



The Scriptural Reasoning Covenant

Scriptural Reasoning is a free, egalitarian and democratic practice of people of different faiths who come together to read their sacred texts in order better to understand religious differences and foster “better quality disagreement” – this being the motto of Scriptural Reasoning.

Scriptural Reasoning at all times respects the integrity and particularity of the ancient and established participant faith traditions, and rather than seeking forced consensus or syncretism, instead pursues a deeper understanding of what is distinctive and disagreeing between the teachings of different religious traditions, as expounded in their sacred scriptures.

Trust and honesty is the starting point of Scriptural Reasoning, in the assurance that people come together strictly as equals in order to read sacred texts for the sake of God alone, never as part of any state-sponsored or other agenda of interference in the sovereign internal doctrines and teachings of any established religious tradition – this being expressed in the phrase “three scriptures on the table, no agendas under the table”.

Likewise, Scriptural Reasoning is built upon the foundations of the strict parity of participant faiths, equality of all Members and their freedom of speech, including the freedom to criticise, rejecting hierarchies of power and control, but rather enabling conversations between women and men, young and old, lay and clergy within Scriptural Reasoning to be freer and more egalitarian than may be the case in wider society.

No person nor institution will ever be permitted to claim ownership of the free practice of Scriptural Reasoning nor exercise any authority over any Member Scriptural Reasoning Group or the liberty of any individual Scriptural Reasoning Member. In particular, there shall never be any suggestion of a “Scriptural Reasoning Reference Group” nor other kinds of “oversight” or control over the free practice of Scriptural Reasoning.

Each local Member Scriptural Reasoning Group is wholly free and independent and is bound by the Community Ethic (“Oxford Ethic”) which defines uniform governance principles of strict parity between participating faiths, equality between Members, and the clear subordination and inferiority of the practice of Scriptural Reasoning to the distinctive and separate faith traditions which take part in it.

The sovereignty and integrity of the “Houses” of Scriptural Reasoning, meaning the autonomous and separate faith traditions which are represented in the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, shall at all times be respected, and there shall never be the creation of alternative “fourth position” Scriptural Reasoning structures which in any way supplant the authority of these ancient

established faith traditions. A person may become a Scriptural Reasoning Member only by being affiliated to one of the Houses represented in Scriptural Reasoning, and it shall always remain the case that Scriptural Reasoning is a practice only for those who have a clear commitment to an established religious tradition, and is not a place for universalist or syncretistic blurring of religious differences.

For practical purposes there may be established minimal bodies such as a Scriptural Reasoning charity and Board of Trustees for the purpose of providing financial support in order to advance the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, but the role of any such committee shall strictly be limited to fiscal matters only, and neither this nor any other body shall exercise any jurisdiction over any Member Scriptural Reasoning Group nor any Scriptural Reasoning Member, nor in any respect act in supervision generally over the practice of Scriptural Reasoning. Rather, the highest authority shall at all times remain the General Meeting of ordinary Members of Scriptural Reasoning (“Community Table”) which shall democratically determine and vote upon the affairs of the Scriptural Reasoning charity.

In order to protect individual Scriptural Reasoning Members and their rights to fair treatment, freedom of expression and personal liberty, this Scriptural Reasoning Covenant is adopted as a Resolution by democratic vote of Members. Together with the Community Ethic (“Oxford Ethic”), this Covenant establishes the basis for an ethical practice of Scriptural Reasoning built upon equality, freedom and service to God alone.

The Scriptural Reasoning Covenant

The Right to Membership

1. Membership of Scriptural Reasoning is the right of every person who conscientiously and in good faith declares affiliation to one of the Houses¹ which are represented in Scriptural Reasoning:
 - a. Any person who applies to attend Scriptural Reasoning meetings and who conscientiously and in good faith declares affiliation to one of the Houses represented in Scriptural Reasoning shall as of right be admitted as an Attendee at meetings;
 - b. No person who declares conscientiously and in good faith affiliation to one of the represented Houses shall be challenged about the doctrines or beliefs which she or he holds, nor be denied admission or otherwise discriminated against by reason of those views;²

¹ A House may be defined as pertaining to a faith (eg. “Christian”, “Jewish”, “Muslim”) or it may be defined as pertaining to a particular tradition or denomination within a faith (eg. “Roman Catholic”, “Evangelical”, “Orthodox Jewish”, “Sunni Muslim”)

² If a House is defined as pertaining to a major faith, a person belonging to a group which conscientiously asserts affiliation to that faith may not be excluded even where others from the same House may disagree with her or his status (eg. if the House is called “Christian” Jehovah’s Witnesses may not be excluded, if the House is called “Jewish” Messianic Jews may not be excluded, if the House is called “Muslim” Ahmadiyya Muslims may not be excluded). Only specification of the House to a particular tradition or denomination within a faith could fairly permit exclusion of these groups.

- c. Any person initially admitted as an Attendee who completes attendance at three Scriptural Reasoning meetings within a twelve month period shall be entitled as of right to election to the status of Member of Scriptural Reasoning;
- d. Thereafter, any existing Member who completes attendance of one Scriptural Reasoning meeting within a twelve month period shall be entitled as of right to renew her or his annual membership;
- e. Members have a common duty to support the practice of Scriptural Reasoning through voluntary donations within their means; however it is strictly prohibited ever to charge any Attendee or Member for membership or admission to Scriptural Reasoning meetings.

The Right to Freedom of Expression and Duty to Defend Freedom of Expression

- 2. Every Attendee and Member of Scriptural Reasoning shall have the right freely to express her or his views in speech, in writing or by other means in accordance with the principle of “better quality disagreement”, this right being limited only by the law of the state:
 - a. This right includes the right to express criticism of religious and other beliefs, criticism of sacred texts and religious and other figures, as well as criticism of other practitioners of Scriptural Reasoning;
 - b. Excepting such limits as are defined by the law of the state, there shall be no censorship nor other constraint placed upon the freedom of expression of an Attendee or Member by any Chair, Trustee, Convener, other Member or other person holding a position of responsibility in Scriptural Reasoning;
 - c. Members of Scriptural Reasoning in the United Kingdom have a common duty under the Education Acts to defend freedom of speech on campus.

The Right to Equality of Voice and Vote

- 3. All Members of Scriptural Reasoning are strictly equal in standing and authority in every respect, and there shall be equality of voice and vote for all, and equal treatment for all regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion or belief, lay or clerical or other social status or personal characteristic:
 - a. The highest governing authority in Scriptural Reasoning is the democratic General Meeting of all voting Members (“Community Table”);
 - b. While there may be offices of Chair, Trustee, Convener and other positions of responsibility for specific functions within the Scriptural Reasoning charity, this principle of equality of all Members is overriding, and there shall never be leaders in Scriptural Reasoning who exercise authority over others;
 - c. Aside from the requirement to abide by the Community Ethic of the Scriptural Reasoning Society (“Oxford Ethic”) and this Scriptural Reasoning Covenant, every Member Scriptural Reasoning Group or individual Member of Scriptural Reasoning shall to the greatest degree have the right freely to undertake Scriptural Reasoning work entirely as they consider appropriate, and shall answer to no one other than the General Meeting (“Community Table”).

The Right to Fair Hearing

4. No Attendee or Member of Scriptural Reasoning shall be excluded from any Member Scriptural Reasoning Group except by a two thirds democratic vote in favour of exclusion by that whole reading community in session following a full and fair hearing:
 - a. In the first instance, in the event of alleged inappropriate behaviour involving a given Attendee or Member, best efforts shall be expended in seeking informal mediation and conciliation;
 - b. Where such mediation efforts are unsuccessful, the Member Scriptural Reasoning Group shall elect a neutral Chair who must be approved also by the Attendee or Member in question, and that Chair shall give reasonable notice of an Extraordinary Meeting of that Group, at which the Attendee or Member in question shall be invited to present her or his case;
 - c. The Attendee or Member in question may not be excluded except by a two thirds democratic vote in favour of exclusion by all regular Members of the Member Scriptural Reasoning Group in question;
 - d. In the event of exclusion, the Attendee or Member in question shall have the right of appeal to the General Meeting of all voting Members (“Community Table”), where the Attendee or Member shall be invited to present her or his case;
 - e. The prior ruling of exclusion by the Member Scriptural Reasoning Group shall not be upheld except by a two thirds democratic vote in favour of exclusion by all Members in attendance at a quorate meeting.

The Common Duty of Vigilance and Safeguarding

5. Concomitant with the rights of equality and liberty of all Members of Scriptural Reasoning stands the shared duty to defend the free, egalitarian and democratic character of the practice of Scriptural Reasoning as expressed in the Community Ethic of the Scriptural Reasoning Society (“Oxford Ethic”) and this Scriptural Reasoning Covenant:
 - a. Members have a common duty to be vigilant in regard to any institution or person who attempts to claim ownership or authority over the name or the free practice of Scriptural Reasoning;
 - b. Members have a common duty to be vigilant in regard to any institution or person who beyond upholding the principles of the Community Ethic of the Scriptural Reasoning Society (“Oxford Ethic”) or this Scriptural Reasoning Covenant, attempts to exercise authority or interfere with the rights of any Member Scriptural Reasoning Group or individual Member of Scriptural Reasoning freely to undertake Scriptural Reasoning work entirely as they consider appropriate;
 - c. Members have a common duty to be vigilant in regard to any institution or person who attempts to instrumentalise or commodify the practice of Scriptural Reasoning for financial or other material gain, or in order to advance state-sponsored or other interference in the sovereign internal doctrines and teachings of any established religious tradition.