



Scriptural Reasoning: Its Anglican Origins, its Development, Practice and Significance

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ABSTRACT

Scriptural Reasoning is the study and discussion of Tanakh, Bible and Qur'an together, usually by Jews, Christians and Muslims. On its Christian side it has had strong Anglican participation since it began in the mid-1990s. This article recounts its origins and development (including its spread beyond the academy and to many countries, including China); offers guidelines for its practice; discusses four key publications that offer Anglican theological understandings of it; summarizes its significance; and proposes that it be practised more widely in the Anglican Communion. The article concludes with meditative and prophetic postscripts.

KEYWORDS: Anglican, Bible, friendship, inter-faith relations, interpretation, practice, Qur'an, Scriptural Reasoning, Tanakh

The Bible has primacy in Anglican theological method, in that we seek to be a community living in obedience to Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God who is revealed through the words of Holy Scripture. ... Our presence in, and engagement with, multi-religious contexts lead us to read the Scriptures in new ways ... [As was affirmed at the Lambeth Conference of 1988] 'A right understanding of the relationship with Judaism is fundamental to Christianity's own self-understanding' ... We must 'reject any view of Judaism which sees it as a living fossil, simply superseded by Christianity'. Our Scriptures speak to us in new ways when they are brought alongside the sacred texts of other religions in the practice known as 'Scriptural Reasoning'. For example, believing ourselves to be in a dialogue with God enabled through the words of the Bible, it can be a profoundly humbling and creative experience for

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us to read the Bible alongside Muslims who likewise believe themselves to be addressed by the one God through the text of the Qur'an.²

I re-crossed the Atlantic to be Director of the Princeton Center of Theological Inquiry for five years. Much of my time there was spent in rethinking the Center (along lines now happily being pursued by the current Director) and in working closely with individual members from many disciplines and many countries. But judged in terms of long-term results it is probably the relationship with one member, the Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs of the University of Virginia, that has been most fruitful. He, David Ford (of Cambridge University) and I have spent much time over many years since the early 1990s working together with others to develop the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, the shared study of our scriptures by Jews, Christians and Muslims. I was deeply gratified when General Theological Seminary invited me to speak about Scriptural Reasoning during the opening conference of the Desmond Tutu Education Center last month, and very disappointed that I could not attend for reasons of health. I am delighted that Peter, David and others, including some Muslim participants in Scriptural Reasoning, led two workshops (I know that a film of this has since been broadcast on PBS [public television]), and also that the practice had such a warm reception in the seminary. Might I take advantage of this occasion to commend Scriptural Reasoning to you as warmly as possible? It is one way of going deeper simultaneously into one's own faith and into the faith of others through study and mutual mentoring, and in my judgement holds considerable promise for the twenty-first century, not least in building much-needed forms of peaceful sociality between the Abrahamic faiths. Its fruitfulness has most recently been seen in last week's Muslim message, *A Common Word*, addressed to Christian leaders, and I hope that this seminary might be a place where that message of love for God and neighbour is responded to wholeheartedly. If only the Anglican Communion could learn this too! My involvement in the 1998 Lambeth Conference and participation in some of the Primates' meetings during the years that followed made me long for a reconciliatory imagination and practice centred on Scripture and nurturing a deeper and richer sociality, touching healingly the depths of each person. May the new Desmond Tutu Center serve this divine purpose well!³

2. Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue. An Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations* (London: The Anglican Consultative Council, 2008), pp. 5–6.

3. Daniel W. Hardy to General Theological Seminary, New York. From a letter written shortly before his death in 2007 on the occasion of the Seminary's conferral on him of an honorary Doctorate of Divinity, which he was too ill to receive in person. See Daniel W. Hardy with Deborah Hardy Ford, Peter Ochs and

Scriptural Reasoning in practice is the study of Tanakh, Bible and Qur'an together, usually by Jews, Christians and Muslims. The 2008 report by the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns, *Generous Love*, is the first official publication of any church to affirm Scriptural Reasoning. This is appropriate, since, as Daniel Hardy says, the Christian beginnings of Scriptural Reasoning came about through two Anglicans meeting with a Jewish colleague to study sacred texts. This article will tell the story of Scriptural Reasoning's origins and development, describe the practice as it has developed to date, and reflect on its significance, with special reference to its Anglican dimensions.⁴

Origins

The origins of Scriptural Reasoning are in Jewish Textual Reasoning. A group of scholars of Jewish sacred texts and philosophers began to gather as a fringe meeting of the annual conference of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in the early 1990s. Daniel Hardy and I were invited by the Jewish philosophers Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs, and we were fascinated as we sat on the edge of this group. The immediate attraction was the sheer liveliness of the discussion, with vigorous, serious argument, a great deal of Jewish and philosophical learning, and laughter. As time went on we discovered strong analogies between Textual Reasoning and what we were about as Anglican theologians: a combination of rereading our classic sources, engaging with Western modernity, and reaching across the boundaries of our own religious tradition in order to converse with those in other traditions.

Our involvement with Textual Reasoning led to us being invited, along with George Lindbeck of Yale, to be Christian respondents at 'Textualities: An International Conference on Postmodern Jewish

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David F. Ford, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 11–12. Hardy was an American Anglican priest who taught in the University of Birmingham for many years, was Van Mildert Canon Professor of Divinity in the University of Durham, then served as Director of the Princeton Center of Theological Inquiry (1990–95) before retiring to live in Cambridge.

4. With regard to another Christian dimension of Scriptural Reasoning, at the time of writing I am guest editing a forthcoming (October 2013) issue of the journal *Modern Theology* on the theme of 'Interreligious Reading after Vatican II'. The issue is especially concerned with Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism.

Reasoning', a meeting of about eighty Jewish academics from many fields in 1997 in Drew University. There Daniel Hardy spoke about Textual Reasoning's 'emphasis on the biblical word approached through a text-embodied tradition of lively reasoning – the living Torah of social reception, debate and performance'. He explained why it was of particular interest to him as an Anglican: 'In my own community ... where scripture, tradition and reason are considered central, they have nonetheless become fragile in practice... The interpretation of scripture in the life of the Church occasions dogmatisms both traditionalist and liberal.'⁵ Hardy saw the quality of conversation around texts in Textual Reasoning opening 'a new profundity of meaning – and thereby the possibility of an endless renewal of wisdom that justifies the supposition that texts "overflow" with meaning in ways beyond other (and nowadays more usual) focuses of attention'.⁶ So he glimpsed in this practice a wisdom-seeking that both accorded with the heart of Anglicanism and could also inspire a biblical therapy for its divisions and pathologies. This was 'a community of dialogue in difference',⁷ and it carried on a struggle for freedom from constricting approaches to the texts it studied. Hardy even challenged Textual Reasoning to do fuller justice to the ways these texts can bring 'to light the purposes and activity of the God whose own intensity is found in the concentration of meaning in these texts'.⁸ This conviction of the fruitfulness of intensive, conversational text study, open to contemporary wisdom-seeking, has remained central in Scriptural Reasoning.

My response to the Drew conference was on what Christians might learn from Textual Reasoning. Among the points are the jazz-like, improvisatory liveliness of the conversation, the concern to repair one's own tradition by drawing on the resources within it, the willingness to read beyond the 'plain sense' of Scripture⁹ and to keep

5. Daniel Hardy, 'Textual Reasoning: A Concluding Reflection', in Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene (eds.), *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century* (London: SCM Press, 2002), pp. 269–76 (269).

6. Hardy, 'Textual Reasoning', p. 271.

7. It is important to note that the Jewish participants in Textual Reasoning were from diverse traditions within Judaism, and they sought not so much consensus as a better quality of debate and disagreement.

8. Hardy, 'Textual reasoning', p. 273.

9. 'There is of course a great deal of this in Christian tradition, but, as in Judaism, it has not usually flourished where modernity has been influential. It should be encouraging for Christians to see Jews renewing it. What is the best name for this? Midrash, pragmatic sense, thinking outside the text while

multiple readings in play, and the beneficial effects on Christian interpretation of reading with Jews. Above all, there is the *chevruta*, the small Rabbinic study group. The sociality of the practice is of its essence: both reading and reasoning are intrinsically communicational and social, and so is the wisdom that is sought and found.¹⁰ All these elements have been carried over into Scriptural Reasoning.

Development

By the time of the Drew conference members of Textual Reasoning were already meeting with Christians and Muslims in the first Scriptural Reasoning group, which also gathered every year as a fringe meeting of the AAR. Since 2000 there has been a further annual gathering: a residential conference in Cambridge University. These two events remain the main international foci of academic Scriptural Reasoning in universities.

Amidst much else in the history of Scriptural Reasoning,¹¹ for the purposes of this article three events are of special interest.

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maintaining the authority of the text, or a combination of allegorical, moral and anagogical senses? My own preferred phrase for the attempt to allow the text to be fruitful through readings that are sensitive not only to its literal meaning but also to other senses, to intertextuality, to the traditions of interpretation, to the contexts (including cultural, ethical and political) of authors, traditional interpreters and ourselves, and to God, is: 'the wisdom interpretation of scripture.' David Ford, 'Responding to Textual Reasoning: What Might Christians Learn?' in Ochs and Levene (eds.), *Textual Reasonings*, pp. 259–68 (264); cf. David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) on this approach and also on Scriptural Reasoning.

10. 'It is conceivable that aspects of the plain sense might be arrived at by solitary readers reasoning alone; it is inconceivable that the discovery of wisdom beyond the plain sense could be achieved that way because the process (of coming to this wisdom together, acknowledging it, and appreciating it as constitutive of our sociality) is intrinsic to it, as is the continuing dynamic of overflow in further communication to others. There are far-reaching implications of all this for concepts of God, community, selfhood and rationality.' Ford, 'Responding to Textual Reasoning', p. 266.

11. Other important events include: 1994–96 – early Scriptural Reasoning-like studies at Drew University, including Basit Koshul as the first Muslim participant; 1995 – formation of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning; 1996 – first three-faith residential meeting, Long Island; 1997 onwards – successive meetings of the AAR in which Scriptural Reasoning with Jewish, Christian and Muslim participants featured, and moved from being a fringe meeting to an official unit on the annual programme; 1998 – National Society for Scriptural Reasoning Website at

The first event was an intensive three day period of joint thinking, text study and planning that was repeated over several years from 1994 to 2007 at Daniel Hardy's summer home by a lake in Connecticut. They were exhilarating times of free, energetic and wide-ranging conversation on scriptures, theology, prayer, philosophy, universities, politics and much else, but with the practical focus on how this developing practice might be imagined, conceptualized and advanced.

The second was the founding of the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme (CIP) in 2002, largely inspired by Scriptural Reasoning. I have been its Director, and its three Academic Directors have been Ben Quash, Nicholas Adams and Mike Higton (all Anglicans involved in Scriptural Reasoning). Among other things, it has organized the annual Cambridge Scriptural Reasoning conference, introduced Scriptural Reasoning to Cambridge University and the local community, pioneered Scriptural Reasoning online, provided resources on its website and developed the

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Drew University; 2000 onwards – 24-hour gatherings held before the AAR annual meeting every year; 2000 onwards – annual residential conferences held at Cambridge University, and sometimes combined with an international summer school for young Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders; 2001 – first issue of the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* (online) at University of Virginia on 'Messianism'; 2005–8 – Princeton Center of Theological Inquiry project on Scriptural Reasoning with a group of sixteen Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars, philosophers and theologians; 2007 – first graduate programme in Scriptural Reasoning in the University of Virginia; 2009 – second international Receptive Ecumenism conference in Durham; 2009 – three-day conference of the European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies (ESITIS) at the University of Salzburg, Austria, on the theme of interreligious hermeneutics in a pluralistic Europe, with a special focus on Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology; the visit by Peter Ochs to Beijing in May 2012; over a number of years the introduction of Scriptural Reasoning to other academic institutions (e.g. in North America – University of Toronto, Princeton, Duke, George Mason, Eastern Mennonite, James Madison, Seattle, Santa Clara, Colgate, Yale, Amherst, Emory, Villanova, Swarthmore, William & Mary; elsewhere – in London, Oxford, Birmingham, Preston, Edinburgh, Dublin, Berlin, Capetown, Lahore, Dubai, Muscat, Beijing, Jinan); the spread of Scriptural Reasoning to settings beyond the academy – schools and prisons in the UK, hospitals in Israel and the Palestinian territories, local synagogue, church and mosque congregations in many countries, national and international leadership programmes; civil society initiatives by London Citizens and the Thousand Cities movement; contributions to the statement by Jewish scholars about Christianity, *Dabru Emet*, in 2000 and its aftermath, and to the Muslim letter to Christians, *A Common Word between Us and You* in 2007 and its aftermath.

www.scripturalreasoning.org website. It has also hosted a doctoral scholarship in Scriptural Reasoning, and employed an experienced teacher of Scriptural Reasoning, Sarah Snyder, in helping to set up grassroots groups in the UK.

The third event was a 2008 symposium hosted in Lambeth Palace by the Archbishop of Canterbury for Chinese and UK academics in the field of religion. One participant, Professor Yang Huilin, was introduced to Scriptural Reasoning at this event and on his return to China he joined with Professor You Bin and others to set up an institute dedicated to Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology: the Institute of Comparative Scripture and Interreligious Dialogue in Minzu University, inaugurated in 2011. This has incorporated several improvisations on Scriptural Reasoning, such as uniting it with Comparative Theology (as pioneered by Francis Clooney, SJ, in Harvard)¹² and linking with the discipline of Comparative Literature. The most striking innovation is in six-text Scriptural Reasoning where Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, Jewish, Christian and Muslim texts are studied alongside one another.¹³

In each of these events there was a strong Anglican contribution, alongside those of other Christian traditions. The Anglicans involved have been ecumenical and collegial with other Christians, and there has been little explicit mention of specifically Anglican identity. Those who have reflected most on Anglicanism in relation to Scriptural Reasoning have been Daniel Hardy, Ben Quash, Peter Ochs and Mike Higton, and their main writings on this are included in four key publications which I will discuss below (besides what Ochs and Quash write in this issue of the *JAS*). First, however, I turn to the practice of Scriptural Reasoning.

The Practice

The website www.scripturalreasoning.org,¹⁴ created under the auspices of CIP, is probably the best widely available account of

12. The relationship between Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology is a leading concern of a forthcoming issue of *Modern Theology* (see n. 4 above).

13. For more on this see: www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/en/resources/papers/sr-in-china

14. The website also provides 'text bundles' grouped around a variety of themes. For more information about Scriptural Reasoning see also the websites of the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme (www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk) and the international Society for Scriptural Reasoning (www.scripturalreasoning.com), together with articles in the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* (etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr).

Scriptural Reasoning in practice. It covers basic issues such as what Scriptural Reasoning is, how it works, who can participate in it and how to get involved. There are also videos of interviews with Jewish, Christian and Muslim practitioners and videos of actual Scriptural Reasoning sessions.

The key guidelines for good practice that are given on the site include the following:

- *Not consensus...* The participants don't have to agree. They may not accept one another's texts as scripture, nor agree with each other's reading of them. Scriptural Reasoning is a process that works even when the participants differ strongly, and when those differences really matter to them. It is not about seeking agreement, but about understanding one another's differences.
- *...but understanding...* Scriptural Reasoning deepens understanding. You learn more about the scriptures of other faith communities, and some of the ways in which they are read. You witness the passion others have for their scriptures, and hear their questions. But you also learn more about your own scriptures, because you read in the company of people who may never have read them before. You see your own scriptures in a new light, through their eyes.
- *...and friendship.* Scriptural Reasoning deepens relationships. You spend time with people of other religions, talking about scriptural texts they really care about – texts that are central to their lives. You share with them scriptural texts that you really care about, too. You don't have to politely agree about everything – you can wade in deep, and talk about issues at the heart of your faith. This doesn't lead to agreement, but we find that it does often lead to friendship.

As the site makes clear, experience has shown that there are a number of factors which contribute to the fruitfulness of Scriptural Reasoning sessions.

Groups work best when the participants are people of faith who care deeply about their scripture. Participants need not have undertaken any special religious education, nor need they have an

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Note that there are other websites bearing similar names which are not affiliated to the Scriptural Reasoning movement described in this article; www.scripturalreasoning.org and the other sites listed here offer the best online resources.

academic background. 'Reasoning' in Scriptural Reasoning sessions is interpreted broadly as encompassing the multifarious process of reading and reflecting on texts; it is not intended to indicate a particular form of academic scrutiny of scriptural texts.

Discussion flourishes most fully when three or more faith traditions are represented, and there are two or more participants from each tradition. A 'facilitator' or 'convener' who is experienced in Scriptural Reasoning can help the discussion to flow and can move the conversation on to the next text according to how much time is available in the session.

Selecting short texts from each body of scripture, and staying close to those texts, is important. When each participant offers a suggestion or interpretation, they should be prepared to answer the question 'Where do you see that in this text?' Participants are not expected to be experts on their own scriptures, nor are they expected or encouraged to speak as 'authoritative voices' of their own tradition. Rather, they are welcomed in their expression of their own view, speaking as a Jew, Christian, Muslim or other person of faith. Time-taking, gentleness, honesty, openness, questioning, humility, passion, seriousness, and good humour are all marks of a Scriptural Reasoning session.

All participants should be able to read all the texts and, for this reason, it is usual to give all the texts in English in an English-speaking context. It is important to be aware that the English translations of certain texts may not have the same status within a faith community as the texts in the original language. In some groups it may be appropriate to give one or more of the scriptures in their original language as well as in translation.

Finally, as the website states, some participants

may think that it is very important to hope, pray and work for the conversion of others to their faith; others will think that such an approach is inappropriate. Everyone in the group needs to behave, however, in such a way that all participants will feel safe from any pressure to accept another tradition, or any attack on their own tradition. So all participants need to agree that the Scriptural Reasoning group itself is not a context in which the main aim is to convince other participants of the truth or authority of one set of scriptures. A Scriptural Reasoning group can, of course, remain a context in which you show your love for your scriptures and for the way of life they lead you towards. At no time are you ever called to compromise your faith commitment.

I now turn to four important recent publications which discuss Scriptural Reasoning theory and practice. These works are of particular significance when considering Scriptural Reasoning from an Anglican perspective.

Publications

The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning

After about a decade of reading together and writing occasional articles, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* was the first collective publication produced by those involved in the practice.¹⁵ Of the thirteen contributors, three are Jewish,¹⁶ two Muslim,¹⁷ and six Anglican,¹⁸ but Anglicanism does not appear in the index, which raises a question about the difference between theology written by Anglicans and explicitly Anglican theology.

Each of the six pieces can be read as an essay in implicitly Anglican theology, but for reasons of space I will confine myself to the final chapter by Daniel Hardy, which responds to all the essays and opens up further horizons. It gives an utterly theocentric understanding of Scriptural Reasoning:

If – at least in my view – we stop to think carefully about *what* the Scriptures of the Abrahamic traditions are, and *why* they are so important to these traditions, we are driven to conclude that they are the *public form of primary discourse of God*; they are *that* discourse made public in these texts ... [This] discourse is established as primary discourse of God when we *find* how it leads us deeply into the infinity of the identity of the Divine, as this in turn enriches and integrates the traditions, and fructifies their interaction. Furthermore, we find that it has the capacity to repair ruptures in discourse of God within and between the traditions and in the ways in which these have begotten – whether directly or indirectly – the troubles of the world.¹⁹

That might be seen as the articulation, in an inter-faith context, of the theocentric, worship-led Anglican theology consistently developed by Hardy over many years.²⁰ It combines an embracing doxology

15. David F. Ford and C.C. Pecknold, (eds.), *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). First published as special issue 22.3 of *Modern Theology* (July 2006).

16. Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs.

17. Tim Winter (Abdal-Hakim Murad) and Basit Bilal Koshul.

18. Chad Pecknold, Nicholas Adams, Ben Quash, Susannah Ticciati, Daniel Hardy and myself. (Chad Pecknold was then Anglican and now is Roman Catholic.) The other Christian contributors are Gavin Flood (Orthodox) and Oliver Davies (Roman Catholic).

19. Daniel W. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', in Ford and Pecknold (eds.), *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, pp. 185–207 (185) (Hardy's italics).

20. Cf. Daniel W. Hardy and David F. Ford, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd; Grand Rapids: Baker

with a principled, pragmatic realism about the way the Church and the world actually are, together with trust and hope that involvement in practices such as Scriptural Reasoning can, in the phrase of Steven Kepnes which Hardy takes as a leading theme of his chapter, 'release sources of reason, compassion and divine spirit'.²¹

Hardy's response is both a masterly interconnecting of the chapters in the volume and a challenge to Scriptural Reasoning to go further, broader and deeper than the contributors have done. He sums up his challenge:

1. What are the most central seminal characteristics of the Abrahamic traditions, between them, and between them and the world?
2. How can we target the deepest suppositions of the Abrahamic traditions: the pattern of the activity of the Divine, the highest reaches of humanity (reason, passion, compassionate care, love, justice, social well-being, etc.) to which we are abductively attracted by the Divine?
3. Finally, we need to *audit* our success in moving towards these targets.²²

His conclusion, subtitled 'Pushing Forward', spells out this call in detail, and many of his points can be read simultaneously as both rooted in his Anglicanism and as a challenge to it: How can we handle a tradition that is divided within itself? How can we not mute the radical, embracing reference to God? How can we '*enlarge reasoning*' and recover '*the Reason of the Scriptures themselves*'?²³ How can we do justice to '*the poetic and polyphonic character of reality, the provisionality and anticipatory character of judgements, the disagreements characteristic of scriptural interpretation, the*

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Academic, 2005), revised and updated edition of *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984) and of the US edition, *Praising and Knowing God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985); Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2001). For Hardy's Anglican ecumenical vision for Christian churches see Daniel W. Hardy, 'Spirit of Unity – Reconcile your People!' (Würzburg: Commission on Faith and Order, World Council of Churches, 1989); Daniel W. Hardy, 'Receptive Ecumenism: Learning by Engagement', in Paul Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 428–41.

21. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', p. 190.

22. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', p. 189 (Hardy's italics).

23. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', p. 202 (Hardy's italics).

surprise ... of new interpretations that emerge, and the unusual logic which is necessary to understand the Scriptures'?²⁴ How can we move beyond the phenomenological, semiotic, metaphysical and traditional forms of conceptualizing and reasoning employed by the contributors to the volume? There is even a probing of the adequacy of the Peircean pragmatist conceptuality of his fellow-founder of Scriptural Reasoning, Peter Ochs, pushing towards a more explicit theocentricity, opening 'the question of whether we are not together *attracted* to read Scripture by the possibility offered there from the Divine, and *pressed* toward wider and wider reparative activity'.²⁵

On the one hand, Hardy wholeheartedly affirms the community of readers and reasoners generated by:

... the highly dynamic and sustaining practice of actually reading and reasoning our Scriptures together. It is an indication of the strength of SR that its participants can bring strong views to the table. But reading and reasoning our Scriptures together is what 'holds' these diverse views in a 'space' where we take responsibility not only for our own views, but also for others. Our mutual hospitality is a *responsible* one, which itself anticipates peace between the Abrahamic traditions and also begins to make a contribution to repairing a world filled with oppression and suffering. '*Above all*', then, is the ongoing practice of reading and reasoning our Scriptures together, in which we learn from a variety of strong presentations like those found in these essays, and learn the possibilities of complex harmony between us. There is indefinitely more still to learn from our Scriptures, our readings and our reasonings.²⁶

On the other hand, he simultaneously probes the quality of the sociality in the group reading of Scriptural Reasoning: 'What kind of sociality is needed in SR if these seeds are to germinate and flower? There would need to be an ease with each other, and a high level of personal relationship, even in the presence of difference and disagreement. These are often spoken of as 'friendship' and 'trust', but are those enough?'²⁷

One way of interpreting that final question is through Hardy's Anglican ecclesiology, which Ochs takes up in the third text below. Friendship and trust are not enough for Scriptural Reasoning because they are not enough for the Church. The interpersonal is essential

24. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', p. 202.

25. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', p. 203 (Hardy's italics).

26. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', pp. 206–207 (Hardy's italics).

27. Hardy, 'The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', p. 202.

but so are other aspects of sociality that require organization, institutionalization and modes of communication beyond the face-to-face. But this is no substitute for Church (or for Synagogue or Mosque). Hardy, Ochs and others gave a good deal of thought to the appropriate institutionalizing of Scriptural Reasoning in such a way as not only to resist substitution or competition, but even to see it as an enhancement of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim 'houses'. One image that emerged was of a 'tent of meeting', lightly institutionalized as a space of mutual hospitality around texts. Today the discussion goes on, with various types of 'tent' being devised in different countries and settings.

Wording a Radiance

Another direction of interpretation emerges in Hardy's final, posthumous publication, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church*. During six months in 2007 when he was dying of cancer, Hardy dictated the central chapters of this book to Peter Ochs, and other chapters are based on other conversations. Scriptural Reasoning was a recurring topic, including in the quotation at the head of this article in which Hardy hopes that the Anglican Communion could learn 'a reconciliatory imagination and practice centred on Scripture and nurturing a deeper and richer sociality, touching healingly the depths of each person'.²⁸ This is the other side of Scriptural Reasoning's inter-faith potential for sociality beyond interpersonal friendship and trust: its intra-faith potential for transforming the Church.

The synergy between the two fascinated Hardy in his last six months, as he reflected on Anglicanism, ecumenism, the Abrahamic faiths and the whole of society all together. Might it be that our intra-faith relations will not come right apart from our inter-faith relations? It is not a matter of first trying to sort out the Church of England, or the Anglican Communion, or ecumenical relations among Churches, and then addressing relations with other faiths. The experience of Scriptural Reasoning suggests that the dynamics of engagement across faiths has something essential to contribute to each faith, and also to society as a whole.

These insights are worked out at some length in a remarkable chapter entitled 'Jerusalem: Jesus' Steps, Measuring the Church'. In the context of reflecting on an experience of intense light at St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem, and on Jesus walking and healing during his ministry, Hardy

28. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, p. 12.

redefines the Church and its mission as he relates it to ecumenism, other faiths, society, all creation and God. The Church is about 'assembling all that needs to be assembled to promote the fullness of human society',²⁹ and 'this ecclesiology is an account of how each creature, and each community of creatures, recovers its primordial attraction to each other and to God'.³⁰

Qualified more than once by 'at our best', Hardy describes an Anglican approach to the complexities of multi-faith and secular settings:

Our way is to take things as we find them and then work in relation to them. In place of triumphal declarations of the truth, we – at our best – value moderation and participation, a quality of embrace that gathers people actually to work with each other on the ground. These values are associated with a willingness to live within the historical situations in which the Church finds itself, and to wait for change to come through the long term of history. This willingness suggests a profound sense of the purposes of the divine and a prayerful search for the divine presence that would truly refresh the places we inhabit, drawing us forward. This is an openness to what we may call *temporal abduction*, which means allowing our imaginations to be drawn forward by divine attraction: an ongoing process of envisioning and re-envisioning, so that we are stretched forward by the divine purposes. This openness has its source in something very deep within Anglicanism. In Richard Hooker's terms, it is to emphasise the fullness of God within the divine purposes, which is to allow oneself to be moved forward by God: moved forward in imagination, in mode of behaviour, in one's mode of reasoning and in one's sociality ... The Anglican Church has a heritage of attending to this aspect of the Spirit arising in history. This heritage is not well recognized today, but it merits close attention. One of the strengths of Anglicanism is its capacity to observe the Spirit moving in history and politics and to recognize that this is a spirit that all peoples can see in their own ways.³¹

Hardy sees this enacted in practices of many sorts: 'walking together' as Jesus did in the Holy Land (extended metaphorically to many areas),³² mutual support and compassion, reparative action, forms of organizing, a conception of Church mission as one 'of opening and embrace rather than of conquest and triumph', engagement with the Bible, and above all the Eucharist as 'an ultimate measure'.³³

29. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, p. 82.

30. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, pp. 82–83.

31. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, pp. 76–77 (Hardy's italics).

32. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, p. 83: 'Ecclesiology is embodied: in Jesus' walking.'

33. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, p. 78.

The Church this portrays is moving in the Spirit in its imagination, thought and action,³⁴ enabling its members to engage with fellow Christians and those of other faiths and none. The two main examples of this that he offers are Receptive Ecumenism and Scriptural Reasoning, and he connects the latter with the Scripture-centred Muslim letter to Christians, *A Common Word Between Us and You*.³⁵ Drawing on Coleridge's concept of 'rational frustration', he concludes the chapter:

What will emerge between the gospel and the Qur'an remains to be seen: our ecclesiology rests on the anticipation and hope that painful dialogue may stimulate rational frustration in the face of the scriptural texts, that this frustration may stimulate ever more intense inquiry, that the inquirers will be drawn to observe new and unexpected patterns of order and unity, and that these patterns will attract them to the light that opens meanings and heals. The depth of rational frustration raised by such a study may most likely correspond to the depth of frustration raised by what the participants observe in their theopolitical contexts. Inquiry that responds to the first frustration may therefore offer resources for responding to the second. One resource would be the friendship and love that may arise among the participants. Another would be the depth of scriptural reading and comprehension that this friendship and love may encourage and support. Another would be the vibrancy of the divine word that may be made visible through this comprehension: an opening to the energy of the life of God, which flows among the participants and between the participants and the two scriptures. This energy is the source of all movement. When it emerges in such a dialogue, then it is a moving dialogue. We may observe the dialogue become walking, for true dialogue is always walking, the participants fellow-walkers.³⁶

The chapter, together with other references to Scriptural Reasoning, amounts to a rationale for Scriptural Reasoning that is distinctively Anglican, written from the inside. The next text, by Ochs, gives a Jewish interpretation of this Anglican rationale.

Another Reformation

The voice of Ochs hardly intrudes explicitly in the chapters of *Wording a Radiance* that were dictated to him by Hardy. The following year, however, he published *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews*, including a chapter, 'Finding Christ in World and

34. For a summary see Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, p. 89.

35. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, pp. 90–93.

36. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance*, p. 93. For further discussion of these themes see Chapter 6.

Polity: Daniel Hardy's Ecclesiological Postliberalism'.³⁷ The book contains the most conceptually rich Jewish account so far of the logic and practice of Scriptural Reasoning; the chapter, together with two others on Anglican thinkers,³⁸ gives not only an account and critique of Anglican ways of understanding Judaism but also a Jewish view of how Scriptural Reasoning and Anglicanism go together. Since Ochs is contributing to this special issue I will not engage further with his thought here.

The Text in Play

The final, most recent publication is, *The Text in Play: Experiments in Reading Scripture* by Mike Higton and Rachel Muers.³⁹ They do both 'Biblical Reasoning' (Christian interpretation of Christian texts on the analogy of Textual Reasoning) and Scriptural Reasoning, and are explicit about their respective traditions – Higton's roots are in English charismatic Evangelical Anglicanism, Muers' in English Quakerism. The result is a demonstration through particular scriptural interpretations, including really difficult texts, of what it can mean for Christians to be led by study with Jews and Muslims deeper into their own texts as well into Tanakh and Qur'an. Higton and Muers also show, through their interplay with each other, how intra-Christian ecumenical engagement can be enhanced through the wider Abrahamic reading practice.

This is not a book to try to summarize – its main strength is in the detail and quality of its understanding of texts – but it is one to be commended for its performance of readings that are exploratory, imaginative, deeply thoughtful and scholarly at the same time. In addition, there is frequent hermeneutical and theological commentary on what is going on in the readings, so that by the end one has been inducted into a practice with accompanying rationales of Anglican and Quaker complexions.

Higton and Muers also offer the best available published Christian description of what the practice of Scriptural Reasoning is like and a virtuoso performance of doing it. Their Chapter 9, 'What is Scriptural Reasoning? How Christians, Jews and Muslims Can Read Together', not only gives a semi-fictionalized script of a study session but also some helpful ideas that supplement those in the section on practice

37. Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 167–94.

38. The others are on John Milbank and myself.

39. Mike Higton and Rachel Muers, *The Text in Play: Experiments in Reading Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

above, on topics such as: the varying pace at which discussions can go; what it means to go beyond the 'plain sense' of a text; taking detours; experimenting with readings; ambiguity of voice; comparing hypotheses; using pick-and-mix vocabularies; and even 'running jokes' – for this sort of study frequently generates laughter.

Conclusion – The Anglican Significance of Scriptural Reasoning

Taking part in the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Communion bishops, I was struck by three things.

The first was the passion for the Bible among the bishops. Not only were the opening and closing plenaries on the Bible, but the small group Bible studies were generally considered one of the best parts of the Conference. This was confirmed by observing the Primates (Archbishops and Presiding Bishops of all provinces of the Communion) during four successive annual meetings 2000–2003, and was graphically illustrated by an incident during the 2000 Porto Primates' Meeting. In a packed schedule the Archbishops decided to insert an extra session during their only free time in order to share with each other what the Bible meant to them. The result was a series of testimonies to the depth, power and relevance of the Bible that fed into a final unanimous communiqué that surprised many who had predicted a split. In the years that followed, this unity was less successfully maintained, but the passion for the Bible was sustained, and was evident again during the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

The second was the number of bishops who recognized the importance of inter-faith engagement. The Conference affirmed and strengthened NIFCON, the Network for Inter Faith Concerns across the Anglican Communion. In 2008 it issued its main publication, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue. An Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations*, whose affirmation of Scriptural Reasoning is quoted at the head of this article.

The third, exemplified by NIFCON itself, was the large number of networks represented and generated by the Anglican Communion.

Scriptural Reasoning combines and enhances all three of these elements: engagement with the Bible, dedication to inter-faith relations, and the importance of nodes interconnected in networks across the Communion. In addition, the story told in this article of its genesis and development shows how strongly, though by no means exclusively, it has an Anglican character on its Christian side.

The time would therefore seem to be ripe for the practice of Scriptural Reasoning to spread more widely through the Anglican Communion,

and so to meet deep longings and needs. It can broaden and deepen understanding of the Bible while at the same time broadening and deepening understanding of the Tanakh and Qur'an. It can lay the foundation for better relations with Jews and Muslims and also, as the practice develops, with other faiths beyond the Abrahamic. It can also help inform conversations and form collaborative alliances in many spheres of society in order to serve the common good. That triple deepening and broadening can be undergirded by the strengthening of community among those who are involved in that triple dynamic. Already, Scriptural Reasoning has spread far beyond the academy and takes place among local congregations from synagogues, churches and mosques, and in prisons, hospitals, schools, leadership courses and elsewhere. There is virtually endless scope for it to be taken up and improvised upon throughout the Anglican Communion, as is happening, for example, in China. It also has the capacity to transform theological education in relation to other faiths by giving ordinands and lay leaders and teachers the opportunity of face-to-face discussion with Jews, Muslims and others about what matters most to each.

A culminating note concerns the worship-centred character of Anglicanism, enacting its core commitment to God and God's purposes. It is tempting to instrumentalize inter-faith relations in order to achieve worthy goals of peace, justice and the flourishing of communities and individuals in various ways. Such practical results are to be desired and welcomed, but not if they displace the primary focus: God. Part of maintaining the holiness of the practice of reading our sacred scriptures together is that, whatever the practical implications, it is primarily done for the sake of God.⁴⁰ There are different ways in which the three traditions (and their many sub-traditions) conceive this, but each affirms the priority of God. For most Jews, Christians and Muslims, joint worship is not acceptable; might it be that joint study of our scriptures is as near as we can come to worship while being true to deeply differing faiths?

Two Postscripts – Meditative and Prophetic

Lectio Divina

Conversation, discussion and argument around texts are intrinsic to Scriptural Reasoning, just as they are to the rabbinic tradition of *chevruta* study that helped to generate it. But what about more meditative, contemplative approaches to Scripture that have been

40. On 'for God's sake' see Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, Chapters 1–4, 7 and 9.

especially part of some Christian traditions? In 2011 some Benedictine nuns from Turvey Abbey, Bedfordshire, came to an Open Scriptural Reasoning session held by Cambridge University as part of its annual Festival of Ideas. After it, they contacted the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme with a suggestion: they had greatly appreciated Scriptural Reasoning but wondered whether it could be done alongside their own habitual practice of *lectio divina*. The result was a gathering for a day at Turvey Abbey of over twenty Jews, Christians and Muslims. We divided into two groups, each of which read the same texts from Tanakh, Bible and Qur'an, engaging first through one practice and then through the other. We then gathered in plenary to discuss together, and the unanimous verdict was that it was a fruitful form of 'stereophonic' interreligious reading. All agreed that, done together successively, these ways of reading gave a richer appreciation of both the texts and of each other.

Daring Friendships

In the story of the Christian Ecumenical Movement and of many other past and present efforts at reconciliation it is striking how often healing is accompanied by daring friendships across deep divisions. Jesus was known for calling his disciples 'friends', and also for his own risky friendships across the social, economic and religious divisions of his society. Scriptural Reasoning has already shown a capacity to enable mutual hospitality among the Abrahamic traditions, and increasingly other traditions too. The potential of this hospitality around texts to enable surprising friendships may well prove to be the most important sign of peace, love and hope that it can give to our world.