

The scalpel and the sword: Reason's role in shaping safe religions in the post-secular age

**Author:**Walter Firth^{1,2} **Affiliations:**

¹Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

²Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Walter Firth,
u21747416@up.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 08 Dec. 2025

Accepted: 02 Mar. 2026

Published: 07 Apr. 2026

How to cite this article:

Firth, W., 2026, 'The scalpel and the sword: Reason's role in shaping safe religions in the post-secular age', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 47(1), a3745. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v47i1.3745>

Copyright:

© 2026. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Many nations historically identifying as secular are now transitioning into post-secular societies in which multiple, competing religious and ideological voices shape public life. This shift creates the possibility that fanatical or extreme interpretations of sacred texts may gain influence within emerging cultural discourses. Consequently, urgent questions arise concerning how religious communities utilise sacred space and sacred texts as sources for communal identity, meaning-making and even legal or political reasoning. These developments necessitate renewed theological reflection on the processes by which Scripture is interpreted, authority is negotiated and communal life is ordered within fluid socio-cultural conditions. This article argues that the Anglican category of Reason remains essential for cultivating responsible interpretation, fostering social cohesion and resisting extremist or coercive religious expression.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: In public deliberation beyond explicitly ecclesial or religious frameworks, debates surrounding the use and interpretation of sacred texts remain persistent. As scrutiny intensifies concerning how such texts are disseminated, taught and invoked, it becomes increasingly vital to maintain a civic space capable of hosting disagreement, critical reflection and plural identities. This article contributes to Practical Theology in post-secular contexts by offering a framework grounded in biblical interpretation, historical analysis and the Anglican concept of Reason for navigating these contested cultural terrains.

Keywords: Reason; sacred text; post-secular; spirituality; fundamentalism; religious education; religious tolerance.

Introduction

Western culture has markedly transitioned from the Christendom framework towards a secular orientation. Yet despite secularisation, the appetite for spiritual and religious enlightenment continues to thrive; potentially more fervently pursued than ever before (Smith & Denton 2009:28). Within this context, renewed attention has been given to the value of religious education, as well as to interpretative tools that enable communities to live constructively amidst pluralism. Although contemporary analyses note that the Anglican Church in England, as a tradition characterised by its rationalist approach, is experiencing declining social traction relative to rapidly growing evangelical and charismatic movements (Indrek & Lombaard 2025:149), the theological resources associated with Anglican Reason continue to offer valuable guidance for responsible interpretation, communal cohesion and engagement in plural public life. The Anglican emphasis on Reason – as a complement to Scripture and Tradition – offers one such tool. It holds particular promise for cultivating interpretative practices capable of sustaining communal life amidst competing truth-claims and mitigating the influence of fanatical or extreme views. Throughout this article, selected historical lexical forms are intentionally retained to signal their diachronic development, thereby drawing attention to the layered history of meaning embedded within contemporary usage.

The philosophy of human nature

Humanity is distinguished from the rest of creation not only by consciousness and self-awareness but also by the capacity for reflection, deliberation and rational judgement. These distinctive capacities are often gathered under the expression the human condition: employed here in its broader anthropological and theological sense rather than in reference to a particular philosophical schema, by probing the fundamental question of what it means to be human. Such inquiry includes the analysis of our intrinsic nature, motivations and location within the wider cosmos (Firth 2025:2).

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

At the heart of the human experience lies the capacity for self-awareness and reflection, creating the intellectual and imaginative space needed to contemplate existential hypotheses. From a theological perspective, this shared human capacity becomes the arena in which God confronts individuals and communities. Divine speech engages rational creatures; revelation invites interpretation, response and transformation. This process can be difficult and fragmented, as finite minds grapple with transcendent truth, yet it is precisely through this struggle that meaning takes shape.

This tension between finitude and transcendence has long distinguished Christian thought. Augustine (1992, *Conf. X*) describes the internal search for God as unfolding within the complex depths of memory and desire, while Aquinas (2006, *ST I-II*) identifies the intellect and will as the primary faculties through which humans participate in the divine nature. As humans inhabit a world always bigger than they can fully comprehend, yet one in which understanding continually grows (Firth 2025:3), engagement with Scripture, faith or tradition must acknowledge the interpretative role of human nature. Religion is thus not imposed upon a blank, passive canvas, but rather mediated through perception, experience and the structured capacity to think. Within this frame, Reason acts as a divine gift enabling responsible interpretation, moral discernment and communal life.

Religion functions as one of the mechanisms through which humans pursue meaning and self-definition. Its enduring presence across cultures and eras signals its fundamental significance, particularly evident in its resilience despite numerous – and sometimes aggressive – attempts to suppress or eliminate it (Smith 2012:27). Studies have demonstrated that even those identifying as atheists often retain an innate sense of transcendental motivation or purpose that is essential to human life (Bering 2003:101).

Defining secularisation

Secularisation refers to the historical and social processes by which religion's authority, influence or presence in public, political and social life is reduced, and worldly or nonreligious spheres gain relative autonomy (Taylor 2007). For a more detailed discussion of its historical development and theoretical perspectives, see Firth.

Contrary to the secular age's tendency to dismiss religion as a by-product of ignorance – famously articulated in Marx's depiction of religion as the *Opium des Volkes* (Marx 1970:131) – contemporary evolutionary biology recognises religion as an emergent outcome of cognitive traits initially serving other adaptive purposes. These include the ability to deduce agency, understand causation and anticipate potential dangers (Diamond 2013:336), which enabled early humans to develop causal explanations vital for survival. The theory of evolutionary modernisation further suggests that the widespread and enduring nature of religion contributes to the survival of individuals and societies (Inglehart 2021:17).

As a result, supernatural beliefs and ascriptions remain integral to everyday life (Joubert & Maartens 2018:38). Recognising that religious beliefs and interpretations shape how individuals participate in both community and national life signals a broader acknowledgement of the transition into a post-secular society (Firth 2022:1).

A robust theological anthropology reinforces the necessity of Reason in the life of faith. Human beings are creatures whose rational capacities are not incidental but fundamental to their vocation within creation. The intellect and will – long recognised within Christian thought as the faculties most reflective of the *imago Dei* – constitute the means by which humans engage God, neighbour and world. Because God addresses humanity as responsible moral agents, revelation presupposes the capacity to interpret, evaluate and respond. This means that Reason is not a post-Enlightenment invention but an intrinsic component of creaturely existence, woven into human nature as part of God's creative intent. Accordingly, interpretative responsibility arises from anthropology itself: rational creatures must read, test and apply sacred texts in ways that reflect both divine intention and human dignity. Recognising this anthropology strengthens the argument that Reason is indispensable not only for theological understanding but also for ethical participation in communal life.

What is religion?

When the word 'religion' is used, there is often an implicit expectation that it carries the same meaning across individuals, communities and cultures. Considering that definitions of religion have legal implications in almost every jurisdiction, one might expect this to be a settled matter (Van Buren, Syed & Mir 2020:802). However, experts across all disciplines continue to highlight significant variation in understanding and definition for the term, and no universal consensus exists (Guthrie 1996:412). This lack of universality stems from religion's intangible and complex nature, as well as the cultural and historical contexts through which the term has been transmitted, and post-colonial critiques even challenge the category 'religion' itself (Masuzawa 2005:14).

Religion, etymologically speaking

The etymology of the modern word 'religion' is somewhat obscure. It entered English around AD 1200, meaning 'a state of life bound by monastic vows' (Cavanaugh 2009:64). It originates out of the Latin *religiō*: with its earliest surviving examples from the 2nd century BC, as a term synonymous with 'scrupulous' (e.g. Plautus 2011). By the 1st century BC, the usage shifted towards contexts involving deities. For example, Cicero (1933) uses *omnis populi Romani religio* [the religion of the Roman people], to describe the rules and/or ritual practices binding a society. This period also shows disagreement around what the component parts of *religiō* mean.

These arguments followed three main understandings that stemmed from or were a combination thereof (see Box 1).

BOX 1: The main understanding of the three arguments.

Argument	Understanding or meaning	Source
<i>Relegere</i>	To read again, in the context of going back over to consider something carefully.	Cicero (1933)
<i>Religare</i>	To tie back or bind	Lactantius (1964)
<i>Re-eligere</i>	To choose again	Augustine (2014)

Note: Please see the full reference list of Firth, W., 2026, 'The scalpel and the sword: Reason's role in shaping safe religions in the post-secular age', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 47(1), a3745. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v47i1.3745>

Term 'religion' in English identity and the West

In the West, religion has often been framed in terms of denominational identity, particularly within European Christianity, which developed alongside national and local cultural identities (Ostendorf 2001:25). Efforts to enable the co-existence of these differing Christian expressions led European constitutional traditions and later post-European colonial societies, to adopt principles of freedom of conscience and religion, even when interpretations varied (Menéndez 2005:179).

Anglican identity exemplifies this historical intertwining of faith, governance and culture. It evolved over centuries through the influence of English monarchs, clergy and laity, blending religious and national identities (Firth 2022:43). In the early 1500s, the English understanding of monarchy as a Christian office under God allowed Henry VIII to claim authority over both the spiritual and temporal realms. The resulting establishment of the Church of England, formalised in the 1534 *Act of Supremacy*, marked the consolidation of one lawful religion under the Crown (Firth 2021:10).

Initially, legal protections for religion aimed to advance the mission of the established church (the Church of England) while also preventing heretical and false religions: that is, any other Christian or spiritual identity (Sandberg 2011:17). Over subsequent centuries, these legal protections for religious freedom gradually expanded. The *Toleration Act* (1689) granted Nonconformists, that is Protestants who dissented from the Church of England, the right to worship freely, whereas the *Roman Catholic Relief Act* (1829) granted Roman Catholics ultimate liberation from prior penalties and incapacities inhibiting worship and public office, and the *Jewish Relief Act* (1858) granted emancipation for Jews and removed final barriers for legal legitimacy (Quint & Hodkin 2007:8). It still remains possible for the English Parliament to make legislation concerning the Church of England, though this has rarely occurred since 1919.

In modern democracies, such as Australia, legal definitions of religion recognise sets of beliefs and practices – typically including acknowledgement of a divine or higher power – through which adherents order their lives morally and practically (Church of the New Faith v Commissioner of Pay-Roll Tax 1983). These legal protections for religious freedom are a fairly recent phenomenon and emerge from a history of colonisation and a lived negative experience of discrimination on the basis of religion, during which Western frameworks sought to create 'enlightened society', particularly in a place

termed by early colonisers as a 'godless land' (Harrison 2012:14). A 'civilized' European model often enforced religious observance as part of broader societal control, and clergy were often complicit in the promotion of this institutional conformity and were habitually disappointed in the indifference and lack of spiritual response in their congregations: indigenous, convict and free settler, who were all equally compelled to attend religious services and fulfil the accompanying observances (Frame 2009:43). By the mid-19th century, Australian colonies moved towards secular systems as part of a broader endeavour to free Australia of the sectarian divisions that had dominated in Britain (Firth 2022:8): culminating in a Federal Commonwealth with the states of this new Federation being established on a secular basis on the assumption that Australian society would be religion free in the public sphere, but that the nation would remain Christian (*Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* 1900).

These historical, anthropological and legal observations reveal that religious identity and practice have never been neutral or self-interpreting. This demonstrates the necessity of Reason as the mediating category through which communities navigate scripture, identity and public life in post-secular societies.

Expression of the term 'religion' outside of the West

No ancient language contains a term perfectly corresponding to the modern concept of religion (Nongbri 2013:14). When such terms appear in non-Western cultures, they typically emerge only after interaction with European Christian concepts. In the case of derivatives from ancient words, as opposed to the conceptual entities, we currently recognise them as, it should be more acceptable to presume them to be verbal activities. For instance, the Greek term Ἰουδαϊσμός (*Ioudaismos*) stems from the verb ἰουδαΐζειν, meaning 'to side with or imitate the Judeans' (Burns 2018:107).

Recorded in 2 Maccabees (2nd century BC), from whence we have developed *Judaism*; it originally referred to the characteristics of Judean culture, spiritual practices and tradition: that is, following the practices associated with the Judean ethnicity and not 'the religion of the Jews' as one typically interprets; in contrast to Ἑλληνισμός [*Hellenism*]: the cultural norms of the indigenous Hellenic (Greek) culture at that time (Clackson 2015:309).

The names of many religions, as we understand them today, are products of relatively recent history. *Hinduism* was coined and first used by Europeans in 1787 (Oddie 2009:41), even though what one may interpret as such faith and spiritual practices predate aforesaid Western interaction. *Hinduism* thus came to function as a generic hypernym inclusive of Indian spiritual traditions, rituals, teachings and practices; many of which are in competition with and contra-distinction to each other (Truschke 2023:248). Likewise, *Buddhism* emerged as a European term in 1801 (Marchand 2023:253). Once again, we end up reading this religion with a Western mindset. Siddhartha Gotama, more frequently referred to simply as

'Buddha', was the founder of *Buddha-Dharma: Dharma* oftentimes translated as teachings or doctrine (of the Buddha) (Kasapa 2021:6). There are different traditions of what one would today term *Buddhism*. In Tibet, it is known as *nang pa'i chos*: 'the Buddhist dharma of the insiders'; in China, *fo jiao*: 'the teaching of the Buddha'; in Sri Lanka, *sasana*: 'the teaching' and in Japan, *butsudo*: 'the way of the Buddha'. Indeed, except for a widespread acknowledgement of India as the birthplace of the Buddha, there is scant understanding across these traditions that their names refer to one single identity that one could call *Buddhism* and maintain no agreement on and as to what should be considered common cannon or sacred text, with each maintaining their own collection of texts as believed taught by the Buddha (Lopez 2004:xii). In regard to the introduction of *butsudo* into Japan, this term was used to distinguish the 'way of the Buddha' from 'the way of the kami', that is, *Shintō*: the local indigenous spiritual practices and traditions (eds. Tanji & Kisaburo 1965:556). These ultimately become codified and take on a national embodiment when tied to government and monarchy. Though the Japanese populus still lives their world under *Shintō* as it is so embedded in the very concept of being Japanese, with over 80% of Japan's population engaging in Shinto activities such as visiting a shrine at New Year, only 4% of Japanese people would define themselves as followers of a religion named *Shintō* (Suga 2017:68).

Religion can thus be viewed as an expressed component of internal assumptions embedded within, and into, the living schemas of what one holds to be true, which are then used (consciously or unconsciously) to frame and live out this scaffold in the mundane. On a basic level, this framework is built on personal experiential factors: biological, environmental, neurological, social, educational and mythic and/or metaphysical that interact with culture to give rise to and sustain both formal and informal rituals and practices that become the way we live.

There is a plasticity in the interplay between these factors that become part of a dynamic system comprising a continuous feedback loop shaping and re-shaping the structure of our lived schemas. This ultimately can become a way that dies out, or that develops into the way family, community and/or nation live or evolve. For this reason, 'religion' and 'way' can be used interchangeably, and in this paper, when needed, I have used way to embody this expression of 'religion'.

It is of significance that background spiritual concepts and actions define culture and its engagement with the physical world, and even if religion has, or should be, rejected as a term *per se*, one's being is identifiable in the way of their culturally shared and lived worldview. As we shift into the post-secular age, what we may be seeing are individuals forming or joining groups that express their 'way', and as these grow in strength and voice, a more imposed sense of how to live that way or live variant ways that may be in direct opposition to each other will develop at state or even

national level, in order to hold society together and be able to function.

The developing 'religious' state of the post-secular age

Around the world, ideological shifts within post-secular nations highlight the tensions and, at times, competing identities of various *ways* within cultures, and the corresponding desire of these identities to impose, be free to or be free from modalities of life and institutional authority.

Firstly, the emerging trend is the push towards the recreation of Christian theocracies, alongside reactionary counter-movements. Such a process may be seen within the United States of America. In the United States, for example, 21% of registered Republicans believe the country should be strictly Christian, adhering to the ideals of Christian nationalism, with a further 33% of registered Republicans sympathetic to such an idea (Public Religion Research Institute 2023:8). Such beliefs are manifest in policy initiatives in fifteen Republican-led States, including public funding for religious schools, increased religious involvement in public schools and mandated displays of the Bible and the Ten Commandments in classrooms (Corbin 2025:2). In contradistinction to this, 47% of registered Democrats reject Christian nationalism outright, with a further 36% being sceptical of such a concept (Public Religion Research Institute 2023:8). Such beliefs are reflected within Democrat policies and practices: such as their 2021 repeal of a Department of Labor rule that encouraged religious organisations' equal participation as federal contractors (Department of Labor 2021:62115).

Secondly, the trend is the nationalisation, or re-nationalisation, of churches: particularly evident in Eastern Europe, where denominational and national allegiances intersect, be this intersection perceived or actual. Examples of this include the nationalisation of, and around, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine (Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Activities of Religious Organisations in Ukraine 2024 3894-IX): with the transfer of holy sites, monasteries and churches from the Orthodox church affiliated with Moscow (the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate [UOC MP]) to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP) (Artymyshyn 2024:221). This has seen a resurgence for the UOC KP as it promotes and embeds itself into the Ukrainian psyche as the sole embodiment of Ukrainian spiritual belief and practice. Cultural shifts taking place within worship as a consequence of this include: changing the language of services and prayer from Old Slavonic to Ukrainian and a review of venerated saints, such as Nicholas II: with the view that displaying icons of a former Russian emperor is at the least inappropriate during Russia's invasion, or at worst, evidence of pro-Russian loyalty (Vovk 2025:1). A second is the compulsory cutting of historical ties between branches of Christian churches, such as in Latvia and Estonia. Because of geo-political allegiances and the Moscow Patriarchate's support for Russia's military invasion, Latvia's parliament, the *Saeima*, passed legislation in 2022 identifying the Latvian Orthodox Church as entirely and

independent and autocephalous, with absolutely no dependence whatsoever on any church outside of Latvia (Cimbalo 2023:1). Estonia's parliament, the *Riigikogu*, passed the *Churches and Congregations Act (2025)*, mandating the severance of the Estonian Christian Orthodox Church's (ECOC) historical, and canonical, ties with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). This article makes no attempt to argue the case for, or against, such moves but aims to simply highlight the developing changes occurring within the post-secular sphere. These movements underscore how churches are increasingly compelled to view their identity within national and ideological frameworks.

Thirdly, the approach is seen in South Africa, where the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) seeks to regulate religion to ensure alignment with constitutional principles protecting and promoting the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities while also promoting and developing peace, friendship, humanity, tolerance and national unity among cultural, religious and linguistic communities (*CRL Act 2002*). Recently, the CRL Rights Commission has attempted to regulate religion in South Africa and has, utilising a variety of methods, pursued a path to hold and compel religious and cultural groups to be held accountable to South Africa's constitution (Banda 2019:1). This has included recent propositions, though not ultimately adopted, for a new act of parliament establishing a framework and standards for a religion to qualify as such, including the de-accreditation of any religion and/or religious group if it had practices considered to be harmful to an adherents' health or mental state, or if considered, or judged to be, exploitive of its practitioners (Banda 2019:2). It has also set up a registration apparatus to assist in further enhancing the professionalising of the religious sector, much like that of other professional bodies: e.g. doctors and lawyers (CRL Rights Commission 2017:39). This may, in the end, enable the CRL Rights Commission to be the ultimate arbitrator in religious matters. This is important because at some stage, intervention is required when religions, or any group for that matter, are engaging in, or may engage in, abuses to human rights and dignity (Mokhoathi & Rembe 2017:7), reflecting the delicate balance between protecting religious freedom and safeguarding human rights within pluralistic societies. This example illustrates how 'Reason' could guide civic oversight without imposing doctrinal conformity.

The very idea of religious freedom acknowledges a plurality of identity groups existing within the multifacility of a democratic society, with one of the pillars of a civilised society being actual and mutual respect for the other's religious beliefs. Modern legal scholars admit to a long history of religiously motivated violence (Eisgruber & Sager 2017:3), yet theologians tend to argue the view that the only hope humanity has for peace and survival is religious tolerance and understanding.

Some form of national oversight of religious groups may be needed, and, if one is arguing for a multi-faceted society inclusive of differing identities and worldviews, then such oversight becomes a necessity. Part of the reason for this stems from the fact that each way has its own distinctive and uniquely identifiable doctrinal schema and framework suppositions; thus, religious disagreements or disagreements between or around how religious views are manifested become acutely disinclined and averse to resolution via dialogue. Even *ways* that are similarly and closely aligned operate within distinct conceptions of reality, and while all religiousness has some overlap, there is an extremely restricted and inadequate vocabulary for the resolution of disagreement: in general, alternative religious beliefs and practices cannot be defended to align with the other's concepts and perception of reality. As such, it becomes an impossibility for one to justify their beliefs to another operating outside of their distinct religious construct. Without religious tolerance, religious disagreement frequently devolves into severe and violent encounters: anyone dissenting from the majority, or the wielders of power, regardless of who these are, become labelled as irrational, aberrations and/or perversions and frequently face isolation or persecution and oftentimes violent persecution at that (Peñalver 1997:5).

The Bible can, and does, provide a positive lens via which Christians may perceive reality, and this sacred text assists in structuring and re-structuring opinions and perspectives as people are invited, as they live out their lives, to engage as characters within the pages of the greatest story ever told: a beautiful story into which God writes humanity (Firth 2022:128). One's responsiveness to God is shaped by the interpretative frameworks provided by the stories that guide their understanding of the divine. A positive and engaging approach to biblical material enables the positive affirmation that teaches people they are loved and cherished characters in God's narrative.

The aforementioned modality, both individually and corporately, nurtures faith and trust. In addition, teaching Scripture in a constructive and engaging manner fosters love, as exemplified in 3 John 1:11: 'Do not imitate what is evil, but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is of God'. By inviting individuals into God's unfolding narrative in the world, Scripture cultivates awareness of and identification with Jesus; it creates a *desideratum* to induce the story upon others as we *lifian*. Through engagement with Scripture, believers come to apprehend divine justice and love as lived and exemplified in Jesus' ministry, fostering an ethic of care, responsibility and relational flourishing that extends to God, self and others.

Using the Bible to inform conceptionality

Use of sacred text, and in this case, the Scriptures, are read and deciphered from *wipinnan* the social milieu and lived praxis of the adherent or audience, sans occurring within a void. Much like any text, the Bible was written in a location,

language and time, with an a priori structure and *way* that underpinned its formation and reformation. The Scriptures, while allotted a leading position of honour, are treated *théorie de l'arbre vivant* pre-final codification; their significance comes to expression only as one interacts attentively with the sacred writings. Conversely, when the text is encountered within cultural contexts far removed from its original setting, how should it be engaged? Is it employed to locate or confer scriptural or theological legitimacy upon a cause, action or argument (Lombaard 2020:216), or is it intended to explore how God has acted and revealed himself in the past: maintaining the credibility of the text within its historical context, so that one may discern what God is doing in the present and, through processes of analogy and parable, permit the text to speak meaningfully into the contemporary moment?

If the former approach is adopted, the genuineness, accuracy and integrity of the text risk distortion in the pursuit of self-legitimation. In such cases, even literal readings of certain passages may prove socially detrimental. One example is Exodus 22:18. Without the moderating function of Reason, such texts may be misapplied with devastating social consequences. The passage is often translated, 'You shall not suffer a witch to live', and has been invoked to justify the persecution and execution of individuals accused of witchcraft: frequently, women who do not conform to prevailing gender expectations, such as widows, unmarried or childless women. Accusations of witchcraft thereby become mechanisms for exerting control over women's bodies while reinforcing male-dominated power structures. Driven in part by forms of religious fundamentalism, violence against alleged witches persists at alarming levels. Each year, hundreds of thousands of vulnerable individuals are reportedly tortured, killed or forced into slavery in regions including sub-Saharan Africa, India and Papua New Guinea (United Nations 2023:2). Dangerously, this passage could just as easily be translated from the Septuagint *φαρμακοὺς οὐ περιποιήσετε* and read 'you shall not keep pharmacists alive' and may thus be used on a literal level to justify the banning of medicine, access to healthcare or the destruction and/or murder of pharmacies and pharmacists.

If, however, the latter approach, in what manner should the text be read? In responding to this question, one must acknowledge that Scripture contains multiple literary forms (Zahn 2020:238): inclusive of letters; ethics, regulations and laws; proverbs, songs and poetry; wisdom sayings and apocalyptic writings. Individual books further employ a range of literary forms, including genealogical records, narrative sections, prophetic oracles, parables and prayers. Although historical events are sometimes recounted, the primary purpose of these texts is theological and instructional rather than to provide a chronological history.

Meaning is never pursued in a vacuum. Cultural, historical and socio-political contexts shape the resources available for individuals and communities to interpret their existence. In contemporary societies marked by rapid change,

technological acceleration and ideological pluralism, meaning becomes increasingly contested. The decline of overarching metanarratives, once predicted to result in the disappearance of religion, has instead intensified the complexity of the search. Individuals draw simultaneously on religious, spiritual, philosophical and scientific sources as they navigate identity, purpose and moral responsibility. In the post-secular age, Christians are called to reconnect sacred texts with these contemporary cultural realities. Here, the Anglican concept of Reason provides a means of interpreting scripture, fostering ethical reflection and promoting social cohesion within diverse societies.

Religious interpretation and the contested public sphere

Human beings do not merely possess the capacity for reflection and interpretation; they inevitably bring these faculties into the fabric of public life. In a post-secular age – marked not by the decline of religion but by its transformation and re-emergence in new social forms – the interpretative nature of humanity becomes a decisive political factor. Religious ideas, sacred texts and theological symbols do not remain confined to private devotion. They shape national identities, influence political mobilisation and inform moral positions within democratic discourse. Thus, the question is not whether religion will enter the public sphere, but how it does so and under what interpretative frameworks it operates. To understand how Anglican Reason functions, it is first necessary to consider the foundational revelation of God, as presented in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Revelation of God

Within Anglican theology, the primary revelation of God is Jesus Christ. Christianity presents this revelation of God in the life, death and resurrection of Christ as the definitive interface with the divine. As the International Commission for Anglican–Orthodox Theological Dialogue (ICAOTD 1976) observes:

By virtue of the divine self-revelation, man experiences personal communion with God. By faith and through obedience he shares truly in the divine life and is united with God the Holy Trinity. (p. 1)

Scripture serves as a secondary source of revelation, providing authoritative testimony to God's activity in creation, the Incarnation and the broader sweep of salvation history.

This means that Anglicans uphold the principle, or doctrine of *Prima Scriptura*, whereby canonised Scripture takes priority over all other sources of divine revelation, guiding faith and practice. It is articulated:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. (Article VI)

This distinguishes Anglicanism from other branches of Christianity, which typically adhere to one of five Latin phrases (or *Solas*) that emerged during the Reformation and encapsulate the Reformers' theological convictions about the essentials of Christianity. Although it is not in the purview of this article to discuss the background or merits of each of these *Solas*, they may be summarised as follows:

- *Sola Scriptura* [Scripture alone]: Scripture alone constitutes the infallible rule of faith, authority and practice within the church.
- *Sola Fide* [faith alone]: Justification and salvation are received solely through faith in Jesus Christ.
- *Solus Christus* [Christ alone]: Salvation is affected only through the atoning work of Christ, who alone mediates between God and humanity.
- *Sola Gratia* [grace alone]: Salvation is granted entirely by the unmerited grace of God, independent of human works.
- *Soli Deo Gloria* [to God alone the glory]: All glory, honour and praise are because of God alone.

Beyond Scripture, Anglicans recognise *Tradition* and *Reason* as essential sources of divine revelation. Tradition encapsulates the living wisdom of the Church expressed through worship, teaching, canonical discipline and spiritual life. Although dogmatic teaching provides unchanging truths, liturgical and canonical practices adapt to the needs and context of communities across time. Reason, however, offers a unique and indispensable lens through which believers engage Scripture and Tradition in ways that are intellectually and ethically responsible, particularly in our pluralistic, post-secular age. With the need for Reason established, we now turn to its specific character and operation within Anglican theology.

Reason

Within Anglican theology, Reason is neither mere rationalism nor a concession to modern scepticism, but a God-given capacity by which humans, made in the divine image, discern truth within the complexity of lived experience. Historically, Anglicans have understood Reason as the interpretative faculty that evaluates, orders and holds in critical tension the claims of Scripture and Tradition. Its function is not independent, nor superior, but as the mode through which revelation is apprehended by rational creatures. Reason, therefore, includes critical reflection, moral judgement, historical awareness and the capacity to recognise genre, context and intention within sacred texts. It is a theological category before it is a philosophical one: grounded in the conviction that the God who communicates is intelligible and therefore addresses creatures capable of understanding. For Anglicans, to use Reason is not to step outside faith but to participate faithfully in the very process by which divine truth encounters the human mind.

Reason, in Anglican thought, operates within the living framework of ecclesial Tradition. Tradition constitutes the

accumulated wisdom, doctrinal reflection and communal discernment of the Church across history. It provides the horizon of meaning within which Scripture is interpreted and guards against purely individual or idiosyncratic readings. Reason does not stand over Tradition but works in dialogue with it – testing claims, recognising historical development and discerning which strands of inherited practice remain faithful to the gospel. The triadic relationship of Scripture, Tradition and Reason therefore forms a hermeneutical ecology: Scripture as the normative witness to revelation, Tradition as the communal memory of its interpretation and Reason as the faculty that evaluates and synthesises these voices within contemporary contexts. This ensures that interpretation remains accountable both to the historic Church and to the demands of present experience. Reason functions as both a mediator and a safeguard. When Scripture or Tradition appears to conflict with ethical or rational insight, Reason allows the believer and/or community to interpret, adapt and contextualise without abandoning faith. This enables the adaptation of current views, beliefs and practices to meet the immediacy of the moment. As such, there are many instances of ideas, issues or ethical standpoints that were formerly novel, fresh, innovative or suspect but are now generally accepted as valid expressions of Bible-based Christianity. Historical examples of this dynamic include slavery, women, divorce and usury.

All human beings have the capacity for rational thought: the mental faculty of Reason (Wells 2010:20). For Anglicans, this ability arises from the shared Athanasian conviction that each person has a rational soul capable of perceiving and understanding God. Reason, as a source of divine revelation, comes from the view that our lived reality does not exist in a vacuum, because God created human beings as part of the created order, and it is into this created order that God also becomes manifest. Creation thus becomes a divine work of art reflecting the glory of God, that people have the ability to touch, imagine and know God.

Indeed, within the created order, imperfect yet permeated by divine presence, there exists a universal divine Reason: a source of unity, purpose and rationality available to all who seek it (Simon 1967:75). This divine Reason informs human conscience, for the human mind is fashioned by a God who designed us to understand, or at least to seek to understand, the world in order to live reasonably good and flourishing lives. Rationality enables us to accomplish the activities for which we were created while also opening the possibility of transcending current knowledge, allowing exploration beyond what we have so far understood and achieved.

Accordingly, outside the biblical covenants, there exists a form of natural knowledge of God accessible through conscience and Reason to all people. This includes the ability to perceive right and wrong (Ramsey 2004:20). Nevertheless, the Anglican justification for Reason is not derived from a neutral or secular framework of rational debate; it assumes the existence of God, and more specifically, the Christian God. Even so, Reason (and, on a technical level, re-reasoning

as society changes, adapts and emerges) is a beneficial utility to enable a safe method for differing and conflicting voices and people to coexist safely and near harmoniously in a post-secular society: explaining how human knowledge expresses the nature of reality while allowing for error, difference of opinion and the potential for growth (Clatworthy 2008:68).

Reason, as a theory of real (but relative) knowledge, does though, provide a crucial means to manage disagreements, differences and disputes not simply in religion, but across all disciplines, including science and ethics, and places an inclination upon people to continually explore and expand their knowledge and understanding. By utilising Reason to do so, the understanding and awareness of any community, including faith communities, grow. It encourages individuals and communities to expand their understanding, and through this process of reflection and re-evaluation, faith communities become more responsive to the world in which they live.

Scripture reinforces this dynamic. The biblical witness itself affirms that God engages humanity through rational, interpretative capacities. The prologue of John's Gospel identifies Christ as the eternal *Logos*, the divine Reason through whom all things were made and in whom the intelligibility of the world is grounded (Jn 1:1–5). Paul likewise appeals to the renewal of the *nous* [mind] as essential for discerning the will of God (Rm 12:1–2), implying that rational transformation is integral to spiritual maturity. Wisdom literature assumes that God's world is structured according to discernible patterns of understanding, inviting believers to 'get wisdom' and cultivate insight (Pr 4:5–7). Even Jesus' own teaching frequently calls listeners to moral reasoning: 'Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?' (Lk 12:57). Scripture, therefore, presupposes that human beings interpret revelation through faculties of understanding, deliberation and evaluation. These texts provide the theological foundation for the Anglican conviction that Reason is not an optional supplement to revelation but an intrinsic dimension of how revelation is received.

Passages traditionally associated with learning from the past and teaching for the future emphasise three enduring responsibilities, namely to pass on the:

- Praises of God – teaching that God is worthy of adoration and gratitude.
- Knowledge of God's strength – affirming God's power above all things.
- Memory of God's wonderful works – recounting God's ongoing involvement in the life of God's people.

Such learning enables individuals to perceive God's activity throughout history. When people are formed to interpret the world through the divine narrative, their identity and imagination are shaped accordingly. Thus, it remains necessary to pass on this theological inheritance across generations – teaching what God has done, how God continues to act and how this may be expressed faithfully in contemporary life.

We should speak habitually and frequently about the knowledge of God's greatness and power above and beyond all things and continue to tell the continually unfolding story of God's significance and influence in active assistance to, in and through people. As we do this, we should also be mindful that not only should our children be taught, but that they should be taught to teach their children so that the word and the work of God may endure across generations.

There are many meta-narratives employed by people to make sense of their world, but Christians privilege a worldview rooted in and drawn from the Bible. This can be healthy and life-giving for individuals, communities and society – or, if mishandled, harmful. Reviewing the past through Reason demonstrates that post-secular societies require some form of oversight of religious groups to ensure healthy interpretation and practice. Scripture offers a lens through which Anglicans perceive reality; it nurtures imagination and shapes moral perspective. Through Scripture, individuals and communities discover themselves as characters within God's unfolding story (Firth 2022:128). Building on the centrality of divine revelation, the following section considers why Reason must be embedded within religious reflection to enable ethical and socially responsible engagement in post-secular societies.

Necessity of imbedding Reason in religious thought

Post-secular societies increasingly expect religious and moral teaching to foster civic virtue, ethical formation and social cohesion. As post-secularism expands, spiritual and religious learning becomes not only desirable but also competitive. Research indicates that spaces for questioning are indispensable to the human search for meaning, addressing fundamental concerns about purpose, gratification, curiosity, isolation and mortality (Firth 2022:5). For this to occur safely and constructively, oversight of religious education and interpretative practices is essential. Healthy models of engagement allow individuals to explore the meaning of their lives, question inherited assumptions and develop a sense of belonging and personal value. The current model and ways of engagement and the processes currently unfolding are not the most beneficial or advantageous for this to occur under.

Through biblical narratives and contemporary spiritual stories, religious communities can help people engage their cognitive, moral and spiritual capacities, cultivating awareness of self, God and others. Religion offers people new lenses through which they can see worlds. These lenses need to offer perspectives on what the world was like, how it is and how it could be. Part of equipping and overseeing how religious groups engage or are monitored needs to include journeying through these lenses, unseeing what they have seen and finding new ways of seeing.

For a post-secular society to be genuinely inclusive, it must embrace intersectionality: the understanding that individuals hold multiple overlapping identities (including race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, disability and age). These intersections shape experiences of privilege and discrimination. Valuing and acknowledging this complex interplay of identities fosters a more inclusive and equitable environment in personal, social and professional contexts. This should enable post-secular societies to engage in harm minimisation, healthy interaction, cultural awareness and sensitivity and promote cultural competence; that is, growing awareness of other cultures and our own, fostering tolerance and broadening perspectives, which is crucial for effective communication and building relationships across differences. Recognising this complexity fosters cultural competence, empathy and constructive engagement across differences. Reason is indispensable in facilitating such reflection.

Religious teaching may sometimes appear irrelevant or dormant, yet often it awaits a future moment of synthesis. In this sense, religious narratives function like subroutines in human consciousness – running in the background until a crisis or moment of transformation calls them forth. When confronted with suffering, mortality, uncertainty or existential questions, people often turn instinctively to sacred stories as interpretative tools. These narratives act as ‘first aid kits’ for the soul.

Psychological and cognitive studies support this dynamic by demonstrating that individuals internalise narrative frameworks that remain dormant until activated by crisis, dissonance or major life transitions. These frameworks function as interpretative schemata – structures of meaning that organise perception, emotion and moral response. Religious narratives, therefore, operate not merely as stories but also as cognitive resources shaping how individuals make sense of suffering, hope, identity and mortality. When responsibly formed through Reason, these schemata promote resilience, empathy and moral imagination. When formed without such oversight, they may distort perception or legitimise harmful responses. This cognitive dimension reinforces the argument that Reason is indispensable to the healthy integration of religious meaning-making.

Experiences that draw on tools from religion to process and handle are ones that as a society, we tend to avoid discussing, as they are uncomfortable and bring to mind either the reality of a world that does not care for us or a world we may no longer be in. Once these tools (or first aid kits) have been given to people, then it is in the experience of moments for which these have been prepared that the skills gained come to the fore. It is important that people are well equipped in the use of such tools, lest the result be a misuse, abuse or maladjustment that inhibits healthy development, social cohesion and inter-personal relations. For some people in their lives, that moment of need (be it of deep personal crisis or a simple spark of new direction) may simply not have occurred yet. However, like a safety net below a trapeze performer, sacred stories act to catch people should they fall and need it.

When people eventually face the harsh realities of life, the lessons and stories from the Bible emerge from temporal stasis and become first aid kits of sacred stories to call to hand for the occasion. However, without Reason and responsible hermeneutics, the same stories may become misused or weaponised: the scalpel in the hands of a physician becomes the blade in the hand of a murderer. Ensuring that people are equipped with healthy interpretative tools is essential for social cohesion, psychological well-being and inter-personal relationships.

A post-secular society cannot afford to treat religious interpretation as a private matter alone; interpretation has public consequences. Reason, therefore, becomes the civic safeguard that protects both believers and non-believers from the dangers of unexamined dogma, interpretative absolutism or theocratic aspiration.

Conclusion

Interpretative diversity is amplified within pluralist democracies, where competing conceptions of truth, morality and national identity coexist – sometimes uneasily – within the same civic space. Religious reasoning thus becomes not only a theological concern but also a civic necessity.

Within this milieu, Scripture functions as a moral and imaginative resource that shapes public consciousness. Yet sacred texts are always read from within a cultural location. This means the same biblical passage may generate divergent ethical and political conclusions depending on the hermeneutical tools applied. Where interpretative frameworks prioritise empathy, justice and communal flourishing, Scripture can become a powerful catalyst for peace, dignity and mutual recognition. Conversely, when texts are approached with literalism detached from context, history or genre, they may sanction exclusion, entrench ideological rigidity or justify harmful practices.

Reason, therefore, becomes indispensable to the life of faith in public. The Anglican triad of Scripture, Tradition and Reason embodies this position: it assumes that revelation addresses rational beings who must interpret divine communication responsibly. Reason, in this view, is not an adversary to faith but part of the created capacity through which humans discern God’s will amidst complex social realities.

Secular nations are at a point of transition: they are shifting into post-secular societies, enabling multi and contra voices and beliefs to influence their citizens. Unmonitored, this process raises a real potential danger that fanatical or extreme views and/or interpretations of sacred texts and ideologies could override the voices of others and imbed themselves within an emerging post-secular culture. These questions concern how sacred spaces and Scripture are employed by faith communities to form communal identity internally and to participate responsibly in the broader social context.

As differing worldviews converge and form new embodiments of religion, of *ways*, it is important that this occurs within a framework that safeguards differences, maintains and upholds equality, non-discrimination and free association: protecting and promoting the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities and developing and enmeshing peace, friendship, humanity, tolerance and national unity within this multi-faceted collection of cultures. To help assist in such formation and interpretation of space and sacred text, the Anglican concept of Reason, adapted and applied, can assist in the safe functioning, interpretation and use of said sacred text and space. In doing so, divergent views, expressions, beliefs and practices may all co-exist in a manner that is not to the detriment of adherents, members of faith groups or non-adherents and non-members of faith groups. The world is, socially and culturally, in a period of adaptation and remoulding. Without intervention and the insight gained from the past, what emerges may be a bleaker and more sinister culture than we have previously experienced. Yet being guided by Reason, such a negative potential can be curtailed for the creation of a more inclusive, diverse and safe world.

In a post-secular society, where diverse ways of life coexist, this responsible reasoning forms the basis for civic dialogue and ethical cooperation. The political implications of this are significant. If individuals and communities approach Scripture with humility, critical awareness and interpretative discipline, they are more likely to contribute constructively to democratic life. If they approach it with unexamined assumptions or weaponised literalism, they risk intensifying social fragmentation. Thus, the health of a pluralistic society is directly tied to the quality of its religious reasoning. Understanding this interplay between interpretation, identity and public life is essential for navigating the evolving religious landscape of the post-secular age.

In the post-secular age, the future of democratic life depends in part on the willingness of religious communities to embrace Reason not as a concession to modernity but as fidelity to the God who created rational, interpretative beings capable of seeking truth together. Ultimately, the Anglican commitment to Reason affirms that the God who reveals is the God who created rational beings capable of discerning truth together; the future of post-secular democratic life therefore depends on the cultivation of communities where faith and Reason cooperate to sustain human dignity, social cohesion and the shared pursuit of the common good.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Walter Firth: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Visualisation, Project administration, Resources, Writing – review &

editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria. The ethics clearance number is T024/21.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors

Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

- Act of Supremacy, 1534, (26 Hen. 8 c. 1), *Parliament Rolls*, Chancery, The National Archives, Kew, catalogue ref. C 65/143, m. 5, nos. 8–9.
- Aquinas, T., 2006, 'Purpose and happiness', in *Summa theologiae*, vol. 16, transl. T. Gilby, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (Original work published c. 1265–1274).
- Artymyshyn, P., 2024, 'The activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate as part of the Russian "soft power" strategy in Ukraine: From hybridity to war', *Наукowyi щорічник «Історія релігій в Україні»* [Scientific Yearbook 'History of Religions in Ukraine'] 1(34), 221–238. <https://doi.org/10.33294/2523-4234-2024-34-1-221-238>
- Augustine, 1992, *Confessions*, transl. H. Chadwick, Oxford University Press, Oxford. (Original work published c. 397–400).
- Augustine, 2014, *De civitate Dei: The City of God, Book X*, transl. P.G. Walsh, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool. (Original work written c. 413–426 CE).
- Banda, C., 2019, 'Redefining religion? A critical Christian reflection on CRL Rights Commission's proposal to regulate religion in South Africa', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v40i1.1948>
- Bering, J.M., 2003, 'Towards a cognitive theory of existential meaning', *New Ideas in Psychology* 21(2), 101–120. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0732-118X\(03\)00014-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0732-118X(03)00014-X)
- Burns, J.E., 2018, 'Gendered language and the construction of Jewish identity in 2 Maccabees', *Journal of Jewish Identities* 11(1), 107–122. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jji.2018.0009>
- Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024, *Law on amendments to certain laws of Ukraine regarding the activities of religious organizations in Ukraine, 3894-IX*, viewed 16 June 2025, from <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/41219>.
- Cavanaugh, W., 2009, *The myth of religious violence: Secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Church of the New Faith v Commissioner of Pay-Roll Tax (Vic), 1983, *HCA 40*; (1983) 154 CLR 120 (27 October 1983), viewed 16 June 2025, from <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/HCA/1983/40.html>.
- Cicero, 1933, *De natura deorum; Academica*, transl. H. Rackham, W. Heinemann, London. (Original work published c. 45 BC).
- Cimbalò, G., 2023, 'The Latvian state imposes autocephaly by law on the Orthodox Church in Latvia', in *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale* [State, Churches and confessional pluralism], University of Milan. <https://doi.org/10.54103/1971-8543/19579>
- Clackson, J., 2015, 'Latinitas, Ἑλληνισμός and standard languages', *Studi e saggi linguistici* [Linguistic Studies and Essays] 53(2), 309–330.

- Clatworthy, J., 2008, *Liberal faith in a divided Church*, O Books, Winchester.
- Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900, viewed 08 December 2025, from https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/senate/powers_practice_n_procedures/constitution.
- Corbin, C., 2025, 'New judicial federalism and the establishment clause: Classroom ten commandments as a case study in state constitutional protection', *Texas Law Review* 104(1), 1–53. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5134565>
- CRL Rights Commission, 2017, *Report on the hearings on the commercialisation of religion and abuse of people's beliefs systems*, viewed 27 June 2025, from https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201708/report-commercializationofreligionandabuseofpeoplesbeliefsystems.pdf.
- Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, 2021, *Rescission of implementing legal requirements regarding the equal opportunity clause's religious exemption rule*, 88 F.R. 12842, viewed 12 June 2025, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-03-01/pdf/2023-04150.pdf>.
- Diamond, J.M., 2013, *The world until yesterday: What can we learn from traditional societies?* Penguin, London.
- Eisgruber, C. & Sager, L., 2017, 'Does it matter what religion is?', in W.C. Durham Jr. & D.L. Breaux (eds.), *Religious rights: An institutional theory*, pp. 47–71, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Firth, W., 2025, 'Spiritual space: Hearing and experiencing the voice of God', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v46i1.3342>
- Firth, W.B., 2021, 'Covid, crown and crosier: A lockdown reflection on monarchy and episcopacy', *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 77(4), a6435. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6435>
- Firth, W.B., 2022, 'Special religious education in a post-secular Australia', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2603>
- Frame, T., 2009, *Losing my religion: Unbelief in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.
- Guthrie, S.E., 1996, 'Religion: What is it?' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35(4), 412–419. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386417>
- Harrison, J., 2012, 'Faith and belief in "the Land of the Holy Spirit"', *Media Development* 59(1), 14–18.
- Indrek, P. & Lombaard, C., 2025, 'Return to denominations in the Baltics, post-communism? Observations and demographic trends in discussion, with Lutheran Churches as case study', *Ceļš* 76, 133–150. <https://doi.org/10.22364/cl.76.08>
- Inglehart, R., 2021, *Religion's sudden decline: What's causing it, and what comes next?* Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- International Commission for Anglican–Orthodox Theological Dialogue (ICAOTD), 1976, *The Moscow agreed statement*, Anglican Communion Office, London.
- Joubert, C. & Maartens, N., 2018, 'Hearing God's voice: Evaluating some popular teachings on the subject', *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 25(1), 38–55.
- Kasapa, S.S., 2021, 'The essence of Buddha-Dharma', *Telangana Journal of IMA* 1(1), 6–8. <https://doi.org/10.52314/tjima.2021.v1i1.3>
- Lactantius, 1964, *The divine institutes: Books I–VII*, transl M.F. McDonald, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC. (Original work published c. 303–311).
- Lombaard, C., 2020, 'Considering mystagogy as method in Biblical spirituality', *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 76(4), a7050. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i1.7050>
- Lopez, D., 2004, *Buddhist scriptures*, Penguin, New York, NY.
- Marchand, S., 2023, 'On Buddhist studies in nineteenth-century Germany', in S.K. Licha & H.M. Krämer (eds.), *Learning from the west, learning from the east: The emergence of the study of Buddhism in Japan and Europe before 1900*, pp. 253–283, Brill, Leiden.
- Marx, K., 1970, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Masuzawa, T., 2005, *The invention of world religions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Menéndez, A.J., 2005, 'A Christian or a Laïc Europe? Christian values and European identity', *Ratio Juris [Reason Law]* 18(2), 179–205. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9337.2005.00294.x>
- Mokhoathi, J. & Rembe, N., 2017, 'Religious liberties and the constitution of South Africa: A call for religious accountability', *Scriptura* 116(1), 1–10.
- Nongbri, B., 2013, *Before religion: A history of a modern concept*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Oddie, G.A., 2009, 'Hindu religious identity with special reference to the origin and significance of the term "Hinduism", c. 1787–1947', in E. Bloch, M. Keppens & R. Hegde (eds.), *Rethinking religion in India: The colonial construction of Hinduism*, pp. 41–55, Routledge, London.
- Ostendorf, D., 2001, 'Christian identity: An American Heresy', *Journal of Hate Studies* 1(1), 23–55. <https://doi.org/10.33972/jhs.3>
- Peñalver, E.M., 1997, 'The concept of religion', *Yale Law Journal* 107(3), 791–822. <https://doi.org/10.2307/797254>
- Plautus, 2011, *The merchant. The braggart soldier. The ghost, The Persian*, transl. W. de Melo, Loeb Classical Library, no. 163, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. (Original work published c. 200–190 BCE).
- Public Religion Research Institute, 2023, *A Christian nation? Understanding the threat of Christian nationalism to American democracy and culture*, viewed 19 May 2025, from <https://www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/PRRI-Jan-2023-Christian-Nationalism-Final.pdf>.
- Quint, F. & Hodkin, P., 2007, 'The development of tolerance and diversity in the treatment of religion in charity law', *Charity Law and Practice Review* 10, 1–16.
- Ramsey, M., 2004, *The Anglican spirit*, Church Publishing Incorporated, New York, NY.
- Riigikogu, Estonian Parliament, 2025, *The Churches and congregations act*, viewed 16 June 2025, from <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/510062025007/consolidate>.
- Sandberg, R., 2011, *Law and religion*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Simon, I., 1967, *Three restoration divines: Barrow, South and Tillotson. Vol I. Selected Sermons*, Presses Universitaires de Liège Series, Liège.
- Smith, C., 2012, 'Man the religious animal: We are naturally but not necessarily religious', *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 222, 27–32.
- Smith, C. & Denton, M.L., 2009, *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Suga, K., 2017, 'Shinto', in G. Oppy & N. Trakakis (eds.), *Interreligious philosophical dialogues*, pp. 68–81, Routledge, London.
- Tanji, G. & Kisaburo, K. (eds.), 1965, *Nihon Shoki, II, Vol. 68 of Nihon koten bungaku taikai* [Japan early, good, Vol. 68 of Japan solo exhibition literature body type], Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo.
- Taylor, C., 2007, *A secular age*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Truschke, A., 2023, 'Hindu: A history', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65(2), 246–271. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417522000524>
- United Nations, 2023, *A/HRC/52/47: Study on the situation of the violations and abuses of human rights rooted in harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks, as well as stigmatization*, viewed 11 July 2025, from <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/47>.
- Van Buren III, H.J., Syed, J. & Mir, R., 2020, 'Religion as a macro social force affecting business: Concepts, questions, and future research', *Business & Society* 59(5), 799–822. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650319845097>
- Vovk, D., 2025, 'Between national security and spiritual liberation: Ukrainian state policies towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 67(1–2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2025.2494937>
- Wells, C., 2010, 'How did God get started?' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 18(2), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1353/arn.2010.0019>
- Zahn, M.M., 2020, *Genres of rewriting in second temple Judaism: Scribal composition and transmission*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.