



Brooklyn Refuses to Silence ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

By Jonathan Menon

Published: June 14, 2012 | Last modified: July 4, 2013

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/06/15/brooklyn-refuses-to-silence-abdul-baha/>

THE CONTROVERSY JUST WOULDN’T go away. The Reverend Percy Stickney Grant had started it all by seating ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Bishop’s chair at his Episcopal Church of the Ascension on April 14. It was now June, but the *Churchman*, the official publication of the Episcopal Church, seemed determined to flog the subject to death.

Reverend John H. Melish had written to the *Churchman* to defend Grant. The teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Melish argued, were essentially Christian, and that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, himself, was “‘by nature Christian,’ as his whole doctrine is that of love.” On June 13, the Church’s response showed up in the daily edition of the *Independent*.

“The question is,” the *Churchman* had printed, “What is the law of the Church, not, What is the character of Abdul Baha or the nature of his teaching.”

The *Independent* agreed. “Dr. Melish cannot defend himself,” its columnist wrote, “except by the bold reply of Peter to the Sanhedrin which forbade him to preach in the temple.” The *Independent* seemed to be saying that Episcopal pastors who welcomed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to their churches could only justify it if they were willing to claim that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was equal to Christ.

But Brooklyn’s churches didn’t see it that way at all. John Howard Melish was one of their own. He was the Rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity, an Episcopal Church on the northwest corner of Clinton and Montague Streets in Brooklyn Heights, a short walk west from Columbus Park and just south of the Brooklyn Bridge. The surrounding churches made their response clear on Sunday, June 16, 1912.

Just before 11:00 a.m., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pulled up in his carriage to the Fourth Unitarian Church on Beverley Road in Flatbush, southeast of Prospect Park. The church had posted a large sign outside in bold letters:

“THE GREAT PERSIAN PROPHET, HIS HOLINESS ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, WILL SPEAK AT 11:00 A.M. IN THIS CHURCH ON THE 16TH OF JUNE.”

Later that afternoon, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed the congregation at a second church in Brooklyn. When the Rev. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman welcomed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to his Central Congregational Church at 25 Hancock Street, he made sure that no one among the congregation could mistake his own position on the issue.

“I should like to say,” he emphasized at the outset, “that it is with great pleasure I ask Abdul-Baha to speak to us tonight.”

“Christian people,” he told his congregation, “can afford to be absolutely free, not tolerant — I do not care for that word — but free and catholic in their extension of liberty and courtesy to other people.”

For Cadman, it wasn’t merely religious regulations that should determine if ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be invited to speak in a Christian Church, but the Christian spirit of charity.

“Abdul-Baha our Elder Brother comes to us from the far East which has always been the birthplace of the world’s great religions . . . and I will leave you in the hands of this visitor whom we are proud to have with us.”

In tomorrow’s feature: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses the Central Congregational Church in Brooklyn, and tackles the controversy head on.

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

Jonathan Menon, “Brooklyn Refuses to Silence ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, June 15, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/06/15/brooklyn-refuses-to-silence-abdul-baha/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan. “Brooklyn Refuses to Silence ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. June 15, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/06/15/brooklyn-refuses-to-silence-abdul-baha/>.

HOW TO CITE THE *239 Days in America* WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

Terms of Use

239 Days in America™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at editor@239Days.com. Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.