

Talk at 309 West Seventy-eighth Street, New York

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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Notes by Howard MacNutt

Question: You have stated that we are living in a universal cycle, the first Manifestation of which was Adam and the universal Manifestation of which is Bahá'u'lláh. Does this imply that other universal cycles preceded this one and that all traces of them have been effaced — cycles in which the ultimate purpose was the divine spiritualization of man just as it is the creative intention in this one?

The divine sovereignty is an ancient sovereignty, not an accidental sovereignty.

If we imagine this world of existence has a beginning, we can say the divine sovereignty is accidental — that is, there was a time[pg 219] when it did not exist. A king without a kingdom is impossible. He cannot be without a country, without subjects, without an army, without dominion, or he would be without kingship. All these exigencies or requirements of sovereignty must exist for a king. When they do exist, we can apply the word sovereignty to him. Otherwise, his sovereignty is imperfect, incomplete. If none of these conditions exists, sovereignty does not exist.

If we acknowledge that there is a beginning for this world of creation, we acknowledge that the sovereignty of God is accidental — that is, we admit a time when the reality of Divinity has been without dominion (lit. “defeated”). The names and attributes of Divinity are requirements of this world. The names the Powerful, the Living, the Provider, the Creator require and necessitate the existence of creatures. If there were



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no creatures, Creator would be meaningless. If there were none to provide for, we could not think of the Provider. If there were no life, the Living would be beyond the power of conception. Therefore, all the names and attributes of God require the existence of objects or creatures upon which they have been bestowed and in which they have become manifest. If there was a time when no creation existed, when there was none to provide for, it would imply a time when there was no existent One, no Trainer, and the attributes and qualities of God would have been meaningless and without significance. Therefore, the requirements of the attributes of God do not admit of cessation or interruption, for the names of God are actually and forever existing and not potential. Because they convey life, they are called Life-giving; because they provide, they are called Bountiful, the Provider; because they create, they are called Creator; because they educate and govern, the name Lord God is applied. That is to say, the divine names emanate from the eternal attributes of Divinity. Therefore, it is proved that the divine names presuppose the existence of objects or beings.

How then is a time conceivable when this sovereignty has not been existent? This divine sovereignty is not to be measured by six thousand years. This interminable, illimitable universe is not the result of that measured period. This stupendous laboratory and workshop has not been limited in its production to six thousand revolutions of the earth about the sun. With the slightest reflection man can be assured that this calculation and announcement is childish, especially in view of the fact that it is scientifically proved the terrestrial globe has been the habitation of man long prior to such a limited estimate.

As to the record in the Bible concerning Adam's entering paradise,[pg 220] His eating from the tree and His expulsion through the temptation of Satan: These are all symbols beneath which there are wonderful and divine meanings not to be calculated in years, dates and measurement of time. Likewise, the statement that God created the heaven and the earth in six days is symbolic. We will not explain this further today. The texts of the Holy Books are all symbolical, needing authoritative interpretation.

When man casts even a cursory glance of reflection upon the question of the universe, he discovers it is very ancient. A Persian philosopher was looking up into the heavens, lost in wonder. He said, "I have written a book containing seventy proofs of the accidental appearance of the universe, but I still find it very ancient."

Bahá'u'lláh says, "The universe hath neither beginning nor ending." He has set aside the elaborate theories and exhaustive opinions of scientists and material philosophers by the simple statement, "There is no beginning, no ending." The theologians and religionists advance plausible proofs that the creation of the universe dates back six thousand years; the scientists bring forth indisputable facts and say, "No! These evidences indicate ten, twenty, fifty thousand years ago," etc. There are endless discussions pro and con. Bahá'u'lláh sets aside these discussions by one word and

statement. He says, "The divine sovereignty hath no beginning and no ending." By this announcement and its demonstration He has established a standard of agreement among those who reflect upon this question of divine sovereignty; He has brought reconciliation and peace in this war of opinion and discussion.

Briefly, there were many universal cycles preceding this one in which we are living. They were consummated, completed and their traces obliterated. The divine and creative purpose in them was the evolution of spiritual man, just as it is in this cycle. The circle of existence is the same circle; it returns. The tree of life has ever borne the same heavenly fruit.

