and it sufficeth us," and then we have Jesus' reply, "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."¹³ The relationship of "the Father in Me" is one which Jesus mentioned many times, and is one that many have attempted to explain. In fact Jesus used it so often that a person could not honestly feel that he understood the true relationship of Christ to God, unless he also understood the relationship signified in "the Father in Me." We could hardly be expected to understand this from a literal standpoint, because such an interpretation would be contrary to science and reason. We are therefore warranted in understanding this from a symbolic and allegorical standpoint. Christ often spoke in parables and it is an interesting fact that when He told His disciples a parable He never advised

them that what He was telling them was a parable, but He always spoke as if it were an actual occurrence. Since we do interpret His parables as allegories it stands that we can also consider the “Father in Me” as allegorical and symbolical, particularly so because a literal interpretation of this statement is beyond reason. And so ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in explaining this statement of “the Father in Me” in Paris in 1913, spoke as follows, “The fatherhood and sonship are allegorical and symbolical. The Messianic reality is like unto a mirror through which the sun of divinity has become resplendent. If this mirror expresses, “The light is in me”—it is sincere in its claim; therefore Jesus was truthful when he said, ‘The Father is in Me.’ The sun in the sky and the sun in the mirror are one, are they not,—and yet we see there are apparently two suns.”¹⁴

And then as we leave the Bible and take up Muhammad and the Qur’án, we have first—“It is not for man that God should speak with him but by vision or behind a veil or he sendeth a Messenger to reveal by His permission what He will.”¹⁵ This confirms the truth, that the knowledge of God is possible only through His Manifestations, or Messengers, as was stated in this verse. Bahá’u’lláh quotes the following verse from the Qur’án: “There is no distinction whatsoever between Thee and Them; except that they are Thy servants, and are created of Thee.”¹⁶ Again Bahá’u’lláh quotes from the Qur’án as follows: “Manifold and mysterious is My relationship with God. I am He, Himself, and He is I Myself, except that I am that I am, and He is that He is.”¹⁷ These holy words of Muhammad require no explanation. They merely indicate to us, that the teachings of Muhammad are identical with those of Christ and Bahá’u’lláh, with regard to the relationship of the Manifestation to God.

And now let us consider the second relationship of the Manifestation: that of His relationship to man.

It was pointed out that since man cannot comprehend the Infinite, it must necessarily follow that the Manifestation of God must have human aspects. Were this not so, man could no more comprehend Him than he could the Supreme Essence, and those that have considered the Manifestation exclusively as God, and denied His human aspects, have perhaps unconsciously, but nevertheless in fact, denied the Infinity of God Himself. We have quoted Bahá’u’lláh where He states that God “caused luminous Gems of Holiness to appear from the worlds of spirit in noble human temples, among His creatures.”¹⁸ From this we understand that God created His Manifestations in human form; that they each took on a physical body and a rational soul, and to each of them was assigned a different Name.

It should not be necessary to attempt to prove this point, for history tells us how the people of the time of a Manifestation have invariably recognized Him merely as one of their own fellowmen, and dealt with Him as such. They certainly could not have mistaken His knowledge, His mercy, His wisdom, His generosity, or His beneficence; as a matter of fact His enemies have even acknowledged that these qualities existed in Him whom they were so mercilessly

persecuting. The persecutions the Manifestations endured were due entirely to the materialism of the people among whom They lived, who were thus permitted to see only the Manifestations' physical condition, and were blinded from recognizing the significance of Their more important Spiritual aspects, which elevated Them to the true station of a Manifestation of God.

Entering this world as an infant, the Manifestation is administered to as any other child. His body develops gradually and is built up of elements just as man's body has been developed. Composed of elements it is therefore also subject to decomposition. The Manifestation has human limitations similar to man in that He is subject to illness, endures pain, is dependent on food and drink, needs sleep and rest, and has either material means or is without them. And yet while the Manifestations have the same physical conditions as mankind, it is evident that these physical powers are often higher developed. For instance, man has ever been amazed at the suffering these Holy Beings were obliged to endure. Men have marveled at their remarkable endurance, their phenomenal recuperative powers. In the specific case of Bahá'u'lláh an account tells of the extraordinary condition of Bahá'u'lláh during the last three years of His life, a period during which He ate practically nothing. Once when He was not feeling well a Greek physician examined His pulse and expressed his astonishment, stating that he had never seen a constitution so sensitive as that of Bahá'u'lláh.¹⁹

The Manifestation also has a rational soul, or individual reality such as man; however, they are not exactly alike; the difference is explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá being as follows:—"But the individual reality of the Manifestations of God is a holy reality, and for that reason it is sanctified, and in that which concerns its nature and quality, is distinguished from all other things. It is like the sun, which by its essential nature produces light, and cannot be compared to the moon, just as the particles that compose the globe of the sun cannot be compared with those which compose the moon. The particles and organization of the former produce rays, but the particles of which the moon is composed do not produce rays, but need to borrow light. So other human realities are those souls who, like the moon, take light from the sun; but that holy reality is luminous in himself."²⁰

So then the Manifestation is similar to man in that He has a similar physical body, but more highly developed, and then like man, He has a rational soul, with the exception that His reality being holy is luminous, whereas man is dependent on his light from the Manifestation.

Where the Manifestation differs essentially from man is in His Divine Identity, which is known as the Divine Bounty. Obviously this is a station which cannot be shared by man, because it is of an environment beyond the realm of man. This station is described as the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, or the Reality of Prophethood.²¹ Being of the Divine World, it has neither beginning nor end. This station represents the radiance of the light of the Supreme Essence or the radiance of the light of the Sun from a perfect mirror, and is the station which Christ referred to when He spoke of "the Father in Me." It is through

this station that the Manifestation displays His Divine attributes; whereby He becomes a Creator of Spiritual Life. By His innate knowledge, He becomes both a Divine Educator and a Divine Physician; an Establisher of a New Social Order.

This Reality of Prophethood wherein the Manifestation differs so essentially from man, as was stated, is of the Divine World, and has neither beginning nor end, hence it does not come into being with the declaration of prophethood by the Manifestation, nor does it cease with the death of His physical body. We have the words of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. The same was in the beginning with God," from which we deduce that the station of Messiahship was always with Christ and existed prior to His baptism, or even to His physical birth. Likewise the Divine Identity of Bahá'u'lláh did not suddenly appear in His physical body while he was sleeping upon His couch, as a literal interpretation of His Tablet to the Sháh of Írán would have us believe. This is explained [by 'Abdu'l-Bahá] in the following words: "Briefly, the Holy Manifestations have ever been, and ever will be, Luminous Realities; no change or variation takes place in their essence. Before declaring their manifestation, they are silent and quiet like a sleeper, and after their manifestation, they speak and are illuminated, like one who is awake."²²

As we study the utterance of the Manifestations, we learn that just as they have a dual relationship, They likewise have a dual form of utterance. There are times when They speak as a man, usually in a spirit of humility, such as the words of Jesus: "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done" or the words of Muhammad: "Say praise be to my Lord! Am I more than a man an apostle," or "I am but a man like you." In this connection there is also Bahá'u'lláh's epistle to the Sháh or Írán, previously referred to. This Tablet is too lengthy to quote, however it clearly indicates Bahá'u'lláh speaking as man, and in addition indicates that the station of Manifestation He had assumed was not of His own will. In His Tablet of Ishráqát He expressed a similar thought by saying, "Had another exponent or speaker been found we would not have made ourself an object of censure, derision and calumnies on the part of the people." Jesus spoke in like manner when He said, "Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from Me."²³

There are other times when the Manifestation speaks directly from the standpoint of the Deity. In this class of utterance His human personality is completely subservient, and we then have the Voice of God speaking direct to man, through Him. Dr. J. E. Esslemont, in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, states that through the Manifestation "God addresses His creatures, proclaiming His love for them, teaching them His attributes, making known His will, announcing His laws for their guidance and pleading for their love, their allegiance and service." And continuing, Dr. Esslemont writes as follows: "In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the utterance frequently changes from one of these forms to another. Sometimes it is evidently the Man who is discoursing, then without a break the writing continues as if God were speaking in the first person. Even when speaking as a man, however, Bahá'u'lláh

speaks as God's messenger, as a living example of entire devotion to God's will. His whole life is actuated by the Holy Spirit. Hence no hard and fast line can be drawn between the human and divine elements in His life or teachings. "Say: 'Naught is seen in my temple but the Temple of God, and in my beauty, but His Beauty, and in my being, but His Being, and in myself but Himself, and in my movement but His Movement, and in my acquiescence but His Acquiescence and in my Pen but His Pen, the Precious, the Extolled!'" "Say: 'Naught hath not been in my soul but the Truth, and in myself naught could be seen but God'."24

Notes: [notes in between square brackets have been added by BLO editor, 2026-02]

1. Bahá'í Scriptures, page 158 [BH06012]
2. John 1:18
3. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, page 70 [XXIX]
4. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, page 77 [XXXIV]
5. The Kitáb-i-Íqán, page 99
6. The Kitáb-i-Íqán, page 103
7. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XIX
8. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XIX
9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, page 61
10. The Kitáb-i-Íqán, page 104
11. John 1:18
12. John 5:16-23
13. John 14:8-11
14. Divine Philosophy, page 152 [interview with Pasteur Monnier (1913)]
15. Qur'án, Sura 42, verse 50 [See alternative translations here]
16. The Kitáb-i-Íqán, page 100 [Hooper Dunbar writes on page 138 of A Companion to the Study of the Kitáb-i-Íqán that this is a tradition (hadith) attributed to the Imám Mihdí, the twelfth Imám.]
17. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, page 66 [Gleanings XXVII (BH00690) , "To this testifieth the tradition..."]
18. The Kitáb-i-Íqán, page 99
19. Star of the West, Vol. VIII, page 178
20. Some Answered Questions, page 177 [Chapter 38: The Three Stations of the Divine Manifestations]
21. Some Answered Questions, page 174 [chapter 38]

22. Some Answered Questions, page 98 [Chapter 16: Intelligible Realities and Their Expression through Sensible Forms]

23. Matthew 26:39 [The authorized translation of the Tablet of Ishráqát (Splendors) is as follows: "... had there been any expounder or speaker discernible, We would not have made Ourselves the object of the censure, ridicule and slander of the people." – Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Ishráqát (Splendors), the ninth Ishráq]

24. Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, page 53 [Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Haykal (Súrih of the Temple), ¶44]

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