

Some Answered Questions, The Human and the Divine Stations of the Manifestations

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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The Knowledge of the Divine Manifestations

Question: What are the limitations imposed upon the powers of the Manifestations of God and, in particular, upon Their knowledge?

Answer: Knowledge is of two kinds: existential knowledge and formal knowledge, that is, intuitive knowledge and conceptual knowledge.

The knowledge that people generally have of things consists in conceptualization and observation; that is, either the object is conceived through the rational faculty, or through its observation a form is produced in the mirror of the heart. The scope of this knowledge is quite limited, as it is conditioned upon acquisition and attainment.

The other kind of knowledge, however, which is existential or intuitive knowledge, is like man's knowledge and awareness of his own self.

For example, the mind and the spirit of man are aware of all his states and conditions, of all the parts and members of his body, and of all his physical sensations, as well as of his spiritual powers, perceptions, and conditions. This is an existential knowledge through which man realizes his own condition. He both senses and comprehends it, for the spirit encompasses the body and is aware of its sensations and powers. This knowledge is not the result of effort and acquisition: It is an existential matter; it is pure bounty.

Since those sanctified realities, the universal Manifestations of God, encompass all created things both in their essence and in their attributes, since They transcend and discover all existing realities, and since They are cognizant of all things, it follows that Their knowledge is divine and not acquired—that is, it is a heavenly grace and a divine discovery.

Let us provide an example merely to illustrate the point. The noblest of all earthly beings is man. In him are realized the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral kingdoms; that is, all these degrees are contained in him in such wise that he is endowed with them all. And, being endowed with all these degrees and stations, he is informed of their mysteries and aware of the secrets of their existence. This is only an example and not an exact analogy.



TRANSLATION

Briefly, the universal Manifestations of God are aware of the truths underlying the mysteries of all created things, and thus They found a religion that is based upon, and consonant with, the prevailing condition of humanity. For religion consists in the necessary relationships deriving from the realities of things. If the Manifestation of God—the divine Lawgiver—were not informed of the realities of things, if He did not understand the necessary relationships deriving from these realities, He would assuredly be incapable of establishing a religion consonant with the needs and conditions of the time. The Prophets of God, the universal Manifestations, are even as skilled physicians; the world of being is as the body of man; and the divine religions are as the treatment and remedy. The physician must be fully aware and informed of all the parts and organs, the constitution and condition of the patient, in order to prescribe an effective remedy. Indeed, it is from the disease itself that the physician deduces the remedy, for he first diagnoses the ailment and then treats its underlying cause. Until the ailment is properly diagnosed, how can any treatment or remedy be prescribed? The physician must therefore have a thorough knowledge of the constitution, the parts, organs, and condition of the patient, and be likewise well acquainted with every disease and every remedy, in order to prescribe the appropriate cure.

Religion, then, consists in the necessary relationships deriving from the reality of things. The universal Manifestations of God, being aware of the mysteries of creation, are fully informed of these necessary relationships and establish them as the religion of God.