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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Applicability of Nord's Loyalty Principle in Quran Translation: A Critical Examination

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| **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the application of the loyalty principle within Skopos Theory in the translation of the Holy Quran. Skopos Theory prioritizes the purpose of the translation, emphasizing how the intended function in the target context should guide the translator's choices, while still requiring respect for the original text. However, translating the Quran presents unique challenges because it is a sacred text with an unchanging divine message that must be carefully preserved. Any changes to the text risk altering its original meaning and religious significance. The study compares several Quran translations to examine how translators demonstrate different types of loyalty. Some focus on literal accuracy, others on spiritual meaning, and some prioritize conveying broader religious concepts. These different approaches affect how readers understand the Quran's message. The findings suggest that the loyalty principle is useful for Quran translation only if translators maintain a high degree of faithfulness to the original text. Translators need to protect the sacredness of the Quran while also making its teachings clear and accessible to modern readers. Balancing these goals is essential for preserving both the theological meaning and ensuring effective communication. This research concludes that a careful and thoughtful application of loyalty can guide translators in producing Quran translations that both respect the source text and meet the needs of today's audience.

1. Introduction

In translation studies, the relationship between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) has been a central subject of scholarly debate, with perspectives evolving across historical periods and cultural contexts. Traditional approaches generally emphasized fidelity and equivalence, focusing on reproducing the linguistic form and content of the original as closely as possible. However, with the emergence of functionalist theories in the late 20th century, the emphasis shifted toward the purpose of the translation as the primary criterion for making translational decisions (Vermeer, 1989). Among these, Skopos Theory redefined translation as a purposeful act of intercultural communication, where the intended function of the target text in its specific context determines the strategies and methods used.

Within this functionalist framework, Christiane Nord (1989) introduced the concept of loyalty, which marked an important ethical turn in translation theory. Unlike fidelity—which is primarily concerned with the technical correspondence between the source and target texts—loyalty addresses the translator's social and moral responsibilities toward all parties involved in the translational act. As Nord (1997) explains, "loyalty commits the translator bilaterally to the source and the target sides" (p. 125). This principle avoids the domination of one culture over another by framing the translator as a mediator who ensures that the communicative intent of the original is preserved while adapting it to the expectations, needs, and norms of the target audience.

Loyalty is particularly valuable for many text types because it fosters trust between the source-text author, the client or initiator, and the target audience. In literary works, for instance, it helps preserve the author's voice and style while enabling cultural accessibility. In technical and legal texts, it ensures that essential information is transferred accurately without compromising

usability or clarity in the target context. In all these fields, the concept of loyalty helps maintain respect for the original text while meeting the audience's needs, leading to translations that are both effective and ethical.

However, when applied to religious texts—especially the Quran—loyalty demands exceptionally careful treatment. From a Muslim perspective, the Quran is not merely a literary or historical document but the eternal, unalterable word of Allah, revealed in Arabic and considered inimitable. Consequently, any translation is regarded only as an interpretation, never as a replacement for the original. This theological reality imposes clear limits on how far a translator can adapt the text to meet the communicative needs of a particular audience. It also raises critical questions: Can Nord's principle of loyalty be fully reconciled with the divine obligations of Quran translation? Should loyalty in this context be equally directed toward the target audience and the divine source, or must priority be given to the latter?

As Stewart (2000) notes, "translators of sacred texts tend to adhere more closely to the original than translators of other types of compositions" (p. 33). Yet within Quran translation itself, approaches vary considerably. Some translators adopt a literalist stance to preserve the style, rhythm, and linguistic features of the original Arabic, reflecting a desire to maintain its distinctive character. Others prioritize accessibility and clarity, sometimes including explanatory notes or religious commentary to ensure that the intended meaning is understood by readers unfamiliar with Islamic tradition. These differing strategies reveal the complexity of applying loyalty in a context where both the theological integrity and the communicative function of the translation are at stake.

This article critically investigates whether Nord's loyalty principle, as framed within Skopos Theory, can be meaningfully applied to Quran translation. It begins by unpacking the theoretical basis of Skopos theory and the loyalty principle and its role in reshaping ethical engagement in translation practice. It then examines the specific linguistic, cultural, and theological challenges of translating the Quran, identifying points where the principle of loyalty aligns with, or comes into tension with, Islamic views on the preservation of divine revelation. Ultimately, the study argues for a nuanced application of loyalty—one that safeguards the sacredness of the Quran while enabling its message to be communicated clearly and appropriately to diverse audiences.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The translation of the Quran poses significant challenges due to its sacred status, theological significance, and linguistic uniqueness. While functionalist approaches like Skopos Theory allow flexibility by prioritizing the purpose of translation, they may conflict with the religious constraints of rendering divine texts. Nord's loyalty principle introduces an ethical dimension that requires translators to act responsibly toward all stakeholders in the translation process. However, it remains unclear whether this concept, originally developed for general translation contexts, can be applied to a sacred text such as the Quran. In Quran translation, the translator's primary responsibility is traditionally to preserve the divine message rather than adapt it to target audience expectations. This raises a critical question: Can the loyalty principle, which seeks balance between source and target cultures, be meaningfully and ethically applied to Quran translation?

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically evaluate the applicability of Nord's loyalty principle, as formulated in Skopos Theory, to the translation of the Quran. It aims to explore how this principle could guide translators in fulfilling their responsibilities toward the divine source, the initiators of translation, and the target audience. By examining how loyalty is interpreted and manifested in Quran translation practices, the study seeks to contribute to the broader debate on translation ethics, particularly in the context of Quran translation.

1.3 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:
1. To what extent is the loyalty principle, as proposed in Skopos Theory, compatible with the theological and ethical requirements of Quran translation?
2. How do Quran translators interpret and prioritize loyalty in their translation strategies, especially when balancing accuracy with audience accessibility?
3. What are the implications of applying—or rejecting—the loyalty principle for the ethical role of the translator in rendering the meanings of the Quran?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Quran Translation

The Quran holds a unique and revered position in Islamic tradition, as it is regarded not merely as a holy book, but as the literal word of ALLAH revealed to the Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him). As Darir (2007) affirms, "the Quran is a comprehensive book of call to the divine message, guidance, wisdom, invocations and law that is meant for the whole mankind from the time of its revelation to the end of time" (p. 52). In addition to its divine status, the Quran is also recognized for its exceptional linguistic and stylistic features. Hassan Mustapha (1998) underscores this by stating that "linguistically and stylistically, the Quran is the masterpiece of the Arabic language. Its grammatical structure, for instance, is specific to it and in many ways different from the grammatical structure of non-Quranic" (p. 200). This dual nature—as both a divine guide and a linguistic miracle—makes its translation into other languages an extraordinary challenge.

Unlike most religious or literary texts, the Quran's language is an essential component of its miraculous character, referred to in Islamic theology as iʿjāz. The richness of its rhetorical devices, rhythm, and eloquence are inseparable from its Arabic form. Abdel Haleem (1999) notes that "the Quran has a distinct style and noble grandeur that immediately sets it apart from other speech, and which Arabs, Muslims, and non-Muslims recognize" (pp. 8–9). Similarly, Saeed (2008) observes that the Quran's unique style "juxtaposes passages of poetic beauty with detailed prescription on seemingly mundane matters of family life, and can thus be difficult to follow" (p. xiv). These stylistic complexities, embedded deeply in the source language, pose significant challenges to translators who must preserve not just meaning but also tone, impact, and reverence.

Translating the Quran is not merely a linguistic exercise—it is a profound intercultural and interreligious task. The Quran serves as a source of theology, law, ethics, and spiritual guidance. For Muslims, its Arabic form is considered inimitable and divinely protected. As a result, many scholars assert that the Quran is ultimately untranslatable in the fullest sense. Nevertheless, translations remain essential for non-Arabic-speaking Muslims and those outside the faith who seek to understand its message. As Abdul Raof (2001) asserts, "the message of the Quran cannot be disseminated without translating its language and culture to other languages and cultures" (p. 137). This need for accessibility raises complex ethical and methodological questions for the translator.

One major challenge in Quran translation stems from the profound linguistic and cultural differences between classical Arabic and the target languages. The Quranic message was revealed in a 7th-century Arabian context, and many of its expressions are rooted in that specific historical and cultural setting. Words such as taqwā (piety) and ṣalāh (prayer) carry layered religious and spiritual meanings that resist simple equivalence. Translating these terms requires more than lexical accuracy; it demands a sensitive engagement with their cultural and religious resonance. Without such care, the translation risks distorting the intended meaning or stripping the text of its depth.

The challenges inherent in translating the Quran have prompted scholars to seek theoretical frameworks capable of addressing both its linguistic complexity and sacred nature. Among the various translation theories, Skopos Theory emerges as a promising approach due to its emphasis on the purpose of translation and the ethical responsibilities of the translator. Within this framework, the principle of loyalty plays a key role, offering a moral lens through which translators can navigate the demands of preserving the divine message while ensuring accessibility for diverse audiences. This concept, which redefines the translator's ethical engagement, will be explored in detail in the following section.

2.2 Skopos Theory: Pioneers and Principles

Translation studies underwent a significant paradigm shift in the late 20th century, moving away from traditional linguistic and equivalence-based models toward more functionalist and socio-cultural approaches. Earlier theories often focused on achieving word-for-word or sense-for-sense fidelity between the source text and the target text. However, this static view of translation was increasingly seen as inadequate for addressing the complexities of real-world translation tasks. In this regard, Hans J. Vermeer (1987) asserts that "translation problems cannot be solved depending on linguistics alone" (p. 29). Therefore, he abandoned the equivalence theory and laid the foundation of functional theory; Skopos theory, in 1978. Nord (1997) declares that "his (Vermeer) desire to break with linguistic translation theory developed from work published in 1976 and became very clear in his 'Framework for a General Translation Theory' of 1978" (p. 10).

In this respect, Munday (2001) points out that "the 1970s and 1980s saw a move away from the static linguistic typologies of translation shifts and the emergence and flourishing in Germany of a functionalist and communicative approach to the analysis of translation" (p. 72). Similarly, Schäffner (2009) notes, "the theories developed by Hans J. Vermeer (1978) and Justa Holz-Mänttäri (1984) reflect a paradigm shift from predominantly linguistic approaches and rather formal translation theories, firmly

situated within the framework of applied and comparative linguistics, to a more functionally and socio-culturally oriented concept of translation" (p. 116). House (2015) also observes that "in the 1980s, following the 'pragmatic turn' in linguistics, the functionalist paradigm shifted the focus of translation studies towards a consideration of the extralinguistic setting of translation" (p. 11).

Edwin Gentzler (2001) summarizes these developments as a double shift: "the shift from source-text oriented theories to target-text oriented theories and the shift to include cultural factors as well as linguistic elements in the translation training models" (p. 70). This broader cultural and functional perspective laid the foundation for the emergence of Skopos Theory, which would become one of the most influential frameworks in functionalist translation studies.

Skopos Theory, introduced by Hans J. Vermeer in the late 1970s, redefined translation as a purposeful, goal-oriented action embedded in specific cultural and communicative contexts. Vermeer (1983) views "translation to be a type of transfer where communicative verbal and non-verbal signs are transferred from one language into another" (p. 49). Since he regarded human actions as inherently intentional, he argued that translation must also be understood as an intentional human action. Vermeer (1989) elaborates: "Any form of translational action, including therefore translation itself, may be conceived as an action, as the name implies. Any action has an aim, a purpose. […] The word skopos, then, is a technical term for the aim or purpose of a translation. […] Further: an action leads to a result, a new situation or event, and possibly to a 'new' object" (p. 173).

Functionalism as a broader paradigm was shaped by several key scholars, notably Katharina Reiss, Hans J. Vermeer, Justa Holz-Mänttäri, and later Christiane Nord. Munday (2001) highlights their contributions, noting that the German School of functionalist translation includes "Katharina Reiss (1971/88) and the functional category of translation criticism, Hans J. Vermeer (1984): Skopostheorie and beyond, Justa Holz-Manttari (1984) and the theory of translational action, and Christiane Nord's Function plus Loyalty Principle (1988/1997)" (p. 71). Holz-Mänttäri (1984) in particular introduced the concept of translatorial action, framing translation as expert intercultural communication rather than a purely linguistic transfer.

The central concept of Skopos Theory is the Greek term skopos, meaning "purpose" or "aim." As Nord (1997) explains, "according to Skopostheorie, the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (Skopos) of the overall translational action" (p. 27). Vermeer (1989) insists that what matters most in translation is not rigid adherence to the form of the source text but the achievement of the intended purpose in the target culture. Reiss and Vermeer (1984) formalized Skopos Theory through six rules:

> *(1) a translatum (TT) is determined by its skopos, which dictates the translation strategies and methods used*
> *(2) the TT is an offer of information in the target culture, related to an offer of information in the source culture*
> *(3) the function of the TT may not necessarily match that of the ST*
> *(4) the TT must be coherent and understandable for its target audience*
> *(5) the TT must maintain a degree of coherence with the ST, respecting the content and meaning*
> *(6) these rules stand in a hierarchy, with the Skopos rule having the highest priority (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984, cited in Munday, 2001, p. 80).*

While Skopos Theory grants translators considerable freedom to adapt texts according to the intended purpose, Christiane Nord identified the need for an ethical constraint to prevent excessive deviation from the source text. To address this, she introduced the principle of loyalty, which she defines as a moral obligation toward all participants in the communicative act: the source-text author, the initiator of the translation, the target audience, and the translator. Unlike fidelity, which focuses on technical equivalence between texts, loyalty emphasizes respect for the intentions and expectations of all parties involved. As Nord (2005) explains, loyalty is "a moral principle indispensable in the relationships between human beings, who are partners in a communication process" (p. 32). In line with the objectives of this article, the next section will examine how this principle can be applied—or challenged—when translating the Quran.

2.3 The Loyalty Principle in Skopos Theory and Quran Translation

Loyalty, as a multi-dimensional concept, has been interpreted across disciplines in diverse ways. In translation studies, its significance has been emphasized particularly within the framework of Skopos Theory, where it serves not as a synonym for fidelity but as an ethical guideline governing the translator's role.

The Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2025) defines loyalty as "the quality of being faithful in your support of someone or something." Translating this into the domain of translation theory, Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) note that loyalty, as conceptualized by Nord (1991), refers to "the attitude which should ideally characterize the translator's relationship to the ST author and sender,

and the TT reader" (p. 98). Nord emphasizes that loyalty involves ethical responsibility—not just to texts, but to people involved in the translation process. This perspective marks a departure from earlier notions of fidelity, which focus primarily on textual equivalence.

In explaining the ethical imperative behind loyalty, Nord (1997) argues that "translators must take these expectations into account," referring to the varying needs and assumptions of readers in different cultural contexts (p. 125). However, this awareness does not license translators to simply comply with target audience expectations. Rather, as Nord puts it, "there is a moral responsibility not to deceive them" (1997, p. 125). This duty extends bilaterally—to the source-text producer and the target-text receiver. Thus, loyalty is "an interpersonal category referring to a social relationship between people" (Nord, 1997, p. 125).

To further differentiate between loyalty and fidelity, Nord (1991) clarifies that loyalty is "a moral principle indispensable in the relationships between human beings, who are partners in a communication process," whereas fidelity is "a rather technical relationship between two texts" (p. 29). In cultures where target readers assume that the translation reflects the author's intent, the translator must respect this assumption and clearly signal any shift in function, thereby maintaining ethical transparency. Pym (2010) supports this interpretation by stating that Nord introduced loyalty "to add a prescriptive dimension" to the translator's role, insisting that translators are ethically bound to "senders, clients, and receivers, all of whom merit the translator's 'loyalty'" (p. 55). Loyalty, therefore, places the translator within a web of human relationships, where every decision potentially affects the trust and understanding between cultures.

In the translation of sacred texts—especially the Holy Quran—ethical responsibility takes on even greater significance. The Quran's divine origin and linguistic inimitability (iʿjāz) require translators to navigate profound religious, cultural, and stylistic complexities. A translation of the Quran is not a simple transfer of words; it is an act of cultural, doctrinal, and spiritual mediation. In this context, loyalty extends beyond fidelity to the sacred source text. It also encompasses responsibility toward the target audience, who may not share the linguistic or religious background of the original. This means preserving the sacredness and message of the Quran while communicating its teachings in a way that is meaningful and accessible.

In practice, loyalty in Quran translation is a balancing act—maintaining doctrinal integrity while ensuring comprehension for the reader. It avoids imposing one culture on another, instead building a respectful bridge between them. In this way, loyalty becomes not only a methodological principle but also an ethical compass, guiding translators in the delicate task of rendering a text of such immense spiritual and cultural weight.

3. Methodology
3.1 Methodology of Research

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive-descriptive approach centered on exploring the loyalty principle as a key ethical concept in Skopos Theory applied to Quranic translation. The research investigates how translators fulfill their moral responsibility to both the sacred source text and the target audience, balancing respect for the original message with the communicative needs of diverse readers. By focusing on loyalty, the study examines how translation decisions reflect the translator's role as an ethical mediator between cultures, texts, and communities.

3.2 Data Collection

This study focuses on a single Quranic verse, Al-Baqarah (2:176), which falls within the thematic domain of belief (al-ʿaqīda)—a domain where the principle of loyalty plays a crucial role. Four English translations of this verse, produced by Sale (1734), Yusuf Ali (1934), Arberry (1955), and Muhammad Asad (1980), were selected to represent a variety of historical periods and translational approaches. The analysis investigates how each translator interprets and applies loyalty, both to the original Quranic message and to the target readership, while navigating cultural, linguistic, and theological challenges. Particular attention is given to the preservation of the text's sacredness and communicative function.

4. Data Analysis

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ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ لَفِي **شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ**

(البقرة : 176)

Dhaālika bi'anna alllaha nazzala alkitāba biālḥaqqi ۗ wa'inna alladhīna akhtalafuwā fī alkitābi lafī shiqāqin ba'īdinu

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Yusuf Ali	Asad	Arberry	Sale
"(their doom is) because Allah sent down the book in truth but those who seek causes of dispute in the book are in a **schism far (from the purpose)**" (p. 70)	"Thus it is : since it is God who bestows the divine writ from on high, setting forth the truth, all those who set their own views against the divine writ are, verily, most **deeply in the wrong.**" (p. 69)	"That, because God has sent down the Book with the truth; and those that are at variance regarding the Book are **in wide schism.**" (p. 28)	"This they shall endure, because GOD sent down the book of the Koran with truth, and they who disagree concerning that book are certainly **in a wide mistake**. " (p. 18)

The collocation "Shiqāqin Baʿīd" is a striking Quranic expression that conveys both rhetorical power and profound religious significance. The noun shiqāq denotes division, opposition, or conflict, while the adjective baʿīd intensifies the sense of distance—implying being far removed from truth or righteousness. This combination is challenging to render into English while preserving both its semantic depth and stylistic elegance. The translations of Yusuf Ali, Arberry, Sale, and Muhammad Asad illustrate differing strategies, each reflecting a distinct interpretation of loyalty to the source text's meaning and form.

Translation assessment of (2:176)

Yusuf Ali translates the phrase as "schism far (from the purpose)." While he preserves the noun + adjective pattern of the original Arabic, the construction is unnatural in English and does not reflect common collocational patterns. To address this awkwardness, he adds "(from the purpose)" as an explanatory note. Although this clarifies the meaning, it disrupts the concise style of the verse. His rendering demonstrates loyalty to the form of the source text but sacrifices fluency and cohesion in the target language, which in turn affects readability and rhetorical impact.

Arberry renders the collocation as "wide schism." His choice aligns more closely with natural English syntax, following the adjective + noun order. While "wide" does not fully convey the sense of being far astray implied by baʿīd, Arberry's version is smoother and more accessible to English readers. His translation reflects an effort to balance loyalty to meaning with natural language flow. However, the semantic force of the Arabic expression is somewhat diminished, as "wide" suggests spatial breadth rather than moral or spiritual deviation.

Sale translates the phrase as "wide mistake," which is problematic both linguistically and semantically. The word "mistake" trivializes the gravity of shiqāq, which refers to serious opposition or schism rather than a mere error. Moreover, "wide" is not a natural collocate for "mistake," making the expression awkward and misleading. Sale's version fails to capture the theological weight of the term and shows a lack of loyalty to both the meaning and stylistic tone of the original.

Muhammad Asad adopts a different approach, paraphrasing the phrase as "are, verily, most deeply in the wrong." By choosing paraphrase over a direct collocational equivalent, Asad prioritizes conveying the underlying sense of error and deviation rather than replicating the form. His rendering is semantically accurate and easily understood, yet it sacrifices the compact and emphatic rhythm of the Arabic collocation. While loyal to the message, it loses some of the aesthetic and rhetorical resonance of the source text.

From a comparative perspective, each translator negotiates loyalty differently. Yusuf Ali emphasizes formal fidelity but struggles with naturalness; Arberry strikes a middle ground by prioritizing readability; Sale lacks both semantic and stylistic precision; and Asad privileges conceptual clarity at the expense of form. This variation underscores the inherent challenge of preserving both meaning and style in translating Quranic collocations.

The analysis demonstrates that loyalty in translation involves more than literal adherence—it requires faithfully preserving the semantic weight and rhetorical force of the original while producing a natural and coherent target text. Among the examined versions, Arberry's "wide schism" is the most structurally fluent, while Asad's paraphrase is the most semantically accurate. Yusuf Ali's and Sale's translations, however, show how either excessive literalism or unsuitable word choice can obscure meaning and

disrupt cohesion. An ideal rendering of "Shiqāqin Baʿīd" would combine Arberry's natural structure with Asad's semantic precision, achieving both fidelity and readability.

Findings

The analysis of the translation of "Shiqāqin Baʿīd" reveals that each translator negotiates the principle of loyalty differently, affecting both clarity and faithfulness. Yusuf Ali maintains the original Arabic structure, showing loyalty to the form of the source text, yet sacrifices naturalness in English, resulting in awkward phrasing. This approach partially aligns with Nord's definition of loyalty, as it respects the source-text author's intent but does not adequately address the target audience's need for fluency. Arberry balances fidelity to meaning with readability, demonstrating greater adherence to Nord's concept by respecting both semantic accuracy and reader accessibility, though some of the moral and rhetorical intensity is softened. Sale appears loyal neither to the theological weight of the term nor to stylistic appropriateness, falling short of Nord's ethical requirement to honor all participants in the communicative act. Muhammad Asad prioritizes conceptual clarity and audience comprehension, fulfilling part of Nord's principle, but his paraphrasing neglects the compactness and rhetorical elegance valued by the source-text author. In translating Quranic collocations such as "Shiqāqin Baʿīd", loyalty should encompass theological accuracy, rhetorical force, semantic precision, and readability, while safeguarding the sacred and authoritative nature of the divine message.

Suggestions for Holy Quran Translators:

- Balance loyalty to the source-text author's intent with clarity and accessibility for the target audience.
- Avoid literalism that prioritizes form over meaning and audience comprehension.
- Choose target-language collocations that preserve the source's divine weight and rhetorical force.
- Use paraphrasing only when it maintains both meaning and stylistic effect.
- Honour multi-directional loyalty by consulting linguistic and religious experts.

Conclusion

Skopos theory emphasizes the principle of loyalty, which requires translators to honor both the source text and the expectations of the target audience. This flexibility allows adaptation to specific purposes, which is useful for many types of texts. However, applying it to the Holy Quran presents serious challenges. The Quran's divine message is unchanging and carries profound religious significance that must be preserved. Modifying the text to suit the target audience risks distorting its original meaning. Within Skopos theory, loyalty can guide Quran translation if it is strictly upheld toward the source text, given the Quran's essential religious duties, commandments, and meanings. Translators may demonstrate different kinds of loyalty: to the exact wording, to the spiritual essence, or to broader concepts beyond the text. These varying approaches can affect the intended message. Nevertheless, loyalty remains valuable for Quran translation as long as the translator preserves the sacred nature of the text while making its religious content accessible and understandable to the target audience.

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