In its polemics against aspects of Jewish and Christian anthropomorphism (God’s omnipotence and moral perfection, divine filiation), the Qur’an strives to construct a negative theology of its own. Yet, some verses, when taken at face value, seem to contradict the new Islamic message.

Thus, when approached linguistically - and not theologically or through modern translations - , some segments in verses like Q 43:84 read “And it is He who in heaven is a god and in earth is a god”. We also learn in Q 33:57, that God curses “those who hurt God and his Prophet”, while another potentially embarrassing passage in Q 66:12 –“and We blew into it/him”–, might suggest that God breathed directly into Mary’s private parts. Such semantic possibilities were evidently discarded.

In examining this category of delicate verses, I will show that: 1) they are rare or unique in their formulation; 2) given their distinctiveness both in form and meaning, some early manuscripts exhibit corrected scribal errors associated with some of these unusual verses; 3) to avoid embarrassment in Q 66:12, the explanation provided by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān in his Tafsir contains an unnoticed Biblical element that can be traced back to the Protoevangelium of James.

I shall also briefly consider the opposite phenomenon where semantic avoidance prevents the formation of specific themes and motifs (accusatory laments, God’s repentance). As a case study, I will argue that the Prophet’s saying mentioning “the dog returning to his vomit” is reminiscent of Prov 26:11 and 2 Pet 2:22. It is to be found within the hadith genre only, for reasons analogous to those that motivated the pious rewriting of Jesus’ threat of vomiting the lukewarm in Codex Sinaiticus: to avoid inappropriate expressions of the divine.