

The Australian Bahá'í

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Special Section:
The Legacy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Loving ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Understanding His Station

The early Bahá’ís in the West struggled to understand the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Boris Handal shares how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded to this confusion.

Following the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh in 1892, there were several Bahá’ís from both the East and West who, in their love for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, lavished praise on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá using extreme laudatory terms. Such exaggerations went beyond ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station and brought Him anxiety and grief. Some believers likened Him to the return of Jesus Christ or to a new Manifestation of God, and others simply elevated Him so much that His positions of servitude and self-effacement were hidden. Enemies of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá used those comments to attack ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and discredit Him.

Time after time, the believers addressed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by the magnificent titles that Bahá’u’lláh had conferred upon Him, such as “*the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root*”, “*the Limb of the Law of God*”, the Being “*round Whom all names revolve*”, the “*Mystery of God*”, “*Branch of Holiness*,” His “*most great favor*”, and “*most perfect bounty*” conferred upon humanity, through Whom “*every mouldering bone is quickened*”. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lovingly discouraged them from using those lofty titles and preferred His self-designated name of “*Servant of Bahá*”.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa, 1921. The Bahá’í World 1936-1938. Copyright © Bahá’í International Community

The stories below reveal how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá educated the friends about His station of servitude.

In *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, Adib Taherzadeh shares the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretary as he recounted the way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reacted to those laudatory remarks from the believers:

... [O]ne day I received a letter from one of the handmaidens of God... This letter, composed in verse, and laudatory in its tone, was addressed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the form of a supplication to the holy presence of God. I handed the poem to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as He was coming down the steps of the house in front of the sea. I thought it was the right moment to give it to Him. He had hardly read one or two lines when He suddenly turned His face towards me and with the utmost sadness and a deep sense of grief said: ‘Now even you hand me letters such as this! Don’t you know the measure of pain and sorrow which overtakes me when I hear people addressing me with such exalted titles? Even you have not recognized me! If you have not appreciated this, then what can be expected of others? ... Don’t you see all that I do day and night, and everything I write in my letters... I swear by Almighty God that I consider myself lowlier than each and every one of the loved ones of the Blessed Beauty. This is my firm conviction... Tell me if I am wrong. This is my greatest wish. I don’t even wish to make this claim, because I dislike every claim.’ He then turned towards the Qiblih and said, ‘O Blessed Beauty, grant me this station’.

John Esslement noted in *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* that there were also a number of Western Bahá’ís who, “*felt that they honoured ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by likening Him to a Manifestation or hailing Him as the ‘return of Christ’*”. Such remarks brought considerable grief to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Who on repeated occasions alluded to Himself only as a servant of the Blessed Beauty. In part to

address these misconceptions and clarify ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s singular station, Shoghi Effendi wrote a letter dated 8 February 1934 that was subsequently published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* under the title “*The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*”.

Western pilgrims, impressed by His arresting figure, often came back to America and disseminated these misunderstandings. For instance, author Earl Redman writes in *Visiting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* that some Bahá’ís were of the belief that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the Spirit of Christ. For this reason, on 1 December 1901, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed a Tablet for William and Wendell Dodge, who were at that time on pilgrimage in the Holy Land, clarifying His station:

In this greatest period there are only two Manifestations, the Blessed Báb (may my soul be a ransom to him) and the Manifestation of the Blessed Perfection (Glory be to Him).

We are all servants of the threshold of Bahá and the one who serves most in His Holy threshold is the most beloved. My greatest wish and desire is submissiveness and servitude at His Holy Threshold. My name, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, means the servant of God; my heart is the servant of Bahá, and my spirit is the servant of Bahá and rejoices only in this name.

Therefore, in order that there may be no discord, all of the believers in the truth must not mention me except as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the servant of God. The essential thing is love. I must love you, and you must love me. Such is the meaning of the truth, while untruth means rancour, discord and hatred. All else save love is merely outwardly uttered words.

On another occasion, friends in New York were in disagreement as to whether ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the return of Jesus Christ. They decided to write to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Who, on 1 January 1907, wrote to the New York City Board of Counsel the passage to the right, as recorded in *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Abbas*.



The Mystery of God

My name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my identity is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my qualification is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my praise is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem; and servitude to all the human race is my perpetual religion. Through the bounty and favor of the Blessed Perfection, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Ensign of the Most-Great-Peace, which is waving from the Supreme Apex; and through the gift of the Greatest name, he is the Lamp of Universal Salvation, which is shining with the light of the love of God. The Herald of the Kingdom is he, so that he may awaken the people of the East and of the West. The Voice of Friendship, Uprightness, Truth and Reconciliation is he, so as to cause acceleration throughout all regions. No name, no title, no mention, no commendation hath he nor will ever have except 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my supreme apex. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory!

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá