

The Proof Based on Establishment (*Dalíl-i-taqrír*) and the Proof Based on Verses (*Hujjiyyat-i-ayát*): An Introduction to Bahá'í-Muslim Apologetics¹

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Abstract

Since the early days of the Bahá'í Faith in Persia, the Bahá'í-Muslim dialogue has generated tremendous interest on both sides. From the Bahá'í camp, significant attempts have been made towards demonstrating the truth of the Bahá'í Faith, based on Islamic texts and theology. Meanwhile, Bahá'í apologists had to stay consistent within the Bahá'í theological framework. To date, there has been no serious attempt to study the development of the Bahá'í-Muslim debate. This study concerns itself with a narrow spectrum of this debate. It will focus on two of the most plausible and effective arguments developed by Bahá'í scholars, namely, the proof based on establishment (*dalíl-i-taqrír*) and the proof based on verses (*hujjiyyat-i-ayát*). The historical and theological aspects of these apologetic developments will be given special attention. The proof based on verses may be said to be an extension of the quranic challenge, upon which Bahá'í scholars capitalized. The proof based on establishment was then a further apologetic development of the proof based on verses. These apologetic arguments were grounded in the writings of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Most of the material for this study comes from the works of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, who has made the most significant contribution to this field. The Bahá'í-Muslim dialogue has continued into our time, but under the towering shadow of Abu'l-Faḍl. Islamic polemicists have also made serious attempts at countering these arguments, and some of their salient arguments will be critiqued in this article. From the setting of a Bahá'í-Muslim dialogue, this study will endeavor to introduce the proof based on establishment (*dalíl-i-taqrír*) into the Bahá'í-Christian dialogue, from which it has been conspicuously absent in the West.

Résumé

Depuis les tous débuts de l'existence de la Foi bahá'ie en Perse, le dialogue bahá'í-musulman a suscité énormément d'intérêt de part et d'autre. Du côté bahá'í, des tentatives importantes ont été faites en vue de démontrer la véracité de la Foi bahá'ie par une argumentation fondée sur les textes et la théologie islamiques. Ce faisant, les apologistes bahá'ís devaient s'assurer de demeurer constants par rapport au cadre théologique bahá'í. A ce jour, aucun effort sérieux n'a été fait pour étudier l'évolution du débat bahá'í-musulman. La présente étude se penche sur une partie seulement de ce débat, puisqu'elle se concentre sur deux des arguments les plus plausibles et les plus efficaces développés par les érudits bahá'ís, soit: la preuve fondée sur l'établissement (*dalíl-i-taqrír*) et la preuve fondée sur les versets (*hujjiyyat-i-ayát*). Les aspects historiques et théologiques de ces développements apologetiques feront l'objet d'un examen particulier. La preuve fondée sur les versets peut être vue comme une extension du défi coranique, auquel recouraient volontiers les érudits bahá'ís. La preuve fondée sur l'établissement était, pour sa part, un développement apologetique plus poussé de la preuve fondée sur les versets. Ces arguments

¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Kambiz Sadeghzade Milani, who was abducted in August 1980, along with the other eight members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran. This article received the Association for Bahá'í Studies award for excellence in Bahá'í Studies.

apologéticas s'appuyaient sur les écrits des figures centrales la Foi bahá'íe. La plupart des textes utilisés pour cette étude sont tirés d'ouvrages écrits par Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, dont la contribution a ce domaine a été la plus significative. Le dialogue bahá'í-musulman se poursuit encore, mais sous l'ombre grandissante d'Abu'l-Faḍl. Les polémistes islamiques ont, de leur côté, tenté de contrer ces preuves et certains de leurs arguments font l'objet d'un examen critique dans cet article. S'appuyant sur le dialogue bahá'í-musulman, l'article essaie d'introduire la notion de preuve fondée sur l'établissement (*dalíl-i-taqrír*) dans le dialogue bahá'í-chrétien, duquel il a d'ailleurs été particulièrement absent en Occident.

Resumen

Desde los albores de la Fe Bahá'í en Persia, el dialogo bahá'í-musulmán ha suscitado tremendo interés de lado y lado. De la parte bahá'í se han hecho esfuerzos considerables encaminados a demostrar la verdad de la Fe Bahá'í utilizando textos y teología islámica. A la vez, las apologistas bahá'ís tuvieron que mantenerse constantes dentro del marco de referencia teológico bahá'í. Hasta la fecha, no se ha visto esfuerzo serio de estudiar el desarrollo del debate bahá'í-musulmán. Este estudio se dirige a una franja angosta de este debate. Enfocara sobre dos de los razonamientos mas efectivos y verosímiles, es decir la prueba basada en establecimiento (*dalíl-i-taqrír*) y la prueba basada en versos (*ḥujjiyyat-i-ayát*). Se le dará atención especial a los aspectos históricos y teológicos de estas elaboraciones apologéticas. La prueba basada en versos puede decirse ser una extensión del reto Coránico, del que se valieron los eruditos Bahá'ís. La prueba basada en establecimiento fue entonces una elaboración apologética por además de la prueba basada en versos. Estos razonamientos apologéticos se fundamentaron en las escritos de las figuras centrales de la Fe Bahá'í. La mayor parte del material para este estudio se deriva de las obras de Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl quien ha sido el contribuyente mas destacado en esta esfera. El dialogo bahá'í-musulmán continua en la actualidad, pero siempre bajo el ascendiente imponente de Abu'l-Faḍl. Los polemistas islámicos han llevado a cabo esfuerzos serios de contradecir estos razonamientos algunos de las cuales serán criticados en este estudio. Partiendo del marco de un dialogo bahá'í-musulmán, se buscara introducir la prueba basada en establecimiento (*dalíl-i-taqrír*) al dialogo bahá'í-cristiano en el Occidente, en donde resalta por su ausencia.

Introduction

The early nucleus of followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh accepted their respective claims on the basis of messianic expectation. They had been prepared to expect the advent of their Promised One, as the Qá'im or "Him Whom God shall make manifest," from within the Shaykhí and the Bábí communities respectively. In fact, polemical argumentation did not play a prominent role in their acceptance of the new kerygma. Quddús, for instance, recognized the Báb based on his exalted gait (Nabíl-i-A'zam, *Dawn-Breakers* 69). Ṭáhirih accepted the Bábí call after a dream, without the need for quranic or ḥadīth arguments (81). Similar dynamics governed the early conversions to the Bahá'í Faith from the Bábí tradition. Soon, however, the new message spread beyond the ranks of these prepared souls, attracting the attention of the general population.

The early exponents of the Bahá'í Faith in the East faced a difficult task of conveying the Bahá'í message to the Muslim population of Persia and the rest of the Islamic world. This task was particularly challenging in that the Bahá'í teacher would frequently have to face a systematic and well-defined theological framework, one in which Muḥammad was the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets, and Islam the last divinely revealed religion. These early Bahá'í teachers and

scholars were gradually able to formulate and develop solid textual arguments and interpretations based on the Qur'án, ḥadīth, and the Bible to communicate the validity of the new message and answer challenges addressed to it. These arguments were especially designed to convince, or at least to silence, their vocal counterparts regarding the validity of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í teachers were not absolutely original in these developments. Most, if not all, of these arguments were based upon key concepts advanced originally by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. This study will focus on the historical and theological development of the *dalíl-i-taqrír* (proof based on establishment) and *hujjiyyat-i-ayát* (proof based on verses), especially through the examination of the writings of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání. Once fully developed, these two proofs became potent arguments in the hands of Bahá'í teachers.

The Material

The study will primarily focus on the *Kitáb al-Fará'id* (The Book of Priceless Pearls) and the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* (That which Separates Truth from Falsehood). The *Fará'id* may easily be said to be the best apologetic defense of the Bahá'í Faith ever written by a Bahá'í scholar. Written by Abu'l-Faḍl in 1898, it is essentially a defense of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, written in response to a prominent Muslim cleric's refutation of the *Íqán*. The *Kitáb al-Fará'id* is arguably the most influential writing in its genre both within the Bahá'í world and without. Virtually every Persian apologetic Bahá'í text since then has relied heavily on its style and content. In fact, numerous later Bahá'í scholars accepted the Bahá'í Faith after they found themselves unable to rebut its argumentation satisfactorily.² The *Fará'id* has also continually attracted the attention of those who have sought to attack the Bahá'í Faith. It is worth noting that a number of anti-Bahá'í polemics in the East were written originally as refutations of the *Fará'id*. This book is essential to this study, as it is in this book that Abu'l-Faḍl, for the first time, systematically outlines the *dalíl-i-taqrír*.

The *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* is a lesser known work by Abu'l-Faḍl written almost five years before the *Fará'id*, while he was a lone Bahá'í pioneer in Samarqand. The *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* is his first major written attempt to prove the authenticity of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions, through both textual and rational proofs. This book is central to the study of Abu'l-Faḍl's development of textual proof.³ In the *Fará'id*, he characterizes the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* as a "great book." There are other works by Abu'l-Faḍl that are available in English, but they are more peripheral to the development of his Bahá'í apologetic. This study, therefore, will only concern itself with the two abovementioned books.

It is appropriate to begin this survey of the *dalíl-i-taqrír* with an examination of the *Kitáb al-Fará'id*. The third chapter of the first segment of the *Fará'id* is entitled, "On the Argument Based on Establishment." Here, Abu'l-Faḍl advances the following thesis:

Should a person claim to be the founder of a religion, and proceed to establish a religion, and claim a relationship between that religion and God (Blessed and Exalted be He), and that religion gains influence in the world and becomes established, this is

² For a very interesting example, see Sulaymání, *Maṣábiḥ-i-Hidáyat*, volume 9. In that volume, the Bahá'í scholar A. Iṣḥraq-Khávarí details the story of his conversion to the Bahá'í Faith.

³ Abu'l-Faḍl himself states in a letter written in 1893 that the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* is an unprecedented book in providing proofs for the Bábí and Bahá'í religions. He also says that this book stands distinct from his previous writings (see Mehrábkháni, *Zindigání-i-Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání* 389).

sufficient proof regarding its truth. Conversely, non-establishment and lack of influence indicate the falsity of a fading and temporary claim. (61)⁴

Abu'l-Faḍl argues that if a religion becomes established in the world and finds a permanent following, then it must be true and of God. Elsewhere in that same book, Abu'l-Faḍl restates the *dalil-i-taqrír* in this way:

No one other than God (Blessed and Exalted be He) is capable of rendering a religion influential and established. The Might and Sovereignty of God prevent the false religion from becoming established. (63)

As one can imagine, the *dalil-i-taqrír* may be highly problematic for the skeptic. Because of this, Abu'l-Faḍl devotes a substantial part of the *Fará'id* to the development and consolidation of the proof based on establishment. Later in this article, some of the major objections that have been directed at the *dalil-i-taqrír* will be enumerated. We shall also examine how Abu'l-Faḍl and later Bahá'í scholars have addressed those criticisms.

The Scriptural Sources

Even though Bahá'í scholars systematically formulated and presented the *dalil-i-taqrír*, it was first advanced by Bahá'u'lláh, who used this argument in numerous tablets and letters. The following passage from the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, addressing the issue of the expected sovereignty of the Qá'im, is historically early and of particular interest. Here, Bahá'u'lláh refutes some prevalent notions regarding the sovereignty of the Qá'im. While providing his interpretation of the sovereignty of the Qá'im, he also provides the foundation for the *dalil-i-taqrír*:

Nay, by sovereignty is meant that sovereignty which in every dispensation resideth within, and is exercised by, the person of the Manifestation, the Day-star of Truth. That sovereignty is the spiritual ascendancy which He exerciseth to the fullest degree over all that is in heaven and on earth, and which in due time revealeth itself to the world in direct proportion to its capacity and spiritual receptiveness, even as the sovereignty of Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, is today apparent and manifest amongst the people. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 107–8)

In the following passage, Bahá'u'lláh explains the meaning of the sovereignty of Muḥammad after detailing some of the challenges and anguish that Muḥammad faced in the course of his ministry. According to Bahá'u'lláh, the sovereignty Muḥammad is the establishment and ascendancy of Islam:

Consider, how great is the change today! Behold, how many are the Sovereigns who bow the knee before His name! How numerous the nations and kingdoms who have sought the shelter of His shadow, who bear allegiance to His Faith, and pride themselves therein! From the pulpit-top there ascendeth today the words of praise which, in utter lowliness, glorify His blessed name; and from the heights of the

⁴ All translations from Persian or Arabic texts are by Kavian S. Milani. Passages from the Bahá'í writings without authorized translations are paraphrased.

minarets there resoundeth the call that summoneth the concourse of His people to adore Him. Even those Kings of the earth who have refused to embrace His Faith and to put off the garment of unbelief, none the less confess and acknowledge the greatness and overpowering majesty of that Day-star of loving kindness. Such is His earthly sovereignty, the evidences of which thou dost on every side behold. This sovereignty must needs be revealed and established either in the lifetime of every Manifestation of God or after His ascension unto His true habitation in the realms above. What thou dost witness today is but a confirmation of this truth. That spiritual ascendancy, however, which is primarily intended, resideth within, and revolveth around Them from eternity even unto eternity. It can never for a moment be divorced from Them. Its dominion hath encompassed all that is in heaven and on earth. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 110–11)

The Bahá'í theological scheme is consistent with this understanding of sovereignty. It may be suggested that Bahá'í theology pivots on the concept of Manifestations.⁵ Simply stated, God has indisputable sovereignty over all creation. Manifestations of God possess God's attributes, sovereignty included. It follows then that they exercise inherent sovereignty in the world. Therefore, Manifestations will sooner or later achieve sovereignty over their enemies in the earthly realm (*násút*). In other words, a divinely inspired religion cannot be stopped.

Another passage by Bahá'u'lláh merits close examination with respect to the *dalíl-i-taqrír*. This passage is to be found in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Here Bahá'u'lláh proceeds to enumerate what he regards as proof for the validity of his mission:

Say: The first and foremost testimony establishing His Truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth. This is, verily, an evidence of His tender mercy unto men. (105)

Three separate but interrelated proofs are provided in this passage. The first and second proofs are incorporated in the *dalíl-i-taqrír*, but Bahá'u'lláh does not presuppose establishment in either case. The establishment (*taqrír*) of a religion is a temporal phenomenon. Bahá'u'lláh does not state that an observer need wait for establishment before the two become valid proofs. However, for an observer temporally distanced from Bahá'u'lláh and the inception of the Bahá'í Revelation, the spread and establishment of the Revelation and teachings would be considered integral parts of the proof.

The Proof Based on Verses

The third proof given above by Bahá'u'lláh represents the basis for the proof based on verses (*hujjiyyat-i-ayát*). Bahá'u'lláh, however, states that “His self,” “His Revelation,” and “the words He hath revealed” must be considered substantial proof in descending order. The formal development of the proof based on verses historically preceded the polemical development of the proof based on establishment (*dalíl-i-taqrír*). It is our conclusion that the *dalíl-i-taqrír* is a further apologetic development of the *hujjiyyat-i-ayát*. Therefore, the development of the proof based on verses will be examined first.

⁵ See, for example, Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 99–104 and *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 64–69.

The third testimony mentioned in the above passage is based on verses.⁶ Bahá'u'lláh states that the verses he has revealed are by themselves sufficient testimony to the truth of his claim. Bahá'u'lláh repeated this theme frequently in his writings. The following example from the Tablet of Ahmad is well known:

O people, if ye deny these verses, by what proof have ye believed in God? Produce it, O assemblage of false ones. Nay, by the One in Whose hand is my soul, they are not, and never shall be able to do this, even should they combine to assist one another. (*Bahá'í Prayers* 211)

The challenge that Bahá'u'lláh presents in these lines is very clear. He unequivocally states that should all his foes gather together they would be incapable of producing verses such as he has written. This challenge has been reiterated many times in the vast corpus of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Say O people, if ye deny that which hath been revealed from the Throne, then by what discourse have ye believed in God? Then produce it and do not hesitate even for less than a moment. (*La'áli ul-Hikmat* 1:25)

If ye deny these verses, then by what proof was your belief in God and Manifestations of His Self established? Produce it, if ye are capable of so doing. (*La'áli ul-Hikmat* 1:43)

The tone and grammatical structure of these verses are as similar in Arabic as they are in English. An interesting question may be raised at this point: Why did Bahá'u'lláh structure all these sentences along the same format? The key may lie in the audience that Bahá'u'lláh was addressing in these verses, which were written for those of Islamic background, who would have been familiar with the very similar quranic challenges. The echo of a familiar challenge in a familiar language and tone serves to make a strong polemical point. This theme is directly addressed in the Qur'án on at least six occasions. The verses below are some examples:

If ye are in doubt regarding what We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it, and call any witness other than God, if ye are truthful. (Qur'án 2:23)

Do they say that: "He has forged it"? Say: bring a chapter like this, and call anyone other than God to your assistance, if ye are truthful. (Qur'án 10:38)

Say: If men and spirits combine to compose the like of the Qur'án, they will not be able to produce it, even should they combine to assist one another. (Qur'án 17:88)

The Qur'án extended the above challenges to those who sought to question the truth of Muḥammad and the Islamic message. The challenge of the Qur'án had remained unanswered for nearly fourteen hundred years. It is in this light that one can see the question Bahá'u'lláh posed to the

⁶ As will be demonstrated, the proof based on verses is clearly rooted in the Qur'án and had been used by Muslim apologists in anti-Christian polemics. For example, see al-Báji, quoted in Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes* 2:212–13.

Muslim learned. That Bahá'u'lláh expressed his challenge in a language closely paralleling the quranic challenge simply rendered it more emphatic. Bahá'í teachers, including Abu'l-Faḍl, noted the argument advanced by Bahá'u'lláh and understood the power of the argument in the setting of its quranic root. Their task was then to formulate fully and to consolidate the *ḥujjiyyat-i-ayát*. This they did, and the proof of the verses has been an effective tool in the hands of the Bahá'í teachers ever since.

One should not fail to mention that the Báb also emphatically used both the establishment (*dalíl-i-taqrír*) and verses (*ḥujjiyyat-i-ayát*) as proofs regarding his mission. The following verse concerns the *dalíl-i-taqrír*:

Say, God hath undisputed triumph over every victorious one. There is no one in heaven or earth or in whatever lieth between them who can frustrate the transcendent supremacy of His triumph. (The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 164)

The proof based on the verses was also frequently used by the Báb:

The Bayán is in truth Our conclusive proof for all created things, and all the peoples of the world are powerless before the revelation of its verses. (*Selections* 159)

Verily We made the revelation of verses to be a testimony for Our message unto you. Can ye produce a single letter to match these verses? Bring forth, then, your proofs, if ye be of those who can discern the one true God. I solemnly affirm before God, should all men and spirits combine to compose the like of one chapter of this Book, they would surely fail, even though they were to assist one another. [Cf. Qur'án 17:90] (*Selections* 43)

In this last passage, the Báb clearly constructs a key sentence very similar to the quranic one already examined. The Báb frequently incorporates quranic verses within his writings, especially when he wants to draw a parallel between himself and the prophet Muḥammad. In this case, the Báb presents his “revelation of verses” as a “testimony,” along the same lines as the Qur'án had done before him and Bahá'u'lláh was to do in the future.

Ayát is the original Arabic word generally translated as verse. It has also been translated as sign. This word was used in pre-Islamic Arabic as well as in the Qur'án. The etymology and derivation of this word are debated. Arthur Jeffery considers it among the foreign vocabulary of the Qur'án. A number of prominent classical Islamic linguists, however, have regarded it as originally Arabic (Raymar, *Tárikh-i-Qur'án* 550). Izutsu, the great quranic linguist, in his study of quranic semantics, defines *ayát* in the context of two other quranic terms, *'aql* (intellect) and *qalb* (heart). Both are needed to comprehend fully the divine *ayát*. He states that the quranic *ayát* (signs) therefore divides the people into two camps—those who reject the sign and those who accept it.⁷ This quranic use has some important implications. One salient implication is as an indisputable sign, one that other claimants have failed to provide, i.e., a miracle. An *ayát*, as such, is bestowed to a Messenger of God as testimony. One such usage occurs in the story of Sálīh, the Prophet of Thamúd, and his miracle. “O people, this is the she-camel of God which is a miracle (*ayát*) for you” (Qur'án 11:64). The following verse is yet another example of this use. “Ask of the children

⁷ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran* 133–40. According to Izutsu, when faced with an *ayát* from God, one has two choices, *taşdíq* (acceptance) and *takdhīb* (regarding it as false).

of Israel regarding the number of clear miracles (*ayát*). We sent them” (Qur’án 2:211). It is in this context that the Qur’án refers to the revealed and eventually written quranic text as *ayát* as well. The implication is clear: that these verses are miracles given by God, given to the Prophet Muḥammad, as seen in the verse, “These are the verses (*ayát*) of the clear Book” (Qur’án 12:1).

According to Abu’l-Faḍl, the Protestants, the Muslims, and the Bábis all agree that the revealed Word of God in itself constitutes sufficient proof regarding the truth of the revealer. He maintains, however, that each religion does so by different criteria. Abu’l-Faḍl devotes some pages to an acute analysis of each group’s reason, whether textual or rational, in the earlier *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb*. Although his study of each claim in that text is interesting, it does, however, lie outside the scope of this article. Years later, he returned to the same topic in his *Fará’id*, to re-address the questions set forth by a Muslim cleric. For centuries, Muslims had understood the challenge of the Qur’án to lie in its eloquent and exalted language. It was accepted that the supreme miracle of the Qur’án was that it had set a standard of eloquence that none of the later grammarians, poets, and rhetoricians was able to meet.⁸ Abu’l-Faḍl’s counterpart, the Shaykh ul-Islám of Tblisi, challenged him with the same argument. Here Abu’l-Faḍl categorically refutes eloquence as a proof with a detailed and well-structured response. The following abridgment represents a summary of his argument against eloquence as a sufficient proof, as detailed in the *Fará’id* (Abu’l-Faḍl, *Kitáb al-Fará’id* 454–79).

He first argues that the proof of a divine book must be one that is universally recognizable. The eloquence of a book in any language, Arabic for instance, cannot be sufficient proof for all who dwell on earth. How can an American, for example, without any firsthand knowledge of Arabic, accept Islam based on the general consensus that quranic Arabic is eloquent and matchless? He then argues that even for those who are familiar with Arabic, eloquence cannot represent an appropriate decisive test. To be able to gauge eloquence properly, one must be well versed in Arabic. As such, the universal testimony of the Word of God can be examined and appreciated by only a few who have spent their lives studying Arabic literature. Again, Abu’l-Faḍl would hold that the criterion of eloquence as sufficient proof falls short.

Abu’l-Faḍl then proceeds to break fresh ground in the Bahá’í-Muslim dialogue. He begins to quote long portions from Christian anti-Islamic polemics, where the writers point out particular grammatical lapses in the Qur’án. His purpose in so doing is to emphasize that the eloquence and literary excellence of the Qur’án would not constitute definitive proof because it is subjective in nature. Passages that the Muslims lauded as masterpieces were dismissed by their foes as grammatically flawed. Prior to the *Fará’id*, the issue of quranic grammatical errors or innovations had not been overtly acknowledged and systematically treated in the Bahá’í-Muslim dialogue. Abu’l-Faḍl was ingenious in his use of the alleged quranic grammatical lapses. This point also served him well elsewhere in the *Fará’id* on the question of lapses of Arabic grammar by Bahá’u’lláh.⁹

The last point that Abu’l-Faḍl argued with respect to the issue of eloquence was the following. On the one hand, among Arabic-speaking people who heard the Islamic message at its inception and during its early years, a majority of eloquent poets and rhetoricians rejected Islam and the Qur’an, claiming, “We can certainly compose similar writings, should we want to” (Qur’án 8:31). On the other hand, he mentions Abu-dhar, Balál, and Uways-i-Qarany as less learned people

⁸ For a modern Muslim apologetic argument based on eloquence, see Sha’ráni, *Ithbát-i-Nubuwwat* 31.

⁹ See the *Kitáb al-Fará’id* 479–533, where Abu’l-Faḍl presents a detailed and challenging reply to the charge of Arabic grammatical errors in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. The Shaykh, however, does not provide any examples. In the course of the discussion, Abu’l-Faḍl manages to point out grammatical flaws in the writings of Shaykh ul-Islám himself.

who accepted the quranic call. Abu'l-Faḍl raises the question that if eloquence is to be considered an absolute test, why is it that the eloquent ones rejected the quranic verses and the ineloquent ones accepted the quranic message?

Abu'l-Faḍl concludes that the eloquence of the quranic language cannot be sufficient evidence regarding the divine origin of the Qur'án. He is correct in that the idea has been unable to silence the quranic critics. A modern-day Christian apologist writes the following:

The Qur'án is not a unique literary masterpiece. There are numerous examples of other beautifully crafted poems, epics, and scripture from the classical period, many much older than the Qur'án. (Soroush, *Islam Revealed* 192–93)

Abu'l-Faḍl had already considered the prevalent Bábí argument based on innate revelation (*nuzúl-i-fiṭri*) in the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb*. His argument against inherent and innate revelation of verses is interestingly absent in the *Fará'id*. This may well be a consequence of the polemical audience of the *Fará'id*. Nonetheless, it serves to demonstrate the earnest quest of Abu'l-Faḍl to arrive at conclusive and indisputable textual proofs. Abu'l-Faḍl paraphrases the concept of innate revelation from the Bábí standpoint in the following manner:

And the People of the Bayán regard the proof and miracle or Divine revelation to be that of innate revelation. Their intention is that should a person assemble words without formal learning and without hesitation, that is sufficient testimony that those words were revealed through Divine revelation, because the utilization of sciences and writing of phrases without formal education and prior reflection and meditation is impossible. It is seen that when scholars want to write a page on a scientific subject they cannot do so spontaneously and without prior thought, in spite of the years they have spent in pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, if an unlettered youth reveal one thousand verses on scientific matters and prayers and verses in three hours spontaneously and without the stopping of the pen there can be no doubt that it is Divine revelation. (Abu'l-Faḍl, *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* 76)

It is interesting that Abu'l-Faḍl argues against the application of this proof based on spontaneous and innate revelation as a universal criterion. Prior to examination of what he states on this issue, some relevant Bábí and Bahá'í texts must be examined. The following example occurs in the *Dalá'il-i-Sab'ih* (The Epistle of Seven Proofs) by the Báb:

How strange then that this twenty-five-year-old untutored one should be singled out to reveal His verses in so astounding a manner. . . . So great is the celestial might and power which God hath revealed in Him that if it were His will and no break should intervene He could, within the space of five days and nights, reveal the equivalent of the Qur'án which was sent down in twenty-three years. (*Selections* 118–19)

Here the Báb openly claims that he could reveal the equivalent of the Qur'án in five days.¹⁰ This statement should be studied in the context of the Qur'án. The Qur'án contains more than 6200

¹⁰ An interesting example of a similar application, from the early days of the Bábí Faith, is recorded in *Nabil's Narrative* (50). The occasion is an assembly of ecclesiastics in Najaf who are listening to the arguments of Mullá 'Aliy-i-Bastámí in support of the new claim.

verses. A tradition from ‘Alí puts the number of quranic verses at 6236 (Raymar, *Tárikh-i-Qur’án* 570). These verses are revelations received by the Prophet Muḥammad in the course of his twenty-three years of earthly ministry. The above statement by the Báb must have been highly challenging to a Muslim readership. It is by no means the only reference to this theme in the Bábí scripture:

There is no doubt that the Almighty hath sent down these verses unto Him [the Báb], even as He sent down unto the Apostle of God. Indeed no less than a hundred thousand verses similar to these have already been disseminated among the people, not to mention His Epistles, His Prayers or His learned and philosophical treatises. He revealeth no less than a thousand verses within the space of five hours. He reciteth verses at a speed consonant with the capacity of His amanuensis to set them down. (*Selections* 81–82)

In this passage the Báb states that he is able to reveal a thousand verses in about five hours. He does not mention the Qur’án in this context. This verse may also be examined in light of the Qur’án. Here the Báb is asserting that he can reveal a volume equal to the Qur’án in slightly more than twenty-four hours. Bahá’u’lláh himself advances a similar argument in the *Íqán*, in support of the claims of the Báb (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 220). He states that his verses have been revealed according to *fiṭrat* (innate revelation) as well (*La’áli ul-Hikmat* 1:47). With regard to his own ability to reveal verses, Bahá’u’lláh, in the *Lawḥ-i-Naṣír*, states that “within the space of an hour the equivalent of a thousand verses hath been revealed” (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 171).

In the light of the above verses by both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, it may seem perplexing that Abu’l-Faḍl argues against innate revelation of verses as sufficient proof for a true claimant.¹¹ He provides two arguments in the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb*, one of which is as follows:

One endowed with knowledge knows that the innate revelation of verses by itself is not sufficient, since it would be limited to those present. It may be sufficient proof for those who are present when the verses are revealed, but not for the rest of people who were not present and did not observe personally. Today no one knows whether Moses was learned or not. . . . Consider this day; nearly forty-four years have passed since the martyrdom of the Primal Point, Glorified be His most Holy and most Exalted name. How can one possibly ascertain whether He revealed verses innately or otherwise? (77)

Abu’l-Faḍl opines that for any given unbiased observer inquiring into the truth of a given religion, it would be impossible to determine absolutely whether verses were revealed by innate revelation or human learning. A case in point is the quranic pronouncement regarding Muḥammad being an *ummí*, i.e., unlettered one. The following verses are good examples:

You (Muḥammad) have neither read any scripture before this, nor have you transcribed any with thy hand, or else those who seek to falsify would have found a cause to doubt it. (Qur’án 29:49)

¹¹ For a modern application of innate revelation by a Bahá’í scholar, see Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh* (1:23).

Those who follow the messenger, the unlettered prophet, who can be found in the Old and New Testaments, who commands them unto the noble and forbids unrighteous deeds, who makes lawful things pure, and prohibits that which is not, He relieves them of their burdens. (Qur'án 7:157)

Islamic polemicists have argued that the illiteracy of the Prophet can be considered further proof that the Qur'án must be divinely inspired. As Abu'l-Faḍl asserts, this is impossible to establish. Some Christian polemicists, for instance, claim that the Prophet of Islam was taught by others. Let us observe the claims of a leading contemporary Christian polemicist:

Most Christian scholars believe that Muḥammad came in contact with Nestorians during his business travels to Damascus and Egypt with his uncle's caravans, then later with Khadija's caravans. The Nestorians established monasteries on the caravan routes and entertained travelers like Muḥammad frequently. Buhaira, a Nestorian monk, is considered as one of the most influential men in Muḥammad's knowledge of the scriptures. The descriptions of hell in the homilies of Eprahim, a Nestorian preacher of the sixth century, resemble Muḥammad's description of hell. (Soroush, *Islam Revealed* 154)

This intriguing topic is outside the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the innate revelation of verses is open to disputation and cannot be considered conclusive proof.

Thus far, Abu'l-Faḍl has told us only what the *hujjiyyat-i-ayát* is not. But then what is the proof of the verses? It is perhaps best to begin by examining the most comprehensive and detailed answer that he provides. This also happens to be the earliest. The *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* is where he enunciates this proof most completely:

And the People of Báhá, who by the grace of the Creator of heavens and earth have been liberated from blind imitation and have attained the summit of investigation, distinguish the Words of God from the sayings of man by a few criteria. It suffices us to mention only two criteria in this book so that this discussion does not become prolonged.

The first criterion is the creativity of the verses of God. By this is meant the foundation of laws and the establishment of traditions and rites that exert influence in the world. These ordinances then become the cause or the elevation of civilization and eradication of the spiritual ailments of the people. . . .

The second criterion is the sovereignty of the verses of God. By this is meant that the Word of God is sovereign and dominant and will not ebb and undergo extinction when faced with the resistance and hostility of governments and people. Rather, it becomes the cause of the disappearance and eradication of the forces that oppose it. For example, the Law of the Torah was not destroyed by the opposition of the Egyptian, Syrian and Assyrian Kings; rather, the word of God conquered the opposing nations. The Faith of Jesus was not destroyed by the resistance of their Jewish and Roman foes. The potency of the New Testament subjugated them. Likewise the resistance of Arab and non-Arab disbelievers did not cause the ebbing of the religion of His Holiness "the Seal." The sovereignty of the Quran dispersed them all. This is the meaning of the

blessed quranic verse, “God desired to confirm the truth by His Words and destroy the unbelievers to the last.”

Through the use of these two criteria, the words of God can readily be distinguished from the sayings of men equally by everyone, regardless of whether they are learned or not, and whether they personally witnessed the revelation of verses or not. (Abu’l-Faḍl, *Faṣl ul-Khiṭāb* 79–80)

Abu’l-Faḍl has finally provided two universal standards that satisfy him. First, the Word of God is creative. This creativity has a number of aspects that he does not discuss any further at this point. Creativity may mean that the Word of God changes the human heart as it interacts with it. This change in the human heart gradually brings about a transformation in the world. Eventually, a new civilization is created. In addition, Abu’l-Faḍl holds that the Word of God enjoys inherent sovereignty and ascendancy over everything else. This innate sovereignty eventually becomes fully manifest in the world. The two meet all the standards that Abu’l-Faḍl has set thus far. Both can be discerned and verified by almost anyone. Neither one requires years of research and training to recognize. These aspects have been repeatedly addressed by both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. The creative nature of the Word of God, for instance, is a prominent motif in Bahá’í scripture:

Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have, at the bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 92–93)

It is perhaps best to conclude this discussion with the following statement by Bahá’u’lláh, verifying the creative aspect of the Word of God:

Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 142)

The Proof Based on Establishment

Let us now begin to reexamine the *dalil-i-taqrír*. The proof based on verses played a key role in the Christian-Muslim debate throughout history. Therefore, its incorporation into the Bahá’í-Muslim debate was to be expected. Similarly, a viable hypothesis was the consideration that Bahá’í apologists had built upon work done by Muslim apologists in the development of the proof based on establishment. Our survey of the Christian-Muslim polemics from John of Damascus (d. A.D. 753) to the most recent exchanges revealed no evidence of the proof based on establishment in either camp. While it is true that classical quranic commentators have elaborated the relevant quranic verses in detail, they have never presented establishment as a criterion.¹² Pending the unearthing of a similar apologetic use of establishment, one may consider the *dalil-i-taqrír* as presented in the *Íqán* and developed in the *Fará’id* an innovation in apologetics.

In the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭāb* Abu’l-Faḍl makes a number of passing references to the fact that the survival of a false religion is impossible and that only divinely inspired religions can become

¹² Such an understanding of *taqrír* would have obviously presented the commentators with an immediate dilemma, i.e., religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism, which meet criteria for establishment. Obviously, Bahá’u’lláh and later Bahá’í apologists did not find this to be problematic.

established, the key point in the proof based on establishment. This he does most clearly in the context of the ascendancy and sovereignty of the Word of God. However, he neither formally presents the *dalil-i-taqrir*, nor does he even use the word *taqrir* (establishment). Based on the text of the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭāb*, one may conclude that Abu'l-Faḍl had not yet formalized the proof based on establishment at that time. In 1898, however, in his most definitive and ingenious defense of the *Íqán*, he begins his formal presentation with the *dalil-i-taqrir*. The thesis that Abu'l-Faḍl should be credited with the formulation of the *dalil-i-taqrir* cannot be fully substantiated at this time. It may appear to be a very plausible thesis at first glance, but it is not supported by the internal evidence in the *Fará'id*. For instance, in that same book Abu'l-Faḍl credits a Bahá'í confectioner with stating (in a written rebuttal to the Shaykh ul-Islám's original refutation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*) that false religions have existed before and have since disappeared. It should be noted that other Bahá'í teachers were at that same time successfully using variants of the *dalil-i-taqrir* in their dialogues with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish scholars. Excellent examples may be found in the recently published volume of the *Kháṭirát-i-Málamírí*. The *Gulshan-i-Ḥaqáyiḡ* (Rose Garden of Truths) is a well-researched presentation of the Bahá'í Faith written by Háj Mihdí Arjumand Hamadáni and aimed primarily at those from Jewish and Christian backgrounds. The arguments of this book are based on dialogues with Christian missionaries that took place in the mid- to late-1890s. The book was written in 1919. Mr. Arjumand does use establishment as a criterion but does not refer to it as *dalil-i-taqrir*. It should be noted that establishment plays a less prominent role in the *Gulshan-i-Ḥaqáyiḡ*. However, if the proof based on establishment were used in the original set of debates, i.e., in the 1890s, it presents strong evidence that the *Fará'id* was not the original presentation of *taqrir*. To complicate matters further, it should be noted that both the *Gulshan-i-Ḥaqáyiḡ* and *Kháṭirát-i-Málamírí* were written approximately twenty years after the *Fará'id*. Obviously, there remain unanswered questions regarding the historical development of the *dalil-i-taqrir*.

There remains little doubt, however, that Abu'l-Faḍl singlehandedly developed the most comprehensive formulation of the proof based on establishment as recorded in the *Fará'id*. It also appears that he has coined the term *dalil-i-taqrir*. Moreover, there can be no doubt that Abu'l-Faḍl was primarily responsible for the consolidation and defense of the *dalil-i-taqrir*. Bahá'í history attests to the fact that the *dalil-i-taqrir* became the mainstay of Bahá'í-Muslim polemical discussions, and in a short time, Bahá'í teachers became adroit in the successful application of the proof based on establishment. Their disputants have since merely attempted to refute the *Fará'id*.

Prior to an examination of the salient features of the argument based on establishment, it is appropriate to comment on the utilization (or perhaps underutilization) of the *dalil-i-taqrir* and *ḥujjiyyat-i-ayát* in the West and by Western Bahá'ís. One can confidently state that neither argument has been used by Western Bahá'ís to any appreciable extent. It may seem readily apparent to all that the proof based on verses assumes a quranic background and a special concept of *ayát* (verses). On this basis, one can understand the exclusion of the *ḥujjiyyat-i-ayát* from the Bahá'í-Christian dialogue. The lack of this background cannot, however, explain the absence of the proof based on establishment from the Bahá'í-Christian dialogue, since the *dalil-i-taqrir* has ample biblical justification. In fact, Persian scholars, including Abu'l-Faḍl, in their dialogues with Christian missionaries, would frequently use biblical criteria to prove that the most supreme testimony to the truth of Jesus is the establishment of Christianity. Then they would apply the same criteria to Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh.¹³ It seems that the Bahá'í authors of the West have

¹³ See, for example, Málamírí, *Kháṭirát-i-Málamírí* 196–202. An abridgement is found in Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* vol. 3 40–44.

generally missed the strength of this argument and its biblical foundation. William Sears, the late Hand of the Cause of God, in his timeless classic, *Thief in the Night*, devotes a significant portion to the implications of the biblical verse, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). He examines this verse as a touchstone for identifying false prophets (Sears 207). An alternative line of argument, using establishment, could have been presented based on Matt. 15:13, “Every tree which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.” Bahá’í apologists coming from a Western Christian background, writing in more recent times, seem to have also neglected the *dalíl-i-taqrír*. In short, it appears that through a keen and exact study of the Bible, Eastern Bahá’í scholars were able to identify correctly and to root the *taqrír* in both the Old and New Testaments. Bahá’u’lláh himself posed the challenge of *dalíl-i-taqrír*, directly and indirectly, to his disputants. The following statement, addressed to a minister of the shah in Constantinople, is a direct application of the *dalíl-i-taqrír*:

If this Cause be of God . . . no man can prevail against it; and if it be not of God, the divines amongst you, and they that follow their corrupt desires, and such as have rebelled against Him, will surely suffice to overpower it. (Qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day is Come* 87)

The *dalíl-i-taqrír* requires that false claimants disappear. The early history of the Bahá’í Faith records a number of independent counterclaimants to the divine call. It is interesting that history tells us that their claims faced rapid demise. Little is even mentioned in scholarly papers regarding counterclaimants. To substantiate his argument further, Abu’l-Faḍl mentions four such claimants in the *Fará’id* (248–49). It is ironic that the best known record of their names is within the context of proving the truth of Bahá’u’lláh, where they are each mentioned as examples of false claimants. Abu’l-Faḍl mentions Siyyid ‘Alá, Aḥmad-i-Kirmání, Khuffāsh-i-Yazdí,¹⁴ and Ḥají Mullá Hāshim-i-Narāqí. Relatively little is known of these claimants and their followers. It is known, for instance, that Siyyid ‘Alá considered himself the embodiment of the Holy Spirit. He had found some disciples, including the future erudite Bahá’í teacher, Ḥají Siyyid Javād-i-Karbilá’í.¹⁵ Abu’l-Faḍl does not mention Azal in his list of false claimants, but certainly Azal can be added to his list.¹⁶ Abu’l-Faḍl had already treated the subject of the Azalí movement in the *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb*.¹⁷

The essence of the *dalíl-i-taqrír*, as presented by Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, can be summarized in the following passage:

Should a person claim to be the founder of a religion, and proceed to establish a religion, and claim a relationship between that religion and God (Blessed and Exalted be He), and that religion gains influence in the world and becomes established, this is sufficient proof regarding its truth. Conversely, non-establishment and lack of

¹⁴ Literally, “the bat from Yazd.”

¹⁵ See the Persian bibliography on the life of Bahá’u’lláh by the late M. Faizi, *Ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá’u’lláh* 57–58.

¹⁶ It can readily be maintained that the Azalí-Bábí movement, not meeting the criteria for establishment, never formed as a unified sect of the Bábí religion. They are best defined in terms of their nonacceptance of Bahá’u’lláh. With regard to scripture, it is worth noting that even Browne remarks that he has never seen the *Kitábu’-n-Núr* (book of light), generally considered the major work by Azal (Ḥaḍrat-i-Ezel) (Momen, *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne* 245).

¹⁷ It is worth noting that he understood Azal to be the subject of 2 Thess. 2:1–12, and his claim and following as a “falling away” (cf. *Faṣl ul-Khiṭáb* 268–69). Years later, Shoghi Effendi also interpreted these verses from 2 Thess. as applying to Azal (Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh* vol. 2 298).

influence indicate the falsity of a fading and temporary claim, especially when this establishment and endurance, as is the way of God in the foundation of religions, are not dependent upon acquired knowledge, earthly riches and treasures, or worldly majesty. . . . In short, God hath, in all heavenly scriptures, testified with this most great proof and has considered the establishment of the Truth and the disappearance of falsehood to be the most mighty sign and the most great proof. (Abu'l-Faḍl, *Kitāb al-Farā'id* 61–62)

Abu'l-Faḍl is so confident of the validity of the *dalil-i-taqrīr* that he claims that without it, no religion can be established as true. In an audacious passage addressing the leaders and scholars of all religions collectively, he writes the following:

And with the slightest pondering it becomes evident that if one ignores the proof of establishment, then it is in no wise possible for one to distinguish between Truth and falsehood. (*Kitāb al-Farā'id* 76–77)

***Taqrīr* in the Bible**

It is now time to apply the *dalil-i-taqrīr* to both the Bible and the Qur'ān and to ascertain whether Abu'l-Faḍl is correct in claiming that it is an integral part of every Revelation. The Hebrew scriptures clearly state that one who speaks lies will perish:

A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. . . .
A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish. (Prov. 19:5–9)

The New Testament is very clear that no human being can be a foundation such as the one that Jesus had become. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, referring to the early Christian community as laborers engaged in building on the foundation of Christ: “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 4:11). The first epistle of John addresses the same issue, but in terms of a different concept. The Qur'ān also argues along this same line at times. The author of this epistle states that since his faith, Christianity, is born of God it cannot be stopped: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). The following is a very emphatic reference to the same theme, one which Matthew ascribes to Jesus himself: “Every tree, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Matt. 15:13). The tree is a common biblical metaphor for religion. Interestingly enough, the Qur'ān also uses the metaphor of a tree in a similar manner. In any case, the biblical lesson is very clear: any humanly constructed religion will be destroyed, and only those religions that derive their spirit and authority from God last.

The New Testament also provides the disputants of the *dalil-i-taqrīr* with a most intriguing case study. Abu'l-Faḍl does not provide any biblical verses in support of the *dalil-i-taqrīr* in the *Farā'id*, but he is definitely aware of the following scripture as he refers to Theudas and Judas of Galilee and their claims. The Book of Acts records a dialogue from early Christian history, at a time when the apostles were nothing more than a negligible minority. This occasion was meant to be a trial of the apostles and in fact of Christianity. The setting is the temple, in Jerusalem, with the apostles standing in the presence of the Pharisees and the high priest. The high priest had put

a question to the apostles to which Peter had replied. His short reply must have adversely affected his jurors:

When they heard that, they were furious to the heart and took council to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, held in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this message or this work be of men, it will come to nought.

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. (Acts 5:33–39)

These words from Gamaliel essentially reiterate the *dalil-i-taqrír*. This example from the New Testament itself demonstrates the strength of the argument based on establishment. After all, it is the most concrete biblical touchstone applied to Jesus Christ and Christianity. The vanishing of Theudas and Judas of Galilee, their claims and followers, as recorded in Acts, gives further credence to the *dalil-i-taqrír*. Eastern Bahá'í scholars have argued that the establishment of Islam and the Bahá'í Faith must also be considered in the context of this biblical touchstone. Indeed, Persian Bahá'í scholars had accurately noted this critical argument: the *dalil-i-taqrír* can be readily maintained based on the Bible.

***Taqrír* in the Qur'án**

A central theme of the Qur'án is the indisputable sovereignty of God and God's religion on earth. The *dalil-i-taqrír* is therefore firmly rooted in the Qur'án. The Qur'án clearly teaches that the forces of truth will inevitably be victorious over the forces of falsehood: "And say: Truth has come and falsehood hath vanished. Verily falsehood is by its nature bound to perish" (Qur'án 17:81). According to the Qur'án, the hosts of God cannot be halted and ultimate victory is always with the Word of God: "Our Word had already been given before to Our servants, the Messengers, That they would be assisted, And that certainly Our hosts shall be victorious" (Qur'án 37:171–72).

The quranic text below is another scriptural use of the metaphor of the tree that closely parallels Matthew 15:13. The Word of God is like a strong tree that will last and continue to bring good fruit; whereas, a false word is like a rootless tree which has no stability. It cannot last:

Do you not see how God compareth a good Word with a good tree whose roots are firm and branches in the sky, Which yields, by the leave of its Lord, its fruits in all seasons. God presents similitudes to men that they might reflect. An evil word is like a rotten tree torn out of the earth. It has no stability. (Qur'án 14:24-26)

This quranic concept has been fully worked out by Bahá'í scholars. Abu'l-Faḍl quotes in the *Fará'id* a large number of similar verses. The following few should suffice:

Verily, We set the truth against falsehood, which shatters it, and falsehood disappears.
Woe unto you for what you attribute to God! (Qur'án 21:18)

Fain do they wish to extinguish the light of God by their mouths; but God will not have it so, for He wills to perfect His light, albeit the unbelievers be averse. It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the True Religion in order to make it victorious over every other religion, even though the unbelievers be averse. (Qur'án 9:32–33)

Islamic history has recorded the names of a few who advanced claims of their own and attempted to confuse the early Muslims. Abu'l-Faḍl is acutely aware of these false claimants and mentions them a number of times to impress the *dalil-i-taqrír* on his disputant. The best known of these false-claimants is Musaylimah. With a number of fellow pilgrims, he attained the presence of the Prophet of Islam in the last year of Muḥammad's life. After returning to his home town of Yamámáh, Musaylimah claimed that he was also a Messenger of God (Haykal, *The Life of Muḥammad* 472–73). He began to distribute his writings as verses of God among the people of his city. Musaylimah found a strong following in Yamámáh. He was audacious enough to send the following message to the Prophet of Islam:

From Musaylimah, the Messenger of God, to Muḥammad, the Messenger of God. Peace be upon thee. Verily, I am a partner in Revelation with you. Half of the earth is for us, and the other half is for Quraysh. However, the Quraysh are an oppressive people. (Ibn-Hishám, *Sirát Ibn-Hishám* 4:600)

Muḥammad sent a short reply to Musaylimah, which Ibn-Hishám records as follows:

From Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, to Musaylimah, the false one. Peace be upon those who follow the Guidance. Verily, the earth belongs to God, and it shall be inherited by those of His servants who He wishes. And the end is with those who fear God. (Ibn-Hishám 4:600)

That was the last year of the Prophet's earthly life. The next year, Abú-Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam, sent troops to subjugate the followers of Musaylimah. Islamic historians record that the Muslim armies were vastly inferior to those at Yamámáh. Nevertheless, Musaylimah was killed in battle, and the Muslims were victorious (Raymar, *Tárikh-i-Qur'án* 299–301). Like Theudas and Judas of Galilee, Musaylimah and his verses vanished. The story of Musaylimah is, however, important to the collection of the Qur'án. A large number of the memorizers of the Qur'án fell in battle. This alarmed the Muslims, and they became convinced that the quranic verses should be compiled so that the Book of God might be preserved. Abú-Bakr began the compilation of the Qur'án, which was completed during the reign of the third Caliph, Uthmán (Raymar 303–9). Musaylimah is best known to history through the series of events that led to the collection of the Qur'án, and not through his claim. Abu'l-Faḍl frequently uses the case of Musaylimah to convey the *dalil-i-taqrír*.

Apologetic Challenges

A number of polemical criticisms have been raised concerning the *dalil-i-taqrir*. Every serious apologetic challenge to the Bahá'í Faith has attempted to undermine the *dalil-i-taqrir*. For the purposes of this article, three objections will be examined. All objections really address the same key points. Abu'l-Faḍl has answered most of the major criticisms in the *Fará'id* itself. In fact, the sections where Abu'l-Faḍl defends and consolidates the *dalil-i-taqrir* are some of the most exciting segments of the *Fará'id*. The chief Islamic cleric of the Caucasus had already raised the following point in rebuttal to a Bahá'í disputant. It is quoted in the *Fará'id*:

Allow me to express myself more clearly. What if one of the idolaters addresses us publicly and says: O People of Islam, O people of Christendom, O people of Moses, and O followers of all true religions! Why have ye all been deceived! Why do you not return to the one true path? Do you not see that idolatry has encompassed the earth? Do you not see that we have more than four hundred million followers in China alone? This is none other than that innate spiritual sovereignty with which our precious founder was endowed! The truth of his words influenced and changed hearts day by day, such as you see today. Therefore, if by sovereignty one intends spiritual sovereignty and ascendancy, which takes place gradually, then it follows that idolatry must be true as well! (Qtd. in Abu'l-Faḍl, *Kitáb al-Fará'id* 158–59)

The point of the Shaykh is well taken. He attempts to counter Abu'l-Faḍl by using the same logic. Abu'l-Faḍl's genius and originality, however, is striking. Abu'l-Faḍl had already maintained that God proves religion through establishment. Therefore, once the people of a religion deny the *dalil-i-taqrir* and reject a Messenger of God, they have effectively lost the only universal standard by which they can validate their religion. They will then no longer be able to defend their religion against external attacks and are thus vulnerable. It is not surprising then that the Shaykh ul-Islám cannot respond to the idolater. Abu'l-Faḍl states that now that the Muslims have rejected the Bahá'í Revelation they can no longer answer this and other challenges in order to defend Islam:

If this question is raised to the people of Islam, you can in no wise answer them. In no way can their falsehood and your truth be proven, because it is impossible that a people of religion should be able to defend their own religion, once they have rejected truth! (Abu'l-Faḍl, *Kitáb al-Fará'id* 237)

Once the *dalil-i-taqrir* is rejected, Abu'l-Faḍl maintains that no religion can be proven. Elsewhere in the *Fará'id*, he goes on to prove that the Chinese religions are not idolatry, but rather religions revealed by God. He painstakingly proves from the Qur'án the Bahá'í teaching that all peoples of the world, including the Chinese, must have been recipients of divine guidance, in the form of Revelation.

A similar challenge may be raised based on the Bible. The New Testament unequivocally warns Christians of false prophets, who will appear and deceive many (Matt. 24:5). Therefore, one can imagine that these false prophets will also be established, because they will deceive multitudes. Hence establishment cannot be regarded as an absolute test. Abu'l-Faḍl did not respond to this particular question in the *Fará'id*. However, his line of argumentation is clear. He would have thoroughly examined the biblical notion of false prophets. His study would indicate that all the

references to false prophets in the New Testament are from within Christianity. Restated, nowhere in the New Testament is a warning given regarding false prophets from outside the Christian community. Therefore, no biblical reference to false prophets can be understood to intend Muḥammad or Bahá'u'lláh:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are hungry wolves. . . .

Not every one that saith unto me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?'

And then I will profess unto them, 'I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' (Matt 7:15–23)

The above passage is clear. False prophets are those who preach in the name of Jesus, who prophesy and heal in the name of Jesus, that is, from within Christianity. Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh did not perform deeds in the name of Jesus. Therefore, they cannot categorically be considered false prophets by New Testament criteria.¹⁸ The *dalil-i-taqrír* then can be readily applied to both Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh.

Another objection to the *dalil-i-taqrír* can be conceived. Why do both the true and false sects of a religion survive? Why is establishment not the sole property of the true sect or church? To this particular objection, Abu'l-Faḍl gives a detailed response, which includes a review of the histories of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and all their major divisions up to his time. Only after a rigorous review does he maintain that none of those divisions were meant to form independent religions. They are all merely branches of the same tree, and the *dalil-i-taqrír* does not distinguish sects and churches within a religion. The religion of Islam, for instance, will last and become influential because of the *dalil-i-taqrír*. The *dalil-i-taqrír* then applies equally to Shí'ah and Sunnī Islam, since they are both based on the Qur'án. The following verse indicates the same: "Do you not see how God compares a good Word with a good tree, whose roots are firm and branches in the sky" (Qur'án 14:24). According to the Qur'án, the branches of a religion survive as a consequence of the establishment of the root.

One can examine the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam in light of the above quranic allegory. The founder of neither tradition has made an independent claim to divine Revelation.¹⁹ Followers of the former are essentially Christian, while the latter's adherents are Muslims.²⁰ The spread of both is then to be expected

¹⁸ This theme is explicit in the Bible. Consult the following verses for further examples: 2 Peter 2:1–2, 2 Tim 4:3.

¹⁹ Joseph Smith is recognized as a prophet. He has defined the term in *The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, as one of many organizational offices of the Primitive Church, along with apostles, teachers, pastors, etc. (cf. article 6).

Qulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, also never claimed an independent Revelation, as he states in the following verse or poetry:

I am not a Messenger, and I have not brought a Book

I am merely one inspired, and a warner from God. (Qtd. in A. Ishráq-Khávárí, *Aqdáh al-Falláh* 2:79)

²⁰ *The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, written by Joseph Smith, is a very interesting document to examine in this regard. Judging from the *Articles*, the Mormon Church diverges very little from traditional Christianity.

within the framework of *taqrír*, just as *taqrír* of Christianity and Islam equally entitles Catholicism, Protestantism, Shí'ah, and Sunni traditions to last.

As one might expect, many disputants have raised similar objections to the *dalíl-i-taqrír*. A particularly interesting variant was raised by Mirzá Áqá Khán-i-Kirmání, a son-in-law of Yahyá Azal. Kirmání was a rather nebulous historical figure of the Qájár period.²¹ He was an Azalí-Bábí, but one who generally presented himself as a Muslim. He was also a political activist. He is best known in Bahá'í history because of the difficulties he caused for Bahá'u'lláh (Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory* 385–90). Less known are his anti-Bahá'í polemics and rhetoric. In his *Haftád va dú mellat* (The Seventy and Two People), which is a short story, Kirmání responds to the *dalíl-i-taqrír*. The setting of the story is a coffeehouse in India, where travellers from the seventy-two religions of the world had gathered. Dialogues and debates were in progress among diverse religions, when a certain Sulaymán Khán entered into dialogue with a Şúfi and a Shaykhí. This fictional Sulaymán Khán, we are told, is a Bahá'í dispatched by the “God of ‘Akká,” to preach to the Indians. At first, Sulaymán Khán quoted numerous tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, addressed to the kings and rulers, including the Tablets to Napoleon III, foreshadowing the emperor's imminent fall. When asked to provide further evidence for the claims of Bahá'u'lláh, he stated the following adulterated version of the *dalíl-i-taqrír*:

Yes! The proof is the claim itself. What proof is greater than a grand claim, if associated with endurance and if it is effective, and if the claimant possesses majesty and might, and raises the call among the masses and endures and is afraid of nothing. (Kirmání 85)

Apparently his fictional audience did not approve of the *dalíl-i-taqrír*. All of the people in the coffeehouse, representing all religions, rose up and collectively spat on Sulaymán Khán, addressing him as follows:

We are astonished at your limitless audacity and shamelessness. If the claim constituted proof by itself, then the claims of Pharaoh, Nimrod, and the anti-Christ must also be proof. If majesty were a criterion, no one had the majesty and might of the Pharaohs and Nimrods. (Kirmání 85)

Obviously, Kirmani had misunderstood the proof based on establishment. As Abu'l-Faḍl has repeatedly pointed out, establishment and *taqrír* must be in the setting of no worldly glory and might. Kirmání is in fact providing examples supporting the *dalíl-i-taqrír*, which simply states that Nimrod will disappear, but Abraham will last. Pharaoh and Caesar will vanish, but the teachings of Moses and Jesus will continue to animate the world.

Conclusion

This article serves merely as an introduction to an aspect of the Bahá'í-Muslim dialogue. The Bahá'í scriptural background to the development of the *dalíl-i-taqrír* and *hujjiyyat-i-ayát* was examined. The polemical necessity for these developments was determined. An approximate chronology for the two arguments in the writings of Mirza Abu'l-Faḍl was established. The two proofs were studied with respect to both the Bible and the Qur'án, and possible implications for

²¹ For a brief synopsis of his life and political thought, see Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* 140–42, 157–61.

the Bahá'í-Christian dialogue were suggested. As well, a preliminary attempt was made to examine some of the key objections raised to both the *dalíl-i-taqrír* and the *hujjiyyat-i-ayát*, as well. However, many questions remain unanswered. There is need for further research, especially with regard to the historical development of the *dalíl-i-taqrír* in the pre- Abu'l-Faḍl era.

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