

The Mystery of Divinity

a Comparison of Traditional Views of Divinity to Those in Some Answered Questions

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Introduction

In the normal course of events we share an endless chain of ideas with the use of definitive terms in efforts to get our points across, whether metaphorical or real. And we do this with great confidence in our own understanding of such terms. Even the parameters of uncertainty can be described with clarity in terms of probability when dealing with a myriad of statistical information, ranging from human affairs to nuclear physics. Yet in matters of the spirit we often do not have a clue as to what words such as soul, God, heaven and others that we use so frequently really mean. Generally they are described in a most superfluous manner in order to at least have some kind of transitory grasp of their relationship. Such a term is Divinity, one that truly relates to a realm of deep mystery. This paper approaches an understanding of this subject in four stages: [1] Sources of knowledge relating to divinity are reviewed with reference to the Greco-Roman, Medieval and modern periods; [2] Applications of meanings provided by these sources are evaluated in terms of current understanding; [3] Societal impacts of such applications are examined; [4] New thoughts and proofs are introduced in light of the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Finally, a conclusion is drawn that infers a new paradigm of spiritual evolution, and suggests a possible platform for philosophical dissertation regarding religious influence on secular matters in the modern world.

1: Sources of Knowledge

Choice sources for researching knowledge are the authentic experts in various fields of expertise, but in most fields, such as astronomy, physical sciences, mathematics, sociology, philosophy, political science, economics, engineering, electronics or education, the notion of divinity is utterly absent. Perhaps in the fields of advertising and of music, a cursory accolade to a product or performer may be made with use of the term 'divine' with little inference as to its true meaning. Even in psychology and medicine the word is rarely if ever mentioned. So, for one to understand divinity requires reflection on a different level. For example, a quality of divinity is called providence where benevolent intervention occurs based on faith. This infers that in the field of theology the ramifications of divinity may be determined.

In one view the concept of Providence, divine care of man and the universe, can be called the religious answer to man's need to know that he matters, that he is cared for, or even that he is threatened, for in this view all religions are centered on man, and man is individually and collectively in constant need of reassurance that he is not an unimportant item in an indifferent world; if he cannot be comforted, to be threatened is better than to be alone in an empty void of nothingness.¹

This comment from an overview article in the Encyclopedia Britannica on divinity with respect to Providence provides a general understanding of ancient and current views of the subject; these will be extolled in this section. Following is a summary in paraphrase of the concepts and views from the article.

A second view of Providence involves a cosmic order wherein mankind has a proper place of a divine nature that is intended for its wellbeing. But it is incumbent that man not pervert the order or upset it by rebellion. However, the degree of firmness of this order, if

too extreme, may invoke the possibility of degenerating into fatalism such that man might then drift powerless on the path of an impersonal destiny. Most religions combine both views.

Greco-Roman Times

The etymology of Providence as a special quality of divinity began in the five or so centuries preceding the Common Era when philosophers and statesmen exercised the terminology with respect to what is now considered to be pagan religious notions. The first Greek author to use the term was Herodotus, a fifth-century BCE historian, who mentioned that Divine Providence was the source of wisdom that keeps nature in balance. Others, like Xenophon and Plutarch, referenced the word in connection with the watchful care of the gods over mankind and the world. Cicero referred to the "Providence of the gods" and the Stoics wrote treatises on the subject. Around the Third Century BCE the Greek poet/philosopher Cleanthes wrote a hymn in glorification of the god Zeus as a benevolent and foreseeing ruler of the world and of man: "For thee this whole vast cosmos, wheeling round the earth, obeys, and where thou leadest it follows, ruled willingly by thee."²

Seneca said man should believe "that Providence rules the world and that God cares for us." Further, the Stoic school to which he belonged rejected blind fate and maintained that everything happens according to a benevolent divine plan, which they preferred to call Providence. It was this concept that influenced Christianity. In the Latin world the word Providence was used as a designation of the deity. In fact it was Seneca again who wrote that it is proper to apply the term Providence to God.

Early Middle Ages

With the fall of Rome in 476 CE, the Christian Church in the west continued its long ascendancy to power. Philosophy was then influenced by the late Roman thinkers Augustine and Boethius, among others. Augustine's philosophical ideas were shaped by Neoplatonism, which helped him understand the realm of truth that lies beyond the senses. It is a spiritual realm that becomes the goal of human striving that Augustine identified with the God of Christianity. Though Divinity is not specifically mentioned, he maintained that truths associated with mathematics and ethics are eternal and immutable but cannot come from the contingent world nor even from the mind, which is also contingent, but are due to the illuminating presence in the mind of eternal Truth, or God.³ In modern terminology this would appear to be an example of Divine Providence.

Boethius is considered to be an important channel through which Greek Philosophy would later be made available in the middle ages. His untimely death at the behest of the Ostrogoth king, Theodoric, cut short his plan to translate Greek Philosophy into Latin, but he was able to translate the logical writings of Porphyry and Aristotle. The Aristotelian doctrine of universals (terms that can be applied to more than one particular thing) are presented as innate ideas (from Plato) that are remembered from a previous existence. "This book was widely discussed in the Middle Ages. It contains not only a Platonic view of knowledge and reality but also a lively treatment of providence, divine foreknowledge, chance, fate, and human happiness."⁴

From the Eastern Church, the Greek Fathers provided another means by which Greek Philosophy would be embraced in the Middle Ages. Again it was Neoplatonic concepts that would provide a synthesis of Christian thought. John Scotus, of Ireland, translated the writings of some of the Greek theologians into Latin. In his own extensive treatise *On The Division Of Nature* he developed an interesting concept regarding divinity.

God is the primal unity, unknowable and un-nameable in Himself, from which the multiplicity of creatures flows. He so far transcends his creatures that he is most appropriately called super-real and super-good. Creation is the process of division whereby the many derive from the One. The One descends into the manifold of creation and reveals himself in it. By the reverse process, the multiplicity of creatures will return to their unitary source at the end of time, when everything will be absorbed in God.⁵

With the writings of the great thinkers of the early Middle Ages, concepts of divinity began to take on new meanings. As philosophers of the period moved away from what was considered pagan beliefs, they integrated secular logic of the early Greeks with a Judeo-Christian stance such that the idea of Divine Providence became central to the basic belief system of Christianity.

Medieval Period

Western philosophy was profoundly influenced by a cultural revolution in the Twelfth Century. New approaches to education emphasized logic, dialectic and early scientific discipline in place of grammar and the reading of classics in Latin, as witnessed by the scholar John of Salisbury (c. 1115–1180):

Behold, everything was being renovated: grammar was being made over, logic was being remodeled, rhetoric was being despised. Discarding the rules of their predecessors, [the masters] were teaching the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy) with new methods taken from the very depths of philosophy.⁶

Platonism was diminished while a renewed interest in Aristotle emerged. His methods of disputation and science were embraced especially by Thomas Aquinas and his mentor Albertus Magnus. There was also great esteem for Arabic and Jewish thinkers, all of whom contributed to a knowledge explosion in Western Europe. Aquinas felt that the philosopher seeks the first cause of things based on data supplied by the senses, whereas the theologian finds truth about God as revealed in sacred scriptures. He thought Aristotelianism to be a useful tool for Christian thought, along with Platonism to some extent. It was Aristotle's proof of a primary unmoved mover that Aquinas deepened or expanded to mean God in the Judeo-Christian context.

The eminent Islamic philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sina) had a profound impact on these medieval Schoolmen whose theological and philosophical teachings in the universities were referred to as Scholasticism. "His analysis of many metaphysical terms, such as being, essence, and existence, and his metaphysical proof of the existence of God were often quoted, with approval or disapproval, in Christian circles. Also influential were his psychology, logic, and natural philosophy."⁷

Among Jewish scholars was Moses Maimonides, who helped the Schoolmen to reconcile Greek Philosophy with revealed religion. He felt that there could be no conflict between reason and faith because both come from God. In deference to Aquinas' view, he thought that Aristotle's arguments for a world eternal were not valid because they disregarded the omnipotence of God.⁸

In sum, the primary philosophy in the Western world during the Middle ages was Christian in the way that it complemented divine revelation. It was the churchmen who developed the philosophical arguments through the Fourteenth Century and who were also theologians at the Universities of Oxford and Paris. But from this

period forward, the importance of divinity and providence gave way to profound changes in the arena of philosophy.

As secular authority replaced ecclesiastical authority and as the dominant interest of the age shifted from religion to politics, it was natural that the rivalries of the national states and their persistent crises of internal order should raise with renewed urgency philosophical problems, practically dormant since pre-Christian times, about the nature and the moral status of political power. This new preoccupation with national unity, internal security, state power, and international justice stimulated the growth of political philosophy in Italy, France, England, and Holland.⁹

As the late middle ages deferred to the Renaissance there burst forth a revival of interest in medicine, classic literature and mathematics. Discoveries in mathematics impelled the scientific revolution in the Sixteenth Century and the impetus of Classical literature provided a philosophical foundation of humanism that emphasized the centrality of human beings in the universe with their supreme value. It was Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) who put forth three propositions that were so pertinent to the times:

Here are enunciated respectively (1) the principle of empiricism, (2) the primacy of mechanistic science, and (3) faith in mathematical explanation. It is upon these three doctrines, as upon a rock, that Renaissance and early modern science and philosophy were built. From each of Leonardo's theses descended one of the great streams of Renaissance and early modern philosophy: from the empirical principle the work of Bacon, from mechanism the work of Hobbes, and from mathematical explanation the work of Descartes.¹⁰

Modern Era

In approaching the Modern Era with its materialistic bent, it becomes evident that we must depart philosophy in order to find any further influence of Divinity on the modern mind. The remaining track for study is religion for whatever it might reveal in those changing times. Indeed the Protestant Reformation provided a “sea change” in western civilization.

What was central to Protestantism throughout its history was the belief that humans are justified before God by grace through faith. It was this that separated the early Christian reformers from Roman Catholicism and its concern with sin, atonement and good works. Justification is concerned with the desire to find oneself on good terms with God:

Aware of its shortcomings, its ignorance, its sin, and its guilt, humankind saw itself standing before a bar of justice presided over by God. Without help, individuals could expect nothing but God’s wrath and condemnation. This meant that they would perish everlastingly, and their present life would be full of torment. Yet the Bible also presented humankind with a picture of a loving and gracious God, who desires happiness for all.¹¹

But the question remained as to how one could be sure that God would not reveal His wrathful side instead of His graciousness. In other words, “how could one be confident that they would be the recipient of God’s positive loving action?”¹²

The answer to this lingering question must somehow depend upon a deeper understanding of Divinity and the source of its Providence. And, it is apparent that the understanding of divinity is inescapably bound up with the Revelation or Enlightenment associated with any religion under question. Some theologians reject revelation on the

basis of mythological conceptions connected with it. With others there have been moments of ecstatic experience that bring the sense of internal revelation and with it some degree of wisdom. But how is it confirmed?¹³ To understand this aspect we will need to know how the meanings inherent to Divinity have historically been applied to the life of human kind.

2: Applications of Meanings

Comments were made that further characterize the nature of divinity with respect to the application of the qualities associated with Providence. For example, the belief in a concept of Providence as a quality of divinity entails the existence of a powerful, wise and benevolent deity. These three attributes are essential and the primary requirement is benevolence. This does not exclude the possibility however of punishment when one transgresses. Yet the divine being is understood to be well intentioned toward man. What's more, Providence does not have to be direct as it may operate through various intermediary beings, such as ancestors or spirits in non literate religions or angels in Christian and Muslim belief. Providence on the other hand can be expressed by a world order that makes life possible and guarantees future existence. Further, it may exist as a principle of cosmic order that is maintained by a divine being. But if the connection between that being and justice is lost, then Providence degenerates into a concept of fate where divinity would be inconsequential.

This idea of cosmic order does have a profound effect on the general picture of Providence as divine care for mankind but does not rule out the introduction of intermediary beings in the process. However, if the cosmic order is considered to be benevolent where man can feel safe, it is markedly different from a personal relationship between man and his god or gods. A personal god can be influenced by prayer and sacrifice to influence events whereas a fixed world can not be so influenced.¹⁴

Although the introduction of intermediary beings brings no essential change in the idea of Providence as the divine watchful care for the benefit of mankind, the notion of a cosmic order changes the picture profoundly. Even if the cosmic order is conceived as a benevolent order in which man is able to feel safe and whose very existence reassures him, such an order is different from the personal relationship between man and his god or gods. The concept of an unchangeable world order requires a different reaction. A personal god may, perhaps, be moved by prayer and sacrifice to give or to prevent events; when the order of the world is fixed, however, the course of events cannot be changed by these or any other means.¹⁵

One can see that such a conflict in precepts opens the door to a confusing array of ideas about providence, divinity and cosmic order where on the one hand one may be attracted to a deity that would have compassion for the individual and where on the other hand one may lean in a rational fashion toward a cosmic order that is under the purview of a distant impersonal Creator no longer involved in the order itself. It could be said that the impact of philosophical arguments on the daily course of human affairs are rarely acknowledged except for those that are in agreement with religious notions of the day. In other words, it does seem that mountains of words, however logical they may be, do not really move people unless they somehow touch the hearts, and for this to happen belief systems must be brought into play, as for instance in the application of prayer in moments of crisis or joy. Hence, when a concept of God is introduced through a revelatory process, the idea of a cosmic order seems logical with its foundation based on faith instead of words alone. That is perhaps why the impact of ideas upon the society of man take hold in the sweeping course of history. But this notion requires a deeper look into the implications of faith in the life of man and of how civilization is constantly tested.

3: Social Impacts

Although the names of the founders of the world's great religions are mentioned in scholarly studies, a point that is generally overlooked is the process associated with Divine Revelation. Simply put, the process of revelation from a Divine Prophet introduces knowledge and wisdom in an utterly different way than those derived by philosophers in a material world. Such knowledge is from a divine source and must be addressed on its own terms that might ultimately require unequivocal faith. Therein lies a problem for many who waffle between certitude and doubt in their pursuit of truth. This is not easy to reconcile, often resulting in a fall-back to an earlier time that might seem more safe and comfortable, as suggested by a phrase in a favorite song "give me that old time religion, it's good enough for me..." Such imagery might produce a sense of solace and peace but in reality a return to an earlier time would remind one of hardships long forgotten. Nevertheless, ideas of the past do linger in various forms as they weave through the cultural psyche. The concepts of the ancients regarding divinity and providence mentioned in Section I are still with us in fragmented forms and, though nameless, do influence our thinking today.

Mention is made of predestination as a possibility for combining the idea of a personal divine will with a cosmic fixed order that man is expected to work within as governed by a set of rules. The Deists in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries believed that "God created the world and the cosmic order in such a manner that to a great extent the course of the world is fixed from the first beginning and he is no longer involved in it."¹⁶ Even now, in the Twenty-first Century, this thought is held by some very accomplished scientists who question the existence of a God that would create a universe and then leave it alone with no apparent further involvement. On the other hand, opposing views

are made: The fact of creation helps man to believe in Providence because it would be inconsistent for the creator god or gods not to care for the further existence of the created world. Only persistent disobedience and open rebellion can then furnish a reason for the Creator to abandon or destroy the world. This situation is expressed in the myths of a great flood or some other form of destruction sent as a punishment. There is, however, never a total destruction of the world in these myths, although this final solution may be threatened for the eschatological (ultimate end) future. It may also be promised, if the eschatological events are construed as the definitive institution of a world order that is perfect for all eternity and will never deteriorate.¹⁷

Additionally, in the Zoroastrian Faith there is among its concepts one of determined order that is natural and ethical as well. Founded around 650 BCE in Persia and later expanded into India, the religion refers to Asha that is identified with the sacred element of fire. His counterpart, Drug, represents evil and deceit, whereas the Indian Rta fills the same role as Drug. Providence, on the other hand, has particular objectives whereas the cosmic order in a general sense embraces the world and, by extension, the universe and all it contains.

The benevolent aspect of Providence may be confined to a special group of people or at least be specially related to that group; or a number of patron gods or saints may watch over some specific activity or smaller group. This accounts for the idea of a chosen people watched over and led by a just and loving God. The ancient people of Israel is, perhaps, the best known example; the concept, however, is widespread. Patron gods and patron saints who are particularly charged with caring for some small group, craft, or activity or who operate in special circumstances, such as during illness or war, occur in most religions and are popular in many.¹⁸

It was suggested that we are left with certain critical problems. "In monotheistic religions, Providence is a quality of the one divinity; in polytheistic religions it may be either a quality of one or more gods or it may be conceived as an impersonal world order on which the gods, too, more or less depend."¹⁹ The consequence of the latter may be chance instead of benevolence all of which reflects a sense of ambivalence for fate and Providence. Lastly, the reconciliation of a provident God with the existence of evil in the world may constitute the most difficult problem associated with Providence and therefore with divinity itself.

4: New Thoughts

'Abdu'l-Bahá puts a question: What connection has the Reality of Divinity with the Lordly Rising-places and the Divine Dawning-points? (SAQ 46) This question alone opens a whole new paradigm for inquiry apart from what has been addressed so far. For instance one might want to know what is meant by Lordly Rising-places. And what are Divine Dawning-points? To answer these questions, certain other considerations deserve attention.

To begin, He infers that the Reality of Divinity is the Essence of Oneness, that it is absolute holiness, and further, it is exempt from all praise because it is pure sanctity above all accessibility in the world of man. He then offers a surprising clarification of supreme attributes with reference to this human plane of existence. He points out that they exist only in our imaginations. In other words, this pure essence of sanctity that is beyond description, that is incomprehensible, that is invisible, and that is inaccessible still surrounds all things. He further makes a point of logic that whatever is being surrounded is necessarily less than that which surrounds. Moreover, that which is being surrounded is limited to its internal reference points but by nature, remains oblivious to the outer reality that surrounds it. No

matter how far evolution may take us, the extent of knowledge that man may acquire will always face the limitations of his own 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. For the essence and the attributes of the Lord of Unity are in the heights of sanctity, and for the minds and understandings there is no way to approach that position. "The way is closed, and seeking is forbidden." (SAQ 146)

The beauty of this is that, though one might not be a part of that sanctified essence, one may be made aware of spiritual reality through the numerous examples of its effects in human interaction in spite of such limitations. For instance, when people commit acts of kindness without expectations of reward, they are exhibiting attributes of a non material order, e.g. kindness, sharing, concern for others and benevolence, to name a few. What's more, these attributes are learned through the study of revelation or by examples of others who have so learned. Philosophical dissertations have their place but they appear to be unable to escape the dichotomy of contending ideas in a kingdom of words when describing divinity as shown in Section I. The approach offered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes far beyond any play of words because His logic is unremitting in the pursuit of truth regarding Divinity.

He observes that human understanding is a quality of man's existence and that man being so endowed is one of the signs of God. Then He asks a provocative question: "How can the quality of the sign surround the creator of the sign?" In other words, a quality of man such as understanding is incapable of comprehending God. Thus Divinity is hidden from all comprehension. Being concealed from the minds of men, it is on a plane impossible to attain. The reasoning here is

that everything of a lower reality is powerless to comprehend that of a higher reality. He gives the example of a tree that, no matter how evolved, cannot comprehend the functions of sight, of hearing and of other functions, and yet “man and tree are alike in that they were created. Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator?”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá elaborates further on the bewildering challenge facing anyone who attempts to understand, much less explain, the unapproachable plane of God. There is simply no sufficient explanation for its comprehension. Indeed, in the mind of man there is no way to identify an indication of it.

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. (SAQ 146)

This quote about auroras and appearances sequels the question put earlier by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding Divine Dawning points. He explains that these mysterious reflections related to the Essence of essences are associated with the Holy Dawning-places for the rising of Divine Messengers of God. They are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God and appear to us in visible form. They are like clear polished mirrors that reflect the splendor of the Sun but in Their own essence reflect the splendor of God. He is quick to point out that the sun is not the same as its image in the mirror and that it never becomes part of it. Similarly, the “Unlimited Reality” is not limited to the place of appearance. In other words it is not anthropomorphic. “No; all the praises, the descriptions and exaltations refer to the Holy Manifestations...” He adds that all the attributes and

qualities mentioned return to the Divine Manifestations although they are beyond human description since no one has attained to the Essence of Divinity. "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." (SAQ 148)

Yet, concurrently we do voice the attributes and names of the Divine Reality and while, in our praise, attribute to Him the familiar five senses as well as knowledge, life and power. To do so affirms that He is incapable of imperfections. In this light a contrast is drawn between perfection and its opposite, imperfection. For example, ignorance is imperfection whereas knowledge is perfection. Thus, the Essence of God is wisdom. Weakness is imperfection but power is the opposite; "consequently, we say that the sanctified Essence of God is the acme of power." (SAQ 148) But all these attributes, though they may have the same names as our own, are beyond human comprehension for they are identical with His Essence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá logically maintains that there would be multiple preexistences if the attributes are not identical with His Essence. And since Preexistence of God is necessary for consideration of the reality of creation, this would mean that there would be an infinite sequence of preexistences. Such a condition is considered to be impossible in a universe of finite entities. That is, if each had an infinite sequence of preexistences then they would no longer be finite and Divine Messengers would be infinite in number and for that matter, the same would apply to God, an obvious error. Thus, His attributes must be identical with His Essence and therefore beyond our comprehension.

At this point 'Abdu'l-Bahá reinforces an extraordinary concept that lies at the root of spiritual belief with a quote from a Hadith. "All that you have distinguished through the illusion of your imagination in your subtle mental images is but a creation like unto yourself, and returns to you." (SAQ 149) He makes it clear that all of these

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eulogies, praises, names and attributes really apply to the Places of Manifestation. Further, it is pure imagination to think of anything beside them because we are unable to comprehend the invisible or the inaccessible.

It is clear that if we wish to imagine the Reality of Divinity, this imagination is the surrounded, and we are the surrounding one; and it is sure that the one who surrounds is greater than the surrounded. From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition. (SAQ 149)

Though not aware of it, people everywhere are caught up in a myriad of imaginations. They have become worshipers of the idols of conjectures that are considered to be the ultimate Reality that, contrarily, is actually purified from all descriptions. And they regard themselves as unified with others being worshipers of idols. At least idols have a material composition whereas the imaginations of man are nothing more than fancies that do not even have a mineral content.

It is affirmed that all the Holy Manifestations of God have attributes of perfection and divine bounties and that from Them lights of inspiration emanate. It is emphasized further that Christ and Baha'u'llah show evidence that is beyond human imagination. It is given that They possess attributes of the former Manifestations but in addition They possess some perfections that other Prophets depend upon. The example is given regarding the Prophets of Israel who were, in themselves, centers of inspiration. Mentioned were Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elijah to, name a few, but as profound and influential as their utterances were, there remains a vast difference in them when compared

to the inspiration of the Word of God as spoken by Manifestations of God such as Christ and Baha'u'llah.

We are asked to reflect upon the way light radiates and stimulates the nerves in the eye to produce sight. The light emanating from a lamp does so in a like manner as the sun but is vastly inferior in power. He further comments that when the spirit of man appears, it does so in the embryonic state. It then progresses to the state of childhood and then to maturity. As such it does so in a condition of perfection. He states the spirit is one, but that in the embryonic condition, hearing and sight are undeveloped but in the state of maturity it appears in splendor and brilliance.

In the same way the seed in the beginning becomes leaves and is the place where the vegetable spirit appears; in the condition of fruit it manifests the same spirit—that is to say, the power of growth appears in the utmost perfection; but what a difference between the condition of the leaves and that of the fruit! For from the fruit a hundred thousand leaves appear, though they all grow and develop through the same vegetable spirit. Notice the difference between the virtues and perfections of Christ, the splendors and brilliance of Bahá'u'lláh, and the virtues of the Prophets of Israel, such as Ezekiel or Samuel. All were the manifestations of inspiration, but between them there is an infinite difference. (SAQ 150)

Conclusion

Philosophy notwithstanding, it was religion that ultimately promulgated a deeper appreciation of Providence with respect to divinity

or, in other words, Divine Providence. In the early period of the Hellenic world, fatalistic belief was strong, as expressed in astrology where man is governed by the stars and planets, while the Talmud of Jewish tradition taught that Israel is subject only to God, not to any of the stars. Later the Christian sense of Providence was shown in the Gospel according to Matthew: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."²⁰

This infers Divine intervention and possibly represents the most meaningful concept of Divinity that remains with us in the Western and Islamic civilizations today in spite of all the later developments. As the ideas regarding Providence evolved from what are sometimes called pagan beliefs, through the many rational arguments from the early middle ages to the Medieval period, through the Renaissance with certain Islamic influences, and through the Reformation regarding proofs of God, we find throughout a cross pollination of religion and philosophy. After all these centuries the Protestant world clings to fundamental concepts of an earlier time mixed with a strong impulse toward individuality.

That is all well and good but a new age is upon us with a spiritual reach heretofore undisclosed. Philosophers are challenged once again to investigate a new vision as presented to us in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Evidence and proofs in the context of His commentary rise above previous assumptions by the ancients and modern thinkers as well. For instance, He stated in so many words that the Reality of Divinity is the Essence of Oneness, that it is pure sanctity above all accessibility in the world of man. (SAQ 146) But He assures us that we, even with our imperfections, are still capable of recognizing the attributes of supreme felicity by the effects that they exhibit in the material world. "Know that the attributes of perfection, the splendor of the divine bounties, and the lights of inspiration are visible and evident

in all the Holy Manifestations;...” (SAQ 149) Finally, the mystery of Divinity may be resolved with the very title of Section 37 in *Some Answered Questions*, “Divinity can only be comprehended through the Divine Manifestations.”

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