

How to Cite a Sacred Text

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Abstract: Allusions to holy scriptures and quotes from sacred texts appear in hundreds of political science articles. Yet while we treat other ancient texts with reverence and diligence, we have not extended a similar care to the holy scriptures of the world's religions. Political scientists often refer to biblical events, statements, and turns of phrase but rarely cite them, chapter and verse. They are careless about referencing the precise translation of the holy texts used, tend to cite religious passages out of context, and disregard the role of religious tradition, interpretation, and practice in shaping and reshaping the meaning of holy texts. I offer examples for these trends, provide evidence for their harmful implications and offer guidelines for the appropriate treatment of sacred texts as formal scholarly sources.

INTRODUCTION: SINS OF SCRIPTURE

The number of political science articles on religion has been rising steadily, doubling every decade or so since the 1940s.¹ The academic journal archive JSTOR now holds over 45,000 political science articles that reference religion of which some 1,500 focus explicitly on religion. Nearly half of these were published in the last decade.² As a consequence, allusions to holy scriptures and quotes from sacred texts now appear in hundreds of political science articles. Approximately one-third of political science articles on religion reference the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or the Qur'an.³ An even larger percentage, perhaps as many as half of these articles, cites passages from these holy texts.⁴

Yet while we treat other ancient texts with reverence and diligence, we have not extended a similar care to the holy scriptures of the world's religions. By comparison, political scientists are cautious about reading the founding documents of the United States in the context they were written and through the lens of subsequent interpretations,

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implementations, and amendments of the text. For example, 84 percent of political science articles about the U.S. Constitution mention James Madison, constitutional amendments, or the Supreme Court.⁵ Scholars citing the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, or the Articles of Confederation tend to do so with great care, providing precise quotes accompanied by accurate references to the source, location, and version cited.

Why then have these scholars not extended a similar courtesy to sacred texts, despite the fact that these scriptures underwent many more centuries of rewriting, rereading, and rethinking? The unique treatment afforded to holy scriptures in political science articles may derive from excessive reverence toward religious texts or from a refusal to take holy texts seriously as scholarly sources. Whatever the case, political scientists have consistently failed to treat sacred texts as they would other historical documents.

The implications of this failure range from the trivial to the grave. Because political scientists often refer to biblical events, statements, and turns of phrase but rarely cite them, chapter and verse, they often get them wrong. This rarely undermines core arguments but can undermine an article's credibility. When authors rely on excerpts from scripture to make arguments about the role of religion in politics, but ignore the critical effect that different translations can have on the meanings of the texts, the consequences can be more serious. Scholars are likely to misunderstand the implications of sacred texts for religious movements if they cite passages out of context, overlooking other passages that confirm, modify, or contradict a given text.

Finally, we do the discipline a great disservice when we rely on excerpts from sacred scripture to reach broad conclusions about a religious movement. The processes of textual interpretation and modification that are inherent to any religious tradition shape the meaning, significance, and applicability of texts. Just as we would never analyze a "secular" political source without considering the generations of philosophers, statesmen, lawyers, and political scientists who have wrangled with the text before us, so it is incumbent upon us to read holy scripture as the adherents of religious movements do: through layers of translation, interpretation, tradition, and practice.

In the following pages, I survey the misuse of religious texts by political scientists in ascending degrees of severity.⁶ I begin this article by noting the tendency to reference verses from holy scriptures without citing their source, resulting in inaccurate renditions. Because the original is so rarely

consulted, some phrases attributed to sacred texts turn out to have no religious origins at all. In the second part of this article, I examine the impact that different translations can have on the meaning of a religious text. This highlights the importance of revealing the translation used and contrasting it with other translations available. In part three, I explore the perils of obscuring the context from which a sacred text has been lifted. Unless we read verses in their original setting and unless we compare them to parallel verses with contrasting messages, we are likely to draw the wrong inferences from an isolated textual fragment. Finally, I urge authors to consider the role of religious tradition, interpretation, and practice in shaping and reshaping the meaning of holy texts. I offer three brief examples of sacred texts dealing with violence and show how subsequent treatments by influential interpreters have muted, augmented, and even subverted prior understandings of these passages.

1. IT AINT NECESSARILY SO

Political scientists often distort quotes, events, and narratives from sacred scriptures or even invent these from whole cloth. The underlying problem is a curious refusal by scholars to trace their ideas about the content of scripture to their origins, accompanied by precise citations. For example, one of the most frequently cited verses from the bible in political science texts is Jesus' call for non-retaliation: "...Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39, KJV).⁷ Less than five percent of articles that cite the phrase "turn the other cheek" reference the biblical origin of this statement.⁸ Another popular phrase, Isaiah's prophecy of a future in which "...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares..." (Isaiah 2:4, KJV) features in 52 articles of which only seven acknowledge the chapter and verse from which the quote was taken.⁹

Proper academic practice aside, citing without referencing one's sources can lead to mistaken assumptions about the content of a text. In the case of biblical quotes, these misconceptions tend to echo common fallacies about biblical narratives. For example, commenting on the role of bible stories in violent clashes in 19th century Transvaal, one author noted the significance of "...the story of Jonah and the whale, the Biblical variant of the swallowing monster motif..."¹⁰ Several other political scientists mention the whale that swallowed Jonah. Jonah, however, was swallowed by a "big fish" and not by a whale.¹¹ Similarly, several political scientists

allude to the three kings who visited the newborn Jesus even though the nativity story does not state the number or royal status of the “wise men from the east” (Matthew 2:1, KJV) who traveled to Bethlehem.¹² Many scholars also confuse the virgin birth of Jesus, explicitly mentioned in the New Testament, with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, a Catholic dogma not reflected in the biblical text. Political scientists fall into the same trap when they refer to Jesus as having been immaculately conceived.¹³

At other times, scholars merely misquote familiar phrases and in so doing, distort their meaning. One example is the popular phrase “money is the root of all evil.”¹⁴ According to According to 1 Timothy 6:10, it is “love of money” (KJV) and not money itself that is the root of all evil. Other corruptions of the original that appear frequently in political science articles include “pride goeth before the fall,” “spare the rod, spoil the child,” and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”¹⁵ If at times authors cite the bible inaccurately, at other times they attribute statements to scripture that are not in the text at all, such as “cleanliness is next to Godliness,” or “God helps those who help themselves.”¹⁶

In all these instances, the implications of failures to cite scripture properly are minor, though they betray a refusal to treat sacred texts as a proper scholarly resource. Such is not the case with failures to recognize the crucial role that translation can play in altering the meaning of a sacred text.

2. LOST IN TRANSLATION

In “Women’s Work in Naga Society: Household Work, Workforce Participation and Division of Labour,” author U. Shimray cites from the third chapter of Genesis to explore the status of women in Naga society:

According to the Holy Bible, the original sin was committed in the Garden of Eden by a woman called Eve. She tasted the forbidden fruit. In Genesis (3:16), the Lord said to Eve, ‘I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shall bring forth children; and they [sic!] desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee’.¹⁷

Shimray should be praised for citing the verse explicitly yet he does so only partially. After all, he is not simply quoting “the Holy Bible” but rather a particular translation of the bible, the King James Authorized Version. Since the precise meaning of Hebrew text is contested, translations of Genesis 3:16 diverge wildly, from the KJV’s “thy desire shall

be to thy husband” to the New Living Translation’s “thy desire shall be to control your husband,” the Douay-Rheims’s “thou shalt be under thy husband’s power” or Robert Alter’s recent translation “your longing shall be to your husband.”¹⁸

Because Shimray does not list the King James Version of the bible in the bibliography of his article, his readers remain oblivious to the biases inherent in his choice of translation. Texas Governor Miriam A. Ferguson is said to have uttered: “If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it ought to be good enough for the children of Texas.”¹⁹ Like Ferguson, many political scientists seem to be treating sacred texts as if they were reading them in the original English.

2.1. Translating the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament

If few scholars bother to provide precise citations for their quotes from sacred texts, fewer still reference the translation they are relying on. Of the hundreds of political science articles published in the last 20 years that cite or reference the bible, only 32 identify the biblical translation consulted.²⁰ The only journals that seem to insist that authors include full references to scriptural sources and translations in their footnotes are *Politics and the Life Sciences* and *Review of Politics*.²¹

Based on this meager dataset of 32 articles, it seems that political scientists prefer to cite from the King James Authorized Version (KJV) of the bible followed by the Revised Standard Version (RSV), in second place, and the New International Version (NIV), in third place.²² The differences between these versions can be stark and can have serious political implications. After all, many of these translations were influenced by political agendas and the most widely cited of all was commissioned by an English king ruling over a nation torn by sectarian strife. King James ensured, for example, that the word “tyrant,” which appears some 400 times in prior translations, was nowhere to be found in the translation that bears his name.²³

The RSV, on the other hand, draws heavily on the 1525 translation by the English reformer William Tyndale, which often phrased passages so as to diminish the influence of the Catholic Church and curb the power of the clergy. This leads to differences between the RSV and the KJV, which sought a conciliatory approach to both Catholic and Protestant readers, and it causes an even greater textual divergence from popular Catholic translations, like the Douay-Rheims (DR).

In Hebrews 2:12, for example, both the KJV and the DR call on readers to praise God “in the midst of the church” (KJV). Here and elsewhere, the RSV translates the Greek *ekklēsia* as “congregation” and not “church.”²⁴ In Matthew 3:1–2, John the Baptist calls on his followers to “do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (DR). The term “penance” implies priests who are superior to laity and who administer confessions of sins and proscribe acts of atonement. Instead, the KJV and the RSV have John say “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” implying an inward change of mind and heart. According to the DR, an angel greets Mary with the words: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28). The word “grace” and the comparison to other women might imply the superiority of Mary over other believers. The KJV translates this as “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.” The RSV and NIV go a step further and omit the end of the angel’s statement altogether: “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee.”

The translation one is using thus has direct implications for the religious and political meanings of a sacred text. This is apparent in one of the KJV’s most contentious translations: Its rendering of the biblical commandment against murder as “thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17), despite divine sanction for lawful killing elsewhere in the text. It is rendered, more accurately, “thou shalt not murder” in most modern translations.²⁵

Different editions of the bible differ not only in their translation of contentious phrases but also in their inclusion and exclusion of words, verses, chapters, and even entire books. Political scientists would thus do well to state not only which translation they are relying on but also which edition of a particular translation they are using, as they would with any other text.

The most notorious example for biblical omission appears in the “Wicked Bible,” a 1631 edition of the King James Bible published by the royal printers in London, which omitted the word “no” from Exodus 20:14, thus rendering the seventh commandment “Thou shalt commit adultery.”²⁶ Other textual variations are the result of careful historical analysis. For example, the most explicit biblical reference to the Doctrine of the Trinity, in I John 5:7–8, appears in the KJV but is omitted from most modern translations of the bible, such as the RSV, because experts in ancient biblical manuscripts consider the phrase to be inauthentic. Where the KJV says “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three

are one,” the RSV simply states “For there are three that testify.” The RSV also omits the closing sentence of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13), which appears in KJV as “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” The translators of the RSV also considered the words “Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you” (Matthew 5:43–44) to be inauthentic and thus omitted them from the Sermon on the Mount altogether.²⁷

Finally, different editions include and exclude entire chapters and books of the bible. Whereas most Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles include the six deuterocanonical books (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and Maccabees) as part of the Old Testament, they are not part of the Jewish canon or the Protestant cannon though, confusingly enough, they are included in the KJV. Complicating matters further, the KJV also includes three apocryphal books (1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, and the Prayer of Manasses) that do not appear in modern Catholic bibles.

2.2. Translating the Qur’an

Similar translation issues arise when political scientists quote from the Qur’an. Of the nearly 2000 political science articles that reference the Qur’an, only 22 (about 1%) explicitly list the translation read by the author. I was able to find only one political science article that draws on multiple translations of the Qur’an.²⁸ The *Middle East Journal* seems to be the only venue that consistently expects its authors to disclose the translation they are using.

Based on these articles, political scientists rely primarily on Arthur Arberry’s translation (1955), followed by N.J. Dawood’s work (1956), and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall work (1930).²⁹ Arberry, a Cambridge Professor of Arabic was the first scholar of Islam to complete a translation of the scripture. Dawood was an Iraqi Jew who cast the Qur’an in idiomatic English. Pickthall, a convert to Islam, was an English novelist and the son of an Anglican clergyman.³⁰

Consider how these three approach one of the most contentious passages in the Qur’an, verse 4:34, which deals with the penalties imposed on disobedient wives by their husbands. Arberry translates it thus: “And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them.” Dawood substitutes “disobedient” for “rebellious.” Pickthall uses “scourge” instead of “beat.” In yet other translations, the misdeed becomes “disloyalty,” “resistance” and even “desertion” and the penalty is rendered as “chastise” and even “beat them (lightly).”³¹ In a

recent translation, the Iranian-American Laleh Bakhtiar argues that the verb *darabtum* actually implies “going” or “moving” so that the verse should be rendered: “But those whose resistance you fear, then admonish them, and abandon them in their sleeping place, then go away from them.”³²

Some translators insert their political biases openly into the text. One of these is the Saudi-sponsored translation by Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, described by one scholar as a “supremacist Muslim, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian polemic.”³³ Here is their translation of surah 1:6–7: “Guide us to the Straight Way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not (the way) of those who have earned Your anger (such as the Jews), nor of those who went astray (such as the Christians).” In verse 5:21, Hilali and Khan translate the words of Moses to the Israelites: “O my people! Enter the holy land (Palestine).” Thanks to the Saudi seal of approval, this now the most widely disseminated Qur’an in most Islamic bookstores and Sunni mosques throughout the English-speaking world.³⁴

Other translators relegate their interpretative preferences to footnotes. Maulana Muhammad Ali’s 1917 translation is one of the earliest and offers a case in point. Because Ali was a leader of the Ahmadiyya movement, an Islamic reformist movement, he rejected miracles. Consequently, his translation of surah 72, traditionally named “The Jinn” (a reference to supernatural beings, hence “genies”), is “Foreign Believers.” In a footnote he explains: “The jinn spoken of here are evidently Christians.”³⁵

In extreme cases, the act of translation is indistinguishable from the act of interpretation. Yvonne Haddad offers one example: Verse 5:44 of the Qur’an reads “Unbelievers are those who do not judge according to God’s revelation.” According to Haddad, Islamists have reinterpreted this verse based on the multiple meanings of the Arabic verb “to judge,” which can also signify “to rule, to govern.” They cast this verse in a political meaning, translating it as “Unbelievers are those who do not rule according to God’s revelation.”³⁶

3. PUTTING WORDS IN HIS MOUTH

In the most influential text on religion and international politics, Samuel Huntington writes: “Islam has from the start been a religion of the sword... The Koran and other statements of Muslim belief contain few prohibitions on violence, and a concept of nonviolence is absent from

Muslim doctrine and practice.”³⁷ Subscribing to this view of Islam requires a highly selective reading of Muslim scripture that attributes great significance to the statements in the Qur’an that encourage war but dismisses all those that prohibit or restrain war. Contrary to Huntington, the Qur’an and authoritative Islamic texts (narrations, jurisprudence, interpretations, and legal opinions) limit war in cause, means, and scope, constrain it in time and space, and identify legitimate and illegitimate targets and weapons.³⁸

Consider two contrasting passages from the Qur’an. The first, known as the “sword verse,” appears in sura 9, verse 5 of the Qur’an: “When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful.” The second is verse 16:123: “Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous manner. The Lord knows best who stray from his path and those who are rightly guided.”³⁹ The first verse features in dozens of political science articles about Islam. The latter has only been cited in two political science articles, both by the same author.⁴⁰

Political scientists cite sacred scriptures selectively in two ways. At times, they cite fragments of text but fail to note statements immediately preceding or following the text that can affect its meaning. At other times, they fail to contrast verses with quotes from other chapters, books, and related scriptures that modify, contradict, or even annul the original verse.

The first form of selective reading is apparent in the treatment of a biblical passage that is particularly popular with political scientists: “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18, KJV). Of the 61 political science articles that use this passage only two reference its source in Leviticus and not one cites the passage in full. Had one of these authors examined the text in its entirety, they would have learned that its peaceful message is constrained in scope. The full verse reads: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18, KJV). In context, the term “neighbor” seems to apply only to the Children of Israel.⁴¹

Often scholars are simply unaware of contradictory passages and of subtle tensions between different texts. These differences can stem from simple textual discrepancies between passages or they can arise from deep disagreements between the authors of sacred texts. The former,

often caused by careless transcribing and corrupted texts, are usually of little significance to social scientists. It may matter little to us whether the property on which Solomon constructed his temple cost 50 shekels (II Samuel 24:24) or 600 shekels (I Chronicles 21:25), whether the Last Supper happened on Passover (Matthew 26:19, Mark 14:16, Luke 22:13) or before Passover (John 13:29, 18:28 and 19:31), or whether God created man out of blood (Qur'an 96:2), clay (Qur'an 15:26), sperm (Qur'an 16:4), or out of nothing (Qur'an 19:67).

At other times, however, significant incongruities between scriptural passages pose substantial challenges. Depending on which verse one is reading, children can or cannot be punished for their fathers' sins (Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9 versus Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:20), salvation can be attained by faith alone or by good works as well (Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8–9 and Romans 3:28 versus Matthew 19:17 and James 2:24), true believers are or are not free of sin (I John 3:6, 3:9 and 5:18 versus II Chronicles 6:36 and Romans 3:10, 3:12 and 3:23), and religion can or cannot be imposed by force (Qur'an 9:5 versus Qur'an 2:256). One cannot draw political inferences from one of these verses without considering its counterparts.

For example, while 71 articles reference Jesus' call to "turn the other cheek" in Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29, only 11 articles reference his statement "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34, KJV). Only one article cites both statements.⁴² Similarly, I found 52 articles that cite Isaiah's peaceful promise "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks." Yet another Hebrew Prophet, Joel, offers a diametrically opposed prophecy: "Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears" (Joel 3:10, KJV). No political science article to date has juxtaposed these two quotes in an effort to grapple with the contradictions between them.

4. SHAKY AS A FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Adam and Eve do not eat an apple in Genesis. There is no mention of Christmas trees or Easter bunnies nor, indeed, of Christmas or Easter in the New Testament. The Hebrew Bible mentions neither skullcaps nor Chanukah nor Bar Mitzvas. Nor do the majority of symbols, rituals, attires, and culinary practices that we have come to associate with the world's religions. These ideas, symbols, and practices succeeded the

completion of the holy scriptures of these religious movements, as did many of the religio-political institutions that dominate these movements today. There are neither synagogues nor rabbis in the Hebrew Bible, no popes or cardinals in the New Testament, and no caliphs, imams or ayatollahs in the Qur'an. These scriptures know nothing of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism; Eastern, Catholic, and Protestant Christianity; or Sunni and Shi'a Islam.

The absence of these institutions from ancient texts does not devalue scripture. To the contrary: it elevates the significance of post-scriptural developments that have muted, neutralized, and even superseded many of the proscriptions that do appear in holy texts. Religions do not consist of sacred precepts locked in ancient scriptures. Over the course of hundreds and thousands of years, the members of religious movements interpret, adapt and implement the meaning of holy texts.

As a result, religious ideas and practices do not always conform to a religious movement's orthodoxy or orthopraxy as captured in formal theology or scripture. They are often local, popular, and eclectic variations that reflect the preferences or habits of a religious group or subgroup. In their daily implementation of sacred texts, Jews rely as much on the Talmud, the Halakha, the Midrash and the writings of leading rabbis and sages as they do on the Hebrew Bible. Christians draw as often on ideas expounded by the Church Fathers, theologians, and religious leaders (from popes to reformers) as they do on the New Testament. Shari'a (Islamic law), Fiqh (jurisprudence), Tafsir (commentary), and the Hadith tradition (narrations about the Prophet and his companions) have done as much to shape Islam as has the Qur'an.

Political scientists, however, are all too comfortable reading holy scripture "literally." Of 1324 political science articles that mention the Qur'an only 30 percent mention Shari'a, Fiqh, Tafsir, or Hadith. The vast majority mention the holy text in isolation from any of these interpretative sources. Only 17 percent of articles about the New Testament make reference to even one of the leading theologians of the Catholic or Protestant movements, such as Saint Augustine of Hippo, Saint Jerome, Saint Gregory, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Philipp Melancthon, Thomas Müntzer, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, or John Knox. Only seven percent of political science articles about the Hebrew Bible mention seminal interpretative sources, such as the Talmud, Mishnah or Gemarah, or key interpreters like Maimonides, Nachmanides or Rashi.

These elucidations, amplifications, and implementations are necessary because so many verses in the holy scriptures cannot be understood

otherwise. Scholars who ignore these subsequent interpretation in an effort to provide a “commonsensical” understanding of the text are depriving their readers of the text’s multiple meanings, many of which believers consider to be just as straight-forward, perhaps even indispensable.

For example, what are we to make of the most popular biblical verse among political scientists: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21, KJV)? Some 80 odd articles quote this verse, usually treating it as an injunction to separate church from state.⁴³ Yet several competing interpretations are available as becomes apparent when this quote is contrasted with others in the New Testament and when subsequent exegesis are brought to bear on its meaning. Romans, attributed to Peter, paints a complex picture when it suggests that “... there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1, KJV). This suggests that Caesar is acting on God’s behalf. In Acts, however, Peter is quoted as telling the High Priest that “...we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29, KJV), proposing that, when in doubt, God supersedes Caesar.

Twelve-hundred years later, one of Christianity’s greatest medieval scholars, Thomas Aquinas, opined that “in those things pertaining to the salvation of souls ... one should obey the spiritual rather than the secular power. But in those things which pertain to civic welfare, one should obey the secular rather than the spiritual power ... Unless, per chance, the secular power is joined to the spiritual power, as in the case of the Pope.”⁴⁴ In his renowned essay “Civil Disobedience,” the American poet and philosopher David Henry Thoreau read the verse from Matthew to mean that those who collaborate with the state are destined to become corrupted by its institutions.⁴⁵ The French philosopher Jacques Ellul argued that the verse “in no way divides the exercise of authority into two realms.” Rather, Jesus meant that Caesar was owed nothing but money, whereas God was owed everything else. “The phrase means: Caesar is legitimate master of nothing but what he fabricates for himself, and that *is* the province of demons!”⁴⁶ Biblical archaeologists have added another twist to this tale, noting that the coin held by Jesus as he was uttering these words may have been inscribed with the text “Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus.” In other words, the very item that prompted this verse depicted Caesar as equal to God.⁴⁷

Religious traditions have played an equally important role in elucidating other issues of fundamental interest to political scientists. The holy texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam contain mere hints about the role of

morality in war, the foundations of political legitimacy, the limits of political authority, minority rights, political freedoms, and so forth. Commentators, theologians, religious leaders, and communities of practitioners have expanded these idea splinters into fully-fledged theoretical frameworks. Interpreters of sacred texts have demonstrated their ability to reconcile, finesse, adjust and even negate holy scripture.

5. THE POWER OF INTERPRETATION: THREE EXAMPLES

The power to interpret sacred texts deserves a prolonged discussion of its own. Due to space limitations, I conclude with three brief examples that illustrate how interpreters across religious traditions have modified sacred texts in one particular issue area, violence.

The first example is from the Hebrew Bible. According to Numbers 25, when Moses proved incapable of stopping the Israelites from whoring with Midianite women, a man named Phinehas took matters into his own hands and slew a fornicating couple. For this impulsive act, in defiance of political authority, God rewarded Phinehas and his descendants with the High Priesthood.

Were one to read this passage outside the context of Jewish tradition, one might be tempted to conclude that it provides a precedent for individual zealotry. Subsequent Jewish interpreters have invested a great deal of effort in dispelling this notion and in diffusing the story of Phinehas. The Talmud, for example, explains that Phinehas acted contrary to the rabbinic spirit.⁴⁸ Though his actions were technically legal, the Talmud adds that “this is religious law but the rabbis do not so instruct.”⁴⁹ Consequently, if a zealot asks religious authorities to sanction his actions, his request should be denied. The rabbis also defined the stringent line that distinguishes legitimate zealotry from reprehensible crime: Had Phinehas killed the couple after their act, he would have been liable for murder. Had one of the victims killed Phinehas in self-defense, they would have been innocent. The consequence of these interpretative maneuvers has been to suppress the notion of zealotry in Judaism.⁵⁰

A second example comes from the fourth surah of the Qur’an. In Dawood’s translation, verse 29 reads: “Believers, do not consume your wealth among yourselves in vanity, but rather trade with it by mutual consent. Do not kill yourselves. God is merciful to you, but he that does that through wickedness and injustice shall be burned in fire. That is easy enough for God.” Is the latter half of this verse an injunction

against suicide? If so, how can it be squared with the growing adoption of suicide bombing by Islamists in the Middle East?

According to Pickthall and Arberry's translations, this verse is not about suicide at all. Both translate the second half of the verse as "and kill not one another." A similar commandment appears in 2:195: "Give generously for the cause of God and do not with your own hands cast yourselves into destruction. Be charitable; God loves the charitable" (Dawood). This time, Arberry's translation is similar to Dawood's, but Pickthall connects the two-halves of the verse, implying that the destruction is meant to be financial in nature: "Spend your wealth for the cause of Allah, and be not cast by your own hands to ruin." Among those contemporary interpreters who read this verse as a prohibition on suicide, some have extended the ban to suicide bombing. Others permit suicide bombing in the case of defensive wars, arguing that Qur'anic rules about defending the realm of Islam override this prohibition. Yet others argue that suicide bombing is not suicide at all but rather "martyrdom" and provide scriptural evidence to support the valorization of such acts.⁵¹

A final example for the power of interpretation comes from the New Testament. The verse from Matthew 5:39 is familiar; 71 political science articles cite it: "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (KJV). The progressive Christian theologian and activist, Walter Wink, has taken the quote's meaning in a new direction. Combining insights from anthropology and theology, Wink argues that the striker in question could only have used his right hand and, consequently, must have hit the victim's right cheek with the back of his hand to humiliate him. The turning of the left cheek, therefore, is not an act of submission but an assertive act, inviting the striker to land a more vigorous open-handed blow. Wink concludes: "The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, 'Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me.'"⁵² Wink was one of the most influential scholars, theologians and leaders of the Progressive Christianity movement.

CONCLUSION

Michael Walzer begins his seminal study of the exodus myth in political history, *Exodus and Revolution*, with a note on translation:

In quoting the biblical text I have used the King James translation, the most familiar and still the most eloquent version, and (together with the Geneva

Bible) the version read by the English and American revolutionaries to whose works I shall often refer. Occasionally, I have provided an alternative translation or a brief explanation of a particularly important word or phrase, but mostly I have let the text stand.⁵³

Such confessions are all too rare among political scientists. Those who wish to follow Walzer's example should adopt a simple rule: treat religious texts as they would any other historical document, be it Homer's *Iliad*, Tacitus' *Annals*, or Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.

Such treatment entails four requirements. First, confirm the veracity and precise phrasing of a quote by citing its location accurately, chapter and verse. Second, divulge the translation employed and, where appropriate, contrast it with alternative translations. Third, exercise caution in extracting the quote from its context. Consider including preceding and ensuing quotes in the citation. Contemplate other verses in the same chapter, book, or text that confirm or contradict the quote. Fourth, situate the text in the appropriate religious tradition, noting subsequent developments that acted to amplify or decrease the significance or impact of the verse. Note both formal interpretations, informal commentaries and religious practices that have shaped the meaning of the text over time.

When fundamentalists read holy texts, they seek to present scripture as infallible and internally consistent.⁵⁴ They sidestep the problem of translation by employing a "literal" reading of text, and reject the effects of theology, interpretation and tradition on the meaning of texts. Political scientists who wish to eschew a fundamentalist reading of holy texts may wish to adopt alternative practices. Whereas religious practitioners can embrace a single interpretation of sacred text as the only authoritative reading, scholars have an obligation to note the multiplicity of translations, meanings and viewpoints that arise from a sacred text.

NOTES

1. On recent trends in the study of religion and politics see Philpott, Daniel. (2009). "Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 12:183–202; Wald, Kenneth D., and Clyde Wilcox. 2006. "Getting Religion: Has Political Science Rediscovered the Faith Factor?" *American Political Science Review* 100:523–529; and Kettell, Steven. 2012. "Has Political Science Ignored Religion?" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45:93–100.

2. These are articles (as opposed to reviews or editorials) in political science journals that have the terms "religion" or "religious" in the abstract. I conducted this search in January 2012. JSTOR showed 604 articles with "religion" or "religious" in the abstract published since 2002 and 10,388 articles that include "religion" or "religious" anywhere in the text published since 2002.

3. Holy scriptures are mentioned in 27.6% of articles with "religion" or "religious" in the abstract and in 8% of articles that merely mention "religion" or "religious" somewhere in the text.

4. As I explain below, precise numbers are hard to come by since most political scientists who cite from scripture do so without following proper citation practices.

5. JSTOR search, conducted January 2012, for articles in political science journals that contain the term “United States” or “U.S.” and “constitution” in the abstract and the keywords “Madison”, “Constitutional amendment” or “Supreme Court” in the body of the text.

6. My analysis is limited to the sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam though my claims apply equally well to the holy texts of other religious movements. I focus on articles, published since 1945, in journals that are identified as political science publications by on-line journal archives.

7. KJV refers to the King James Version of the Bible. I rely on the 1987 printing which is in the public domain.

8. Those three are McKenna, Joseph C. 1960. “Ethics and War: A Catholic View.” *American Political Science Review* 54:648–649; Burtchaeil, James Tunstead. 1988. “How Authentically Christian Is Liberation Theology?” *Review of Politics* 50:270; and Atanasov, Bogdan B. 2002. “Friendship and Strife in Frank O’Connor’s ‘Guest of the Nation’.” *International Journal on World Peace* 19:80, 82. None of these indicate which translation of the bible they are using. Indeed, the three articles seem to be using different translations since McKenna uses the KJV phrase “resist not evil” whereas Burtchaeil uses the NIV’s “strikes” instead of the KJV’s “smites.”

9. It is worth noting that most of the authors who followed proper citation practices for this verse did so prior to 1945. Talmager, T. Dewitt. 1889. “The Northern and Southern Dead.” *American Advocate of Peace and Arbitration* 51:79; Talmager, T. Dewitt. 1854. “An Address on Peace.” *Advocate of Peace* 11:140; Goldtsein, Israel. 1944. “The Stake of the Jew in a Just Peacem.” *World Affairs* 107:14; Goldtsein, Israel. 1838. “The Duty of Christians Regarding War Learned from the Bible.” *Advocate of Peace* 4:161; Hershey, Amos S. 1911. “The History of International Relations During Antiquity and the Middle Ages.” *American Journal of International Law* 5:909; Patai, Raphael, and Andrew Wilson. 1987. “The Quest for Peace: A View from Anthropology.” *International Journal on World Peace* 4:11; and Pellerin, Daniel. 2003. “Calvin: Militant or Man of Peace?” *Review of Politics* 65:53.

10. Hofmeyr, Isabel. 1991. “Jonah and the Swallowing Monster: Orality and Literacy on a Berlin Mission Station in the Transvaal.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17:642.

11. Young, Oran. 1969. “Aron and the Whale; A Jonah in Theory.” In *Contending Approaches in International Politics*, eds. Rosenau James N. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Bjorvatn, Kjetil. 1995. “Leviathan in a Dual Economy.” *Public Choice* 84:150; and others. In fairness, the retelling of this story in Matthew 12:40 mentions a fish or a whale, depending on the English translation used. Hence the significance of the making one’s translation explicit, as discussed below.

12. Maghen, Ze’ev. 2008. “Occultation in ‘Perpetuum’: Shi’ite Messianism and the Policies of the Islamic Republic.” *Middle East Journal* 62:233.

13. Mousseau, Michael. 2007. “Some Systemic Roots of the Democratic Peace.” *International Studies Review* 9:93, citing Rasler, Karen, and William R. Thompson. 2005. *Puzzles of the Democratic Peace: Theory, Geopolitics and the Transformation of World Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 112; Sokoloff, William W. 2001. “Kant and the Paradox of Respect.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45:773; Salamon, Lester M. 1994. “The Rise of the Nonprofit.” *Foreign Affairs* 73:43; and Crocker, Chester A., and Fen Osler Hampson. 1996. “Making Peace Settlements Work.” *Foreign Policy* 104:59.

14. See, for example, Ivory, Ming. 2003. “The Social Context of Applied Science: A Model Undergraduate Program.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 585:157; and Hodge, Robert W., and Steven Lagerfeld. 1987. “The Politics of Opportunity.” *Wilson Quarterly* 11:124.

15. Proverbs 16:18 actually reads, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (KJV). Proverbs 13:24 reads: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him in good season” (KJV). In Luke 6:31, Jesus says “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (KJV). A similar statement appears in Matthew 7:12. Articles that misquote these verses include Krugman, Paul. 1998. “America the Boastful.” *Foreign Affairs* 77:33; Huntley, Wade L. 2007. “U.S. Policy toward North Korea in Strategic Context: Tempting Goliath’s Fate.” *Asian Survey* 47:480; Barnosky, Jason. 2006. “The Violent Years: Responses to Juvenile Crime in the 1950s.” *Polity* 38:323; Cryer, Debby. 1999. “Defining and Assessing Early Childhood Program Quality.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 563:44; Berggren, D. Jason, and Nicol C. Rae. 2006. “Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith,

Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36:618; and others.

16. Coombe, Rosemary J. 1993. “Tactics of Appropriation and the Politics of Recognition in Late Modern Democracies.” *Political Theory* 21:424; Drogus, Carol Ann. 1995. “The Rise and Decline of Liberation Theology: Churches, Faith, and Political Change in Latin America.” *Comparative Politics* 27:473. See also Farah, Randa. 2009. “Refugee Camps in the Palestinian and Sahrawi National Liberation Movements: A Comparative Perspective.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38:84. This last article (mis)locates the verse in the Qur’an.

17. Shimray, U. A. 2004. “Women’s Work in Naga Society: Household Work, Workforce Participation and Division of Labour.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 39:1701.

18. The New Living Translation was completed in 1996. The Douay Rheims translation dates to the early 17th century. Robert Alter’s translation appeared in 2004. Alter, Robert. 2004. *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

19. There is no evidence that Governor Ferguson actually said these words. Indeed, similar quips have been traced back to the 19th century.

20. To arrive at this figure, I searched the JSTOR archive for political science articles that included key terms like “King James” and “bible” or “King James Version” or “Authorized Version” or “Christian Standard Bible” etc. I obtained a list of the 10 most popular bible translations from the Christian Booksellers Association April 2012 Best Seller list at http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible_Translations.pdf. Most of these articles referenced the translation used in the first footnote in which a biblical verse was cited while others alluded to the translation in mid-text without a formal footnote.

21. Other journals that apply formal citation standards to sacred texts often, though not consistently, are *Political Psychology*, *Political Research Quarterly*, and *Polity*.

22. For the RSV, I am employing the 1901 edition of the American Standard Version, which is in the public domain. For the DR, I am using an American edition from 1899 (Baltimore, MD: John Murphy Company, 1899). Readers are invited to compare these and other translations on-line using websites such as <http://www.biblegateway.com> or bible.cc.

23. Nicolson, Adam. 2003. *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 58.

24. This example and others below are from Bobrick, Benson. 2001. *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 112–115; and McGrath, Alister. 2001. *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*. New York, NY: Random House, 57–59 and 75.

25. These include the Contemporary English Version (1995), the Good News Translation (1992), the English Standard Version (2001), the God’s Word Translation (1995), the New American Standard Bible (1960), the New Century Version (2005), the New International Version (1984), and others.

26. For this and many other typographical errors in bible printing see Russell, Ray. 1980. “The Wicked Bibles.” *Theology Today* 37:360–363.

27. McGrath, *ibid.*, pp. 243–244.

28. Van Evera, Stephen. 2006. “Assessing U.S. Strategy in the War on Terror.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 607:18.

29. Arberry, Arthur J. 1990. *The Koran Interpreted*. London: Allen & Unwin; Dawood, N.J. 1953. *The Koran: With a Parallel Arabic Text*. London: Penguin; and Pickthall, Marmaduke William. 1953. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. New York, N: New American Library.

30. For an excellent assessment of various Qur’anic translations, see Mohammed, Khaleel. 2005. “Assessing English Translations of the Qur’an.” *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring: 58–71. Curiously, Muhammed repeatedly juxtaposes these translations with “literal” translations from an unstated source, presumably the author’s own.

31. Readers who wish to explore competing translations of the Qur’an are encouraged to experiment with websites that display multiple variants side by side, such as <http://al-quran.info> or <http://quran.com>.

32. Bakhtiar, Laleh. 2007. *The Sublime Quran*. Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications.

33. Mohammed, *ibid.*

34. Mohammed, *ibid.*

35. Muhammad Ali, Maulana. 2002. *The Holy Quran: Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary*. Lahore, Pakistan: Ahmadiyya Islamic Movement, note 1, p. 1140.

36. Haddad, Yvonne. 1983. "The Qur'anic Justification for an Islamic Revolution: The View of Sayyid Qutb." *Middle East Journal* 37:27. I have used Dawood's translation of the original verse. Haddad seems to be using her own translation.

37. Huntington, Samuel. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 263.

38. See, for example, Johnson, James Turner. 1997. *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press; Khadduri, Majid. 1955. *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press; and Kelsay, John. 1993. *Islam and War: A Study in Comparative Ethics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.

39. Both translations are from Dawood, *ibid*.

40. Sau, Ranjit. 2002. "Musharraf's Quest for a 'Progressive and Dynamic' Pakistan." *Economic and Political Weekly* 37:1720; and Sau, Ranjit. 2001. "On the Kashmir Question: Liberation, Jihad or What?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 36:1475.

41. Hassner, Ron E., and Gideon Aran. n.d. "An Overview of Religion and Violence in the Jewish Tradition." In *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, eds. Kitts, Margot, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Michael Jerryson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 78–99.

42. Dole, *ibid*.

43. Recent examples include Barnett, Michael. 2009. "Evolution without Progress? Humanitarianism in a World of Hurt." *International Organization* 63:645; Yilmaz, Hakan. 2007. "Islam, Sovereignty, and Democracy: A Turkish View." *Middle East Journal* 61:479–80; and Flint, Andrew R., and Joy Porter. 2005. "Jimmy Carter: The Re-emergence of Faith-Based Politics and the Abortion Rights Issue." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35:33.

44. Aquinas, Thomas. 1988. *Commentary on the Sentences*, Book IV, Question 44. Quoted in Baumgarth William, and Richard J. Regan. eds. 1988. *Saint Thomas Aquinas on Law Morality and Politics*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 259–260.

45. Thoreau, Henry David. 1993. *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*. Toronto: Dover.

46. Ellul, Jacques. 1980. "Anarchism and Christianity." *Katalagette* Fall:20.

47. Crossan, John Dominic, and Jonathan L. Reed. 2001. *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 177, 222–223, 320.

48. Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 27:2.

49. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 81b. Author's translation.

50. Collins, John J. 2003. "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122:3–21; Eisen, Robert. 2011. *The Peace and Violence of Judaism: From the Bible to Modern Zionism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Hassner and Aran, *ibid*.

51. For a sampling of these debates see, for example, Tamimi, Azam. 2009. "The Islamic Debate over Self-inflicted Martyrdom." In *Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World*, eds. al-Rasheed Madawi, and Marat Shterin. London: I.B.Tauris, 91–104; Moghadam, Assaf. 2008/9. "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks." *International Security* 33:xx–xx; Strenski, Ivan, 2003. "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim Human Bombers." In *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15:1–34. Burki, Shireen Khan. 2011. "Haram or Halal? Islamists' Use of Suicide Attacks as 'Jihad.'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23:582–601.

52. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), p.176.

53. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p.xi.

54. See, for example, Barr, James. 1991. *Fundamentalism*. London: SCM Press.