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Tafāḍul Without Tafrīq: Reconstructing the Concept of Distinction Among the Messengers in Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285

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Abstract
The relationship between the distinction in rank among the messengers and the obligation to believe in all messengers presents a hermeneutical challenge in interpreting Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285. The former affirms differences in the ranks of the messengers, while the latter prohibits *tafrīq* (discrimination) among them. This study aims to examine the semantic relationship between these two verses, critically evaluate the arguments advanced by Qur'anic exegetes in reconciling the verses with hadith reports concerning prophetic superiority, and reconstruct the concept of *tafāḍul without tafrīq* as a theological-hermeneutical framework. Employing a qualitative library-based approach, the study applies the comparative method of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr muqāran*), integrated with semantic and intratextual analyses. Its primary sources include the Qur'an, relevant hadith reports, and the exegetical works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, and Ibn ʿĀshūr. The findings demonstrate that *tafḍīl* refers to distinctions in divine favor and status established by God, whereas *tafrīq* primarily denotes the selective rejection of the legitimacy of certain messengers. A comparative examination of Qur'anic exegesis and hadith reports indicates that prohibitions against ranking prophets must be understood in light of their textual foundations, contextual circumstances, and the limits of human authority. The study identifies three interconnected conceptual dimensions: differentiation in divine favor, the unity of prophetic legitimacy, and the limits of human comparison. Its theoretical contribution lies in systematically articulating the relationship among these dimensions through the concept of *tafāḍul without tafrīq*, demonstrating that differences in prophetic rank do not undermine the unity of faith in all messengers. This framework contributes to Qur'anic exegesis and the theology of prophethood by integrating linguistic analysis, intratextual relationships, and classical exegetical reasoning.
Keywords: *tafāḍul without tafrīq*, prophetic hierarchy, comparative Qur'anic exegesis, Qur'anic semantics, prophetic legitimacy.

Abstrak
Hubungan antara keutamaan sebagian rasul dan kewajiban mengimani seluruh rasul menghadirkan persoalan hermeneutis dalam penafsiran QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 253 dan 285. Ayat pertama menegaskan adanya diferensiasi derajat kerasulan, sedangkan ayat kedua melarang tafrīq di antara para rasul. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis hubungan semantik kedua ayat, mengevaluasi argumentasi para mufasir dalam merekonsiliasi ayat dan hadis tentang keutamaan para nabi, serta merekonstruksi konsep tafāḍul tanpa tafrīq sebagai kerangka teologis-hermeneutis. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan metode tafsir komparatif (tafsīr muqāran) yang dipadukan dengan analisis semantik dan intratekstual. Sumber primer meliputi Al-Qur'an, hadis terkait, serta penafsiran al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, dan Ibn ʿĀshūr. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tafḍīl merujuk pada diferensiasi karunia dan kedudukan yang ditetapkan Allah, sedangkan tafrīq terutama berkaitan dengan pengingkaran selektif terhadap legitimasi kerasulan. Perbandingan tafsir dan hadis memperlihatkan bahwa larangan pengutamaan antarnabi perlu dipahami dengan mempertimbangkan dasar tekstual, konteks pernyataan, dan batas otoritas manusia. Penelitian ini menghasilkan tiga dimensi konseptual yang saling berkaitan, yaitu diferensiasi karunia ilahi, kesatuan legitimasi kerasulan, dan batas perbandingan manusia. Kontribusi teoretisnya terletak pada sistematisasi hubungan ketiga dimensi tersebut melalui konsep tafāḍul tanpa tafrīq, yang menegaskan bahwa perbedaan derajat tidak meniadakan kesatuan pengakuan iman terhadap seluruh rasul. Kerangka ini memperkaya kajian tafsir dan teologi kenabian melalui integrasi analisis kebahasaan, hubungan antarayat, dan argumentasi penafsiran klasik.
Kata Kunci: *tafāḍul tanpa tafrīq, hierarki kenabian, tafsir komparatif, semantik al-qur'an, legitimasi kerasulan*

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Introduction

The concepts of prophethood and messengership constitute fundamental pillars of Islamic theology, connecting the authority of revelation, the legitimacy of its messengers, and the continuity of divine guidance throughout human history. The Qur'an presents prophets and messengers as sharing a common divine source of commissioning, while simultaneously acknowledging differences in their ranks, responsibilities, miracles, and experiences of revelation. The relationship between this unity and differentiation raises a hermeneutical question concerning how distinctions in rank among the messengers can be established without undermining the recognition of their collective prophetic legitimacy. Within the development of Qur'anic studies, representations of prophetic figures are no longer examined merely as collections of biographical narratives but are increasingly understood as integral to the construction of theological discourse, intertextual relationships, and the formation of religious authority. Sinai (2017) emphasizes the importance of analyzing literary structures, historical contexts, and the development of Qur'anic argumentation,[1] Meanwhile, Neuwirth situates prophetic narratives within the dynamics of revelation and the Qur'an's relationship with earlier scriptural traditions.[2] Johns also demonstrates that prophetic figures known from the biblical tradition assume distinctive roles and emphases within Qur'anic discourse.[3] This perspective underscores that the question of distinctions in rank among the messengers must be examined through textual and theological analyses that consider the argumentative function of the Qur'anic verses, rather than merely through the construction of a hierarchy of prophetic figures.

The tension between differences in rank and the unity of prophetic legitimacy is explicitly reflected in Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285. The former states, *tilka al-rusulu faḍḍalnā baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍ*, affirming that Allah has favored some messengers over others. By contrast, Qur'an 2:285 contains the declaration *lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin min rusulih*, affirming that believers make no distinction among any of His messengers. When these statements are interpreted in isolation, the acknowledgment of distinctions in rank may appear to conflict with the obligation to recognize all messengers without discrimination. However, this apparent tension does not necessarily constitute a textual contradiction, since the two verses employ different linguistic constructions, subjects of action, and argumentative contexts. In verse 253, the act of *tafḍīl* is attributed to Allah, whereas verse 285 situates *tafrīq* within a declaration of religious faith and commitment. In his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī explains distinctions in rank among the messengers in terms of the divine favors and statuses bestowed upon them, while interpreting the prohibition of *tafrīq* as a rejection of the selective acceptance of some messengers and denial of others.[4] This distinction highlights the need to examine the relationship between the bestowal of distinction as a divine act and the recognition of all messengers as an obligation of faith.

This issue becomes even more significant when considering the broader structure of Qur'an 2:253. The verse not only affirms differences in rank among the messengers but also provides examples of particular distinctions, including direct communication with Allah, elevation in rank, and the granting of clear signs to Jesus, son of Mary, along with

[1] N Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction: The Qur'an*, 2017, https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85212730983&partnerID=40&md5=a21fde1ceb5ab73c4440175a64fcddac.

[2] Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[3] A H Johns, "Prophets and Personalities of the Qur'an," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, 2020, 488–501, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.12.

[4] A J M ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*, ed. A M N V - 24 Shākir (Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 2000).

his strengthening through the *Rūḥ al-Qudus* (Holy Spirit). Al-Ṭabarī interprets direct communication with Allah as one of the distinctive privileges granted to Moses, while the elevation in rank indicates particular forms of honor bestowed upon certain messengers.[5] In his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī examines the linguistic structure of the verse and the question of distinctions in rank among the messengers through a range of theological arguments,[6] Meanwhile, in his *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, al-Qurṭubī explicitly addresses the relationship between the Qur'anic verse affirming distinctions in rank among the messengers and the hadith reports that prohibit elevating one prophet above another.[7] These differences in exegetical reasoning demonstrate that the question of *tafḍīl* within the classical Qur'anic exegetical tradition concerns not only the recognition of distinctions among the messengers but also the epistemological and normative limits of determining and articulating such distinctions.

From the perspective of Qur'anic semantics, the terms *tafḍīl* and *tafrīq* cannot be treated as conceptually identical. The word *faḍḍalnā* in Qur'an 2:253 derives from the Arabic root *f-ḍ-l*, which, in this context, denotes the bestowal of distinction or superiority by Allah. Meanwhile, *nufarriqu* in Qur'an 2:285 derives from the root *f-r-q*, which conveys the meaning of separating or distinguishing. However, the meaning of a Qur'anic term cannot be established solely on the basis of its lexical root; its interpretation requires an examination of actual usage, syntactic structure, and discursive context. In *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary*, Sinai demonstrates the importance of a semantic approach that takes into account the development and contextual usage of Qur'anic terminology.[8] In examining the relationship between these two verses, semantic analysis is necessary to determine whether *tafrīq* encompasses every acknowledgment of differences in rank or, more specifically, refers to distinctions in the acceptance of the authority of the messengers. Accordingly, the reconstruction of meaning must be grounded in the relationship between linguistic structures, theological reasoning, and the broader structure of Qur'anic discourse, rather than merely in the shared translation of the term "distinguishing."

The differences in the argumentative contexts of the two verses further underscore the need for an intratextual reading. Qur'an 2:253 follows a series of discussions concerning the messengers and the history of communities that received divine revelation, proceeding to elaborate on particular distinctions among the messengers as well as the disagreements and conflicts that arose after the arrival of clear signs of prophethood. By contrast, Qur'an 2:285 appears in the concluding section of the surah as a declaration of faith in and obedience to Allah. Thus, verse 253 addresses both the differentiation of divine favors bestowed upon the messengers and the historical reality of disputes among their communities, whereas verse 285 articulates the collective commitment of believers to the entirety of divine revelatory authority. Neuwirth emphasizes the importance of examining the structure of a surah as an integral dimension of the formation of Qur'anic discourse and community,[9] Meanwhile, Sinai demonstrates that the relationships between verses and the structure of their argumentation constitute essential elements of Qur'anic literary analysis.[10] This perspective allows the two verses to be understood in terms of their respective functions without overlooking their underlying theological unity.

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[5] Al-Ṭabarī.

[6] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).

[7] Muhammad Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006).

[8] Nicolai Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary* (Princeton University Press, 2023), https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691241319/key-terms-of-the-quran.

[9] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*.

[10] Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*.

The question of distinctions in rank among the messengers is also closely related to the representation of prophetic figures within the broader monotheistic traditions. Reynolds highlights the complexity of the relationship between Qur'anic narratives and biblical traditions, particularly in the portrayal of figures such as Moses, Jesus, Abraham, and other prophets.[11] Johns explains that figures known from earlier religious traditions may acquire new emphases and argumentative functions within the Qur'an.[12] Neuwirth also situates prophetic figures within the interconnected contexts of Qur'anic discourse, earlier religious traditions, and the formation of the community receiving divine revelation.[13] Furthermore, Reynolds explores the interaction between the Qur'an and Christian traditions within the context of Late Antique Arabia.[14] These studies demonstrate that differences in the representation of the messengers cannot be separated from the Qur'an's relationship with earlier revelatory traditions. However, such intertextual studies primarily examine the historical, literary, and theological relationships between texts. Their contribution to the question of *tafḍīl* and *tafrīq* is therefore more appropriately understood as providing a contextual foundation rather than directly resolving the semantic tension between the two verses.

Another aspect requiring attention concerns the relationship between the bestowal of distinction and the authority to make theological judgments. In Qur'an 2:253, Allah is the agent who bestows distinction, indicating that differences in rank among the messengers are inseparable from divine will and knowledge. Reynolds places Allah at the center of the Qur'an's theological discourse and representations, emphasizing that divine actions and attributes cannot always be reduced to human categories of judgment. This perspective is relevant to distinguishing between the attribution of particular distinctions as explicitly established through revelation and human practices of comparing prophets. Al-Qurṭubī relates this issue to hadith reports prohibiting the elevation of certain prophets above others, while Ibn Kathīr, in his *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, examines relevant hadith reports and their possible interpretations in relation to the Qur'anic affirmation of distinctions in rank. Accordingly, the question to be addressed is not merely whether differences in rank among the messengers are acknowledged, but also whether every assertion of prophetic hierarchy possesses a legitimate textual foundation and how such assertions should be understood in light of prohibitions against comparisons characterized by partisanship or antagonism.

Meanwhile, Qur'an 2:285 situates the unified recognition of all messengers within the broader framework of faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. Al-Ṭabarī explicitly explains that the declaration *lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin min rusulih* constitutes a rejection of selective acceptance, namely, believing in some messengers while denying others. Consequently, this prohibition does not necessarily negate all differences in the characteristics, miracles, or ranks of the messengers.[15] This interpretation can be situated within the broader scholarly discussion of how religious communities construct their identities and establish boundaries of recognition. Patel demonstrates that the historical formation of Muslim identity is closely related to the ways in which communities distinguish themselves from other groups, although his study focuses on practices of socioreligious identity differentiation rather than prophetic

[11] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

[12] Johns, "Prophets and Personalities of the Qur'an."

[13] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*.

[14] Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*.

[15] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.

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hierarchy.[16] The relevance of this scholarship is primarily conceptual, as it highlights the importance of distinguishing the establishment of boundaries of belief from the rejection of the legitimacy of divinely revealed authority that believers are theologically obligated to recognize.

Previous studies on prophethood can be classified into several major strands of academic scholarship. First, historical-critical and Qur'anic literary studies emphasize textual structures, the dynamics of revelation, and the position of prophetic figures within Qur'anic discourse.[17] Second, intertextual studies examine the relationships between Qur'anic narratives and Jewish and Christian traditions in shaping the representation of prophetic figures.[18] Third, theological studies and historical investigations into the formation of religious authority examine the relationships between divine action, prophetic legitimacy, and the development of Muslim identity construction.[19] Fourth, the classical Qur'anic exegetical tradition provides direct arguments concerning distinctions in rank among the messengers and the obligation to acknowledge the divine mission of every messenger.[20] Each of these strands of scholarship makes an important contribution; however, the semantic and normative relationship between *tafḍīl* and *tafrīq* requires a more focused analytical synthesis.

Based on this mapping of the existing literature, the research gap addressed in this study lies primarily at the conceptual and methodological levels. Conceptually, a clearer distinction is needed between the superiority of certain messengers as an expression of differentiated divine favor and the prohibition of *tafrīq* as an obligation to affirm faith in all messengers without exception. Hermeneutically, the relationship between these two concepts must be examined through the argumentative structures of Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285, rather than merely by combining normative conclusions already established within the exegetical tradition. Methodologically, a comparative investigation must examine differences in linguistic usage, the argumentative foundations employed by Qur'anic exegetes, and the relationship between the Qur'anic verses and hadith reports concerning the ranking of prophets. This gap does not imply that attempts to reconcile the two verses have never been undertaken, since the issue has already received attention within the classical exegetical tradition. Rather, the contribution of the present study lies in systematically reconstructing these interpretive foundations through engagement with semantic approaches and contemporary Qur'anic scholarship.

In response to these issues, this study formulates three principal research questions. First, how do the semantic constructions of *tafḍīl* in Qur'an 2:253 and *tafrīq* in Qur'an 2:285 shape the relationship between differences in prophetic rank and the unified recognition of all messengers? Second, how do classical and modern Qur'anic exegetes

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[16] Y Patel, *The Muslim Difference: Defining the Line between Believers and Unbelievers from Early Islam to the Present* (Yale University Press, 2022), https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300248968.001.0001.

[17] Johns, "Prophets and Personalities of the Qur'an."

[18] Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*; G S Reynolds, *Christianity and the Qur'an: The Rise of Islam in Christian Arabia* (Yale University Press, 2025), https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300281750/christianity-and-the-quran/.

[19] G S Reynolds, *Allah: God in the Qur'an* (Yale University Press, 2020), https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300246582/allah/; S W Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (University of California Press, 2020), https://www.ucpress.edu/books/muhammad-and-the-empires-of-faith/hardcover; Patel, *The Muslim Difference: Defining the Line between Believers and Unbelievers from Early Islam to the Present*.

[20] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*; al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb*; Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm* (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1999); M al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30* (Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-al-Nashr, 1984).

explain distinctions in rank among the messengers, the prohibition against discriminating among them, and the relationship between these two Qur'anic statements and hadith reports concerning prophetic superiority? Third, how can the concept of *tafāḍul without tafrīq* be reconstructed as a theological-hermeneutical framework that distinguishes divinely established distinctions in rank from forms of differentiation that deny the legitimacy of messengership? Accordingly, this study aims to identify the semantic structures of the two verses, critically evaluate the exegetical arguments developed within the interpretive tradition, and formulate a conceptual relationship between differences in rank, the unity of the divine source of revelation, and the obligation to believe in all messengers.

The academic significance of this study lies in developing an integrative reading of two Qur'anic statements that serve different argumentative purposes but need not be understood as contradictory. Unlike approaches that merely affirm the existence of a prophetic hierarchy or broadly assert the equality of all messengers, this study proposes *tafāḍul without tafrīq* as an analytical framework that distinguishes three interrelated dimensions: the differentiation of divine favors and ranks established by Allah, the unity of prophetic legitimacy within the structure of faith, and the limits of human judgment in comparing the distinctions granted to the bearers of revelation. This reconstruction is expected to contribute to Qur'anic studies and exegesis by deepening the understanding of the relationship between semantics, the argumentative structures connecting Qur'anic verses, and the theology of messengership. The study does not claim novelty on the grounds of being the first to reconcile verses concerning prophetic distinctions. Rather, its originality lies in systematically clarifying the interpretive foundations and conceptual boundaries governing the relationship between *tafḍīl* and *tafrīq*, thereby providing a more precisely defined and critically assessable analytical framework for scholarship in *Uṣūl al-Dīn* and Islamic Studies

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research, adopting a textual-hermeneutical design through the comparative method of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr muqāran*), integrated with semantic and intratextual analyses of the Qur'an. This approach was selected to examine the conceptual relationship between *tafḍīl* (the bestowal of distinction) in Qur'an 2:253 and *tafrīq* (differentiation) in Qur'an 2:285, particularly to determine whether these concepts reflect a normative contradiction or operate within distinct theological domains. The method of *tafsīr muqāran* is employed because it enables a systematic comparison of Qur'anic verses, the arguments advanced by exegetes, and relevant hadith reports pertaining to the interpretive issue under investigation.[21] Semantic analysis is employed to identify the relationships among lexical meanings, grammatical structures, and the contextual usage of terms within Qur'anic discourse, taking into account the principles of terminological analysis developed by Sinai.[22] The integration of these two approaches is not intended to establish a new method of Qur'anic exegesis but rather to serve as an analytical strategy for elucidating the relationship between distinctions in rank among the messengers and the unified recognition of their prophetic legitimacy.

[21] W M A Wahid and N M R Kamils, "Muqaran Tafsir Method: Its History, Basis and Implications," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 4, no. 3 (2024): 247–54, https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v4i3.34234; A Fitriatunnisa and D A Rafdi, "Metode Tafsir Muqaran Dilihat Kembali," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 3, no. 4 (2023), https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v3i4.31043.

[22] Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary*.

The primary sources of this study include Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285, along with verses that bear a direct conceptual relationship to them, particularly Qur'an 4:150–152 and 17:55. The exegetical corpus comprises five works: *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* by al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm* by Ibn Kathīr, and *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* by Ibn ʿĀshūr. These sources were purposively selected on the basis of their scholarly authority, diversity of linguistic and theological approaches, comprehensiveness in addressing the two verses, and relevance to debates concerning distinctions in rank among the messengers. Hadith reports concerning the prohibition against elevating certain prophets above others, particularly those recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, are employed as supplementary primary sources to examine the relationship between Qur'anic argumentation and the hadith tradition. Secondary sources consist of scholarly monographs and journal articles addressing Qur'anic semantics, the theology of prophethood, intertextual relationships, and exegetical methodology, with priority given to publications from 2015 to 2026.

The analytical procedure consists of four stages. First, a linguistic-semantic analysis is conducted of the Arabic roots *f-ḍ-l* and *f-r-q*, the syntactic constructions *faḍḍalnā baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍ* and *lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin min rusulih*, and the differences in grammatical subjects and contexts of usage. Second, an intratextual analysis examines the relationship between the two verses, the argumentative structure of Sūrat al-Baqarah, and other Qur'anic passages addressing differences in prophetic rank and the obligation to believe in all messengers. Third, a comparative analysis is undertaken of the interpretations offered by the five exegetes, focusing on similarities, differences, linguistic foundations, the use of transmitted reports, and the theological implications of their respective arguments. Fourth, a hermeneutical synthesis is developed to formulate a possible conceptual relationship between the divine bestowal of distinction and the prohibition against differentiating among the messengers in matters of faith. The findings are organized into a comparative matrix comprising five analytical categories: *source of distinction*, *forms of differentiation*, *scope of the prohibition of tafrīq*, *authority to determine prophetic rank*, and *theological implications*. Coding is employed as a technique for organizing textual data, as described by Saldaña, rather than as a substitute for established procedures of Qur'anic interpretation.[23]

The validity of the interpretations is ensured through cross-examination of the Qur'anic text, the arguments advanced by the exegetes, and relevant hadith reports, accompanied by systematic documentation of the editions, volumes, page numbers, and locations of the verses or narrations under examination. Each interpretive difference is evaluated on the basis of linguistic consistency, conformity with the contextual setting of the verses, the evidentiary foundations of the arguments, and coherence with the overall research corpus. This study explicitly distinguishes between meanings expressed in the primary sources, the interpretations offered by individual exegetes, and the conceptual reconstruction developed by the researcher to avoid imposing artificial harmonization on the texts. This principle of transparency is consistent with the requirement for analytical traceability in qualitative research and with a comparative approach that treats differences in exegetical reasoning as subjects of critical evaluation rather than merely as materials to be synthesized into a single, predetermined conclusion.[24] Through this procedure, the concept of *tafāḍul without tafrīq* is treated as an interpretive proposition to be critically examined against textual evidence, rather than as a predetermined theological assumption established prior to the investigation.

[23] Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Sage, 2021).
[24] Saldaña; Wahid and Kamils, "Muqaran Tafsir Method: Its History, Basis and Implications."

Results and Discussion

Differentiation in Rank among the Messengers: A Semantic Analysis of *Tafḍīl* in Qur'an 2:253

The differentiation in rank among the messengers in Qur'an 2:253 constitutes a theological affirmation of the diversity of divine favors and statuses bestowed by Allah upon the bearers of His message. Such distinctions do not necessarily imply differences in the legitimacy of their messengership; rather, they reflect the distinctive characteristics of their divine missions within the unity of the source of revelation. This finding is significant because discussions of distinctions in rank among the messengers frequently intersect with questions of prophetic hierarchy, the authority to make theological judgments, and the relationship between their shared status as messengers and their individual distinctions. In contemporary Qur'anic studies, an analysis of prophetic representations requires attention to textual structures, intratextual relationships, and the argumentative functions of narratives, rather than merely identifying the distinctive attributes of individual prophetic figures. Allah states in Qur'an 2:253:

تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلٰى بَعْضٍ مِنْهُمْ مَّنْ كَلَّمَ اللّٰهُ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجٰتٍ ۗ وَاٰتَيْنَا عِيْسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنٰتِ وَاَيَّدْنٰهُ بِرُوْحِ الْقُدُسِ ۗ وَلَوْ شَاۤءَ اللّٰهُ مَا اقْتَتَلَ الَّذِيْنَ مِنْۢ بَعْدِهِمْ مِّنْۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَاۤءَتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنٰتُ وَلٰكِنِ اخْتَلَفُوْا فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ اٰمَنَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ كَفَرَ ۗ وَلَوْ شَاۤءَ اللّٰهُ مَا اقْتَتَلُوْا وَلٰكِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيْدُ

"*Rasul-rasul itu Kami lebihkan sebagian mereka atas sebagian yang lain. Di antara mereka ada yang Allah berfirman langsung dengannya dan sebagian lagi ada yang ditinggikan-Nya beberapa derajat. Kami telah memberikan kepada Isa putra Maryam bukti-bukti yang nyata dan menguatkannya dengan Rohulkudus. Seandainya Allah menghendaki, niscaya orang-orang setelah mereka tidak akan saling berperang setelah bukti-bukti nyata datang kepada mereka. Akan tetapi, mereka berselisih sehingga ada yang beriman dan ada yang kafir. Seandainya Allah menghendaki, niscaya mereka tidak akan saling berperang. Akan tetapi, Allah melakukan apa yang Dia kehendaki*."

Semantically, the construction *faḍḍalnā baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍ* employs a Form II verb (*fiʿl mazīd*) derived from the Arabic root *f-ḍ-l*, denoting the act of bestowing distinction or superiority. The use of the pronoun *nā* in *faḍḍalnā* identifies Allah as the agent who establishes such distinctions, while the construction *baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍ* indicates differentiation among the messengers without specifying a comprehensive ranking. Grammatically, this construction affirms the existence of relative distinctions in rank but does not establish that all messengers must be arranged according to a single hierarchical criterion. The principle of contextual semantic analysis requires that the meaning of a term be understood through the relationship between its linguistic structure and its usage within Qur'anic discourse.[25] Thus, *tafḍīl* in this verse is more appropriately understood as the divine establishment of distinctions in favor rather than as an injunction to engage in subjective comparisons among the messengers.

In his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī explains that the expression *tilka al-rusul* refers to the messengers whose accounts have been mentioned in the preceding passages of Sūrat al-Baqarah. He identifies Moses as the messenger granted the distinctive privilege of speaking directly with Allah and cites Mujāhid's interpretation associating elevation in rank with the commissioning of the Prophet Muhammad as a messenger to all

[25] Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary*.

humanity.[26] This explanation demonstrates that distinctions in rank may be manifested through different forms of divine communication and the scope of prophetic missions. However, the identification of particular privileges does not necessarily establish a comprehensive ranking encompassing all messengers. In this context, al-Ṭabarī's interpretation reinforces the distinction between acknowledging specific divine favors and constructing a hierarchy based on criteria not explicitly stated in the text.

Ibn ʿĀshūr's interpretation in *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* places greater emphasis on the linguistic structure of the verse. He identifies Moses as the messenger to whom Allah spoke directly, while interpreting the expression *wa rafaʿa baʿḍahum darajāt* as an allusion to the Prophet Muhammad. According to Ibn ʿĀshūr, the use of *baʿḍahum* in this construction refers to a particular individual rather than merely reiterating the general statement concerning differences in rank.[27] His interpretation demonstrates that distinctions in rank among the messengers can be examined through syntactic structures, the sequence in which prophetic figures are mentioned, and the rhetorical functions of particular expressions. However, this conclusion must be distinguished from the explicit meaning of the verse, since the identification of the Prophet Muhammad in the relevant phrase represents an interpretive conclusion derived from exegetical reasoning.

A more complex issue emerges in al-Qurṭubī's interpretation. In his *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, he examines the relationship between the Qur'anic affirmation of distinctions in rank among the messengers and hadith reports prohibiting the elevation of certain prophets above others. One of the arguments he considers distinguishes the essential nature of prophethood, which is shared by all prophets, from additional distinctions manifested in miracles, status, and particular divine favors. Accordingly, differences in prophetic rank need not be understood as diminishing the legitimacy of the prophethood of others.[28] Ibn Kathīr also offers several possible explanations for the prohibition against ranking prophets, including the contexts of disputes, partisan zeal, and attempts to compare prophets on the basis of subjective judgments.[29] This debate demonstrates that the question of *tafḍīl* is not merely semantic but also concerns the epistemological limits of making claims about prophetic superiority.

The mention of Jesus, son of Mary, broadens the understanding of prophetic distinction through the granting of *al-bayyināt* (clear signs) and his strengthening by *Rūḥ al-Qudus* (the Holy Spirit). Al-Ṭabarī interprets *al-bayyināt* as clear evidences affirming the messengership of Jesus, while identifying *Rūḥ al-Qudus* with Gabriel, who strengthened Jesus by Allah's permission.[30] This representation is relevant to the discussions advanced by Reynolds and Neuwirth concerning the roles of prophetic figures within Qur'anic discourse and their relationship to earlier revelatory traditions.[31] However, intertextual studies cannot serve as a direct basis for establishing a theological hierarchy among the messengers. Their primary function is to illuminate the distinctive representation of each prophetic figure within the argumentative structure of the Qur'an.

The concluding section of the verse introduces an equally significant dimension through the declaration *wa lākin ikhtalafū fa-minhum man āmana wa-minhum man kafar*. After describing distinctions in rank among the messengers, the Qur'an addresses

[26] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.

[27] Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30*.

[28] Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*.

[29] Kathir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*.

[30] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.

[31] Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*.

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the disagreements and conflicts that arose among the communities that came after them. Al-Ṭabarī associates these disagreements with differing responses to the evidences of messengership that had been conveyed to these communities.[32] This textual relationship indicates that the central concern in the continuation of the verse is not merely the differences in rank among the messengers but also humanity's acceptance or rejection of the guidance they conveyed. Nevertheless, the verse does not explicitly state that these disagreements were directly caused by the practice of comparing the ranks of the messengers.

Based on this analysis, the conceptual contribution of this subsection lies in distinguishing between differences in rank established by Allah, the manifestations of divine favor identifiable through revelation, and human hierarchical judgments that require independent interpretive justification. This distinction clarifies that acknowledging *tafḍīl* does not entail unrestricted freedom to establish prophetic superiority through speculation. These findings also provide a semantic foundation for examining Qur'an 2:285, particularly whether the prohibition of *tafrīq* concerns the rejection of certain messengers or also restricts particular forms of comparison. Accordingly, differences in prophetic rank and the unity of prophetic legitimacy can be critically examined without presupposing either that they are contradictory or that they are conceptually identical.

The Unity of Faith and the Prohibition of *Tafrīq*: An Intratextual Reading of Qur'an 2:285

The unity of faith in all messengers constitutes a theological principle affirmed in Qur'an 2:285 through the prohibition of *tafrīq*, understood as making distinctions among the messengers in accepting and acknowledging the truth of their divine missions. This principle does not necessarily negate the differentiation of divine favors and ranks affirmed in Qur'an 2:253. Rather, the apparent tension between the two verses highlights the need to distinguish the unity of prophetic legitimacy from equality in rank among the bearers of revelation. Within Qur'anic studies, this distinction requires an interpretive approach attentive to linguistic structures, intratextual contexts, and the theological functions of prophetic representations. Qur'an 2:285 states:

اٰمَنَ الرَّسُوْلُ بِمَآ اُنْزِلَ اِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَّبِّهٖ وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَۗ كُلٌّ اٰمَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَمَلٰۤىِٕكَتِهٖ وَكُتُبِهٖ وَرُسُلِهٖۗ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ اَحَدٍ مِّنْ رُّسُلِهٖۗ وَقَالُوْا سَمِعْنَا وَاَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَاِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيْرُ

"*Rasul (Muhammad) beriman pada apa (Al-Qur'an) yang diturunkan kepadanya dari Tuhannya, demikian pula orang-orang mukmin. Masing-masing beriman kepada Allah, malaikat-malaikat-Nya, kitab-kitab-Nya, dan rasul-rasul-Nya. (Mereka berkata,) 'Kami tidak membeda-bedakan seorang pun dari rasul-rasul-Nya.' Mereka juga berkata, 'Kami dengar dan kami taat. Ampunilah kami, wahai Tuhan kami. Hanya kepada-Mu tempat (kami) kembali.*"

Linguistically, the construction *lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin min rusulih* employs the verb *nufarriqu*, derived from the Arabic root *f-r-q*, which in this context denotes the act of making distinctions. However, the scope of this prohibition cannot be determined solely on the basis of its lexical meaning. In his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī specifically examines the use of the term *aḥad* and rejects an interpretation that treats it merely as synonymous with the entire group of messengers. According to his interpretation, the negation is intended to reject distinguishing one messenger from another in terms of acknowledging their prophethood. This argument is significant because the restriction of the meaning of

[32] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.

tafrīq does not arise merely from an attempt to harmonize the two verses but is grounded in syntactic and theological considerations within the classical exegetical tradition.[33]

In his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī explains that the phrase *lā nufarriqu* represents a declaration made by believers, with the verb *yaqūlūna* (they say) understood as implicit. He also notes a variant reading that employs the third-person form but favors the first-person reading on the basis of the transmission he considers authoritative. Substantively, al-Ṭabarī interprets this prohibition as a rejection of the practice of believing in some messengers while denying others. All messengers must be affirmed as bearers of divine revelation from Allah, despite the differences in their experiences of being commissioned as messengers.[34] This interpretation demonstrates that the unity of messengership is primarily grounded in the authenticity of the divine source of their missions, rather than in the identical nature of their responsibilities or the uniformity of their individual distinctions.

This interpretation is further reinforced by Qur'an 4:150–152, which describes the nature of *tafrīq* more explicitly:

وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ

"*Mereka berkata, 'Kami beriman kepada sebagian dan kufur kepada sebagian (yang lain).'*" (QS. al-Nisāʾ [4]: 150).

Conversely, verse 152 affirms the standing of those who believe in Allah and His messengers without making distinctions among any of them. This intratextual relationship indicates that *tafrīq* concerns the selective acceptance of the legitimacy of messengership. Ibn Kathīr interprets Qur'an 4:150–152 as a critique of the practice of accepting the prophethood of certain messengers while rejecting that of others. In his interpretation of Qur'an 2:285, he also emphasizes that all messengers are acknowledged as bearers of true divine guidance, even though the religious laws they conveyed may differ according to Allah's decree.[35]

In his *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Ibn ʿĀshūr situates Qur'an 2:285 as an argumentative conclusion that synthesizes various themes discussed earlier in Sūrat al-Baqarah. According to his interpretation, the affirmation of faith in Allah, the angels, the scriptures, and the messengers reflects the unified commitment of the Prophet Muhammad and the believers to divine revelation. The subsequent declaration *samiʿnā wa-aṭaʿnā* (we hear and we obey) further connects the acceptance of divine truth with obedience. Thus, the unity of faith constitutes not merely a verbal profession of belief but also entails the obligation to adhere to divine guidance.[36] This reading broadens the interpretation of *tafrīq* from the question of acknowledging prophethood to the integrity of religious commitment, without excluding the possibility of differences in rank among the messengers.

This issue acquires an epistemological dimension in al-Rāzī's argumentation. He maintains that if evidence of prophethood constitutes the basis for accepting a messenger, the selective application of this evidentiary principle to other messengers requires valid justification. Accepting the prophethood of one messenger on the basis of certain evidence while rejecting that of another who meets comparable evidentiary criteria would result in argumentative inconsistency.[37] Thus, *tafrīq* can be understood not merely as a form of

[33] al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb*.
[34] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.
[35] Kathir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*.
[36] Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30*.
[37] al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb*.

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theological rejection but also as a question of epistemic consistency in evaluating the validity of divine missions.

In contemporary scholarship, Johns explains that prophetic figures in the Qur'an assume distinctive functions within the structure of Qur'anic discourse and the formation of the community receiving divine revelation.[38] Neuwirth likewise situates prophetic representations within the development of Qur'anic discourse,[39] while Reynolds highlights the intertextual relationships between the Qur'an and earlier scriptural traditions.[40] Patel further broadens the understanding of the construction of religious identity boundaries throughout Islamic history.[41] This body of scholarship does not directly resolve the question of *tafrīq*, but it helps explain why the recognition of all messengers constitutes an essential element in the formation of Qur'anic religious identity.

Based on the preceding analysis, the conceptual contribution of this subsection lies in distinguishing among the unity of prophetic legitimacy, consistency in the affirmation of faith, and the differentiation of divine favors bestowed upon the messengers. Qur'an 2:285 establishes the obligation to acknowledge all messengers without selectively rejecting any of them, whereas Qur'an 2:253 affirms the existence of distinctions in rank according to Allah's decree. Accordingly, the two verses need not be understood as mutually contradictory statements, since they differ in their subjects, scope, and normative functions. Nevertheless, this conclusion does not imply that all forms of comparison among the messengers are automatically permissible. The legitimacy and limits of such comparisons must still be examined in light of relevant exegetical arguments and hadith reports. This reading strengthens the framework of *tafāḍul without tafrīq* as a theological-hermeneutical proposition that distinguishes the acknowledgment of differences in prophetic rank from the rejection of the legitimacy and truth of their divine missions.

The Dialectic of *Tafḍīl* and *Tafrīq* in Classical Qur'anic Exegesis: Reconciling Qur'anic Verses and Hadith Reports on Prophetic Superiority

The dialectic between acknowledging distinctions in rank among the messengers and the prohibition against comparing them demonstrates that the question of *tafḍīl* within the classical Qur'anic exegetical tradition concerns not merely the establishment of a prophetic hierarchy but also the limits of human authority in asserting the superiority of one prophet over another. Qur'an 2:253 explicitly declares *faḍḍalnā baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍ*, whereas Qur'an 2:285 affirms *lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin min rusulih*. The apparent tension between these statements becomes more complex when considered alongside hadith reports prohibiting the elevation of certain prophets above others. Reconciling these three textual elements therefore requires a distinction between divinely established differences in rank, the unified recognition of all messengers, and human practices of prophetic comparison. This approach is consistent with the importance of examining argumentative structures and intratextual relationships in Qur'anic studies.

This issue is illustrated in a hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī concerning a dispute between a Muslim and a Jewish man. When the Jewish man affirmed the superiority of Moses, the Muslim challenged his statement and slapped him. The Prophet Muhammad subsequently rebuked this conduct with the following statement:

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[38] Johns, "Prophets and Personalities of the Qur'an."

[39] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*.

[40] Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*.

[41] Youshaa Patel, "'Whoever Imitates a People Becomes One of Them': A Hadith and Its Interpreters," *Islamic Law and Society* 25, no. 4 (2018): 359–426, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-00254A01.

لَا تُفَضِّلُونِي عَلَى مُوسَى

"*Janganlah kalian mengutamakan aku atas Musa*".[42]

Related accounts are also found in hadith numbers 2412 and 7472. It is important to note that the prohibition occurs in the context of a dispute that escalated into physical violence, rather than within an abstract discussion of the ontological status of the prophets. Indeed, in the continuation of the narration, the Prophet explains his uncertainty as to whether Moses would regain consciousness before him following the Resurrection or had been granted a particular exemption. This context indicates that comparisons among prophets may become problematic when employed to justify the denigration of others.[43]

In his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that Qur'an 2:253 constitutes a divine declaration concerning the distinctions bestowed upon certain messengers. He identifies Moses as the recipient of direct communication with Allah and cites Mujāhid's interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's mission to all humanity as one manifestation of his elevation in rank.[44] Meanwhile, in his interpretation of Qur'an 2:285, al-Ṭabarī explains that the prohibition of *tafrīq* concerns the practice of believing in some messengers while rejecting others. These two interpretations provide a basis for distinguishing the differentiation of divine favors from the unity of prophetic legitimacy. However, since al-Ṭabarī discusses the two verses within their respective contexts, the systematic relationship between *tafḍīl* and the prohibition against ranking prophets found in hadith reports still requires further analytical synthesis.

In his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī develops the discussion through linguistic considerations and theological reasoning. In interpreting Qur'an 2:253, he examines the construction *tilka al-rusul*, the various forms of prophetic distinction, and the relationship between divine favors associated with messengership and the ranks of the prophets. Meanwhile, in his interpretation of Qur'an 2:285, he situates the unified recognition of all messengers within the broader framework of faith in the entirety of Allah's revelation.[45] The distinction between these two contexts demonstrates that statements concerning prophetic rank cannot simply be equated with differentiation in the acceptance of the truth of messengership. Conceptually, al-Rāzī's analysis provides a foundation for distinguishing questions of status established by Allah from questions of human epistemological consistency in recognizing the bearers of divine revelation.

A more explicit argument for reconciliation can be found in al-Qurṭubī's interpretation of Qur'an 2:253. He outlines several scholarly approaches to understanding the relationship between the Qur'anic affirmation of distinctions in prophetic rank and the hadith reports prohibiting comparisons among prophets. These include the possibility that the prohibition is associated with humility, disputes, or concerns that such comparisons might diminish respect for the prophet being compared. Al-Qurṭubī then pays particular attention to the view that distinguishes the essential nature of prophethood from additional distinctions manifested in miracles, divine favors, status, and various forms of divine assistance. Within this formulation, the essential nature of prophethood constitutes a status shared by all prophets, whereas differentiation arises

[42] Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, ed. Muhammad Zuhayr ibn Nasir Al-Nasir (Beirut: Dar Tawq al-Najah, 2002).

[43] Al-Bukhari.

[44] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Al-Qurʾān*.

[45] al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb*.

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from the particular distinctions and privileges bestowed upon them.[46] This perspective offers a means of reconciliation without assuming that either source invalidates the other.

Ibn Kathīr presents a more diverse range of interpretive possibilities. In his exegesis of Qur'an 2:253, he outlines several possible approaches to reconciliation: the prohibition against ranking prophets may have been expressed before knowledge of particular prophetic distinctions was revealed; it may reflect the Prophet's humility; it may pertain specifically to situations involving disputes; assertions of prophetic superiority should not be based on personal opinions or partisan zeal; and the determination of prophetic rank ultimately belongs to Allah alone.[47] However, these interpretive possibilities do not carry equal argumentative weight. The explanation grounded in the context of the dispute receives direct support from the circumstances described in the hadith, whereas the explanation based on the chronology of revelation requires additional historical evidence. Therefore, the various explanations presented by Ibn Kathīr should be understood as interpretive alternatives requiring critical evaluation rather than as a single, unified argument.

Ibn ʿĀshūr adopts a different approach by analyzing the rhetorical function and discursive context of Qur'an 2:253. He explains that the verse seeks to honor the messengers while simultaneously affirming that Allah has bestowed particular distinctions upon some of them. In addressing the hadith reports prohibiting the ranking of prophets, Ibn ʿĀshūr distinguishes between general affirmations of prophetic superiority and detailed comparisons among individual prophets. He also offers a chronological explanation for certain hadith reports prohibiting the elevation of the Prophet Muhammad above Moses.[48] This approach demonstrates that reconciliation can be grounded in the scope of the statements, the degree of specificity involved in prophetic comparisons, and the contexts in which such statements were made. Nevertheless, chronological arguments must be approached with caution, since not all hadith reports provide sufficient temporal information to establish the sequence in which the statements were delivered.

A comparison of the five exegetes reveals that the relationship between *tafḍīl* and the prohibition against ranking prophets can be explained through three analytical categories. The first distinguishes the essential nature of prophethood from additional divine favors, as explicitly articulated by al-Qurṭubī. The second distinguishes prophetic distinctions established through revelation from comparisons based on subjective opinions, as emphasized in Ibn Kathīr's interpretation. The third distinguishes general acknowledgment of prophetic distinctions from detailed comparisons that may generate disputes, as discussed by Ibn ʿĀshūr. These categories represent the present study's synthesis of the exegetes' arguments rather than terminology uniformly employed across all the sources.

Accordingly, the theoretical contribution of this discussion lies in demonstrating that reconciling the Qur'anic verses and hadith reports does not require denying differences in rank among the messengers. Qur'an 2:253 affirms distinctions established by Allah; Qur'an 2:285 rejects the selective denial of messengership; and the hadith reports prohibiting prophetic comparisons provide a basis for evaluating the context and legitimacy of human practices of ranking prophets. This framework strengthens the possibility of reconstructing *tafāḍul without tafrīq*, while maintaining that the limits of

[46] Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*.

[47] Kathir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-ʿAẓīm*.

[48] Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30*.

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legitimate assertions of prophetic superiority must be determined through textual reasoning rather than claims of superiority unsupported by revelation.

Reconstructing *Tafāḍul without Tafrīq*: Differentiation of Divine Favors, Unity of Prophetic Legitimacy, and the Limits of Human Authority

The reconstruction of the concept of *tafāḍul without tafrīq* demonstrates that the Qur'anic acknowledgment of differences in rank among the messengers can be understood consistently with the obligation to believe in all messengers without selective discrimination. The semantic, intratextual, and comparative analyses presented in the preceding sections indicate that Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285 do not address entirely identical issues. The former affirms the differentiation of divine favors established by Allah, whereas the latter articulates the unity of religious commitment to the bearers of revelation. Hadith reports concerning the prohibition against elevating the Prophet Muhammad above Moses introduce a third issue, namely, the limits of prophetic comparisons within human interactions. These three issues provide the foundation for developing *tafāḍul without tafrīq* as a theological-hermeneutical synthesis, rather than as terminology explicitly formulated by all classical exegetes.

The first dimension concerns the differentiation of divine favors, which is directly grounded in the declaration *faḍḍalnā baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍ* in Qur'an 2:253. The use of the verb *faḍḍalnā* indicates that the bestowal of distinction is attributed to Allah, while the construction *baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍ* acknowledges differences in rank without establishing a comprehensive hierarchy. These distinctions are manifested through direct communication with Allah, elevation in rank, the granting of clear signs of messengership, and strengthening through *Rūḥ al-Qudus* (the Holy Spirit). Qur'an 17:55 further extends this intratextual foundation through the declaration *wa-laqad faḍḍalnā baʿḍa al-nabiyyīna ʿalā baʿḍ*, which explicitly acknowledges that certain prophets have been favored over others. Al-Ṭabarī situates these distinctions within the context of divine favors bestowed upon the messengers, while Ibn ʿĀshūr emphasizes that the grounds for such distinctions are not entirely accessible to human knowledge. Consequently, differentiation cannot be reduced to a single hierarchical criterion established through subjective judgment.

The second dimension concerns the unity of prophetic legitimacy, as affirmed through the expression *lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin min rusulih* in Qur'an 2:285. This declaration forms part of the broader structure of faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. An intratextual reading of Qur'an 4:150–152 indicates that *tafrīq* primarily concerns the practice of accepting certain messengers while rejecting others. These verses explicitly condemn the attitude expressed in *nuʾminu bi-baʿḍin wa-nakfuru bi-baʿḍ* (we believe in some and disbelieve in others), contrasting it with faith in all messengers without exception. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathīr situate this unified recognition as a consequence of faith in the truth of the messengers' divine missions. Thus, the unity of prophetic legitimacy does not require uniformity in divine favors, just as differences in divine favors do not justify denying the legitimacy of any messenger.

The relationship between these two dimensions must be clarified by distinguishing the status of messengership from the individual characteristics of those entrusted with divine revelation. In his discussion of Qur'an 2:253, al-Qurṭubī presents a view that distinguishes the essential nature of prophethood from additional distinctions manifested in miracles, status, and particular divine favors. This distinction provides a foundation for developing analytical categories concerning the unity of prophetic legitimacy and the differentiation of divine favors. However, the term "unity of prophetic legitimacy" in this study is not intended to suggest that all prophets possessed identical responsibilities,

religious laws, or scopes of their missions. Rather, it specifically refers to the obligation to acknowledge the truth of their divine missions on the basis of their common divine source of commissioning. From the perspective of contemporary Qur'anic studies, such an analysis requires attention to terminological usage, discursive structures, and the relationship between representations of prophetic figures and the broader structure of Qur'anic argumentation.[49]

The third dimension concerns the limits of human authority in making comparisons among prophets. Hadith numbers 2411 and 2412 in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* demonstrate that assertions concerning the relative superiority of the Prophet Muhammad and Moses became the subject of a dispute between a Muslim and a Jewish man, which escalated into physical violence. In this context, the Prophet Muhammad prohibited the particular assertion of prophetic superiority that had become the subject of contention.[50] This hadith report does not, in itself, invalidate the Qur'anic affirmation of distinctions in rank among the prophets. Rather, it highlights the importance of considering the context, purpose, and consequences of such comparisons. Ibn Kathīr offers several possible approaches to reconciliation, including distinguishing between prophetic distinctions established through revelation and assertions of superiority arising from partisan zeal.[51] Therefore, this study proposes that the legitimacy of comparisons among prophets must be assessed by considering their textual foundations, the limits of human knowledge, and the contexts in which such comparisons are made.

These three dimensions can be understood in terms of the relationship between theological determination, epistemic obligation, and interpretive responsibility. The differentiation of divine favors constitutes a statement concerning Allah's actions; the unity of prophetic legitimacy represents the obligation of believers to acknowledge all messengers; and the limits of comparison concern how human beings employ their knowledge of prophetic distinctions. This distinction intersects with Reynolds's discussion of the representation of divine action in Qur'anic theology and Patel's examination of the construction of religious identity boundaries. However, neither work specifically formulates the concept of *tafāḍul without tafrīq*. Their relevance is primarily conceptual, particularly in clarifying the relationship between divine authority, religious recognition, and human conduct.

Based on the synthesis of semantic, intratextual, and comparative arguments, the relationship between differences in rank among the messengers, the unity of prophetic legitimacy, and the limits of human authority can be articulated through the framework of *tafāḍul without tafrīq*. This framework integrates Qur'anic evidence, the arguments advanced by exegetes, and hadith reports concerning prophetic superiority, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Conceptual Reconstruction of *Tafāḍul without Tafrīq* in the Theology of Messengership

Analytical Dimension	Textual and Exegetical Foundations	Interpretive Findings	Theoretical Implications
Differentiation of divine favors (*tafḍīl*)	Qur'an 2:253; Qur'an 17:55; al-Ṭabarī (2000); Ibn ʿĀshūr (1984)	Allah establishes distinctions in the ranks, divine favors, and privileges bestowed upon	Differences in prophetic rank do not undermine the

[49] Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*; Johns, "Prophets and Personalities of the Qur'an"; Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary*.

[50] Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari, *Al-Jami Al-Musnad Al-Sahih Al-Mukhtasar Min Umur Rasul Allah Wa Sunanih Wa Ayyamih (Sahih Al-Bukhari)* (Beirut: Dar Tawq al-Najah, 2001).

[51] Kathir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-ʻAẓīm*.

		the messengers without presenting a comprehensive hierarchy.	legitimacy and truth of messengership.
Unity of prophetic legitimacy (*nafy al-tafrīq*)	Qur'an 2:285; Qur'an 4:150–152; al-Rāzī (1999); Ibn Kathīr (1999)	Believers are obligated to acknowledge all messengers without accepting some while rejecting others.	The unity of faith does not require uniformity in prophetic missions, miracles, or ranks.
Limits of human authority in prophetic comparison (*ḍawābiṭ al-mufāḍalah*)	Al-Bukhārī (2001), nos. 2411–2412; Muslim, no. 2373; al-Qurṭubī (2006); Ibn Kathīr (1999)	Comparisons must take into account revelatory evidence, the limits of human knowledge, and the contexts in which such statements are made.	Prophetic distinctions must not be invoked to justify unsupported comparisons or acts of hostility.

Source: The author's analytical synthesis based on Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285, Qur'an 4:150–152, Qur'an 17:55, primary exegetical works, and relevant hadith reports. The three dimensions are analytical categories developed in this study rather than an explicit classification uniformly employed by the exegetes.

This conceptual framework is further supported by the overall argumentative function of Qur'an 2:253. After affirming differences in rank among the messengers, the verse describes the disagreements and conflicts that arose among communities following the arrival of clear evidences of messengership. Ibn ʿĀshūr situates this sequence within the relationship between the history of the messengers, the acceptance of divine guidance, and religious conflicts.[52] Although the verse does not explicitly state that every conflict arises from comparisons of prophetic rank, its argumentative structure demonstrates that differing human responses to revelation can have serious social consequences. This finding extends the discussion of *tafḍīl* beyond the question of individual prophetic distinctions to encompass the responsibility involved in interpreting and employing theological statements.

Compared with classical Qur'anic exegesis, which has already proposed various approaches to reconciliation, the contribution of this study does not rest on the claim that the relationship between Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285 is being resolved for the first time. Rather, its contribution lies in organizing these arguments into three analytical categories that can be traced to and critically examined against primary sources. Methodologically, this framework integrates semantic analysis, intratextual reading, and comparative evaluation of exegetical arguments without obscuring differences among the exegetes. Theoretically, *tafāḍul without tafrīq* demonstrates that differences in prophetic rank are not equivalent to differences in prophetic legitimacy, while the unity of faith does not require the elimination of all individual distinctions. Accordingly, this study proposes a conceptual reconstruction that preserves the authority of Qur'anic statements concerning prophetic distinctions, affirms the obligation to recognize all messengers, and establishes limits on human claims of prophetic superiority based on textual evidence and the contexts in which such claims are made.

Conclusion

Based on the semantic, intratextual, and comparative analyses of Qur'an 2:253 and 2:285, this study concludes that acknowledging distinctions in rank among certain messengers does not contradict the obligation to believe in all messengers without selective discrimination. The two verses have distinct yet complementary semantic scopes and theological functions. The concept of *tafḍīl* in Qur'an 2:253 denotes the differentiation

[52] Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr Al-Maʿnā Al-Sadīd Wa-Tanwīr Al-ʿaql Al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-Majīd NV - 30*.

of divine favors, miracles, and ranks established by Allah, whereas *tafrīq* in Qur'an 2:285, as further clarified by Qur'an 4:150–152, primarily concerns the selective acceptance of certain messengers and the rejection of others. Thus, the unified recognition of the truth of all divine missions does not require uniformity in the ranks, responsibilities, or distinctive privileges of the bearers of revelation. This distinction provides a foundation for understanding the relationship between the two verses without negating the explicit meaning of either.

A comparative examination of the interpretations offered by al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, and Ibn ʿĀshūr demonstrates that reconciliation between these Qur'anic verses and hadith reports prohibiting the ranking of prophets is supported by diverse lines of argumentation. These differences primarily concern the essential nature of prophethood and additional divine favors, the source of authority for determining prophetic distinctions, and the contexts in which comparisons among prophets are made. The findings indicate that the question of distinctions in rank among the messengers cannot be adequately resolved through an unequivocal assertion of either hierarchy or absolute equality. A more comprehensive interpretation must consider textual evidence, the limits of human knowledge, and the potential misuse of claims of prophetic superiority in religious disputes. Accordingly, the diversity of exegetical arguments constitutes an essential finding of this study rather than a set of differences to be eliminated through forced harmonization.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in reconstructing the concept of *tafāḍul without tafrīq* as a theological-hermeneutical framework integrating three dimensions: the differentiation of divine favors, the unity of prophetic legitimacy, and the limits of human authority in comparing prophets. This framework clarifies that differences in prophetic rank are not equivalent to differences in prophetic legitimacy, while the unity of faith does not entail the elimination of all individual distinctions. The originality of this study lies not in claiming the first reconciliation of Qur'anic verses concerning prophetic superiority but in systematically articulating the relationships among these three dimensions through semantic analysis, intratextual reading, and comparative evaluation of Qur'anic exegesis and hadith reports. Within *Uṣūl al-Dīn* and Qur'anic Studies, this reconstruction provides a conceptual foundation for understanding the relationship between the authority of revelation, the recognition of all messengers, and human interpretive responsibility.

The broader implication of this study is the importance of distinguishing theological beliefs grounded in revelation from claims of superiority constructed through subjective judgments or employed to justify hostility. However, given its textual-hermeneutical nature, the study's conclusions are limited to conceptual reconstruction and are not intended to provide empirical evidence concerning the social consequences of comparisons among prophets. Future research may expand the exegetical corpus across different historical periods and intellectual traditions, undertake a more detailed examination of variations in hadith transmission, and investigate the application of the *tafāḍul without tafrīq* framework within contemporary theological discourse and religious education. Ultimately, this study affirms that acknowledging differences in rank among the messengers must remain grounded in the unity of faith in all messengers and be governed by the authority of revelation and the responsibility inherent in human interpretation,

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