The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá’í Writings

by

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INTRODUCTION

At the center of all teachings of the Bahá’í Faith stands the figure of the manifestation of God. Anyone who would explore the Bahá’í scriptures and delve into their meaning must grapple with this important, often paradoxical figure. For the Bahá’í Faith teaches a God that transcends the world so completely as to remain utterly unknowable, yet a God that manifests Himself in each world according to the understanding of that realm's inhabitants. The Bahá’í scriptures extol a veritable panoply of prophets, equally lauding Jesus and Zoroaster, Buddha and Muhammad. Only one concept ties together for Bahá’ís the mosaic of humankind's religious experience throughout recorded history: the concept of the manifestation of God. Some appreciation of the background of this new world religion is necessary to understand so powerful and central an idea.

The Bahá’í manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in Arabic and Persian, and his immediate audience consisted for the most part of nineteenth-century Middle Eastern Muslims. The theological and philosophical ideal familiar to this audience owed a great deal, not only to the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religious traditions, but also to the Greek and Hellenistic philosophical heritage. For this reason, much of the psychology and cosmology of the Bahá’í writings is framed in broadly Aristotelian terms. Their image of the prophet beard a likeness in certain respects to the philosopher king of Plato and al-Farabi. The mystical theology of Plotinus (203-269/70 AD), the founder of Neoplatonism, particularly influenced the cultural context of the Bahá’í writings. Plotinus taught God’s unknowability, the emanation doctrine of creation, and the co-eternity of the universe with God. He also asserted the existence of a Universal Intellect as a metaphysical principle between God and the physical universe. In their own particular manner, the Bahá’í writings affirm many of these ideas, as well.

The Bahá’í concept of the intermediary between God and humankind expresses itself paradigmatically in the term "manifestation of God" or "theophany" (mazhar ilahi, zuhur). This idea emphasizes simultaneously the humanity of that intermediary and the way in which he shows forth the names and attributed of God. According to the Bahá’í writings, the manifestation of God is not an incarnation of God, as the transcendent Godhead can never incarnate itself in a mere mortal frame. But neither is the manifestation of God an ordinary, sinful mortal. He acts as a pure mirror to reflect the attributed of the Deity into this temporal plane. The term "manifestation of God" is not the only name the Bahá’í scriptures apply to this figure. They refer to him as prophet-messenger, prophet endowed with constancy, Primal Will, Word of God, Universal Intellect, and Primal Point. It should be clear that the concept of the manifestation of God in Bahá’í thought involved many elements. In some ways, the Bahá’í writings affirm the validity of terms and ideal which appear in past scriptures, theologies and philosophical systems. Much terminology, for instance, derived from the Qur'an (which Bahá’ís regard as authentic revealed scripture) and ultimately reflects the Judaic religious heritage. For example, in the Bahá’í writings the Jewish insistence on the oneness and transcendence of God are consistently present. One also finds terminology similar to that of John’s Gospel, especially to those passages where John explicates the Logos concept. But in the Bahá’í writings, these past terms are integrated into a new vision, and sometimes endowed with new significance. Although perhaps none of the terms and concepts which Bahá’í scripture employs to describe God's envoy to humankind appear there for the first time, including that of the manifestation of God (an epithet used by Shi'i thinkers), the Bahá’í scripture’s use of these terms and concepts creates a new theology. It differs from the conventional Imami Shi’ite prophethood in some respects, and often had more in common with the prophethood of the Muslim philosophers.

Theophany constitutes the primary basis of the Bahá’í approach to prophecy, and it is appropriate to call this area of Bahá’i theology "theophanology," differing as it does from Christology, Buddhology, and most Islamic prophetologies. To set this Bahá’í idea of the manifestation of God in context will require a brief investigation into some other areas of Bahá’u’lláh’s theology, including the understanding of God, the Logos or Word of God, and of human beings themselves. A consideration of the background of some of these Bahá’í doctrines in Shi’ite Islam will also prove valuable.

GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES

Bahá'u'lláh paradoxsically relates personally to a God Who is not a person. He depicts God as the Absolute Truth (Haqq), as inconceivable to mortal human beings and even to the prophets and messengers themselves. Addressing God, Bahá'u'lláh writes:
The necessary to review briefly the existed, and that it or unite Himself with any part of it? The Bahá’í writings accept that God has attributes. One must understand the nature of these attributes in Bahá’í theology in order to grasp the concept of the manifestation of God. Bahá’u’lláh affirms that God’s essential attributes are simply different names for his essence. These essential attributes include sight, bearing, life, power, and so forth. This means that, for instance, God’s sight is not an independent faculty or entity with its own being, existing apart from God’s essence. Rather, God’s essence is his sight. Shi’i tradition also taught this, elaborating on the views of an early Muslim theological school known as the Mu’tazilis.

The Mu’tazilis showed a willingness to apply the tools of Hellenistic philosophy and Greek Christian theology to Islamic materials. However, they put these tools to specifically Islamic purposes, and often came to attack the positions of their unwitting mentors. The Mu’tazilis accepted a view wherein whatever is eternal is God. The early Mu’tazili thinker Wasil Ibn ‘Ata’ (d. 748 AD) is reported to have said, “He who posits a thing and an attribute as eternal posits two gods.” The Mu’tazilis therefore chose to reject the reality of God’s attributes, to avoid what they saw as the polytheistic implications of setting beside God a plethora of real, eternal attributes which would themselves be divine. Most other Muslims accepted the idea that God has real attributes co-eternal with Himself, but they rejected the belief that the uncreatedness or eternity of these distinct attributes made them God.

The Mu’tazilis divided God’s attributes into the essential attributes (as-sifat as-sifatiyyah) and the attributes of action (as-sifat adh-dhatiyyah) and the attributes of action (as-sifat adh-dhatiyyah). They held that the essential attributes are eternal or preexistent (qadim), but insisted that these attributes have only a nominal existence, remaining but means of denying imperfections in God. On the other hand, they believed that the active attributes, such as will, love and command, are not preexistent but rather are originated (muhdath). They held that God can be characterized by the opposite of the active attributes, but not of the essential attributes. That is, there may be cases where He does not will something, but He is always seeing and never blind. The Mu’tazilis considered neither of these two sorts of attributes real entities. Ibrahim an-Nazzam (d. 815 AD) held that attributes are merely an allegorical way of expressing the essence of God in limited human terms. God, then, does not know by virtue of an entity, Knowledge, outside his essence. Rather, God knows by virtue of Himself (binafsihi), as Abu’l-Hudhayl (d. 841/9 AD) put it. This basic stance was adopted by the later Shi’i, theologians, and some oral reports attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja’far as-Sadiq, indicate agreement with the distinction between essential and active attributes.

The rationalist Mu’tazili doctrine that some attributes of God, like his speech, are originated rather than preexistent eventually collided with a prevalent Muslim doctrine that the Qur’an is preexistent, a dogma that has Jewish and Christian antecedents. Since Muslims also considered the Qur’an to be the Speech of God, and it was certainly a real entity, its preexistence would mean to the Mu’tazilis that it was a god or God. They rejected what they saw as a sort of idolatry of the Qur’an. The Mu’ tazili doctrine of the created Qur’an became the official view of the state for a period, but in the end, the Sunni branch of Islam wholeheartedly adopted the dogma of the Qur’an’s uncreatedness. However, they rejected the idea that such a doctrine made the Qur’an a god or part of the Godhead. Shi’i, theologians tended to accept instead the Mu’tazili view that the Qur’an, as the Speech of God, is originated rather than uncreated.

The Bahá’í writings accept that God has both essential and active attributes, thus affirming the validity of this Mu’ tazili distinction. As we have seen, Bahá’u’lláh states that God’s essential attributes are simply different names for his essence. Bahá’u’lláh also accepted that active attributes like God’s speech are originated rather than uncreated, as shall be demonstrated below. However, Bahá’u’lláh was addressing his audience a thousand years after the zenith of the Mu’tazili movement, and his theology is more complex than theirs. For Bahá’u’lláh, even things which are originated, like the Qur’an, can exist outside of time and so be preexistent.

**GOD AND THE WORLD**

**ANY RELIGIOUS SYSTEM** takes positions on God’s relation to the world. Has the world always existed, or did God bring it into existence at a particular point in time? Is God the same as the world or other than it? If He is other than it, does He incarnate Himself in it or unite Himself with any part of it? The Bahá’í Faith also holds views on all these issues, and these views have a bearing upon our understanding of the concept of the manifestation of God. As for the first question, Bahá’u’lláh asserts that the universe has always existed, and that it has always depended upon God for its existence. In order better to understand his statements on this matter, it will be necessary to review briefly the background of this question in Islamic thought.

The equation of preexistence with divinity led the Mu’tazilis to reject the idea (originating in Aristotle’s philosophy) that the universe...
has always existed, since that would make matter itself a second God in their eyes. They therefore argued for the creation of the universe from nothing at a particular point in time.

For the Mu'tazilis, all things were either preexistent or originated. Either they had a beginning or they did not. However, later Islamic thinkers introduced a more complex analysis. In particular, Avicenna (980-1017 AD) made a seminal contribution to this debate. Avicenna, like many other Muslim philosophers, not only accepted the authority of Aristotle, but simultaneously based himself on the *Enneads of Plotinus*. Indeed, medieval Muslims thought the *Enneads* to be the work of the Macedonian sage, since they existed only in an anthology with the misleading title, *Theology of Aristotle*. The *Enneads* asserted that the universe is co-eternal with God, and has always been emanated by Him. Avicenna accepted this Neoplatonist position, but tried to make a clear distinction between God and the creation by isolating two types of preexistence: temporal and essential. These two categories, he said, also apply to origination.

In Avicenna's view, origination in time is serial in nature, characterized by a "before" and an "after" that cannot exist at the same time. However, essential origination does not necessarily occur in time. Something which is essentially originated from something else could nevertheless be simultaneous with it, since for something to be essentially originated means simply that it has a cause. For instance, if God has always been emanating the matter of the universe, both God and the universe would be preexistent in regard to time. But, Avicenna wrote, they would not both be essentially preexistent, since God is "prior" to the universe from the point of view of causation.\[19\]

It is important for Bahá'í theology that Bahá'u'lláh affirmed Avicenna's solution to the problem of the co-eternity of the universe with God. In his *Tablet of Wisdom* (*Lawh-i hikmat*; c. 1874), Bahá'u'lláh explained that when the holy books (the Bible and the Qur'an) speak of the creation of the universe in time, they are alluding in symbolic fashion to the essential preexistence of God and the essential origination of the material universe. However, Bahá'u'lláh continues, this does not prevent the universe from being co-eternal with God and sharing with Him in temporal preexistence. \[18\] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá later expanded on the Avicennian schema in this regard.\[17\]

| CHART I |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| PREEXISTENT | ORIGINATED |
| ESSENTIALLY | |
| a. GOD | c. LOGOS, UNIVERSAL MATTER, COMPOSITE CREATURES |
| TEMPORALLY | |
| b. GOD, LOGOS, UNIVERSAL MATTER | d. COMPOSITE CREATURES |

a. Only God is essentially preexistent, which means that He is not preceded by a cause.
b. God, the Word of God, and the matter out of which the universe is formed are all temporally preexistent. They have always existed.
c. The Word of God, universal matter, and composite creatures (e.g. an individual human being) are all essentially originated, since they are preceded by a cause.
d. Composite creatures—a tree, or a planet—are originated in time. There was a time when they did not exist. This is not true of the Word of God, nor of universal matter.

The doctrines of emanation and the co-eternity of the universe with God have often been linked to monism. However, Bahá'í scriptures avoid such doctrines by maintaining an absolute distinction between God and his emanated creatures. In his *Haft Vadi* (*The Seven Valleys*), Bahá'u'lláh wrote that the spiritual seeker might pass through a stage wherein he believes the being of the created world to be the same as God's being.\[13\] This doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) was propounded by many great medieval Muslim mystics, such as Muhhyi'd-Din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 AD) and 'Abdu'l-Karim al-Jili (d. 1428 AD). However, most Shi'i thinkers rejected this doctrine. An important refutation of this view entitled *Ayn al-Ya'qin* (*The Eve of Certainty*) was written by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (d. 1826 AD), the founder of the Shaykhi school of Shi'ism, and whom the Bábí and Bahá'í religions claim as a herald.\[19\]

Bahá'u'lláh stated in *The Seven Valleys* that the true seeker will pass beyond such limited notions as monism. Bahá'u'lláh seems to have viewed the Sufi doctrine of the unity of being as the natural result of thinking on a certain spiritual level, and as a set of propositions which make sense on that level. However, when set in the context of higher levels of truth, monism is shown to be inadequate and will be abandoned by the more advanced treader of the mystic path. It is therefore obviously inaccurate to speak, as some Western observers have, of the Bahá'í Faith as pantheistic.

Bahá'u'lláh further denies the possibility that God could become incarnate (*hulul*) and that the worlds of God could descend into the grades of the creatures.\[35\] In his major theological work, *The Book of Certitude* (*Kitab-i Iqan*, 1862), Bahá'u'lláh writes:

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence [*zuhur va buruz*], ascent and descent, egress and regress.\[21\]
In denying that God manifests Himself as a corporeal being, Bahá'u'lláh makes an important distinction between the Bahá'í concept of manifestation and that of the extremist Shi'ís. Some of these latter believed that God in his essence could become fully manifest in a human being. For Bahá'u'lláh, however, the essence of God is absolutely transcendent and is not manifested in the contingent world.

The Word of God serves as the metaphysical link between this unknowable essence of God and the material world for Bahá'u'lláh. This doctrine of the Word of God, or Logos, has as its background much of Greek, Hellenistic and Islamic philosophy and mysticism, including the Gospel of John (1:1-18). As in John, Bahá'u'lláh teaches in his Table of Wisdom that the Word of God (kalimatu'lláh, kalamu'lláh) is the instrument whereby the universe was brought into being. It is the cause of the entire creation, imperceptible to the senses, consisting neither of nature nor of substance, and is identical to the Command (amr) of God. Here we should remember that the Qur'an also affirmed the existence of the Word of God, and identified it especially as a title of Jesus. This is perhaps because Jesus symbolized in the Qur'an the creative Word of God, wherein God simply says "Be!" and it is (Qur'an 19:16).

In the Table of Wisdom, Bahá'u'lláh uses the phrases "the Word of God" and "the Speech of God" interchangeably. As we have seen, in Islam God's Speech is a divine attribute. But as we mentioned above in the discussion of the controversy over the uncreated Qur'an, Shi'í theologians like Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i asserted that it is an active rather than an essential attribute. The Shi'ís, as well as the Bahá'ís, see the Speech of God as an action which does not inhere in the essence of God: Since a cause "precedes" this action, it is in the Bahá'í view originated, even though it preexists the cosmos by being outside of time.

Another synonym for the Word of God is the Book. Revealed scripture is therefore a manifestation in this world of God's creative speech. But according to Bahá'u'lláh, this verbal or written revelation proceeds from the human incarnation of the Word of God. In the Tablet of Ashraf(c. 1865-66), Bahá'u'lláh states that "the Book of God hath been sent down in the form of this Youth." In Arabic, the statement says literally that the Book of God has "manifested itself in the temple of this Youth." A similar verse appears in a tablet revealed two or three years later. In the beginning of the Suratu'r-Ra' is (Tablet of the Leader, August, 1868), addressed to the Ottoman First Minister Mehmet Emin Ali Pasa (1815-1871), Bahá'u'lláh wrote that the world had been set ablaze by the Word of the Lord, the Most Glorious. It is, He continued, more ethereal than the wafting of the breeze, and has become manifest in human form. This Word, or Speech of God, through which God created the universe therefore manifests itself in human form upon the planet earth from time to time. Bahá'í theology considers all past prophets and founders of true religions manifestations of this Logos principle.

Since God creates the cosmos by the Logos, it is not simply a creature among other creatures. It exists on a higher order of being than the world of creation ('alam al-khalq), in the realm of God's Command ('alam al-amr). Human beings find even the manifestation of the Word of God in this world incomprehensible, since that which it manifests lies beyond mortal understanding. Addressing God, Bahá'u'lláh writes that "every way is barred to the comprehension of the Manifestation of Thy Self and the Day Spring of Thy Beauty." Human beings, therefore, find both God and his Word unknowable. The separate realms of Divinity, Command and Creation cannot penetrate each other on the level of essence. At the lowest level, that of creation, the only possible knowledge of God derives from a knowledge of his signs (sing. ayah). In his commentary on the oral report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, "Whoever knows himself knows his Lord," Bahá'u'lláh explains:

He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation.

Here, he explains the sign of God as a reflection of his attributes, a reflection which is latent and which is deposited (vadi'ih) within each created thing.

In another tablet on the same theme, Bahá'u'lláh explains:

Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

This theme, that each created thing is a sign of one of God's attributes, permeates the entire corpus of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. This might be called the doctrine of "General Revelation," which teaches that God is revealed in his creation by virtue of his effulgence (tajalli) therein. This is not an effulgence of his essence, as some mystics taught, but rather an effulgence of his active qualities or perfections. Bahá'u'lláh stresses that the sign of God within each creature is only potentially manifest. In the case of human beings, they can choose to fulfill their potentialities by becoming more perfect and bringing to fruition the names and attributes deposited within them, or they can choose not to do so.

To summarize, Bahá'í scriptures teach that God is sanctified above having distinct essential attributes and is holy above all names. All that human beings can know of Him is that He exists, and that He is not subject to the imperfections inherent in finitude, createdness and contingency. Therefore, we find it appropriate to apply to God those attributes of perfection which we see in our own world of creation, not because these in any way adequately describe God, but as a means of expressing our conviction that He has no imperfections. This attribution of qualities of perfection to God also helps individuals on their own spiritual path. By concentrating upon human perfections in worshipping God, we come to know what is best in ourselves, and begin to develop our own potentialities. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Far, far from Thy glory be what mortal man can affirm of Thee, or attribute unto Thee, or the praise with which he can glorify...
Shi'i philosopher Mulla Hadi Sabzavari defined these five figures as "the leaders of the prophets," the messengers, upon whom all affairs depend. They are Noah, Abraha, and the major prophets and messengers are five and they are those endowed with prophethood. While Bahá'u'lláh's teachings about the manifestation of God, that is, Bahá'u'lláh's theophanology, is to examine some of the titles He gives these figures. Two of the more common titles are "prophet" and "messenger." The Qur'an uses both of these terms, but their origin is much more ancient than the seventh century AD. The word nabi (prophet) probably came into the Arabic language from the Hebrew perhaps through the Aramaic. According to the usage of the Qur'an, prophets were those figures whom God sent to the Jews and Christians, whom it calls "people of the Book" because they possessed written scriptures. If only the Judaic traditions seem to have had prophets, each person is promised a messenger (rasūl; see Qur'an 10:48, 16:18). The messenger is the head of the people, whereas the prophet may only be a preacher or warner. The Qur'an mentions as messengers Arab figures like Hud and Salih, to whom the Bible does not refer. Moreover, some persons the Bible only calls patriarchs, like Jacob and Joseph, are referred to as prophets in the Qur'an.

For the Imams, the difference between the prophets and messengers depended upon their internal states and conditions. Ja'far as-Sadiq (d. 765 AD), the sixth Imam, is said to have described four levels of prophets and messengers. The first is the prophet who prophesies in himself, but to no one else. The second is the prophet who sees visions and hears voices while asleep, and cannot do so while awake. God does not send this second sort of prophet to any people with a specific mission, and he remains under the authority of an Imam, or spiritual superior. He gives Lot as an example of this sort of prophet and identifies Abraham as his Imam. The third level consists of the prophet who sees visions and hears voices in his sleep, and sees the Angel of Revelation, and who is sent to a group of people, whether large or small. He cites Jonah as an example of this sort of prophet, in his mission to Ninevah. This type of prophet also has a higher spiritual authority over him. Finally, there is the prophet who sees visions and hears voices both while asleep and while awake. Such a one is himself a spiritual leader (Imam), and the prophets endowed with constancy (sing.: ulūl-azm), or legislating prophets are all of this sort.

The basic distinction between the prophets in Imam Ja'far's view seems to arise from two considerations. One of these is the prophet's function and whether he is sent to a people with a mission. Of the two kinds of prophets who are sent with a mission, the higher level prophet is a leader of his people. The other consideration is a matter of the prophet's own internal spiritual psychology and depends on the breadth of his mystical visions and whether or not he is able to have these visions while in a waking state. Imam Ja'far says that both of the two higher levels of prophet mentioned here can see the Angel of Revelation, but only the highest level can do so while awake.

Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i gives at least five criteria for the prophet. He must be of pure lineage (in the sense that his ancestors on both sides led moral lives), blameless, absolutely truthful, the most knowledgeable and continent of the people of his time, and protected (ma'sum) from all sins, major and minor, before and after receiving his mission. Al-Ahsa'i follows earlier Shi'i thinkers in distinguishing between the teaching prophet (nubuwwat at-ta'rif) and legislating prophet (nubuwwat at-tashrin). One early Shi'i writer defined a prophet as a man who brings a message from God without the mediation of any human being. Most Shi'i thinkers also believed that the ability to perform miracles was one of the requirements of prophethood. While Bahá'u'lláh's theophany, as expounded by Bahá'u'lláh's son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, accepts that miracles can occur, these are not held to constitute decisive proof for the truth of a prophet's mission.

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The Islamic and Bahá’í traditions identify the highest level of prophethood as that of the prophets endowed with constancy. The phrase itself is quranic (46:14), but is obscure in its original context. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, however, employed this phrase in a clearer way. He is reported to have said that the major prophets and messengers are five and they are those endowed with constancy among the messengers, upon whom all affairs depend. They are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Later Shi’i thinkers saw these five figures as “the leaders of the prophets,” all of whom brought religious laws (shari’ah). The renowned nineteenth century Shi’i philosopher Mulla Hadi Sabzavari defined the prophet endowed with constancy as a messengers whose covenant and religious laws
Bahá'u'lláh mentions the figure of the prophet endowed with constancy several times in the Book of Certitude and says that these were prophets to whom a book was revealed. He calls Moses, for instance, the "Author of a divinely-revealed Book." Book in this sense carries the implication that it contains legislation. Many of the minor prophets of the Old Testament, for instance, authored books, but this does not make them prophets endowed with constancy. Such prophets were all, like Moses, legislators. This term also implies that these were major prophets who made lasting covenants with God, abrogating past covenants.

Shi'i and Bahá'í writings thus envisage many different kinds of prophets. God did not send everyone called a prophet in the holy books with a mission to a particular people. God did not render everyone whom He sent as a prophet with a mission, like Jonah or Isaiah, a legislator. The Qur'an calls those prophets whom God sent to be the leaders of their people messengers, but not all of these abrogated the former divine laws. The Qur'an calls Abraham's son, Ishmael, both a prophet and a messenger (19:55), but he did not reveal a new book superceding the religious teachings of Abraham. The prophets endowed with constancy include only those who actually performed the historic role of abrogating the laws of a previous dispensation and replacing them with new ones. To sum up, not every prophet is a messenger, and not every messenger is a prophet endowed with constancy.

"Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the prophets endowed with constancy as "independent prophets." He explains, "The independent Prophets are the lawgivers and the founders of a new cycle. Without an intermediary They receive bounty from the Reality of the Divinity." He groups all the other kinds of prophet together under the category of "followers and promoters" of the independent prophets. He cites Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as independent prophets. He gives Solomon, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as examples of the "followers and promoters."[44]

Shi'i thinkers considered all prophets sinless or morally infallible (ma'sum). They argued that if the prophet could sin, then his followers could have no confidence that he was not lying to them. Moreover, since prophets are exemplars to be emulated, their followers would be expected to emulate their sins. We have already seen that al-Ahsa'i taught that prophets are protected from major and minor sins, both before and after they begin their ministries.

Bahá'í scriptures uphold the doctrine of the moral infallibility of the prophets. In his Most Holy Book (al-Kitab al-aqdas: c. 1873), Bahá'u'lláh enunciated the doctrine of the most great infallibility (al-'ismah al-kubra):

There is no partner for Him Who is the Dayspring of Revelation in His Most Great Infallibility. He is, in truth, the exponent of 'God doeth whatsoever He willeth' in the kingdom of creation. Indeed, the Almighty hath exclusively reserved this station for Himself [or "His Self"] and to none is given a share in this sublime and highly exalted distinction.

Bahá'u'lláh goes on to say in The Most Holy Book that this is a matter which had been hidden and which is being clearly manifested in this dispensation. He notes that there were those who were unaware of the judgment of scripture on this matter, referring very likely to those Muslims who did not accept the moral infallibility of the prophets. Since the Qur'an did not clearly state this teaching, Bahá'u'lláh was here clarifying a point that had caused much controversy in Islam.

Bahá'u'lláh further explained this teaching in Splendors (Ishraqat), addressed to Jalil-i Khu'i, an early believer who inquired about the verse on infallibility in The Most Holy Book. In Splendors, Bahá'u'lláh states that the term infallibility has several possible meanings, and in its broadest sense can refer to anyone God has guarded from sin and transgression. However, Bahá'u'lláh continues, the most great infallibility is a special characteristic of those prophets of God who are exalted above ordinances and prohibitions. This appears to be a reference to the prophets endowed with constancy, who as legislators are not bound by the laws of the previous dispensation. Not only are they protected from sin, but they are morally "sanctified above errors and omissions." They are infallible sources of law and ethics, having the power to define the ethical for their own dispensations by virtue of their sinlessness and their revelatory intuition of the needs of their times. The most great infallibility as a doctrine, Bahá'u'lláh says, acts to protect his religion. He reiterates that no one can share in it other than the Self of God. This phrase refers to the universal manifestation of God, who is the manifestation of the Self of God, as we shall see below.

In his mystical ode, Qasidih-i 'izz-i varqa'iyiyih (Ode of the Dove. 1855-56), Bahá'u'lláh explains that the prophet has both an inward and an outward aspect. When speaking of Moses as being rightly guided and going through a process of self-purification, Bahá'u'lláh was speaking of the human manifestation or effulgence (tajalli) of Moses in the world of creation. He implies that there is a sort of ideal Platonic form of Moses which absolutely perfect and exists in a metaphysical realm. When it is manifested on earth, this earthly Moses evinces what seems to be imperfections and seems to make spiritual progress. These attributes, however, pertain to the human incarnation of Moses, and not to his ideal essence.

THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

While Bahá'u'lláh uses such titles as Word, prophet, messenger, and prophet endowed with constancy, to describe the intermediary between God and humankind, the central concept in his writings remains the manifestation of God, the theophany (mazhar-i ilah). A related concept is tajalli, or effulgence. While the term mazhar does not appear to be early or quranic, the related term tajalli, does appear in the Qur'an (7: 143: cf. Exodus 33:17-23). The Qur'an tells the story that Moses ascended Mount Sinai and pleaded with God to reveal Himself to him: "God said, 'By no means canst thou see Me (directly), but look upon the mount, if it abide in its place, then shalt thou see Me.' When his Lord manifested [tajallil] his glory on the mount, He made it as dust, and Moses fell down in a swoon." Both the Qur'an and Exodus deny that it was possible for Moses to see God directly, but allow that he could see God indirectly. Later Muslim
commentators suggested that it was God’s attributes that were manifested in this story, and the Muslim mystic Ibn 'Arabi, saw the prophets themselves as manifestations or effulgences of God.

While the idea that God can manifest Himself in a powerful way thus has qur'anic roots, the elaboration of this idea into an element of prophetology was the work of later Islamic thinkers. In particular, there was a Neoplatonic use of the concept of manifestation. In the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, by a group of anonymous Shi’i scholars who probably wrote in the late ninth century, manifestation is used almost as a synonym for emanation. The Universal Soul is said to be manifest (zuhir) by virtue of the Universal Intellect, which was the first emanation front God. The Universal Soul then manifests its virtues upon primal matter, giving it form and bringing the universe into being. [54]

The Brethren of Purity held that, while no being could share with God in the divine attributes, God did emanate such divine attributes as were fitting upon the Universal Intellect. [55] Since many Muslim thinkers believed that the prophet was himself humanity’s link with the Universal Intellect, it was then natural for them to think of the prophet as a manifestation of the divine attributes that God emanated upon the Intellect. The Druze movement in Egypt, which centered on the Fatimid ruler al-Hakim (r. 996-1021), was very much influenced by Neoplatonism and used the term “manifestation of God” as a technical term in its prophetology. [56] The concept of manifestation was also used by the Persian Isma'ili of Alamut in the twelfth century. [67]

It was not only Isma'ili who employed the concept of divine manifestation in talking of the prophets. Yahya as-Suhrawardi (I 152-1191 AD), the famed mystic, wrote in his book, *Temples of Light*, of the Mahdi, or promised one of the Muslims, in these terms: Revelation was entrusted to the prophets, and its interpretation and elucidation have been delegated to the most great, illuminated and bounteous Manifestation, the Counselor. This is as Christ warned, saying... "But the Counselor... whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things." [68]

Suhrawardi was apparently expecting another major manifestation of God, for he was executed by the Ayyubid government for believing that God could create a prophet after Muhammad, contrary to the Muslim doctrine that Muhammad was the last prophet.

Other Sufi thinkers like the Andalusian Muhyi'd-Din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 AD) and the Egyptian Ibn Ata'u'llah (d. 1309 AD) used the concept of divine manifestation (tajalli, zuhur). Both thinkers tended to talk in terms of the manifestation of the divine essence, rather than simply of the attributes of God, and they tended to see all created things as manifestations of that essence. [59] As we shall demonstrate below, in the Bahá’ Faith it is only God’s attributes that are manifested, and these are fully manifest only in the prophet endowed with constancy; not just any mystic can become a perfect manifestation of God according to the Bahá’í scriptures.

The evidence for the use of the idea of the divine manifestation in Twelver Shi’ism seems to be rather late. It was from Sufi sources like Ibn 'Arabi that the mystical Imam Shi’i theologian Sayyid Haydar Amuli (b. 1320) derived his own doctrine of the manifestation of God. In his view, as well, not only the divine names but also the divine essence is manifested. While Amuli was an important Imam thinker, his theophanology is more Sufi than Imam. [60] Another heterodox Imam figure, Fadl'u'llah Astarabadi-al-Hurufi (1340-1394 AD) wrote in one of his poems, "The countenance of Adam is the manifestation of the essence of God / This true statement is the religion of the prophets." [61] However, like the Druze and the Isma'ili of Alamut, al-Hurufi speaks in an unqualified fashion of the manifestation of the very essence of the Deity, an approach to theophany which implies that God could become immanent. Most Muslims, and even most Shi'is, rejected this approach as heretical.

More mainstream Imam thinkers adopted a less radical understanding of theophany as a manifestation solely of the attributes. rather than the essence of God. The conventional Imam use of this doctrine can be seen clearly by the Safavid period in Iran. One of the more important Safavid Shi'i, thinkers was Muhammad Taqi Majlisi Avval (d. 1660), who was overshadowed by his even more eminent son, Mulla Muhammad Baqir, [62] In a commentary on a composition attributed to the tenth Imam, 'Ali al-Hadi (d. 868 AD), Majlisi adverts to the doctrine of the manifestation of God. The Imam had written, Peace be upon the loci (mahall) of the knowledge of God." This implies that God is known through a human locus, which is to say, through prophets and Imams. Majlisi comments, "This means that only they [the prophets and Imams] ever truly knew God, and that He is not known save through their descriptions of Him. They are most perfect manifestations (mazahir) of his names and his most beautiful attributes." [63]

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this theophanic prophetology apparently had some currency in Twelver Shi'iti thought. Al-Ahsa'i discussed the concept of manifestation of God (zuhur, tajalli), and concluded that it is not the essence of God which manifests itself, but only God’s activity (athar, fit). [64] The nineteenth-century philosopher Mulla Hadi Sabzavari talks of Adam as the most great manifestation and the most perfect mirror of the names and attributes of God. [65] He says that, just as the perfect man or the prophet and the Imam is a mirror of the names and attributes of God, so the essences of created things are in turn mirrors of the perfect man. [66] He speaks of the knowledge of Muhammad and 'Ali, as the Most Great Spirit and the Universal Intellect. He adds, "This knowledge is the knowledge of God, because they are his most beautiful Names and his most perfect Words." [67]

THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD IN THE BAHÁ’Í WRITINGS

THE CONCEPT of the manifestation of the names and attributes of God is, however, much more central to the Báb and Bahá’í scriptures than it ever was to any Twelver Shi'ite thinker. Al-Ahsa'i himself, for instance, does not refer to this concept in his discussion of the nature of the prophet. [68] The Báb, on the other hand, often referred to the "Manifestation of the Self of God." [69] In his commentary on the report front the Prophet Muhammad that “Whoever kneweth himself knoweth his Lord,” Bahá’u’lláh explains that the preexistent essence of God is exalted above the knowledge of anyone other than Himself, and therefore the report was referring to the need for a
knowledge of the Self of God, which is, to say, the manifestation of the names and attributes of the Deity. In his Ode of the Dove, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the Self of God (nafs-i rahmaniyyih) as having been "consigned to human form" (muvadda'ih) in the person of Moses. In the Jawahir al-Asrar (Gems of the Mysteries, c. 1861), Bahá'u'lláh several times refers to the "Manifestation of the Self of God." Speaking of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh says that God manifested the Báb in the station of Himself. Bahá'u'lláh writes at the beginning of The Most Holy Book:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead [literally: "His Self"] in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation.

The Self of God therefore seems to refer to the totality of God's active attributes, of which the prophets and messengers are manifestations. Whether this concept of the Self of God is related to the Neoplatonic idea of the Universal Self or Soul is difficult to determine at this point.

The "manifestation of the names and attributes of God" becomes so powerful a description of the prophet in the Bábí and Bahá'í writings that it eclipses such terms as "prophet" and "messenger." Bahá'u'lláh explains in the Jawahir al-asrar that God closed the cycle of prophecy with the Prophet Muhammad, as it says in the Qur'an, "Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets; God has knowledge of everything." (Qur'an 33:40). The implication is that the prophet, and the messenger, was a more primitive form of theophany which came to an end with Muhammad. With the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, in the Bahá'í view, humankind has entered a new religious cycle characterized by a fuller theophany. In this cycle, concepts like "prophet" and "messenger" have been transcended.

Bahá'u'lláh discusses three possible meanings for this phrase. The first is an interpretation which asserts that at the Resurrection, there will be a "general effulgence (tajallih)" of God in all created things. But Bahá'u'lláh asserts that since each created thing is already a sign or manifestation of at least one of the names and attributes of God, this "general effulgence" is always present, and no one need wait until the Judgment Day for it. A second possibility is a Sufi interpretation which asserts that the presence of God refers to the "specific effulgence" of God's essence itself. Bahá'u'lláh objects, however, that human beings cannot perceive even the effulgence of God's essence, any more than they can perceive that essence itself. If this were the meaning of the presence of God, Bahá'u'lláh says, then no one could ever hope to attain it. Bahá'u'lláh here rejects the idea, held by some Sufis, of the immanence of God's essence, wherein the created world itself is nothing more than the effulgence of the divine essence. He denies that there can be any connection between the created world and the effulgence of that essence. In the third possible meaning Bahá'u'lláh discusses, the Qur'an would intend by the presence of God the "secondary effulgence" which some mystics called the "holy emanation (fayd-i mughaddas)." This secondary effulgence is an effulgence, not of God's unknowable essence, but simply of his names and attributes. This, according to Bahá'u'lláh, is the station of the prophets and the Imams.

Bahá'u'lláh reiterates that the prophets and Imams are the minors of the attributes of God, and that only through knowledge of them can human beings attain a knowledge of God. He adds:

Therefore, whosoever, and in whatever Dispensation, hath recognized and attained unto the presence of these glorious, these resplendent and most excellent Luminaries, hath verily attained unto the "Presence of God" Himself, and entered the city of eternal and immortal life. Attainment unto such presence is possible only in the Day of Resurrection, which is the Day of the rise of God Himself through His all-embracing Revelation [arising of the Self of God through His universal Manifestation].

Therefore, the Resurrection Day symbolizes the appearance of a new Manifestation of God, and the attainment to a knowledge of and belief in this figure equates with the attainment to the "Presence of God" promised in the Qur'an.

In Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Manifestation ('Akka period), He delineates the station of the manifestation of God. He begins by describing a metaphysical entity termed the manifestation (az-zuhur), which seems to be broadly similar to the Word of God or Logos that Bahá'u'lláh discussed in The Tablet of Wisdom. Just as the Word of God was there described as neither nature nor substance, in this tablet Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that the manifestation is not composed of the four elements of classical physics. Nor, He states, is the manifestation made up of the four natures. The essence of the manifestation is sanctified above likeness and cannot be known through anything else, being unique above the manifestations of createdness (i.e. contingent beings). Indeed, no creature can even claim to exist in the presence of the manifestation. All things were created by the speech (qawl) of the manifestation, but the latter remains unknowable to them in its inmost reality.

Bahá'u'lláh describes the manifestation as the mystery of divinity and the essence of self-subsistence, which is to say, it is a manifestation of these divine attributes. Nevertheless, the manifestation 'seats itself' upon the 'throne' of a human body. This metaphysical entity appears as a human being upon the planet earth. Bahá'u'lláh seems to say that there is a difference between the bodies of ordinary human beings and the human temple of the manifestation. The difference, however, is one of quality and not of kind.
This paradox is explained by Bahá'u'lláh's doctrine of the dual nature of the manifestation. He wrote:

Since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature [du 'unsur], the physical, pertaining to the world of matter; and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself [ilahi]. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a
In Bahá'u'lláh's view, the manifestation of God has, during his earthly sojourn, many human limitations. He must eat and drink, is subject to being plunged into poverty or becoming wealthy, can attain glory or be reduced to abject abasement, and in general has the same needs and material constraints as other human beings. On the other hand, Bahá'u'lláh says that "viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been and are applicable to those Essences of being..."[89]

Again, the idea that the prophet has both a divine and a human station is not a wholly novel one in Islamic culture. Sufis like 'Abdu'l-Karim al-Jili taught that Muhammad was characterized by the attributes of divinity, and that it was proper to say that he was both the Eternal Truth (i.e. God) and a creature.[87] However, he did so on the basis of his theory of the unity of being, which is unacceptable to Bahá'í theology.[88] The mystical Shi'i philosopher Mulla Sadra Shirazi (d. 1642, AD) also held that the prophet has two aspects, one turned toward sanctification, and the other toward the material world of the body. In his phrase, the prophet is "a divine man, or a human Lord."[89] Again, however, Mulla Sadra believed that God, as a simple essence (basti al-haqqah), is all things, though he denied that individual existents could be identified as God.[90] The Bahá'í Faith, however, teaches the concept of the absolute transcendence of God.

Despite the clear statements in Bahá'u'lláh's writings attributing the station of divinity to the manifestation of God, we should underscore that such a station derives from being a manifestation of the divine attributes, rather than of the essence of God. Bahá'u'lláh categorically states that God will never manifest his essence and will remain forever hidden in his essentiality. He can be known only through the manifestations of his attributes, while his essence remains forever sanctified above all attributes.[81] In Alessandro Bassani's phrase, however, Bahá'u'lláh sometimes employs a sort of "abbreviation" and states the divinity of the manifestations of God with no qualifications.[84] Bahá'u'lláh openly says, "Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: 'I am God!' He verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto."[83] But all that is meant by such a statement is that the one speaking is a theophany of the divine attributes. In the Arabic Bayan, God tells the Báb that He has given him two stations, and in one of these nothing but God Himself can be seen.[82] In the Surat al-Ahzan (Tablet of Sorrows, circa 1867-68), Bahá'u'lláh laments the martyrdom of the Báb and castigates those who slew God and knew Him not.[83] Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh does sometimes talk of the manifestation of the essence of God.[88] But in the light of his frequent disclaimers that the divine essence can be manifested, we must take this as an abbreviated way of speaking of the manifestation of the attributes of the essence of God.

In the Effulgences (Tajalliyat), Bahá'u'lláh addresses himself to this issue. He says that the cycle of the full manifestation of God had been timed such that mankind should have reached the sort of spiritual maturity that this concept could be grasped and appreciated. He adds that many, however, could not accept it owing to their immaturity. He indicates that opposition came from both Muslims and Bábís. He directs the latter to read their own scriptures, and points out to the Muslim's that the qur'anic story of Moses' encounter with God is no less a description of theophaney than Bahá'u'lláh's own writings. Muslims, Bahá'u'lláh complains, have accepted that God could manifest Himself in a burning bush, but will not allow that He could do so in a human being.[87]

At the very end of his life, in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (1891), Bahá'u'lláh made a final defense of the use of the concept of "divinity" (ulhiyyat) to describe the manifestations of God.[95] This for the most part consisted of quoting reports from the Imams which indicated a claim of divinity. He then advised the Shi'i Muslims who accept these reports as authentic to interpret his own claims of divinity in whatever way they interpreted the Imams' statements. In this same book, Bahá'u'lláh explained that his own claim to divinity is not an assertion of his exaltation, but is rather a denial of self. Precisely because Bahá'u'lláh has extinguished his base self, God can shine through him. He wrote of the station of divinity:

This station is the station in which one dieth to himself and liveth to God. Divinity. whenever I mention it, indicateth my complete and absolute self-effacement. This is the station in which I have no control over mine own weal or woe nor over my life nor over my resurrection.[88]

In Bahá'u'lláh's view, then, the manifestations of the names and attributes of God do not have a single station, nor are they limited to a single function. They are, at one extreme, humble and abject servants of God. At the other, they claim to speak with the voice of God Himself, and to manifest his divine perfections to a wayward mankind.[95] When it serves their purposes to do so, they emphasize their humanity. At other times they might proclaim their divinity. In Bahá'u'lláh's theophanology, divinity and humanity in the manifestation are not mutually exclusive, but are, rather, complementary.

In one of his earlier works, the Tablet of the City of Divine Unity (written sometime in the late 1850’s or early 1860’s), Bahá'u'lláh warns, "Beware, 0 believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation."[101] He adds that this acknowledgment of the unity of God's manifestations is a prerequisite for the recognition of the unity of God Himself. The implication seems to be that by exalting one particular manifestation over the others, one becomes attached to something other than God, and so makes that prophet or messenger a partner in one's loyalty to God. When God sends a new messenger, a believer whose loyalty is thus compromised will reject him and so ultimately betray God.

Bahá'u'lláh's theology recognizes different levels of perception, different degrees of truth. He did not have the dry scholastic outlook, so common in medieval Islam, that religion consists of a set of dogmatic propositions which must be taken on faith and at face value. Thus, he says in Jawahir’l-asrar [Gems of the Mysteries] that at one point a spiritual seeker might perceive great distinctions and differences between the manifestations of God, but as the seeker progresses along the spiritual path the underlying unity of the
manifestations will become more apparent. [109] In the beginning, while dwelling in the City of Search, the seeker perceives contradictions and differences between the manifestations of God. But when the seeker arrives in the City of Love, the next highest stage, these distinctions disappear.

The manifestations of God in their relationship to one another have both the station of unity and the station of distinction, Bahá'u'lláh teaches. He writes in The Book of Certitude that the former of these is the “station of pure abstraction and essential unity.” In this respect, He continues, “if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth.” [109] In this sense, all the manifestations of God perform the same function in mediating between the world of God and the world of creation. Each manifested the Word of God. Each taught the same basic religion, but modified it for his particular audience's needs and culture. Bahá'u'lláh says that since each manifested the same divine attributes, we can see each as a spiritual “return” (raj'ah) of all the past manifestations of God. [104] This by no means implies any sort of reincarnation (a doctrine rejected by Bahá’í scriptures), since each manifestation of God had his own individual soul, which never returns to the earth.

Given this essential unity of the manifestations of God, from whence does their diversity derive? Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that “It is because of this difference in their station and mission that the words and utterances flowing from these Well-springs of divine knowledge appear to diverge and differ.” [111] While each theophany is a source of the light of the divine attributes, some shine more brightly than others, and some exemplify more of these attributes while in human form than others. [109] In this station of distinction, “each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations.” [107] Bahá'u'lláh elsewhere explains that these apparent variations in the intensity of the light of the manifestations of God derive solely from the variable receptivity of their human audiences. Each manifestation acts in such a way as to fulfill the needs of the particular age and people he addresses. [109]

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ’S TEACHINGS ON GOD

At this point, we should examine more closely the elaboration of Bahá’í theology undertaken by Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas, who was designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the legitimate interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The Báb had forbidden philosophy and logic altogether, and Bahá'u'lláh's own works generally concerned themselves more with ethics, mysticism, doctrine and theology than with philosophy. Bahá'u'lláh did nevertheless remove the ban on philosophy, and He wrote important tablets concerned with philosophical issues. It was, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá who revived the Shaykhi tradition of philosophical theology within the Báb-Bahá’í context. He makes extensive reference to the basic concepts of the Iranian Neoplatonist tradition, and he shows himself conversant with the major theological and philosophical issues in the history of Islamic thought.

'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote his first piece on philosophical theology in Edirne (Adrianople) sometime between 1864 and 1868, when he was in his early twenties, and it displays a considerable erudition, remarkable in so young a writer. The work in question is the Tafsir-i kuntu kanzan makhfíyan (Commentary on "I was a Hidden Treasure"), an explication of an oral report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, speaking with the voice of God: "I was a hidden treasure, and loved to be known; thus did I bring the creation into being, that I might be known." [109] 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote the treatise far an Ottoman official, Sekvet Ali Pasa, and it is a subtly wrought refutation of the major premises of the Sufi school of Ibn 'Arabi followed by an exposition of the Bahá’í view. It stands very clearly in the tradition of al-Ahsa’i’s Aynu’l-Yaqin, but is not overtly critical of Ibn ‘Arabi, and his followers, going so far as to cite works by the great Andalusian mystic in support of some Bahá’í positions. . . . 'Abdu'l-Bahá attempts to demolish the Sufi monist position, while evincing nothing but respect for the Sufis themselves.

'Abdu'l-Bahá uses various sections of the oral report "I was a hidden treasure" to delineate the Bahá’í view of metaphysics. He asserts that the Prophet's saying demonstrates the stages of God's hiddenness and manifestation. [110] In the highest station, Unicity (ahadíyyih), only God's essence and his essential attributes, which are identical to his essence, exist. In this station, he says, God's knowledge is his essence and his essence is his knowledge; God is unmanifest and alone. This, he explains, is the station of "I was a hidden treasure." In the second station God manifests Himself by his essence to his essence. In this station of "and loved to be known," the metaphysical principle of the divine Manifestation comes into being. This primordial manifestation of God then dawns forth upon the world off contingency (imkan) with all the names and attributes of God, causing the new creation to come to exist. This is the station, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says. of "thus did I bring the creation into being." However, only when human beings come to recognize the human manifestation of God, and so actualize within themselves the latent Most Great Sign of God, do they fulfill the purpose of creation. That purpose, he says, is for them to know God, a knowledge they can only attain through a recognition of his human manifestations. [111] Only at this point do they bring to fruition the Prophet's saying.

In the course of arriving at this schema for the metaphysical structure of the universe, 'Abdu'l-Bahá addresses several controversies in Islamic thought which have a bearing upon the idea of the manifestation of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá reaffirms the complete unknowability of the essence of God. He argues this logically by asserting that we can have knowledge of a thing in only two ways: either we perceive the thing directly, or we know it through a metaphor or likeness. He points out that both ways of knowing are impossible in knowing God. Knowers of God, he says, must be knowers of the divine attributes which are reposed in the nature of man. [119]

We are, therefore, brought back to the question of God's attributes. It will be useful at this point to recapitulate some of the points made in our discussion of the divine attributes above. We have seen that the Mu'tazili-Shi'i tradition declared that God has two sorts of attributes, essential and active. The early Shi'i theologian Ibn Bábuyah wrote that whenever he predicated the attributes of the essence of God, he only intended to deny their opposite in Him. Thus, to say that God is knowing means only that He is not ignorant. These essential attributes include hearing, sight, knowledge, power, grandeur, life, self-subsistence, oneness and preexistence. [119] Shi'i
asserted these attributes of God in a purely nominalist sense, and they felt them to have no reality apart from the essence. They also predicated active attributes of God. Ibn Bábuyah gives "willing" as an example of an active attribute. God is not always willing, he says, and therefore his willing is an originated activity.[114] Another such originated activity among God's attributes is, according to Shi'i theologians, the divine speech.

In his dispute with the monist school of Ibn 'Arabi, al-Ahsa'i introduced yet another complexity. He not only accepted that some attributes are essential while others are active, but also argued that some attributes are represented in both categories. He asserted that God has two kinds of knowledge, essential and active. The former is merely a verbal category and is in reality identical to the divine essence. The latter is an originated action. He employed this refinement in his refutation of the doctrine of the unity of being. According to the Shaykhi summary, the Sufis held that knowledge could not exist without objects of knowledge, or intelligibles (ma'ālima). Therefore, they said, the subsisting essences (al-a'yan ath-thabitah) of all created things had always existed cognitively in God's knowledge. They then posited that knowledge is essentially identical with the object of knowledge. The finite intelligibles of created essences would, therefore, be identical with God's knowledge, insofar as they are the objects of that knowledge. The Sufis concluded that since God's knowledge is, in turn, identical to his essence, these intelligibles are, therefore, identical to his essence as well. Through this syllogism, the upholders of the unity of being arrived at the position that the subsisting essences of all created things are identical to God's essence. This argument derives from Ibn 'Arabi, who taught that the subsisting essences of things are in God's knowledge prior to their actual existence. Even mystics like Mulla Sadra, who tended to follow Ibn 'Arabi in most else, rejected this position. The idea of the basic identity of the intellect with the intelligible goes back to Aristotle, but the Muslims probably derived it from the Neoplatonist Porphyry (234-305 AD). Avicenna incisively criticized this notion, but the extremely influential Mulla Sadra upheld it. In this case, as in many others, Shaykhi and Bahá'í thinkers agree with Avicenna rather than with Ibn 'Arabi and his monist school.[115]

Al-Ahsa'i replied by denying the basic postulates of this Sufi argument, which would reduce all existence to one undifferentiated essence. He denied that God's knowledge stands in need of objects of knowledge and attempted to refute the argument that knowledge is identical with the thing known.[116] He also asserted that God knows the finite essences of created things not by his essential knowledge, but by his active knowledge, which is itself originated.

'Abdu'l-Bahá summarizes al-Ahsa'i's arguments in this regard. After giving the Sufi viewpoint in the first half of his commentary, he proceeds to refute it in the second half. He proves by several logical arguments that God's knowledge does not stand in need of objects of knowledge. He points out that the statement that God's knowledge acquires objects of knowledge bases itself on a false analogy with the knowledge of human beings, who are finite creatures. Since God's essence is unknowable, and his essential knowledge is simply a different name for his essence, his knowledge must therefore also be unknowable and unlike contingent knowledge. Second, if God's knowledge stood in need of an object, then his essence would be the same token exhibit this need, which is impossible given the self-subsistence of God's essence. If God's necessarily existent knowledge were to stand in need of an object of knowledge, he says, then that need would make the divine knowledge contingent rather than necessary. Finally, he objects that if the objects of knowledge were the same as the knowledge, they could not be said to have a separate existence, and would thus be nonexistent.[117] He agrees with al-Ahsa'i that God's knowledge is of two types, active and essential, and asserts that it is his active knowledge that knows contingent intelligibles. Both this active knowledge and its objects, he adds, are originated and are not essentially preexistent.[118]

Thus, viewed from the station of Unicity, God's essence and his essential attributes are pre-existent, but all his active attributes, as well as his creatures are originated.[119] He concludes that the Sufi postulates concerning the unity of being might have some validity at a lower station of God's effulgences, but not at the highest unmanifest station of Unicity. Here again, Bahá'í theology shows itself not to be a simple set of positive doctrinal propositions. The validity of a theological belief like monism is determined by its relative truth and the spiritual station in which it is held and about which it is asserted. The Sufis, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, were mistaken only in absolute terms. Their view derived from operating on a lower spiritual plane than that of Unicity, and on that lower plane it bore some relative truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá almost seems to be recognizing theological positions as language-games in the Wittgensteinian sense, each of which makes internal sense. However, his position is not the entirely relativist one that each of these language-games is equally valid, but that there is a hierarchy, with some coming closer to absolute truth than others.

On the level of Unicity, only God's essence possesses the absolute being of essential preexistence. It should be clear from our discussion above of Shaykhi, Bábí and Bahá'í theology that it is not this divine essence, nor the essential attributes, which manifests itself on the plane of effulgence. It is, rather, the originated, active attributes of God which are manifested in the contingent world. The human prophet or manifestation of God is the full reflection of these attributes, such that it is permissible for him to assert his divinity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes an oral report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad referring to his relationship with God: "I have states with God wherein He is I and I am He, save that He is He and I am I." This station, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, is reserved for the manifestations of God. However, the effulgences of this station can be imprinted upon the purified hearts of the believers.[120]

CHART III
THE SUFI ARGUMENT FOR THE UNITY OF BEING:

First Minor Premise: If it is true that God is always knowing, then God's knowledge stands in perpetual need of objects of knowledge.

First Major Premise: All objects of knowledge are identical to that knowledge.

First Conclusion (Second Minor Premise): The objects of God's knowledge are identical to his knowledge. (A=B)

Second Major Premise: God's knowledge is identical to his essence. (B=C)

Final Conclusion: The objects of God's knowledge are identical to his essence. (A=C)

Implication: If God knows the subsisting essence

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S REFUTATION OF THE UNITY OF BEING

First Minor Premise: If it is true that God's essential knowledge is necessarily existent, it cannot stand in need of any object.

First Major Premise: The objects of knowledge are not identical to that knowledge.

First Conclusion (Second Minor Premise): The objects of God's knowledge are not identical to his knowledge. (A does not equal B)

Second Major Premise: God's active knowledge, by which He knows things, is not identical to his essence. (B does not equal C)

Final Conclusion: The objects of God's knowledge are not identical to his essence. (A does not equal C)

Implication: God's necessary and unknowable essence is wholly other than the contingent and finite essences of his creatures.

During the period 1904-1906, 'Abdu'l-Bahá received a visit in his Ottoman exile at 'Akka from Laura Clifford Barney (later Mrs. Hippolyte Dreyfus), an eminent American Bahá'í who took advantage of her time there to elicit answers from him on a wide range of theological and philosophical questions. The resulting book became known as Some Answered Questions. All those interested in Bahá'í thought stand in the late Mrs. Dreyfus-Barney's debt for her inquiring mind and her initiative in preserving 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thoughts on these issues.

EMANATION AND MANIFESTATION

Some Answered Questions contains a vast storehouse of Bahá'í theology, which scholars have barely begun to investigate. Here, our discussion will center on those theological positions which bear directly on the concept of manifestation. A related idea is that of emanation. Neoplatonist Muslim philosophers objected to the notion of creation expounded by literalist Muslim theologians because the creationist paradigm implies that God acted to create the world at a particular point in time. This, in turn, implies that there was some change in God Himself, as He had not prior to that point been a creator. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, following Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom, rejects the creationist paradigm, and gives his version of the Plotinian concept of emanation. He told Dreyfus-Barney:

"The Essence of Unity has always been in one condition, which neither changes nor alters, has neither transformation nor vicissitude. He is the Eternal, the Immortal. Therefore, the proceeding of the human spirits from God is through emanation."

In Islamic physics, contingent things were said to subsist by virtue of something. All things ultimately subsisted by virtue of God (qa'im bi'lláh). That is, they owed their origin and continued existence to Him. But if contingent creatures subsist by virtue of God, the question arises of how they are brought into being and how they are sustained. 'Abdu'l-Bahá replies that they subsist through God's emanation (sudur, fayd).

'Abdu'l-Bahá, like Plotinus, uses the image of the sun and its rays to explain the idea of emanation. He says that just as the sun emanates light rays from itself without dividing itself or moving, so God emanates lesser levels of being from Himself without partitioning Himself or descending to the earth. Neoplatonists also often employed the mirror image as a metaphor for the divine emanation, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses this parallel as well.

To underscore the point that the Bahá’í doctrine of creation by emanation does not imply monism or pantheism, 'Abdu'l-Bahá contrasts it to the Sufi concept of the universe as an essential manifestation of God. Al-Ahsa'i had rejected the subsistence of things through the manifestation of God's essence as synonymous with incarnation (hulul). 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that emanation in the Bahá’í sense is similar in meaning to creation. As the writing emanates from the author, as the discourse emanates from the rhetorician, so the universe emanates from God. The author cannot be said to be identical with his book, nor to be incarnate in it. On the other hand, the book certainly reveals something of the workings of his mind and tells something about his personality. The human spirit is,
It is perhaps confusing that 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the term "manifestation" in two distinct senses. One is the essential manifestation of God taught by some Sufi and extremist Shi'i thinkers. The other is the manifestation of God's attributes. The second use of manifestation is the more common one in Bahá'í scriptures, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms it as the only valid one. He says:

But the proceeding through manifestation (if by this is meant the divine appearance, and not division into parts), we have said, is the proceeding and the appearance of the Holy Spirit and the Word, which is from God.\[128\]

He indicates that the word ‘manifestation” can denote simply "effulgence" (tajalli), implying an effulgence of attributes rather than the sort of essential manifestation which would have incarnational and pantheistic implications. He adds that the Holy Spirit subsists by virtue of God through this sort of nonessential manifestation.

The doctrine of emanation has, since the time of Plotinus, generally been associated with a parallel doctrine of the co-eternity of the universe with God. This was true in the case of Muslim philosophers like Avicenna, though the Isma'ili encyclopedists, the Brethren of Purity, were an exception in this regard. It is also true in the case of Bahá’í thought. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá gives two arguments for the preexistence of the universe.\[129\] The first is that since God is changeless, and is characterized by the attribute of being a Creator, there could never have been a time when He had not created the universe. This is the argument from the immutability of God. The other major argument is the Avicennian one that absolute nonexistence has no potentiality for existence. This stance relies heavily upon Aristotelian physics, which posited the causation of a thing as the realization of its potentialities. But if there were a time when nothing existed, nothing could be caused (in Aristotelian terms, there would be no "material cause"). Obviously, nonexistence contains within itself no potentialities, and certainly not the potentiality for existence. Therefore, like Aristotle, Avicenna accepted that matter always existed, and that particular things are actualizations of the potentialities within that primal matter. This is much the same argument put forward by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá teaches that the external universe is the lowest of three levels. He says that between the world of God and the realm of creation lies the realm of divine Dominion (malakut). This realm was the first emanation from God, and it then shed its effulgence upon the realities of contingent things.\[130\] It is the middle term, with many names in Bahá’í scriptural theology, we shall now examine. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá makes an explicit acknowledgment that he is interpreting Bábí and early Bahá’í theology in Neoplatonic terms when he says:

The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the "First Mind," and which the people of Bahá call the "First Will." This emanation, in that which concerns its action in the world of God, is not limited by time or place; it is without beginning and end—beginning and end in relation to God are one.\[131\]

In Bábí theology, the Primal Will was the Logos, the metaphysical principle below that station of pure abstraction which is divinity. It is the station of particularization which is the Primal Will.\[132\] In this passage, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explicitly identifies it as a Bábí-Bahá’í term for what the Neoplatonists called the Universal Intellect (Gk. nous).

‘Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that, like the one matter of the universe, the Universal Intellect is an eternal emanation from the eternal Truth (God). However, that the Universal Intellect is co-eternal with God does not mean it shares with Him in essential preexistence, as we have seen above. Rather, its essence is originated, in spite of its not having a beginning in time. God's essentially preexistent being thus has a crucial priority, though one of causation and not of time, over transtemporal principles like the Universal Intellect. This latter principle possesses only relative existence, and thus may be said to be without being in relation to God.\[133\]

(See Chart I above.)

‘Abdu'l-Bahá proceeds to explain that the referents of terms like Word or Logos, Holy Spirit, and the Universal Intellect are the perfections of God. "These perfections," he adds, "were with God; so the sun manifests all its glory in the mirror."\[134\] Here, he extends the Bábí-Bahá’i metaphysical paradigm to Johannine Christianity, as before he had extended it to Muslim Neoplatonism. We have seen in the Commentary on "I was a Hidden Treasure," although he does not say so here, that this realm of divine perfections, which are summed up in the Logos, is the realm of the active, originated attributes rather than that of the essential attributes of God. In this same passage, he explains that the Christian Logos did not have reference to the physical station of Christ, but rather to the divine perfections which were manifest in him. The human manifestation of God is thus a reflection of a reflection. A Christ or a Bahá'u'lláh is a perfect reflection of the attributes which make up the Word of God, and that Word of God is, in turn, the originated reflection of God's essence.

**'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S PSYCHOLOGY**

This brings us to a consideration of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's doctrine of the kinds of spirit in the manifestations of God, and their three stations. The Shi'i theologian Ibn Bábuyah also isolated five kinds of spirit in the prophets and Imams. The lowest was the spirit of motion, then...
the appetitive spirit, the spirit of power (ruh al-quwwah), the spirit of faith, and finally the Holy Spirit. Obviously, Ibn Bábuyah was influenced by Plato’s three parts or forms of the human soul, the appetitive, spirited, and rational. But he mysteriously eliminated the rational part and at the bottom level added the Aristotelian animal soul, or spirit of motion. To this basic schema, he appended at the upper levels the Christian-Islamic ideas of a spirit of faith and the Holy Spirit.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s schema is more purely Aristotelian. The lowest kind of soul in Aristotle’s psychology is the vegetative or nutritive soul, which consists of the power to increase or decrease in all spatial dimensions, and that of reproduction. Next in the hierarchy is the animal soul, with the two faculties of originating local movement and sense-perception. In Aristotle taught that human beings possessed both types of soul, in addition to the mind, with its faculties of abstract thought and practical deliberation. He held that mind (or the human soul) was radically unlike the vegetative and animal souls, however. The latter were simply results of the arrangement of matter in a certain way (entelechy). These souls did not exist before the organism’s birth and ceased to exist with its death. In contradistinction, Aristotle believed that the human soul or mind is immortal. It is obscure as to whether he thought this immortality would be as an individual, or whether the individual intellect would be joined to the metaphysical Active Intellect. Like Plato, Aristotle thought that the human soul preexisted the physical body.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá accepts the basic outlines of Aristotelian thought on the various types of soul or spirit, though he denies the preexistence of the human soul while teaching its individual immortality. He affirms that the manifestations of God share in the three types of spirit: the vegetative, with its faculty of spatial growth; the animal, with its sensitive and locomotive faculties: and the human spirit, with its powers of intellectual investigation. He further accepts Ibn Bábuyah’s additional levels of the spirit of faith and the Holy Spirit. The spirit of faith seems to be a moral and ethical faculty whereby the human soul acquires the perfections of God, and might be a Christian or Muslim, elaboration upon the “practical” faculty isolated by Aristotle within the mind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms the Aristotelian definition of the vegetative and animal souls as epiphenomena, as faculties generated by the particular material composition of the organisms involved. However, in the case of the human soul he sees the process as one of the particular organic composition of the human body “attracting” a human spirit, as a magnet attracts iron. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explication of the three stations (maratib) provides another way of viewing the Manifestation of God. The first of these, the bodily station, is composed of elements and so is subject to decomposition and death. This bodily station is originated in time. The second station is that of the rational soul (nafs-i natiqih). This is not composed of elements, but it is also originated, having a beginning but no end. Finally, there is the station of theophany, which he identifies as the Divine Appearance, the Word of God, the Eternal Emanation, and the Holy Spirit. The relationship between the human soul of the manifestation of God and this Logos-principle resembles that between the glass and the lamp. He likens the body to a niche for the lamp. Clearly, the niche can cease existence without requiring the destruction of either the lamp or its glass. The rational soul of the manifestation of God therefore survives death and continues to receive the emanation and effulgence of the Logos. This Logos is outside of time, having neither beginning nor end, but remains essentially originated insofar as it is eternally caused by God. It therefore exists at a lower level than the essence of God, which is essentially preexistent and not preceded by a cause.

CHART IV

Each of these stations or levels has its own means of perceiving and knowing, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presents a fully developed epistemology of the manifestations of God. He says that the bodily station of the theophanies perceives things to the degree that it is possible to do so in the physical world. This physical component of the manifestations of God demonstrates weakness and inability in many situations, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms, and he points out that Bahá'u'lláh refers to it as a condition of "sleep" compared to the "waking" state of the higher perceptions. Manifestations of God are, therefore, not supermen on the physical plane. As in other human beings, their bodies are the seats of the animal spirit, with its faculties of sense-perception faculties apparently not better developed in manifestations than in other human beings.
The manifestations of God also share in the station of the human soul, with its faculties of intellective cognition or theoretical knowledge, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains. They thus have minds, like other human beings, and undergo learning processes. 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions two modes of knowledge generally available to ordinary humans. The first is sense-perception, whereby an external form is reflected in the "heart," and this is due to the sensitive faculties of the animal spirit. The second kind of ordinary knowledge is conceptualization or imagination (tasavvur), wherein the human mind generates within itself the conception of an object. As both of these sorts of knowledge depend upon forms (sing. surah), these are together termed "formal knowledge" (ilm-i sur).

While the manifestation of God shares with other human beings in these basic faculties, he has an extra dimension, a further means of knowledge transcending that of the ordinary human being. This knowledge is termed "existential knowledge" (ilm-i vujud) by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This knowledge has the properties of being immediate and unmediated, and of being innate and unacquired. 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens it to the knowledge a man has of his own self. Just as he knows he is sad without recourse to external sense-perception, being immediately aware of his condition, so the manifestation of God existentially perceives the world as a whole. He describes this existential knowledge as a holy emanation (fayd) upon the manifestation's human soul from the Universal Intellect. This knowledge informs the manifestations of God of the realities of things, and they are able through this knowledge to found systems of religious law which are appropriate to the conditions of society. Their knowledge in this respect is of the necessary connections which relate all entities in the world, and their laws are aimed at regulating and balancing this world-system. This knowledge is the sole property of the Universal Intellect, which emanates it upon the human rational soul of the manifestation of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá goes on to provide an even more detailed analysis of the workings of the Universal Intellect. He says that the divine Universal Intellect, which is metaphysical, is a preexistent faculty. It is the Universal Intellect which encompasses existing realities and receives the divine lights and mysteries. This is a cognitive faculty, not a perceptive, sensing faculty. He adds that the spiritual faculties of the world of nature are perceptive faculties: through sense-perception they discover the realities of beings and the properties of existing things. He teaches that the heavenly intellective Faculty, which is metaphysical, encompasses. cognizes and comprehends things, and is aware of secrets, realities, and divine meanings. It discovers hidden, heavenly realities. This divine intellective Faculty is reserved for the holy Manifestations and the Fountainheads of Prophethood. He also says that a ray from the "lights" emanated by the human manifestations of God illumines the hearts of the righteous, who thus share to some extent in this faculty of pure cognition through the mediation of the manifestations.

THE MISSION OF THE MANIFESTATION

'Abdu'l-Bahá discusses the function and mission of the manifestation of God in human society in great detail. He conceives human beings both as animals with inherited behavioral drives and tendencies and as thinking beings who are capable of adopting symbolic norms and curbing those animal tendencies. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that in human beings such emotions and attitudes as anger, jealousy, fractiousness, covetousness, avarice, prejudice, hatred, pride and dominance are produced by this animal nature. He states that, were human beings left under the sway of nature, they would be governed entirely by these very emotions and motivations. Since they do not have many of the innate inhibitory mechanisms which, for instance, prevent some mammals of the same pack from killing and devouring each other, human beings without symbolic norms would act even more selfishly than other mammals. However, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, biology is not destiny. In spite of their venal animal tendencies, human beings can be trained and educated so that they adopt and abide by higher values whereby they can be transformed into "angels."

Since education and socialization are considered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to be so essential to the perfecting of human beings and the smooth functioning of human society, the position of the educator is for him, therefore, quite exalted. He explains that there are three kinds of education. The first is education for the welfare of the body, such as the teaching of nutrition and the means of providing the body with shelter and a modicum of comfort. The second education is for the welfare of the human society, including policy (siyasa), administration, human happiness, commerce, industry, sciences, arts, discovery and inventions. This is an education for civilization and progress. The third education is for a sound character and the acquisition of divine perfections. This education includes ethics and, in general, the advancement toward a fulfillment of human potentialities for becoming more God-like. There must, he says, from time to time arise an educator who teaches on all three of these levels.

This educator, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, must be perfect in all respects, and more distinguished than any other human being. He must give forth teachings which will regulate the form of society, advance knowledge and the sciences, and uplift minds to the metaphysical world where they can receive the emanations of the Holy Spirit and come to reflect the attributes of God. He adds:

One Holy Soul gives life to the world of humanity, changes the aspect of the terrestrial globe, causes intelligence to progress, vivifies souls, lays the foundation of a new existence, establishes the basis of a marvelous creation, organises the world, brings nations and religions under the shadow of one standard, delivers man from the world of imperfections and vices, and inspires him with the desire and need of natural and acquired perfections.

This educator is the manifestation, whom we have previously discussed.

In the Bahá’í view, as was pointed out earlier, manifestations of God have been coming to humankind as long as man has existed, and will continue to do so for as long as the species exists. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that there are distinct cycles within this process. The great cycle consists of hundreds of thousands of years, and is characterized by three periods. The first is a series of
manifestations of God who prepare for a universal theophany. The appearance of the latter and his dispensation constitutes the second period. The third period within the great cycle is that of the manifestations who succeed the universal manifestation. While they can reveal new laws and abrogate his ordinances, they remain under his spiritual authority. Our own cycle, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, began with Adam (about 6,000 years ago?), and the first period of preparation extended from the time of Adam to that of the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh, he says, was the universal manifestation for this cycle, and after Him, this cycle will continue for 500,000 years. This entire cycle, 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms, will be dominated by the specifically Bahá'í principle of the political and religious unification of the planet for human welfare.

CONCLUSION

It should be apparent from this survey that the concept of the manifestation of God is pivotal to Bahá'í thought. It dominates Bahá'í metaphysics, theology, anthropology and sociology. It depicts a series of figures who reflect divine attributes into the human world in such a way as to add to the progress and advancement of human morals and society. It depicts these High Prophets as the sole channels for humankind to a knowledge of the unknowable essence of God. It defines them as incarnations of all the names and attributes of God, as perfect human beings. It sees them as mirrors reflecting the emanations of a metaphysical entity which is variously referred to as the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, the Primal Will, the Most Holy Emanation, the Universal Intellect, and the Self of God. This Primal Will or Universal Intellect, this Logos principle, was the first emanation from a changeless Absolute Truth, embodying the active, originated attributes of that timeless divine Reality. The material universe itself is no more than a further emanation from this Logos, reflecting in its elements and creatures the attributes of that realm beyond nature. It is only in human beings that the full range of these divine attributes are effluent, and only in the human manifestation of God that they are perfectly reflected to the rest of humanity. By acquiring these attributes and developing the spirit of faith, human beings can overcome their animal drives and emotions to build a harmonious human civilization. The manifestation of God is, moreover, an educator not only of men’s spirits, but of their intellects as well. He instructs mankind as to how societies are to be organized and administered, and encourages the development of sciences which further human good.

The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High. The light which these souls radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto leaven which leaveneth the world of being, and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Through them the clouds rain their bounty upon men, and the earth bringeth forth its fruits. All things must needs have a cause, a motive power, an animating principle. These souls and symbols of detachment have continued to provide, the supreme moving impulse in the world of being.[161]

The nature of this figure is expounded in the Bahá’í writings in every type of discourse imaginable in the nineteenth century Middle East, from Sufi mystical poetry to Neoplatonic technical terms, from Shi’i prophetology to the ancient Greek ideal of the philosopher-king, from Aristotelian psychology to Johannine Logos theology. In short, Bahá’ís scriptures have theophanology as their central theme. In great detail, with a colorful array of terms and metaphors, they attempt to explain the manifestation of God to finite human minds.

ENDNOTES

Note: for more information on this topic, cf. some of the newer work of Stephen Lambden, Christopher Buck, Jack McLean, and others (see, for example, lists of citations at Bahai-library.org/books/rg/rg.biblio11.html#37, and Bahai-library.org/books/rg/rg.biblio17.html#66). Quotes from Bahá’í scriptures in this article can easily be found through a keyword search at TrueSeeker. The scanning process may also have introduced some typographical errors of a sort that the spell check did not catch.

1 Mirzá Husayn ’All of Nur, known as Bahá’u’lláh (1817-1892), founded the Bahá’í Faith in 1863 in Baghdad. Bahá’u’lláh's eldest son, 'Abdul-Bahá 'Abbás (1844-1921) succeeded Him as leader of the Bahá’í Faith, and the writings of these two figures constitute the scriptures of the faith. For Bahá’u’lláh's biography, see H.M. Balyuzi. Bahá’u’lláh: King of Glory. (London: George Ronald. 1980). For an overview of Bahá’u’lláh's works, see Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. (Oxford: George Ronald. 1974-76. 2 vols. —).


3 For the Bahá’í attitude to the Greek philosophical tradition. see Bahá’u’lláh's Tablet of Wisdom (Lawh-i hikmat) in Bahá’u’lláh. Majmu’ih-yi matbu’-ih-yi alváhi-yi mubarakih-yi Hadrat-i Bahá’u’lláh, (Cairo: S’a’adah Press, 1920), pp. 37-53. For an English translation, see Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. trans. Habib

Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.* trans. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani. (Wilmette. Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. 2nd rev. ed. 1976), pp. 3-4. The original of this text is still in manuscript, and is catalogued at the Bahá’í World Centre in Haifa under AB 139. My thanks to the Universal House of Justice for providing me with a photocopy of this manuscript.


Ibid., p. 133.


Wisdom, p. 140/40; the Báb also taught the coeternity of the universe with God. See his *Dala‘il-i sab’ih* (*Seven Proofs*). *Selections,* p. 125/89.


beliefs as the subsistence of things by the essential manifestation of God, calling these ideas forms and phantoms that were imagined by the people. He warns that whoever clings to their words will be deprived of the mystical knowledge of God: Majmú'ih. pp. 140-142. For further evidence that Bahá'u'lláh was critical of Ibn Arabí, see Shoghi Effendi Rabbáni, God Passes by, (Wilmette. Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Comm., 1944), pp. 122-123.

18. Ahmad al-Ahsá'í. Aynu'l-yaqín. UCLA Special Collections, Shaykhi Collection 1053/c. Box I. ins. 3. The Báb condemned the doctrine of wahdatu'l-wujúd as polytheistic in his Sahifih-yí adliyyih: see Denis MacEoin. "The Concept of Jihád in the Bábí and Bahá'í Movements," unpublished paper presented at the 3rd Annual Seminar on Bahá'í Studies at the University of Lancaster. April 7-8, 1979, footnote 103. The doctrine of existential monism is not to be confused with pantheism. As Alessandro Bausani has pointed out recently, Ibn 'Arabi says the world always has need of God, while God can dispense with the world: see A. Bausani, "Note su alcuni aspetti 'scientifici' delle Futuhat Makkiya di Ibn 'Arabi," Revista degli Studi OrienraIl, 52 (1978), p. 206. However, the fact remains that Shaykh Ahmad refuted the doctrine of existential monism. The Báb declared it polytheistic, and Bahá'u'lláh rejected it as ultimately inadequate.


23. Bahá'u'lláh, Wisdom, pp. 140-141/41.42.


27. idem. Majmú'íh. p. 87.

28. idem, Gleanings, p. 4/Ms. ABI39. Bahá'í World Centre.

29. idem, Gleanings, p. 262; Majmú'íh, p. 346.

30. idem, Gleanings, p. 65; Majmú'íh, p. 339.


32. idem, Gleanings, pp. 4-5; Ms. AB 139. Bahá'í World Centre.

33. idem, Gleanings, pp. 67-68; Majmú'íh. pp. 341-342.

34. Bahá'u'lláh, Íqán. pp. 102-103/82-83.


36. al-Ahsá'í, Hayátun'nafs. p. 66.


42. Ibn Bábuyah. *A Shi'ite Creed*, p. 93.


46. Ibid., p. 53/45.


52. Ibid., 105/54-55.


56. See note 22 above.


59. See, for instance, Muhyi'd-Dín Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-hikam*, with comm. by Abdu'r-Razzaq al-Qásháni (Cairo: al-Maymaniyyah Press. 1321/1903-4). pp. 32-33, where he talks of God's essential manifestation (tajalli dhatí), and pp. 33-34, where he says "and you are his (God's) mirror wherein He sees his own attributes, which are none other than his essence." See also Paul Nwyia. *Ibn Ata'llah (m. 790/1309) et la naissance de la confrerie Sádlite* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1972). pp. 91-92. 127, 141, 215.

60. See Sayyid Haydar Amuli, *Jami' al-asrar wa manba' al-anwar*. eds. Henry Corbin and Osman Yahya (Tehran: Institut Franco-Iranien de Recherche. 1969), p. 392, where Amuli approvingly quotes Ibn Arabi's assertion that 'the prophets are the manifestations of the divine Essence.'


64. al-Ahsá'í. Hayatu'n-nafs. pp. 50-51.
66. Ibid. p. 82.
68. al-Ahsá'í, Hayátu'n-nafs, pp. 64-73.
69. Sayyid `All Muhammad al-Bab. al-Bayán al-arabí, printed in 'Abdu'r-Razzáq al-Hasani al-Bábiyyun wa'l-Báhiyyun fi hadirihim wa madihim. (Sidon: 1926. np.), p. 84. See also the Báb's Kitáb-i asmá', Selections. pp. 140-141/99-100.
71. al-Ahsá'í, Hayátu'n-nafs, pp. 64-73.
72. Sayyid `All Muhammad al-Bab. al-Bayán al-arabí, printed in 'Abdu'r-Razzáq al-Hasani al-Bábiyyun wa'l-Báhiyyun fi hadirihim wa madihim. (Sidon: 1926. np.), p. 84. See also the Báb's Kitáb-i asmá', Selections. pp. 140-141/99-100.
73. Bahá'u'lláh, Jawáhirul-asrár. Athár, III. p. 44.
74. Bahá'u'lláh. al-Kitáb al-aqdas, p. 1; Synopsis, p. II.
82. Ibid. pp. 34.35129-30
93. Bahá'u'lláh. Íqán. p. 178/149.
94. See the Báb's Arabic Bayán. Wáhid IV in al-Hasani, al-Bábíyyun wa'l-Baha'iyyun, p. 87. Cf. the Báb's Persian Bayán, II. 11; III, 6: VI, 7.
97. Bahá'u'lláh, Tajaliyyát. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. pp. 52-54/203-205.
98. Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 111-115/82.84.
100. Bahá'u'lláh, Íqán. p. 181/151.
105. Ibid., p. 177/148.
106. Ibid., pp. 103-104/84.
107. Ibid., p. 176/147.
108. Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings. p. 79.
111. Ibid. pp. 50-51.
114. al-Ahsá'i, 'Aynu'l-yaqín. p. 4.
120. Ibid., pp. 21-22.
121. It should be noted that the English translation is often not technical in dealing with philosophical terms. I shall therefore give my own translations of technical passages and terms where necessary, placing these more technical translations in footnotes or brackets where appropriate.
The Essence of Unity [God] has always maintained a single condition, with neither change nor alteration, neither transformation nor transposition. He is eternal and everlasting. Therefore, the subsistence of human spirits by the Eternal Truth [God] is through emanation [sudúr]. The Barney translation renders qivám bi as 'dependence' rather than subsistence.

The first thing to emanate from the Eternal Truth was that universal reality to which the ancient philosophers applied the technical term "the First Intellect," and which Bahá'ís call the 'Primal Will." This emanation, in the world of God, is not limited in time and space in regard to actuality. It has neither beginning nor end. In relation to the Eternal Truth, the first and the last are the same.

The perfections were with God, like the sun which appeareth wholly manifest in the mirror." The Imámi Shi'i thinker Mullá Sadrá also identified the Neoplatonic Active Intellect with the Holy Spirit, and with the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel. See Corbin, "De Ia philosophic prophetique," p. 67.

'Islam also denies the preexistence of the soul. Also, Avicenna's Holy Intellect (p. 248), possessed only by the prophets, parallels the level of the Holy Spirit mentioned by 'Abdul-Bahá.
151. Ibid. p. 217/165.
152. Ibid.
153. Ibid. pp. 7-9/5.
154. Ibid., p. 119/90.
155. Ibid., pp. 7-9/5.
156. Ibid., p. 214/162-163.
157. Ibid., p. 8/6.
158. Ibid., p. 8-9/6-7.
159. Ibid., pp. 9-10/7.
160. Ibid., pp. 160-161/120-122.