

Chapter 1

Julia Snyder, “Introduction: scripture and violence – is there a bomb in this text?”

Introduction

This is a discussion guide for Julia Snyder’s chapter in Julia Snyder and Daniel H. Weiss (eds.) (2021). *Scripture and Violence*. London: Routledge.

Summary of Chapter

Snyder’s chapter briefly surveys some of the many topics that need to be addressed if one wants to think seriously about “scripture and violence.” She first makes general comments about “violence.” What is it? Is it something “religious” communities have a unique responsibility to address? She then explores some questions more specifically about “scripture and violence.” What role do passages from the Bible and the Qur’an play in motivating or justifying violence in the world today? What is involved in interpreting and applying scriptural texts? And what leads people to think or say that those who consider certain scriptures “sacred” might be more inclined to violence – or less inclined to violence – than others? Snyder also introduces the other chapters in the book.

Understanding the Argument

As you read Snyder’s chapter, answer the following questions. These questions are designed to help you understand her argument.

1. Snyder argues that it is better not to use the term “religious violence” (pp. 4-6).
 - a. What reasons does she give for avoiding the term?
 - b. Is she saying that religious people never act violently, or that there is never a connection between an act of violence and someone’s religious faith or scripture?
2. Snyder briefly discusses the process of interpreting and applying scriptural texts today (pp. 8-11). What are the main points she makes?
3. According to Snyder, what might lead people to think or say that those who consider certain scriptures “sacred” might be more inclined to violence – or less inclined to violence – than others (pp. 11-14)?

Digging Deeper

After discussing questions 1-3 above, take time to reflect on the following issues:

4. Snyder asks, “What is violence?” (p. 4). How do you tend to use the word “violence”? What sorts of things do you call “violence,” in what contexts? What sorts of things might other people call “violence,” for which you do not tend to use that label?
5. Can you think of ways in which average citizens in your country could be said to be complicit in violence that they do not actively perform themselves – just as members of society (see pp. 5-6)? Remember to consider things that don’t tend to be treated as problematic, and which don’t get mentioned in the news.
6. Have you heard people associate religion and violence, or a particular religion and violence? Were they talking about their own tradition or another tradition? What are some reasons people might be more likely to express concern about someone else’s tradition or scripture than their own?
7. Snyder suggests that when discussing scripture and violence, one should “distinguish between factors that contribute to violence *before the fact* and what is said *after the fact*” (p. 7).
 - a. Why might it be problematic *not* to make such a distinction?
 - b. What challenges might one face when trying to make this distinction in actual practice – i.e., when trying to understand an actual act of violence that has been performed?
8. Do you tend to think of the Bible and the Qur’an as “instruction manuals or books of guidelines that tell religious people what to do” (p. 13)?
 - a. Where do you think you got that idea from?
 - b. Take a few minutes and glance at various parts of the Bible and the Qur’an. How does that change your understanding of the contents of these scriptural collections? (If you don’t have access to a paper copy, you can read these scriptures online. See, e.g., biblegateway.com and quranexplorer.com.)

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Many topics discussed by Snyder are addressed further in other chapters of *Scripture and Violence*.
- For a longer discussion of the term “religious violence,” see:
 - o William T. Cavanaugh (2009). *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.