

SOME EXTRACTS FROM THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS ON THE NATURE OF GOD

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

...God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is and hath ever been veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. “No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving.”¹ No tie of direct intercourse can possibly bind Him to His creatures. He standeth exalted beyond and above all separation and union, all proximity and remoteness. No sign can indicate His presence or His absence; inasmuch as by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible.

(The Kitáb-i-Íqán (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 98)

And 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; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself.... The second station is the human station, exemplified by the following verses: “I am but a man like you.” “Say, praise be to my Lord! Am I more than a man, an apostle?”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 66–67)

Know assuredly that God's creation hath existed from eternity, and will continue to exist forever. Its beginning hath had no beginning, and its end knoweth no end. His name, the Creator, presupposeth a creation, even as His title, the Lord of Men, must involve the existence of a servant.

...the habitation wherein the Divine Being dwelleth is far above the reach and ken of any one besides Him. Whatsoever in the contingent world can either be expressed or apprehended, can never transgress the limits which, by its inherent nature, have been imposed upon it. God, alone, transcendeth such limitations. He, verily, is from everlasting. No peer or partner has been, or can ever be, joined with Him. No name can be compared with His Name. No pen can portray His nature, neither can any tongue depict His glory. He will, for ever, remain immeasurably exalted above any one except Himself.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 150–151)

¹ Cf. Qur'án 6:104.

From the Writings and Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Existence is of two kinds: one is the existence of God which is beyond the comprehension of man. He, the invisible, the lofty and the incomprehensible, is preceded by no cause but rather is the Originator of the cause of causes. He, the Ancient, hath had no beginning and is the all-independent. The second kind of existence is the human existence. It is a common existence, comprehensible to the human mind, is not ancient, is dependent and hath a cause to it. The mortal substance does not become eternal and vice-versa; the human kind does not become a Creator and vice-versa. The transformation of the innate substance is impossible.

(Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), p. 61)

God is eternal and ancient—not a new God. His sovereignty is of old, not recent—not merely existent these five or six thousand years. This infinite universe is from everlasting. The sovereignty, power, names and attributes of God are eternal, ancient. His names presuppose creation and predicate His existence and will. We say God is Creator. This name Creator appears when we connote creation. We say God is the Provider. This name presupposes and proves the existence of the provided. God is Love. This name proves the existence of the beloved. In the same way God is Mercy, God is Justice, God is Life, etc. Therefore, as God is Creator, eternal and ancient, there were always creatures and subjects existing and provided for. There is no doubt that divine sovereignty is eternal.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 158–159)

Know that the Reality of Divinity or the substance of the Essence of Oneness is pure sanctity and absolute holiness—that is to say, it is sanctified and exempt from all praise. The whole of the supreme attributes of the degrees of existence, in reference to this plane, are only imaginations. It is invisible, incomprehensible, inaccessible, a pure essence which cannot be described, for the Divine Essence surrounds all things. Verily, that which surrounds is greater than the surrounded, and the surrounded cannot contain that by which it is surrounded, nor comprehend its reality. However far mind may progress, though it may reach to the final degree of comprehension, the limit of understanding, it beholds the divine signs and attributes in the world of creation and not in the world of God....

Minds are powerless to comprehend God, and the souls become bewildered in explaining Him. “The eyes see Him not, but He seeth the eyes. He is the Omniscient, the Knower.”

Consequently, with reference to this plane of existence, every statement and elucidation is defective, all praise and all description are unworthy, every conception is vain, and every meditation is futile. But for this Essence of the essences, this Truth of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God. All the perfections, the bounties, the splendors which come from God are visible and evident in the

Reality of the Holy Manifestations, like the sun which is resplendent in a clear polished mirror with all its perfections and bounties. If it be said that the mirrors are the manifestations of the sun and the dawning-places of the rising star, this does not mean that the sun has descended from the height of its sanctity and become incorporated in the mirror, nor that the Unlimited Reality is limited to this place of appearance. God forbid! This is the belief of the adherents of anthropomorphism. No; all the praises, the descriptions and exaltations refer to the Holy Manifestations—that is to say, all the descriptions, the qualities, the names and the attributes which we mention return to the Divine Manifestations; but as no one has attained to the reality of the Essence of Divinity, so no one is able to describe, explain, praise or glorify it. Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations.

(Some Answered Questions (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 146–148)

From Letters Written on Behalf of the Guardian to Individual Believers

We find God only through the Intermediary of His Prophet. We see the Perfection of God in His Prophets. Time and space are physical things; God, the Creator, is not in a “place” as we conceive of place in physical terms. God is the Infinite Essence, the Creator. We cannot picture Him or His state; if we did, we would be His equals, not His creatures. God is never flesh, but mirrored in the attributes of His Prophets, we see His Divine characteristics and perfections.

(9 October 1947)

The Master uses this term “the Divine Reality is sanctified from singleness” in order to forcibly impress us with the fact that the Godhead is unknowable and that to define It is impossible; we cannot contain It in such concepts as singleness and plurality which we apply to things we know and can experience. He uses the method of exaggerated emphasis in order to drive home His thought that we know the sun indirectly through its rays, the Godhead indirectly through the Manifestations of God.

(20 February 1950)