

REASSESSING THE TRANSLATION OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC VERSES IN THE QURAN BY N. J. DAWOOD: A CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study critically examines the translation of anthropomorphic verses in the Quran by N. J. Dawood, a Jewish Orientalist whose widely distributed English version, *The Koran*, has attracted attention for its theological implications. Grounded in the Islamic doctrine of *tanzīh*, which emphasises the absolute transcendence and incomparability of God, the study analyses 31 Quranic verses that contain anthropomorphic expressions. Through comparative textual analysis, Dawood's interpretations are evaluated against those of two Muslim translators, namely, *The Noble Quran* by Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan, representing the Salaf tradition, and *The Quran: A New Translation* by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, which aligns with Ash'arite theology. The findings reveal that Dawood's renderings often lack theological consistency, with lexical substitutions, inconsistent capitalisation of divine references, and interpretive choices that introduce anthropomorphic imagery. In several instances, his translations are further influenced by Judeo-Christian narrative parallels, leading to doctrinal misrepresentations. The study argues that

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Dawood's omission of classical Islamic sources such as *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature results in theological distortions. It concludes that translations of Quranic verses involving divine attributes must be grounded in traditional Islamic hermeneutics to ensure linguistic integrity and preserve the foundational tenets of Islamic theology.

Keywords: Quranic translation; anthropomorphism; Jewish Orientalism; N. J. Dawood; Islamic theology; *tanzīh*; divine attributes.

Khulasah

Kajian ini meneliti secara kritikal terjemahan ayat-ayat antropomorfik dalam al-Quran oleh N. J. Dawood, seorang orientalis Yahudi yang versi terjemahannya dalam bahasa Inggeris iaitu *The Koran* yang telah tersebar luas dan menimbulkan implikasi teologi yang signifikan. Berasaskan doktrin *tanzīh* dalam Islam iaitu penegasan tentang keagungan dan ketidaksamaan Allah dengan makhluk, kajian ini menganalisis 31 ayat al-Quran yang mengandungi elemen *mutashābihāt*. Analisis perbandingan dilakukan terhadap dua terjemahan oleh sarjana Muslim, *The Noble Quran* oleh Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali dan Muhsin Khan yang mewakili pendekatan Salaf, dan *The Quran: A New Translation* oleh M. A. S. Abdel Haleem yang selari dengan pendekatan teologi Ash'arī. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa tafsiran Dawood sering kali tidak selari dengan prinsip teologi Islam, antaranya penggunaan istilah yang menggantikan maksud asal, ketidakkonsistenan huruf besar dalam rujukan kepada sifat-sifat ketuhanan, serta pengaruh naratif Judeo-Kristian yang membawa kepada kekeliruan doktrin sebenar. Kajian ini berpendapat bahawa ketiadaan rujukan kepada sumber klasik Islam seperti tafsir dan hadis telah menyebabkan penyelewengan tafsiran. Kajian ini menegaskan bahawa terjemahan ayat-ayat *mutashābihāt* perlu berpaksikan kepada kerangka Islam tulen bagi

menjamin ketepatan linguistik dan memelihara kesucian akidah.

Kata kunci: Terjemahan al-Quran; antropomorfisme; Orientalisme Yahudi; N. J. Dawood; akidah; *tanzīh*; sifat-sifat Allah.

Introduction

The Quran, revealed in the Arabic language, contains linguistic and theological nuances that resist complete translation. Translating it into other languages requires a strict methodology to preserve its unique linguistic and theological integrity. Due to the linguistic and cultural differences between Arabic and English, the original Arabic text remains inimitable and irreplaceable.¹ According to Muhammad ibn Shaqrun, many Orientalist translations of the Quran contain elements that misrepresent Islamic teachings.² Muslim scholars emphasise that qualified translators must not only possess linguistic mastery but also demonstrate theological trustworthiness (*thiqah*) to ensure accuracy and prevent distortion.³

The Quran rejects anthropomorphism, as emphasised in Sūrah al-Shūrā 42:11. In contrast, anthropomorphic descriptions of God are prevalent in Judaism, as seen in passages from Genesis 32:29 and Exodus 14:31. The occurrence of anthropomorphic language in the Hebrew Bible, which ascribes human-like attributes to God such occur in (Gen. 3:8), (Gen. 11:5; 18:21), (Ex. 19:18; 34:5), (Gen. 17:22; 35:13), (Ex. 12:12–13, (Isa. 6:1), (Num. 7:89),

¹ Fuzi El Mallah, "The Miraculous Nature of the Quran Defies Imitability and Hence Translatability," *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 5(10) (2022), 18–29.

² Muḥammad ibn Shaqrun, "Qaḍāyā Tarjamāt Ma'āni al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *Journal University Ibn Youssef Marrakech* (2002), 29–50, 46.

³ 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Ik, *Uṣūl al-Taḥsīr wa Qawā'iduhu* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986), 474.

(Ps. 132:13; 135:21), (Dan. 7:9), (Ex. 33:23, (Ex. 15) and in (II Sam. 22; Ps. 18).⁴

Given these theological distinctions, this study critically investigates the narrative of a Jewish Orientalist named Nessim Joseph Dawood, also known as N.J. Dawood (hereinafter referred to as Dawood), through his interpretation of the anthropomorphic verses of the Quran. Given the significant references to anthropomorphic terms in the Hebrew Bible that drive this article, it seeks to study Dawood's view to get a closer look at his Judeo influence on anthropomorphic nuance within the context of Quranic verses.

This study systematically presents all anthropomorphic verses from *The Koran* and compares Dawood's translation with selected Muslim translators, namely Mohsin Khan and Taqi al-Din al-Hilali (*The Noble Quran*),⁵ and M. A. S. Abdul Haleem (*The Quran: A New Translation*).⁶ These translations were chosen as they represent two different schools of thought: *Salaf al-Salih* and *Khalaf*. Abdul Haleem draws on classical scholars such as Fakhr al-Rāzī, al-Zamakhshārī and Rāghib al-Isfahānī,⁷ while *The Noble Quran* reflects Salafi tendencies.⁸ By using these benchmarks, this study assesses the tendencies

⁴ Kaufman, G. D. A., "Religious Interpretation of Emergence: Creativity as God," *Journal of Religion and Science* 42(4) (2007), 915-928, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9744.2007.00880.917.

⁵ Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali & Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran in the English Language* (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, 2009).

⁶ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Quran: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁷ Muhammad Sultan Shah, "A Critical Study of Abdel Haleem's New Translation of the Holy Quran," *al-Qalam* (2010), 1-15.

⁸ V.P.C. Ubaid, "The Quran and Its Translation: An Analysis Discourse on Jihad in Selected English Translation," *Quranica - International Journal of Quranic Research* 6(2) (2014), 19-38, <https://doi.org/10.22452/quranica.vol6no2.2>, 24.

in Dawood's translation regarding anthropomorphic interpretations.

Dawood was born on August 27, 1927, in Baghdad, Iraq.⁹ His father, Yosep was described as a devoted Jew who lived near a synagogue in Iraq. According to Fischell, while Dawood himself remained in the UK, his family maintained close connections to Israel. His brother Hessel served as a commercial attaché at the United States Embassy in Israel, while another brother, Yakov, served in the Israeli military. Dawood passed away on November 20, 2014, and was survived by his wife, Juliet Abraham, three sons, and nine grandchildren.¹⁰ This led Dawood to develop a strong attachment to Judaism.

In 1944, at the age of seventeen, he left Iraq for Britain to pursue his education. Unlike Dawood's other siblings, he did not immigrate to Israel after the establishment of the State of Israel but chose to remain in the UK after the Iraqi regime tormented the Jewish population. Upon completing his studies, Dawood began his professional career as an English teacher in the south London area. He later moved into journalism and took on the role of editor for a Jewish community magazine in England, commonly referred to as *The Jewish Chronicles*.¹¹

The Koran was first published in 1956 and has undergone multiple revisions, with the most recent edition published prior to Dawood's death in 2014. Marion Fischell, a columnist for *The Jerusalem Post*, reports that the work has been reprinted seventy times since it was first published by Penguin Books in London. *The Koran* is the culmination of Dawood's unwavering dedication to the

⁹ Editorial, "N.J. Dawood: Obituary," *The Telegraph*, 2014.

¹⁰ Marion Fischell, "The Jewish Master of Arabic," *The Jerusalem Post*, 22 January 2015, <https://www.jpost.com/international/the-jewish-master-of-arabic-388614>

¹¹ Emile Cohen, "N.J. Dawood Life History," interview by M. Zulfahmi Mohamad, June 19, 2017.

Quranic translation work, which continued until his death. Between 1956 and 2014, Dawood undertook no fewer than eight major revisions, four of which included substantial modifications. From the 1990 edition onwards, Dawood adhered to a particular translation framework for passages in *The Koran*. Nevertheless, it appears that certain Quranic verses were omitted in later editions, as seen in the 2014 publication.¹²

Dawood further explains that he has made numerous revisions since the beginning of this publication to ensure that all translated content is in line with the needs of modern society. Additionally, the use of English can be guaranteed for its accuracy while maintaining the inherent characteristics of each language.¹³ In an effort to ensure his work is friendlier to modern needs, Dawood said he has made significant changes to his translations, incorporating certain constructs such as term "Allah" with the word "God", replacing word "God of creation" into "Gods of the universe", and transforming the term "*Zakat*" from "Alms Tax" to word "Alms Levy"¹⁴

This study aims to critically analyse Dawood's approach to translating anthropomorphic verses in *The Koran* and evaluate its consistency with Islamic theological principles. It also examines how Dawood's theological background influences his interpretation, particularly in comparison to Muslim translators and Orientalist perspectives. Furthermore, the study assesses the potential impact of Dawood's translation on the understanding of Islam among non-Muslim readers and proposes translation strategies grounded in authentic Islamic scholarship.

Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan adopt a conservative approach in their translation, *The*

¹² Fischell, "The Jewish Master of Arabic."

¹³ Nessim Joseph Dawood, *The Koran* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 11.

¹⁴ Dawood, *The Koran*, 11.

Noble Quran, which prioritises the Salafi methodology of interpreting divine attributes. Their work provides a direct counterpoint to Dawood's approach, as they maintain theological neutrality by translating key terms with explanatory footnotes rather than literal interpretations. They argue that translations should reflect the beliefs of the intended audience, and therefore, their version avoids rendering terms that could be misunderstood through an anthropomorphic lens. Their critique of Western-oriented translations, including Dawood's, points to the dangers of theological misrepresentation when Quranic interpretations are separated from Islamic traditions.¹⁵

Building on this concern regarding Western engagement with Islamic texts, Fadli et al. discuss the historical context of Orientalism and its influence on Quranic studies. The authors discuss how Western scholars, often referred to as Orientalists, have approached the Quran, highlighting both the contributions and criticisms associated with their methodologies. The article emphasises the importance of understanding these perspectives to foster a more nuanced appreciation of the Quranic interpretations.¹⁶

In a similar vein, Abdullah Shehab et al. examine orientalist perspectives on the origins and sources of the Quran. The authors evaluate various theories proposed by Western scholars, assessing their methodologies and the conclusions drawn from them. The research aims to provide a balanced view by juxtaposing orientalist critiques with traditional Islamic scholarship, thereby enriching the discourse on the Quran studies.¹⁷

¹⁵ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran*.

¹⁶ M. F. Nazar Fadli & T. Fisa, "Orientalist and Their Study of the Quran," *Jurnal Ilmiah Teunuleh* 1 (2020), 82–95, <https://doi.org/10.51612/teunuleh.v1i2.25>, 82.

¹⁷ K. Abdullah Shehab & F. Pasandi, "A Critical Study of the Sources of the Holy Quran and Its Origin from the Perspective of Orientalists,"

Expanding the discussion to the Jewish intellectual tradition, Minnema explores the evolution of European self-perception and its influence on views of Jews and Judaism. He discusses how various forms of orientalism have shaped Jewish identity and scholarship, providing insight into the complex interplay between European and Jewish intellectual traditions.¹⁸

To further understand the ideological frameworks of key figures in this discourse, Salaymeh critically examines the categorisation of certain scholars, notably Ignaz Goldziher, as a prominent orientalist in the early nineteenth century. She argues that despite their sympathetic approaches, their methodologies often remained rooted in Eurocentric biases, reflecting broader orientalist tendencies.¹⁹

Lastly, complementing these critiques with an interfaith philosophical perspective, Senin et al. examine the theological and philosophical interactions between Muslim and Jewish scholars during the medieval period, focusing on the works of al-Ghazali and Maimonides.²⁰

It has been argued that N. J. Dawood's claims of Judeo influences in the Quranic jurisprudence are unfounded and rooted in ethnocentrism. The paper concludes that the Quran presents its own theological framework and purpose, distinct from that of the Old Testament. It argues that the perception of the Quran as a mere duplication of Jewish

Linguistic Research in the Holy Quran 12(2) (2023), 47–62, <https://doi.org/10.22108/NRGS.2024.142151.1969>, 47.

¹⁸ L. Minnema, "Different Types of Orientalism and Corresponding Views of Jews and Judaism: A Historical Overview of Shifting Perceptions and Stereotypes," *Antisemitism Studies* 4(2) (2020), 270-325, <https://doi.org/10.2979/antistud.4.2.04>, 270.

¹⁹ L. Salaymeh, *The 'Good Orientalist'* (De Gruyter eBooks, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110728422-007>, 204.

²⁰ Nurhanisah Senin et al., "Preliminary Analysis on Muslim-Jewish Discourse in Medieval Period: The Case of al-Ghazali and Maimonides," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 20(2) (2018): 195–216, 195.

rabbinical sources is a result of religious bias and a lack of understanding of Islamic principles.²¹

Noor delves into the theological debates surrounding anthropomorphism within Sunni Islam, particularly focusing on the interpretations of *maqām maḥmūd* and the rejection of anthropomorphic views by Sunni scholars. The rejection of anthropomorphic interpretations has been a consistent theme in Sunni theological discourse.²²

These studies collectively demonstrate the ongoing discourse surrounding Orientalists' translation and the importance of preserving theological accuracy in Quranic interpretation. While some scholars focus on linguistic precision, others emphasise theological coherence, reinforcing the need for a well-grounded exegetical approach in Quranic translation.

Scope and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology, utilising comparative textual analysis, to critically evaluate Dawood's rendering of anthropomorphic verses in *The Koran* (2014 edition). The primary aim is to assess the extent to which Dawood's translation aligns with or diverges from mainstream Islamic interpretations, particularly in light of theological sensitivities concerning divine attributes.

A total of 31 anthropomorphic verses were selected based on their thematic relevance to the study. These verses were then systematically compared with two prominent

²¹ M. Z. Mohamad, "Narrative of Judeo Influences in the Quranic Jurisprudence according to Jewish Orientalist: A Study on The Koran by N.J. Dawood," *BITARA: International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 7(2) (2024), <https://bitarajournal.com/index.php/bitarajournal/article/view/609/845>, 320

²² Umar Muhammad Noor, "Polemik Pentafsiran *Maqām Maḥmūd* dan Penolakan Antropomorfisme dalam Kalangan Ahli Sunnah," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 23(1) (2021), 1–48, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol23no1.1>.

English translations that include *The Noble Quran* by al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan, which represents the *ithbāt* (affirmation) methodology, and *The Quran: A New Translation* by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, reflecting an Ash'arite interpretive stance. To ensure historical and doctrinal depth, the analysis also incorporates classical exegeses, namely *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, *al-Rāzī*, and *Ibn Kathīr*, providing traditional commentarial perspectives on the selected verses.

Each verse was assessed for theological consistency with the doctrine of *tanzīh* (divine transcendence) and was examined for potential traces of *taj̣sīm* (embodiment) or *tamthīl* (anthropomorphic likening). This dual evaluation of theological and linguistic dimensions is intended to identify any interpretive deviations that may arise in Dawood's translation.

In addition, the study integrates Lawrence Venuti's translation theory, specifically the concepts of domestication and foreignization, as an analytical tool. Domestication refers to rendering a source text in a manner that is culturally familiar to the target audience, which may dilute the original's distinctiveness. Conversely, foreignization preserves the text's original cultural and linguistic identity, even at the cost of reader accessibility.²³ By applying this framework, the study critiques Dawood's apparent omission of exegetical context and semantic

²³ Lawrence Venuti's translation theory distinguishes between two primary strategies namely, domestication and foreignization. Domestication involves adapting the source text to the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience, often at the expense of preserving its original context and worldview. Foreignization, on the other hand, retains the foreignness of the source text, aiming to expose readers to its original linguistic and cultural distinctiveness even if it challenges their familiarity or comfort. Venuti critiques domestication for promoting ethnocentric readings and calls for a more ethical, foreignizing approach to translation. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19-25.

precision, highlighting the risk of theological distortion in sacred texts when translation choices prioritise fluency over fidelity.²⁴

Anthropomorphic Verses According to Muslim Scholars

This section begins with an overview of the concept of anthropomorphism in Islam. Some Muslim scholars uphold the principle of mediatory stance, which asserts doctrines that God has hands and a face because the Quran affirms this. While the fact itself is known, the phenomenon is beyond human description, as only God should be the one to decide how these terms should be understood.²⁵

Al-Qaṭṭān categorises anthropomorphism verses into three parts: Verses that are known only to Allah, verses or words that allow for multiple interpretations, and verses that cannot stand alone due to their ambiguity and require clarification from other sources.²⁶ In Islamic theology, the discussion surrounding Allah's attributes is a central and intricate topic, with various schools of thought developing distinct methodologies. Two key concepts in this discussion are *ithbāt* (affirmation) and the approach of the Ash'arism school.

In classical Islamic scholarship, the term *Salaf* (السلف) refers to the righteous predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), namely, the Prophet's companions, their followers, and the generation that followed them. The *Salaf* are known for their pious character and cautious approach to ambiguous

²⁴ Anayya Syadza Zainuddin et al., "Abd al-Rauf's Contributions to Quranic Exegesis: Historical Context, Methodology and Malay Translation," *Sinthop: Media Kajian Pendidikan, Agama, Sosial dan Budaya* 3(1) (2024), 9–21.

²⁵ W. Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34(3) (2002), 441–463, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743802003021>, 441

²⁶ Manā' al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2002), 95.

theological matters, particularly divine attributes (*ṣifāt*). Al-Qarāḍāwī stresses that the core principle of Islam in dealing with the attributes of Allah is emphasised in Sūrah al-Shurā 42:11; "*There is nothing like Him and He is All-Hear, All-Seer*". It is therefore of the utmost importance that has been dictated on this subject is free of any *ta'ṭīl* (refuting the meaning), *tahrīf* (modifying the meaning), *tashbīh* (comparing Allah with others), *tamthīl* (resemblance), *takyīf* (specifying the exact nature and reality), and *tajsīm* (embodying).²⁷

In contrast, Salafiyyah, particularly in post Ibn Taymiyyah expression, adheres to *ithbāt bi-lā kayf*, which is affirming the attributes without inquiry into their nature,²⁸ while firmly opposing *ta'wīl* and even denying the presence of allegory (*majāz*) in the Quran.²⁹ Prominent Salafi exegetes such as al-Sa'dī, al-Shinqīfī, and al-Jazā'irī consistently followed this anti-*ta'wīl* hermeneutic, interpreting verses on divine attributes (*āyāt al-ṣifāt*) in a literalist manner or abstaining from interpretation altogether.³⁰

Thus, while both the Salaf and the Salafiyyah reject anthropomorphism, their theological methodologies diverge: one emphasises epistemic humility (*tafwīd*), while the other champions textual literalism (*ithbāt*).³¹ Therefore, this study distinguishes between the Salaf as a historical generation and the Salafiyyah as a doctrinal movement. For

²⁷ Yusuf al-Qarāḍāwī, *Fuṣūl al-'Aqidah bayn al-Salaf wa al-Khalaf* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2015), 43–45.

²⁸ Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm ibn 'Abd al-Salām Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Ta'sīs Bida'ihim al-Kalāmiyyah* (Riyadh: Majma' Mālik al-Fahd, 2005), 1:98–105.

²⁹ Izza Rohman, "Salafi Tafsirs: Textualist and Authoritarian?" *Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies* 1(2) (2012), 198–204. <https://doi.org/10.15408/QUHAS.V1I2.1324>.

³⁰ Izza Rohman, "Salafi Tafsirs", 202–204.

³¹ Izza Rohman, "Salafi Tafsirs", 205; see also Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mighrawi, *al-Mufasssirūn bayn al-Ta'wīl wa al-Ithbāt fī Āyāt al-Ṣifāt* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000), 694–705.

example, while The Noble Quran by Hilali and Khan reflects the Salafīyyah's emphasis on literal affirmation with footnoted explanation, this should not be conflated with the epistemic caution of the early Salaf, who refrained from detailed explication of ambiguous divine attributes.³²

Ithbāt is a Salaf hermeneutical principle that accepts divine attributes such as *yād* (hand), *wajh* (face) and others as stated in the Quran without metaphorical reinterpretation (*ta'wīl*), while simultaneously negating any creaturely likeness (*tashbīh*). Salaf's approach aligns with Sūrah al-Shura 42:11: "There is nothing like Him" by affirming the textual wording of attributes but rejecting their literal human forms. For instance, *yadullāh* (God's Hand) is affirmed as a true attribute, yet its nature (*kayfiyyah*) is deemed beyond human comprehension, a stance termed *bilā kayf* (without asking of "how").³³

Meanwhile, the Ash'arī theological tradition adopts a dual strategy in handling ambiguous texts (*mutashābihāt*) regarding divine attributes. Contrary to the assumption that Ash'arīs uniformly adopt *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation), classical and contemporary scholars within the school affirm the complementary use of *tafwīd* (assigning meaning to Allah), particularly when the verse does not overtly imply anthropomorphism.³⁴ This approach is rooted in affirming the text's wording (*ithbāt al-laḥẓ*) while refraining from asserting a definitive interpretation or specifying the modality (*bilā kayf*) of the attribute, thereby preserving divine transcendence (*tanzīh*).³⁵

³² Muhammad Taqī & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 15.

³³ Muḥammad al-Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn, *Sharah al-'Aqīdah al-Wasīṭah li Shāykh al-Islām Ibn al-Taymiyyah* (Riyadh: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2000), 2: 41.

³⁴ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sanūsī, *Umm al-Barāhīn*, ed. Khalīl Zuhri (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2009), 7–9.

³⁵ 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭi' al-Adillah fi Uṣūl al-I'tiqād* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanjī, 2002), 112–116.

For instance, al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī often preferred *tafwīd*, particularly on verses where rational re-interpretation might cause more confusion.³⁶ Al-Ghazālī, in his middle period, supported both *tafwīd* for general audiences and *ta'wīl* for specialists.³⁷ In contrast, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī adopted extensive *ta'wīl*, interpreting *istiwā* as *istawlā* (dominion) and *yad* as divine power.³⁸

Contemporary Ash'arī scholars, such as Sa'īd Fūdah and 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥabashī, reaffirm that *tafwīd* and *ta'wīl* are not oppositional, but rather tools applied according to the context, audience, and the level of theological risk.³⁹ Both methods aim to preserve *tanzīh* (Allah's transcendence) while avoiding *tashbīh* (resemblance) and *ta'īl* (negation). Furthermore, Al Mansoori's report in *Attributes of God in Creedal Doctrines* confirms that the Ash'arites acknowledge the metaphorical nature of these attributes while also accepting *tafwīd* as a means of affirming the sacred text without overstepping the epistemic boundaries of human reason.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is essential not to characterise the Ash'arī school as exclusively rationalist. Rather, it operates with theological gradation and epistemic humility, a method committed to balance between divine affirmation and transcendence, depending on the situation that anthropomorphic

³⁶ Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 112-116.

³⁷ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-'Awām 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Cairo: Dār al-Minhāj, 2005), 34–36. See also: Al-Ghazālī, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, trans. & ed. Frank Griffel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 268.

³⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 2:133–135.

³⁹ Sa'īd Fūdah, *Sharḥ 'Aqīdah al-Imām al-Ṭahāwīyyah* (Amman: Dār al-Imām al-Nāwawī, 2012), 55–60; 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥabashī, *al-Sunnah wa al-Bid'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fath, 2016), 28–33.

⁴⁰ Salma Saeed Amer Al-Mansoori, "Attributes of God in Creedal Doctrines," *Journal of Posthumanism* 5(4) (2025), 675–693, <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i4.1139>, 675-676.

expressions in the Quran should be interpreted metaphorically.⁴¹

Anthropomorphic Verses According to Dawood

In contrast to Salaf and Ash'arism, Dawood offers a different spectrum, as he combined both methods and has developed his own approach to dealing with the anthropomorphic description. Since Dawood insisted on his effort in producing a modern English translation of *The Koran*, he devoted more than 50 years to studying and revising it. Considering Dawood's long engagement with Quranic translation resulted in a work that underwent numerous revisions over five decades, this article discusses the method of anthropomorphic verses of Dawood and examines the misinterpretations of anthropomorphic verses in his translation. This section provides an in-depth analysis of anthropomorphic verses and their interpretation by Dawood. The aim is to determine whether Dawood's method is consistent with the core principle of Islam. The search for anthropomorphic verses according to Dawood's interpretation of the Quran consists of two sections. First, the direct interpretation. Second: indirect interpretation through biblical references.

A- Direct Interpretation

Dawood's direct interpretation of anthropomorphic verses includes a total of 31 verses, categorised into five main themes. Table 1 below shows the verses related to the theme of *Yad* (يَدُ اللَّهِ).

⁴¹ Ahmad Fanani, "The Hanbalite Theology: A Critical Study of the Hanbalite Theological Creeds and Polemical Adversaries," *Jurnal Afkaruna* 17(1) (2021), 2-3, <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v17i1.11353>,

Table 1: *Yad* (يَدُ اللَّهِ)

1. Say: ' <u>Grace is in the hands of God</u> : He bestows it on whom He will. (Sūrah Āli 'Imrān 3: 73). ⁴²
2. The Jews say: ' <u>God's hand is chained</u> ' May their own hands be chained! May they be cursed for what they say! (Sūrah al-Māi'dah 5:64). ⁴³
3. Those that swear fealty to you, swear fealty to God Himself. <u>The Hand of God is above their hands</u> . (Sūrah al-Fath 48:10). ⁴⁴
4. Let the People of the Book recognise that they have no control over the grace of God; that grace is in <u>His hands alone</u> . (Sūrah al-Hadīd 57:29). ⁴⁵
5. Satan, 'said He, 'what prevented you from bowing to him whom <u>I created with My own hands</u> ? Are you too proud, or do you deem yourself. (Sūrah Sād 38: 75). ⁴⁶

Source: Analysis based on N. J. Dawood's *The Koran* (2014 edition).

Table 2 below shows the verses related to the theme of '*ayn* (أَعْيُنٌ/عَيْنٌ).

Table 2: '*Ayn* (أَعْيُنٌ/عَيْنٌ)

1. Do not grieve at what they do. Build the ark under Our watchful eyes, and with Our inspiration. God's grace is infinite. (Sūrah Hūd 11:37). ⁴⁷
2. I lavished My love on you, so that you might be reared under My eye. (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2: 39). ⁴⁸
3. We revealed Our will to him, saying: 'Build the ark under Our watchful eye.'" (Sūrah al-Mu'minūn 23:27). ⁴⁹

⁴² Dawood, *The Koran*, 38.

⁴³ Dawood, *The Koran*, 76.

⁴⁴ Dawood, *The Koran*, 348.

⁴⁵ Dawood, *The Koran*, 372.

⁴⁶ Dawood, *The Koran*, 307.

⁴⁷ Dawood, *The Koran*, 307.

⁴⁸ Dawood, *The Koran*, 209.

⁴⁹ Dawood, *The Koran*, 229.

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| <p>4. Await with patience the judgement of your Lord: you are ever in Our sight. (Sūrah al-Ṭūr 52:48).⁵⁰</p> <p>5. Drifted on under Our eyes. (Sūrah al-Qamar 54:14).⁵¹</p> |
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Source: Analysis based on N. J. Dawood's *The Koran* (2014 edition)

Table 3 below shows the verses related to the theme of *Wajh* (الوجه).

Table 3: *Wajh* (الوجه)

1.	Whichever way you turn there is the face of God. He is omnipresent and all knowing. (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2: 115). ⁵²
2.	Whatever alms you give shall rebound to your own advantage, provided that you give them for the love of God. (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2: 272). ⁵³
3.	Who for the sake of God endure with fortitude. (Sūrah al-Ra'd 13:22). ⁵⁴
4.	That is best for those that strive to please God. (Sūrah al-Rūm 30:38). ⁵⁵
5.	But the alms you give for the love of God shall be repaid many times over. (Sūrah al-Rūm 30:39). ⁵⁶
6.	All that lives on earth is doomed to die. But the face of your Lord will abide for ever. (Sūrah al-Rahmān 55: 26-27). ⁵⁷
7.	For the sake of his Lord the Most High only (Sūrah al-Layl 92:20). ⁵⁸
8.	Seeking only to gain His favour. (Sūrah al-An'ām 6:52). ⁵⁹
9.	Restrain yourself, together with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His pleasure. (Sūrah al-Kahf 18:28). ⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Dawood, *The Koran*, 359.

⁵¹ Dawood, *The Koran*, 362.

⁵² Dawood, *The Koran*, 11.

⁵³ Dawood, *The Koran*, 30.

⁵⁴ Dawood, *The Koran*, 166.

⁵⁵ Dawood, *The Koran*, 274.

⁵⁶ Dawood, *The Koran*, 274.

⁵⁷ Dawood, *The Koran*, 365.

⁵⁸ Dawood, *The Koran*, 416.

⁵⁹ Dawood, *The Koran*, 86.

⁶⁰ Dawood, *The Koran*, 194.

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| <p>10. We feed you for God's sake only; we seek of you neither recompense nor thanks. (Sūrah al-Insān 76:9).⁶¹</p> <p>11. There is no god but Him. All things shall perish except His Face. (Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ 28: 88).⁶²</p> |
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Source: Analysis based on N. J. Dawood's *The Koran* (2014 edition)

Table 4 below shows the verses related to the theme of *Istiḥwā'* (الإستِواء).

Table 4: *Istiḥwā'* (الإستِواء)

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| <p>1. He created for you all that the earth contains; then, ascending to the sky. (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2: 29).⁶³</p> <p>2. He then ascended the throne and pressed the sun and the moon into His service. (Sūrah al-Ra'd 13:2).⁶⁴</p> <p>3. The Merciful who sits enthroned on high. (Sūrah Tāhā 20: 5).⁶⁵</p> <p>4. In six days He created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them, and then ascended the throne. (Sūrah al-Furqān 25:59).⁶⁶</p> <p>5. Then, turning to the sky, which was but a cloud of vapour. (Sūrah Fuṣṣilāt 41:11).⁶⁷</p> <p>6. Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then ascended the throne. (Sūrah al-A'raf 7:54).⁶⁸</p> <p>7. Yet your Lord is God, who in six days created the heavens and the earth and then ascended the throne, ordaining all things. (Sūrah Yūnus 10:3).⁶⁹</p> |
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⁶¹ Dawood, *The Koran*, 401.

⁶² Dawood, *The Koran*, 260.

⁶³ Dawood, *The Koran*, 2.

⁶⁴ Dawood, *The Koran*, 165.

⁶⁵ Dawood, *The Koran*, 208.

⁶⁶ Dawood, *The Koran*, 242.

⁶⁷ Dawood, *The Koran*, 323.

⁶⁸ Dawood, *The Koran*, 102.

⁶⁹ Dawood, *The Koran*, 136.

8. It was God who in six days created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them, and then ascended the throne. (Sūrah al-Sajdah 32:4).⁷⁰
9. It was He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then seated Himself upon the throne. (Sūrah al-Ḥadīd 57:4).⁷¹

Source: Analysis based on N. J. Dawood's *The Koran* (2014 edition)

Table 5 below shows the verses related to the theme of *al-Majī'* (المجىء).

Table 5 : *al-Majī'* (المجىء)

1. and your Lord comes down with the angels, in their ranks. (Sūrah al-Fajr 89:22)⁷²

B- Indirect Interpretation

In this category, Dawood's interpretive approach extends beyond direct interpretations of the Quran. He reinterprets Quranic passages, which are originally devoid of anthropomorphic elements, by associating them with Biblical narratives that carry anthropomorphic elements. Such Biblical citations are meticulously provided in the footnotes. These Biblical references are systematically cited in the footnotes. Table 6 below shows the list of anthropomorphic indirect interpretations.

⁷⁰ Dawood, *The Koran*, 281.

⁷¹ Dawood, *The Koran*, 369.

⁷² Dawood, *The Koran*, 372.

Table 6 : List of Anthropomorphic Indirect Interpretations

1. (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:249)	The appointment of seventy companions of Prophet Moses
2. (Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt 51:24)	The story of the prophet Abraham’s guests

Source: Analysis based on N. J. Dawood’s *The Koran* (2014 edition)

Results and Discussion

Dawood’s translation reflects a clear tendency towards domestication as theorised by Lawrence Venuti. By prioritising reader accessibility over cultural authenticity, Dawood reconfigures the Quranic text to align more closely with Western biblical conventions. This can be seen in his rendering of *istiwā’* as “sits enthroned on high,” which anthropomorphises the divine in a manner typical of the *Old Testament*, thereby making the text more intelligible to Western readers at the cost of violating Islamic theological norms. The following table 7 illustrates how Dawood’s translation aligns with Venuti’s domestication strategy, in contrast to Muslim translators who use a foreignising approach.

Table 7: Comparative Application of Venuti’s Translation
Theory

Verse / Concept	Dawood’s Translation	Al-Hilali / Khan & Haleem	Venuti Strategy	Remarks
Sūrah al-Shūrā 42:11 – “Likeness”	Not emphasised in footnotes*	Preserved with explanatory notes*	Foreignization (others) *	Dawood omits clarifications that preserve divine transcendence
Sūrah Tāhā 20:5 – “Istiṭwā”	Sits enthroned on high	Rose over the Throne	Domestication	Adds imagery that resembles human posture
Sūrah Sād 38:75 – “Yad”	I created with my own hands	I have created with Both My Hands	Domestication	Loses theological specificity by using smaller lowercase
Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:115 – “Wajh”	There is the face of God	There is the Face of Allah	Domestication	Loses theological specificity by using smaller lowercase
Allah vs God	Consistently replaced	Maintains “Allah”	Domestication	Adapts for Western

*Dawood renders the clause quite literally (e.g., “*There is nothing like Him*”). However, he provides no footnote or gloss that helps a Western reader understand why this verse is the theological safeguard against attributing human form to God.

*Al-Hilali & Khan and Abdel Haleem keep the same wording and then add a brief explanatory note (e.g., “*This verse is cited by Muslim theologians to deny all anthropomorphism*; see also Q 6:103”). The note *foreignizes* the text by foregrounding an Islamic doctrinal concept (*tanzīh* = absolute transcendence) that has no exact equivalent in Biblical thought.

*Because those Muslim translators retain the Arabic theological nuance and explicitly flag its doctrinal weight, they are practicing foreignization: they leave the “foreign” concept (*tanzīh*, *bilā kayf*) visible and invite the target-language reader to adjust to it.

	“Allah” with “God”			readability, at risk of theological dilution
Sūrah al- Baqarah 2:249 & al- Dhāriyāt 51:24 – Anthropomor- phic Narratives in Footnotes	Referenced Biblical stories (e.g., Exodus)	Refer to classical tafsīr (e.g., Ibn Kathīr)	Domesticati on	Relies on external Judeo- Christian framework

Source: Comparison between Venuti’s Theory of Dawood
(2014) Al-Hilali & Khan (2009) & Haleem (2006)

Venuti criticises such strategies and attributes as ethnocentric violence. In Dawood’s case, the removal of Quranic foreignness not only distorts meaning but also imposes a Judeo-Christian worldview onto a distinctly Islamic epistemology. This aligns with Venuti’s concern that domestication privileges dominant cultures by rewriting foreign texts in familiar, comforting terms.

In contrast, Abdel Haleem, al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan adopt strategies closer to foreignisation, retaining theological terms like “Allah” or explaining “*Yadullāh*” through footnotes rather than rendering them into culturally equivalent but misleading expressions. These translations maintain theological integrity by respecting the Quran’s ontological distinctions, even if doing so makes the text more challenging for non-Muslim readers.

A fundamental principle of Islamic theology concerning God’s attributes is the rejection of anthropomorphism, corporeality, and personification. This argument is supported by the Quran, which emphasises the disembodiment of God and rejects any form of creature, as stated in Sūrah al-Shūrā 42: 11:

"The Creator of the heavens and the earth. He has made for you mates from yourselves, and for the cattle (also) mates. By this means He creates you (in the wombs). There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer."

In Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ 112: 4:

"And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him."⁷³

Dawood's approach to anthropomorphic interpretation can thus be divided into three different categories: A- interpretation with the method of *ithbāt*; B- interpretation with the method of *ta'wīl*; C- interpretation with a new approach. The details of each category might be concluded as follows:

A- Interpretation with The Method of *Ithbāt*

Of the total of 31 verses interpreted by Dawood, 9 correspond to the Salaf method of affirming the anthropomorphic attributes of God without distorting the meaning, while refraining from any interpretation or distortion, as stated in the Quran. This approach is similar to Salaf and that of Al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan in their translation.⁷⁴

However, this study identifies inconsistencies in Dawood's interpretations, particularly in his application of anthropomorphic terms. First, Dawood translates the word "hand" in Sūrah Āli 'Imrān 3:73. In this verse, he uses the plural form instead of the singular form, as evidenced by the following translation:

قُلْ إِنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

⁷³ Al-Quran, chapter 112, verse 4.

⁷⁴ Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'ah, '*Idāḥ al-Dalīl fī Qaṭ' Ḥujāj Ahl al-Ta'wīl*' (Beirut: Dār al-Salām, 1990), 1:40.

"Grace is in the hands of God."

Second, Dawood inconsistently applies capitalisation to divine pronouns and anthropomorphic terms. For example, in Sūrah Ṣād 38:75, he capitalises the subjective pronoun "I" in the verse, "*I created with My own hands*," but renders the possessive "*My own hands*" in lowercase, despite both referring to Allah in the form of *mutashābihāt*. This inconsistency suggests an uncertainty in Dawood between affirming divine agency, which is emphasised through "I", and avoiding literalism, which downplays "hands". As can be seen below:

قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقْتُ بِإَيْدِي

"Satan said, He, what prevented you from bowing to him whom I created with My own hands?"

In contrast, as shown above, in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ 28:88, Dawood uses capital letters for the possessive pronoun and the noun in a phrase that contains anthropomorphic description. This indicates that Dawood is inconsistent in presenting the correct interpretation. A translator of the Quran must uphold the core principles of Islamic theology and maintain consistency in translating key theological terms.

... كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ ...

"...All things shall perish except His Face..."

Comparing the *ithbāt* method of Dawood with the book *The Noble Quran* by Muhammad Taqiuddin Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, it appears that Dawood's interpretation offers a different context. Table 8 below shows the comparison between them.

Table 8: Comparison Between Dawood and Al-Hilali & Khan & Haleem

Verse	Issue	Dawood	Al-Hilali & Muhsin Khan
1. (Sūrah Āli ‘Imrān 3:73)	The Hand	Grace is in the hands of God.	All the bounty is in the Hand of Allah. ⁷⁵
2. (Sūrah al-Hadīd 57:29)		that grace is in His hands alone.	and that (His) Grace is (entirely) in His Hand. ⁷⁶
3. (Sūrah al-Fath 48:10)		The Hand of God is above their hands.	The Hand of Allah is over their hands. ⁷⁷
4. (Sūrah Ṣād 38:75)		I created with My own hands?	I have created with Both My Hands. ⁷⁸
1. (Sūrah Ṭahā 20:39)	The Eye	you might be reared under My eye.	that you may be brought up under My Eye. ⁷⁹
2. (Sūrah al-Qamar 54:14)		which drifted on under Our eyes.	Floating under Our Eyes. ⁸⁰
1. (Sūrah al-	The Face	Whichever way you turn, there	So, wherever you turn (yourselves or your faces) there is

⁷⁵ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 81.

⁷⁶ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 744.

⁷⁷ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 694.

⁷⁸ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 616.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 417.

⁸⁰ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 724.

Baqarah 2:115)	is the face of God.	the Face of Allah. ⁸¹
2. (Sūrah al- Raḥmān 55:27)	But the face of your Lord will abide forever.	And the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Honour, will remain forever. ⁸²
3. (Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ 28:88)	All things shall perish except His Face.	Everything will perish save His Face. ⁸³

Source: Comparison of Dawood (2014) & Al-Hilali & Khan (2009) & Haleem (2006)

B- Interpretation with the Method of *Ta'wīl*

This section examines Dawood's method of allegorical interpretation in *The Koran*. After a thorough analysis, it is found that Dawood applies the *ta'wīl* method in his book, thus revealing another unique feature of *The Koran*. It is learnt that there are seven anthropomorphic verses which Dawood presented are in accordance with the *ta'wīl* method. It is noticeable, however, that in five out of two verses, Dawood distances himself from others. This occurred in Sūrah al-Tūr 48, Sūrah al-Rūm: 39, Sūrah al-Insān: 9, Sūrah al-Layl: 20, Surah Fuṣṣilāt: 11 as follows. Table 9 below shows the comparison between Dawood and Abdel Haleem.

⁸¹ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 22.

⁸² Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 729.

⁸³ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 528.

Table 9: Comparison Between Dawood and Abdel Haleem

Verse	Issue	Dawood	Abdel Haleem
1. (Sūrah al-Ṭūr 52:48)	The Eye	you are ever in Our sight.	you are under Our watchful eye. ⁸⁴
2. (Sūrah Hūd 11:37)		Build the ark under Our watchful eyes.	Build the Ark under Our [watchful] eyes and with Our inspiration. ⁸⁵
3. (Sūrah al-Mu'min ūn 23:27)		Build the ark under Our watchful eye	'Build the Ark under Our watchful eye. ⁸⁶
1. (Sūrah Rūm 30:39)	The Face	but the alms you give for the love of God shall be repaid many times over.	but whatever you give in charity, in your desire for God's approval. ⁸⁷
2. (Sūrah al-Insān 76:9)		We feed you for God's sake only;	saying, 'We feed you for the sake of God alone. ⁸⁸
3. (Sūrah al-Layl 92:20)		for the sake of his Lord the Most High only,	but for the sake of his Lord the Most High. ⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Quran: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 346.

⁸⁵ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 138.

⁸⁶ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 216.

⁸⁷ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 259.

⁸⁸ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 401.

⁸⁹ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 424.

1. (Sūrah Fuṣṣilāt 41:11)	The Elevation	Then, turning to the sky,	Then He turned to the sky. ⁹⁰
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Source: Comparison of Dawood (2014), Haleem (2006)

C- False Interpretation

Of the thirty-one anthropomorphic verses in the Quran, there are eleven interpretations that could be categorised as going against the fundamental viewpoint of Islam. Table 10 below shows the false interpretation by Dawood.

Table 10: False Interpretation by Dawood

Verse	Issue	Dawood
1. (Sūrah al-Mā'idah 5:64)	The Hand	The Jews say: God's hand is chained.
1. (Sūrah al-Rūm 30:38)	The Face	That is best for those that strive to please God.
1. (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:29) 2. (Sūrah al-A'raf 7:54) 3. (Sūrah al-Ra'd 13:2) 4. (Sūrah Yūnus 10:3) 5. (Sūrah Tāhā 20:5)	The Elevation	then, ascending to the sky. and then ascended the throne. He then ascended the throne and pressed the sun and the moon into His service, and then ascended the throne. the Merciful who sits enthroned on high.

⁹⁰ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 301.

6. (Sūrah al-Furqān 25:59)		and then ascended the throne.
7. (Sūrah al-Sajdah 32:4)		and then ascended the throne.
8. (Sūrah al-Hadīd 57:4)		and then seated Himself upon the throne.
1. (Sūrah al-Fajr 89:22)	The Coming	"and your Lord comes down with the angels, in their ranks".

Source: Author's analysis based on N. J. Dawood's *The Koran* (2014 edition)

To further analyse the above table, this paper has divided the discussion point into four categories:

I- Confusing

There is in Sūrah al-Mā'idah 5:64, which, according to Dawood, seems to be confusing, as he interpreted "*The Jews say: 'God's hand is chained'*". According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, "*chained*" means to fasten, secure or confine with a chain.⁹¹ In contrast to Dawood, Muhsin Khan gave the interpretation "*The Jews say: Allah's Hand is tied up*"⁹² The word "tied" means to restrict someone's movement by binding their arms or legs or binding them to something.⁹³

At first glance, the interpretation presented by Dawood seems to agree with that of Muhsin Khan. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that Dawood's rendition is characterised by a higher degree of specificity

⁹¹ Angus Stevenson & Maurice Waite, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 234.

⁹² Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 155.

⁹³ Angus Stevenson & Maurice Waite, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1507.

and thus conveys a sense of exaggeration compared to Muhsin Khan's interpretation of "tied". Muhsin Khan explained that the Jews accused Allah of not blessing them and being stingy towards them.⁹⁴ The latter exemplifies the optimal understanding that emphasises a neutral approach in mentioning Allah's attribute. Moreover, Dawood has failed to provide additional explanation on the meaning of the verse, only to enlighten the readers on the perspective of the "*God's hand is chained*" mentioned in the verse.

II- Interpretation Contradicts Islamic Basic Fundamentals

One of the fundamental standpoints of Islamic creed is *Qiyāmuḥu bi Nafsiḥi*, which constitutes the self-subsistence of Allah that is being without a subject of inherence or individuator. Allah is the Self-Sustaining One whose existence needs nothing; He is self-existent and self-sufficient; everyone depends on Him. It is He who gives existence to every existing thing. He renounces everyone and everything, but no one can renounce Him. He is too exalted to be confined to places and is far above change. What happens to souls can never happen to Him.⁹⁵

However, we find this contradiction occurs in *The Koran* in Sūrah Rūm 30:39:

ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ...

...that is best for those that strive to please God.⁹⁶

Dawood interpreted *Wajh* as "to please God", which negates the omnipotence of Allah and reflects Allah's dependence on others, which is impossible for His divine attribute since He is the Creator of all creatures. Therefore, the interpretation of pleasing God is unacceptable, as He

⁹⁴ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 155.

⁹⁵ Al-Sanūsi, *Umm al-Barāhin*, 59.

⁹⁶ Dawood, *The Koran*, 274.

does not need anything to gain His omnipotent approval, as emphasised in Sūrah Fatir 35:15:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

“People, it is you who stand in need of God while God needs nothing and is worthy of all praise.”

The most appropriate interpretation for the above case, which aligns with the fundamental principles of Islamic theology and avoids any anthropomorphic misrepresentation it reflects the theological accuracy and consistency required to maintain the integrity of the divine attributes as described in the Quran, ensuring that the translation does not imply any human-like characteristics to Allah. Table 11 below shows the comparison between Dawood and Abdel Haleem, al-Hilali, and Muhsin Khan.

Table 11: Comparison Between Dawood and Abdel Haleem, al-Hilali, Muhsin Khan

M. A. S. Abdel Haleem	Al-Hilali, Muhsin Khan
that is best for those whose goal is God’s approval. ⁹⁷	That is best for those who seek Allah’s Countenance. ⁹⁸

Source: Comparison between Venuti’s Theory of Dawood (2014), Al-Hilali & Khan (2009) & Haleem (2006)

II- Interpretation that Carries *Tamthīl* (Resemblance) a) Ascending

The verb “ascended” is mentioned by Dawood in six verses that refer to Allah’s attribute of *al-istiwā’*. The use of the verb “ascended” is impossible for it resembles Allah’s attribute of creation, motion and movement, as “ascended”, as used by Dawood, gives the meaning of going up, climbing or rising.⁹⁹ Therefore, we are of the opinion that the term “ascended” appears explicitly and is exposed to a

⁹⁷ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 259.

⁹⁸ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 454.

⁹⁹ Angus & Maurice, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 75.

form of similarity that refers to the movement of similar creatures and humanistic.

Interpretations such as "establish" or "turn" used by Abdel Haleem are considered feasible and more in line with the interpretations of Ash'arite scholars as discussed by al-Rāzī, on the term "اسْتَعْلَى عَلَى الْمَلَكِ". Another aspect of acceptable interpretation is according to Muhsin Khan's version, which aligns the term "rose/rise" with the views of the Hanbalite scholars who discussed this issue.¹⁰⁰ Imam Al-Ṭabarī, for example, explained that the possible meaning of the term *istiwā'* can be interpreted as "عَلَا" and "ارْتَفَعَ".¹⁰¹

The verb may contain the connotation '*alā* for ascent to great heights, *istaqarrā* for proof and *irtafa'ā* for exaltation. The basic belief of Muslims is to accept and acknowledge in accordance with Allah's revelation that He holds a position above the Throne. Allah alone knows the true nature and essence of this attribute (*al-istawā'*), as Imam Malik astutely remarked: "*Istawā'* is known, but its actuality remains unrecognised".¹⁰² Therefore, the most appropriate translation in this context would be the description of ascension above the Throne.

Therefore, this study tends to agree with Haleem that the interpretation of *al-istiwā'* as "establish"¹⁰³ and "turn".¹⁰⁴

"Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and earth in six Days, then established Himself on the throne."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 14:122.

¹⁰¹ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, 2001), 16: 11.

¹⁰² Abū. 'Uthmān al-Ṣabūnī, *Aqīdah al-Salaf wa Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth*, ed. M. Ibn Shams al-Dīn (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1998), 2: 43.

¹⁰³ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 98.

¹⁰⁴ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Quran, chapter 7, verse 54.

"It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then turned to the sky and made the seven heavens; it is He who has knowledge of all things."¹⁰⁶

b) Lord Comes Down

Another problem that should be emphasised and that leads to misunderstandings in *The Koran* is the translation of the verb "come" by Dawood in Sūrah al-Fajr 89:22: "and your Lord comes down with the angels, in their ranks". Dawood misrepresented the meaning and misunderstood the Arabic reference to the phrase وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا as he added phrasal verb "comes down". This translation is clearly deviant and contradicts with core principle of Islam, in which the denial of Allah to any directional movement or any movement that resembles the activity of creation is firmly anchored. Furthermore, if we hold Dawood's translation of "comes down", it represents Allah's need for an element of direction and form, which is rejected by the basic teaching of Islam. The core belief of Islam is that the essence of Allah should be understood to transcend the concepts of substance and atom. Essentially, this encompasses all attributes commonly associated with substance and atom, including motion, form, colour, direction, space, shape, length, width, depth, feelings and various other aspects. It is important to note that Allah surpasses any kind of description. This concept is better known as *Mukhālafatuhu li al-Ḥawāḍith*.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, this study agrees with the translation by Haleem¹⁰⁸ and Al-Hilali¹⁰⁹, who translates the word only as "comes" without adding other phrasal adjectives.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Quran, chapter 2, verse 29.

¹⁰⁷ M. Rosder, *Asas Tauhid Pertumbuhan dan Huraianannya* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989), 25.

¹⁰⁸ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 421.

¹⁰⁹ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 835.

II- Interpretation that Carries the Element of *Tajsīm* (Personification)

This section examines the element of the personification of Allah in Dawood's interpretation of the anthropomorphic verses. There are some verses that have been translated with the sense of the personification and embodiment of Allah. This can be seen in Sūrah al-Ḥadīd 57:4 and Sūrah Ṭāhā 20:5 regarding the verb *al-istiwā*'. Dawood gave the meaning of the verbs as "sits enthroned on high" and "seated Himself upon the throne". At first glance, the translations seem unproblematic, until we realise that Dawood has added the expressions "enthroned" and "Himself", thus comparing Allah's attribute with humanistic characteristics. It is a denial of the notion that Allah is a *jawhar*, an indivisible particle, or possesses essential physical attributes such as form, shape, colour and composition. Furthermore, it is a rejection of the notion that Allah is an '*araḍ*, an accidental or coincidental being, or that his existence is dependent on others.¹¹⁰

This study emphasises that there is no way to describe *al-istiwā*', as mentioned earlier, that only Allah knows the meaning best. Perhaps Dawood should consider clarifying the meaning in an explanatory note to the verses as an alternative. This study provides another aspect of translation that perhaps fulfils the necessity of the verse as "rose over the throne", the confirmation of the position that fits Allah beyond human ability to comprehend.¹¹¹

Another aspect of the personification and embodiment of Allah can be found in indirect interpretation. First, upon commentary on Sūrah al-A'rāf 7:155, al-Bayḍāwī states that the Prophet Moses (PBUH) chose seventy men from among the Israelites to ascend Mount Sinai. During the

¹¹⁰ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Zayn al-Fāṭanī, *Farīdat al-Farā'id fī al-'Ilm al-'Aqā'id* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Ibn Ḥalabī, n.d.), 6.

¹¹¹ Muhammad Taqī & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 208.

journey, an earthquake shook the mountain, whereupon the Prophet Moses (PBUH) lamented to Allah, fearing for his safety and that of his people.¹¹² This verse is a continuation of Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:55, when the Israelites asked the Prophet Moses (PBUH) to ask Allah for His revelation. According to Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, the Israelites had asked the Prophet Moses (PBUH) to make Allah manifest before them shortly after they had realised that Allah had previously spoken to the Prophet Moses (PBUH). The trembling of the mountain was therefore a sign of Allah's anger towards the Israelites.¹¹³

With this Quranic narration, Dawood linked it to a reference from Exodus 24:9–11 which states that all the Israelites clearly saw the manifestation of the Lord as Bible following verse;¹¹⁴

“9. Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up. 10. and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. 11. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.”

The above biblical text is explicit evidence of an anthropomorphic element, depicting God as standing with feet on an object while personifying God as having a raised hand.¹¹⁵ Without further explanation, Dawood associated this biblical narrative with Sūrah al-A'raf 7:155.

¹¹² Nāsir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1998), 4: 36.

¹¹³ Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005) 4:58.

¹¹⁴ Holman Bible Publishers, *The Holy Bible: Christian Standard Bible (CSB), Pew Bible, 2nd Printing* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 68.

¹¹⁵ Bernd Janowski, *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*, trans. Armin Siedlecki (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 86-90.

Secondly, in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt 51:24, Dawood associated the story of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) with Genesis 18:1-9. The Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt 51:24 tells a story of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) received extraordinary visitors sent by Allah to convey to him a message about the birth of Prophet Ishaq (PBUH) and the calamity for the people of Sodom.¹¹⁶ According to Ibn Kathīr, these visitors were Jibril PBUH, Mikail (PBUH) and Israfil (PBUH) who met with the Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) to give him the news.¹¹⁷

However, the difference between Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt 51:24 and Genesis 18:1-9, in which Dawood has attempted to link this verse to the biblical narrative, is that the account in the Old Testament is ambiguous, as the biblical text mentions that the number of extraordinary visitors who came to his house was three. The only clear difference is that the biblical text explicitly states that God himself visited the household of the prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) and was accompanied by two angels.¹¹⁸

Given this fact, the study finds that Dawood failed to understand the principles of divinity firmly rooted in Islamic teachings as far as the debate on anthropomorphism within the Islamic faith is concerned. To summarise, Dawood's attempts actually highlight the negative aspects of the *Old Testament* itself. Upon closer examination, one finds that the concept of anthropomorphism occurs in the stories of interaction or communication processes between God and his creatures, which seem to be not only limited to his messengers, but also to the ordinary men, such as seventy elders who also have the privilege of speaking directly to their God and seeing Him. It is learnt that this

¹¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 7:35.

¹¹⁷ 'Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Aẓīm* (Giza: Maktabat Awlād al-Shaykh li al-Turāth, 2000).

¹¹⁸ H. Sadia et al., "Prophet Lot (Lūṭ) in the Bible and the Holy Quran," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business* 3(8) (2011), 1030.

anthropomorphic characteristic embedded within the *Bible* has rooted from its compilation through a group of scribes known as Yahwists.¹¹⁹ It is assumed that the Yahwists movement was active around the seventh century BC, based on the tendencies within this movement, which was influenced by Near Eastern culture as well as Persia and Babylon.¹²⁰

In contrast to Islam, the concept of anthropomorphism is completely unacceptable in Islam. The evidence from the Quran rejects any resemblance of Allah to his creatures. In fact, anthropomorphism can affect a Muslim's faith if he explicitly recognises certain forms and shapes associated with the divinity of Allah.¹²¹

C-Interpretation with New Approach


The forthcoming outlook presents a new approach by Dawood, which is considered unique. This was done in the interpretation of an anthropomorphic description "الْوَجْهُ" in which Dawood differed from other interpretations. Unlike other interpretations, Dawood's method demonstrates allegorical elements, which this study finds both interesting and consistent with Islamic theological principles. To show the differences and similarities in these interpretations, Table 12 below compares Dawood's translation with those of Abdel Haleem, al-Hilali, and Muhsin Khan.

¹¹⁹ David L. Peterson, "The Yahwist on the Flood," *Vetus Testamentum* 26(4) (1976): 438–446, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1517011>, 442.

¹²⁰ Levin, C. "The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125(2) (2007), 214-217, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27638432>,

¹²¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, 51.

Table 12: Comparison Between Dawood and Abdel Haleem, al-Hilali, Muhsin Khan

Verse	Issue	Dawood	M. A. S. Abdel Haleem	Al-Hilali, Muhsin Khan
1) (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:272)		you give them for the love of God.	provided you do it for the sake of God. ¹²²	when you spend not except seeking Allah's Countenance. ¹²³
2) (Sūrah al-An'ām 6:52)		seeking only to gain His favour.	Seeking nothing but His Face. (Haleem, 2016) ¹²⁴	seeking His Face. (Al-Hilali, 2009) ¹²⁵
3) (Sūrah al-Ra'd 13:22)		who for the sake of God endure with fortitude.	who remain steadfast through their desire for the face of their Lord. (Haleem, 2016) ¹²⁶	And those who remain patient, seeking their Lord's Countenance. (Al-Hilali, 2009) ¹²⁷

¹²² Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 31.

¹²³ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 61.

¹²⁴ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 83.

¹²⁵ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 177.

¹²⁶ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 155.

¹²⁷ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 324.

4) (Sūrah al-Kahfī 18:28)		seeking His pleasure.	seeking His approval. (Haleem, 2016) ¹²⁸	seeking His Face. (Al-Hilali, 2009) ¹²⁹
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Source: Comparison between Venuti's Theory of Dawood (2014), Al-Hilali & Khan (2009) & Haleem (2006)

Conclusion

The contributions of Jewish Orientalists to Quranic studies should play an important role in promoting harmony and tolerance by providing diverse perspectives that promote understanding and dialogue between different cultures and faiths. This engagement ultimately promotes a more nuanced appreciation of the Quran and its teachings within a global context. Dawood, as an orientalist, approached the Quran through a lens influenced by his own theological background. His translation, *The Koran*, reflects theological tendencies that, in several instances, have led to misrepresentations of core Islamic principles. This is evident in his approach to anthropomorphic verses, where his interpretations appear to be shaped by his religious perspective rather than by established Islamic exegetical traditions.

The analysis reveals that Dawood based his translation of the Quran solely on the Quran, without referring to other credible sources in Islam, which include the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Muslim scholars. This leads Dawood to misunderstand the Quran and present an incorrect interpretation of the verses. The lack of engagement with classical Islamic sources has led to misrepresentations of Islamic theological principles in Dawood's translation. The important point of this study is that Dawood has misrepresented the basic tenets of Islam,

¹²⁸ Muhammad, *The Quran: A New Translation*, 185.

¹²⁹ Muhammad Taqi & Muhammad Muhsin, *Translation of Meanings of the Noble Quran*, 389.

which are the creed of Islam, thereby allowing his religious influence on the study of the Quran to shine through. This study highlights the theological influences shaping Dawood's translation of anthropomorphic verses in *The Koran*. While his translation has achieved widespread readership, it exhibits inconsistencies and misrepresentations that contradict Islamic teachings.¹³⁰

The findings suggest that Dawood's neglect of Islamic exegetical traditions contributed to these inaccuracies. Future research should explore how Quranic translation can maintain theological accuracy while making the text accessible to a global audience. Additionally, the role of interfaith engagement in Quranic studies should be further examined to ensure that translations do not unintentionally misrepresent Islamic beliefs. In conclusion, interfaith through cross-religion discourse should be able to promote harmony if it is free of religious motives and focuses on shared values and common goals.¹³¹ This shows the potential for peaceful coexistence between these two Abrahamic religions. As Allah emphasises in Sūrah Āli 'Imrān 3:64: Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah. But if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims."

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¹³¹ Ungaran Rashid et al., "The Concept of Peace in The Bible and The Quran: A Comparative Study," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 22(2) (2020), 239.

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