

(Baha?-Allah, 1934, pp. 74-75; tr., pp. 99-100). These intermediaries have a twofold nature, namely, their physical body and human nature, which belong to the ?alam-e kalq, and their spiritual reality, which belongs to ?alam-e amr. They represent God on earth and reflect all that humans can know of God, by perfectly manifesting all of the names and attributes of God (Baha?-Allah, 1934, pp. 77-78; tr., pp. 103-4; idem, 1984, no. 30, p. 55; tr., p.74; ?Abd-al-Baha?, pp. 110-12, 114-16; tr., pp. 146-48, 151-53; Dawudi, pp. 129-37), hence each is designated a Manifestation of God (mazhar-e elahi) and this is the term that Baha?-Allah uses in relation to himself rather than such terms as messenger (rasul) or prophet (nabi). Thus in the Bahai faith, this term indicates a manifestation of the Divine attributes and not an incarnation of God.

Since the Manifestation of God is the manifestation of the attributes of God and the representative of God on earth is the only access to God available to human beings, Baha?-Allah states that the knowledge of God can only be attained through these Manifestations, and, indeed, recognizing these Manifestations and obeying them is recognizing and obeying God (Baha?-Allah, p. 74; tr., p. 99; idem, no. 21, p. 40; tr., p. 50; ?Abd-al-Baha?, p. 168; tr., p. 222). Because of this, it is possible, Baha?-Allah states, to identify the Manifestation of God with God (as Christians do with Christ). On the other hand, bearing in mind the lower, human nature of the Manifestation, it is possible to assert (as Muslims do) that Mohammad was just a man who was a messenger of God (Baha?-Allah, 1934, pp. 138-39; tr., pp. 178-79).

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An important and distinctive aspect of this Bahai doctrine is the assertion that, since God is unknowable and utterly transcendent and the Manifestations of God are the representatives and agents of God in this world, everything that is stated in the scriptures of all religions describing God and His actions in the world applies in reality to the Manifestations of God (?Abd-al-Baha?, pp. 112-13; tr., p. 149). This applies in particular to prophecies in various scriptures of the eschatological meeting with God at the Time of the End, or the Day of Judgement, which, in the exegesis of the Bab and Baha?-Allah, becomes the appearance of a new Manifestation of God (i.e., themselves) at the end of a religious dispensation, which is the time when the followers of the previous religions are judged according to whether they recognize the new Manifestation of God or not, hence the Day of Judgement. Their coming alive spiritually through this recognition is the Resurrection (The Bab, 2:7, pp. 30-33; Baha?-Allah, 1934, pp. 107-11; tr., pp. 138-43; Dawudi, pp. 141-48).

One consequence of this doctrine of the Manifestation of God is that the essential nature and station of all of the Manifestations of God is one, and indeed they can be considered, at the spiritual level, as one reality that has appeared in the world at different times (Baha?-Allah, 1934, p. 118; tr., p.

152; idem, 1984, no. 34, p. 58; tr., p. 78). Therefore there is also a transcendent unity of the religions brought by these Manifestations of God (Baha?-Allah, 1984, no. 132, pp. 287-88; tr., p. 184; see also Schaefer, 1995, pp. 144-57). Another consequence is that each of the Manifestations of God can be considered as the “return” of a previous one, and this is the basis for the claim of Baha?-Allah to be the return of Christ (Baha?-Allah, 1934, p. 120, tr., p. 154). Similarly, since they are one in reality, Baha?-Allah states that any of the Manifestations can claim to be the first or the “Seal of the prophets” (katam al-nabiyin; Qor?an 33:40) and that this is the real meaning of this latter Qo?anic expression (Baha?-Allah, 1934, pp. 111-12, 139; tr., pp. 161-62, 179). On the other hand, Baha?-Allah asserts that each of the Manifestations of God comes at a particular time and has a specific mission, which is determined by the condition of humanity at that time. Hence they and the religions that they bring appear to human beings to be different. The successive Manifestations of God have been the agents of the progressive unfoldment of the Divine will and the main catalysts for humanity’s social evolution, each one building on the teachings of the previous one (Baha?-Allah, 1934, pp. 137-38; tr., pp. 177-78; idem, 1984, no. 132, p. 184; tr., p. 288). In addition to those mentioned in the Bible and Qor?an, such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad, the authoritative Bahai texts also recognize Zoroaster, Krishna, and the Buddha as Manifestations of God and assert that numerous others have come to humanity whose names may have been lost, such as, for example, among Native Americans (Baha?-Allah, 1984, no. 87, pp. 115-16; tr., p. 84; Fazel Mazandarani, pp. 46-47).

In a more general sense, Bahai theology regards everything in creation as manifesting some of the attributes of God to a certain degree. Human beings alone among created things, however, have the capacity to manifest all of the attributes of God (Baha?-Allah, 1984, no. 27, p. 50; tr., p. 65; Dawudi, pp. 99-119), but the prophets/founders of the world’s religions are the Manifestations of God par excellence, because they perfectly manifest all of the attributes of God. Belonging as they do to a realm and an order entirely distinct and above humanity, it is not possible for any human being to attain this station of being a Manifestation of God (?Abd al-Baha?, pp. 116-18; tr., pp. 154-56; Dawudi, pp. 126-29).

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