

COULD WE IMAGINE A RELIGION FOR PRIVATE USE?

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1. Introduction

Wittgenstein made the remark, “Make sure that your religion is a matter between you and God only,”¹ during a discussion when his pupil and friend M. O’C Drury mentioned his intention to be ordained a priest after leaving Cambridge. Wittgenstein did not want to ridicule the idea, nor could he approve it. He thought that the clerical collar would choke Drury one day. He was thinking of the institutional and dogmatic aspects of being a priest in the Anglican Church. He found attempts to make religious beliefs as scientific theories or philosophical propositions offensive and ridiculous. Drury would be tempted to present Christian beliefs as more or less proved scientific hypotheses or logical conclusions in his sermons and teachings, according to Wittgenstein. It was in this context Wittgenstein had made the above remark.

The spirit of the remark is in harmony with Wittgenstein’s overall attitude to religion. The autobiographical notes, letters, and conversations with friends reveal Wittgenstein’s struggles with religious belief. In his view, in religion, “Once you have been turned around, you must stay turned round” (CV 53)² and it is a hard job requiring persistent attention and effort because one is working on one’s own life, which is an ongoing process of being human. He did not ridicule religious beliefs; on the contrary held them in great respect. According to him, “All religions are

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¹R. Rhees ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, 117.

²CV = *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998.

wonderful, even those of the most primitive tribes.”³ He himself, however, never committed to a religion; but confessed, “I am irreligious, but with *Angst*” (NL 118, 62).⁴ Religion was, for him, “the calm sea bottom at its deepest, remaining calm, however high the waves rise on the surface” (CV 61); “A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them” (CV 4). He longed for such an ideal, a resting place. In 1946 he was still searching and struggling with himself as he wrote, “And only if I could be submerged in religion might these doubts be silenced. For only religion could destroy vanity & penetrate every nook & cranny” (CV 54). He sought the will of God in his life and prayed for the light from above. He said to Drury: “I have a letter from an old friend in Austria, a priest. In it he says he hopes my work will go well, if it should be God’s will. Now that is all I want: if it should be God’s will.”⁵ It was also his prayer, “God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone’s eyes” (NL 135 103 c: 27.7.1947, CV 72).

Though Wittgenstein admired religious celebrations, rituals, and symbols, their values were relative for him. He did not approve of street preachers or those who make systems out of religious belief. By and large, he avoided all public religious expressions. As one grows up in religious life, according to his observation, “a man’s expression of religion becomes much drier.” In a reported conversation in Schlick’s house on December 17, 1930 he asks: “Is talking essential to religions?” and replies: “I can well imagine a religion in which there are no doctrinal propositions, in which there is thus no talking. Obviously the essence of religion cannot have anything to do with the fact that there is talking, or rather: when people talk this itself is part of a religious act and not a theory” (WVC 117).⁶ In religion, language is used primarily as part of a religious act, though it may also be used to describe, defend, explain and elucidate religious experiences and religious truths. However, for believers there is more to religion and following a religion than what they can speak about and they speak more than what they can systematise. “The religion of the future,” Wittgenstein thought, “will be without any priests or ministers.” It

³Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 117.

⁴“*Bin irreligiös, aber mit Angst.*” NL = *Wittgenstein’s Nachlass* (The Bergen Electronic Edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

⁵Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 181-2.

⁶WVC = *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, B. F. McGuinness ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.

“will have to be extremely ascetic” and people “have to live without the consolation of belonging to a church.”⁷ A religion devoid of language, rituals, priests, and church could be pictured as “a matter between God and the believer only.” It needs to be seen, however, whether such a notion of religion is true.

2. A *Private* Religion?

The question is this: ‘Can one follow a religion ‘privately’ and ‘Could we imagine a *religion* ... for private use? ... a *religion* that can only be known to the person himself: to his immediate private life. So another person cannot understand this *religion*’ (refer *PI* 243).⁸ In Wittgensteinian terms, a *private* religion that is drawn from this remark would be so *private* that it is logically impossible for another person to follow. The content of this religion is exclusively the subjective experience of the believer. To devise and maintain the essential privacy of this religion, the practices of this religion should not be connected with anything that may undermine their radical privacy. Thus, the natural and cultural expressions of beliefs, words, and logical concepts used in other religions are excluded; otherwise, ‘someone else might understand it as well as I’ (see *PI* 256). It is a religion ‘which no one else follows’ but which the person alone ‘*appears to follow*’ (refer *PI* 269).

As in the case of *private* language, the issue of privacy in a putative *private* religion is not empirical but logical. A ‘private’ religion is not just reciting prayers and performing rituals alone in one’s room or in the Himalayan peaks or in the Egyptian deserts; nor is it Robinson Crusoe or the last of the Mohican practising religion alone. Individuals can follow religion in physical isolation. It is also possible that a new religion is founded which has only one follower. People may also keep their religion a secret either by choice or by circumstances. All these religious practices are private in some sense, but others could know about them and could also be initiated into them. They are secret religions rather than *private* religions, in the Wittgensteinian sense; they are only contingently private, not logically. In a ‘private’ religion, it is logically impossible for others to

⁷Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 129.

⁸*PI* = *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe trans., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953.

know about it or share in it. Others are excluded logically; it is a matter between God and self only.

This *private* religion fantasy could be sustained only under the influence of a pervasive picture of human experience according to which our experiences are exclusively *private*. According to this picture, the subjective knowledge about sensations, feelings and other experiences, including religious, is infallible. What *seems* to me *is* the case. Moreover, others cannot contest my claims about my religious experience. In this view, my own soul is transparent to myself and inaccessible to others. The objects, events, and processes in it are immediately known by introspection, and they are true. Moreover, these states are independent of behaviour. It seems also that I cannot know of other people's experiences and religious states as I know my own, direct and infallible, as they are inferred only from the observation of their behaviour, an indirect and fallible form of knowledge. I cannot achieve certain knowledge of others' religious experiences; I can, at best, only surmise that things are thus-and-so with them. Further, it seems impossible for another person to have what I have when I have a religious experience. Therefore, if I define 'religious' by reference to what I have, then it is logically impossible for others to know what I mean by the word 'religious'. That means, according to this picture of human experience, my religion is essentially *private*.

On the *private* language model of meaning, the private linguist knows from his own experiences of feelings and moods what the corresponding names stand for. It is his inner experiences that make the words meaningful; for example, he knows what pain is only from his own case. According to Wittgenstein, it would then be possible that the experience that everyone calls 'pain' could be quite different. In his famous example of 'beetle in the box', he showed that it would be possible for everyone to have something different in each one's box. That means the object in the box has no place in the language-game at all, as long as others cannot verify it – "the box might even be empty."⁹ A radically

⁹"Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case! – Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. – But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language? – If

private language is, therefore, without content. Wittgenstein's attempt in the 'beetle in the box' argument was neither to deny nor to affirm existence of the 'beetle', but rather to show that we cannot construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation'. There are sensations, but they cannot be understood as *private* entities. "It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either!" (PI 304).

If we apply this example to the *private* religious person, the religious experience that he refers to may be different for different individuals; or there might be no experience at all. It would become a "mere ornament, not connected with the mechanism" (PI 270). What this shows is that the religious experience cannot play in this language-game at all as an objective entity. A believer's relation to the experience cannot be expressed in terms of 'object and designation'. If one sets himself to make sure his religion is a matter between himself and God only, he would lack any criteria other than his experience. The question is once again whether his experience could serve also as the only standard of his religion. Normally, a measure must be independent of what is measured and a description must be independent of what it is to be compared with if it is to be assessed as a correct or incorrect description. The problem is this: a religious experience cannot be measured by standards other than religious. At the same time an experience cannot be its own standard. It has to have connections with other experiences, religious as well as non-religious. It cannot stand alone logically. Our experiences, including our religious experiences, are objective. They are subjective in the sense that subjects have them and only in relation to the subjects they have a logical status; but they are objective because they are independent of the subject. For a *private* religious person there is no notion independent of the subject. How things are for him exhausts all reality.

A *private* religious person, therefore, will have no way to judge whether he is practising a religion or a superstition or something else. In fact, there is no judging here: "One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk

so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty. – No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant" (PI 293).

about ‘right’” (*PI* 258). Whatever *seems* to me religious *is* religious is not the way to talk about ‘religion’! The important distinction between *seems* and *is* is not operative here losing objectivity to a *private* religion. Besides, there is also the issue of normativity, namely, whatever be the case there is something that a believer *ought* to do. The distinction between *is* and *ought* ought to be safeguarded. The crucial philosophical issue is: Can there be ‘a religion which is a matter between the believer and God only’? I argue that a radically *private* religion is without content; even the believer cannot practise it; it cannot have objectivity and normativity and, therefore, no use; it is a mere fantasy! Positively, I argue that though religion is a matter between God and the believer, it is a joint venture of nature and nurture sustained by God.

3. Following a Religion

It is tempting to posit a gulf between religious belief and following a religion – to consider the former as something abstract and independent of the latter, which is concrete and contingent. Wittgenstein’s investigations into meaning and use, and rules and rule-following help us to clarify the nature of this apparent gap. Though there are differences between belief and practice they are not two entities – one conceptual and the other empirical – that are brought together externally. They are not two things that can be grasped independently of one another. Like the relation between a true proposition and the fact that verifies it or a desire and something that satisfies it (*WVC* 157), the relation between belief and practice is internal. To understand a belief is to recognise what acts are in agreement or in conflict with it, just as to understand a description is to understand what would be the case if it were true or false. There is no gap between them. There are obviously important differences between practices with belief and those without belief. Believers could rightly ask: ‘What greater difference could there be?’ (refer *PI* 304). There is also an important difference between what we do and what we ought to do in religious matters. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, I argue that ‘following a religion is a practice’ (refer *PI* 202). My aim is to show that the important elements of objectivity, regularity, and normativity that are interwoven in the concept of practice are operative in religious practices as well. Religions make sense only in the context of objective, regular, and normative practices.

First of all, following a religion is objective; there is a distinction between thinking that one is following a religion and actually following it. Objectivity safeguards the distinction between *seems/thinks* so and *is* so. Whatever *seems* religious to me *is* religious is not an acceptable position. Following a religion is something that a believer actually does, not merely something that seems so to the agent. It is only in the actual practice of a religion that a religion is understood and followed. The *private* religious person is confused to claim that religion is a matter between himself and God only in such a way that only he *knows* that he follows his religion and only *he* can follow *that* religion. The concept of an essentially private religion is incoherent because it is without content and no possible use. A *private* believer cannot keep the distinction between *thinking* that he is following a religion and he *is* actually following it. Without that distinction thinking that one was following a religion would be the same as following it (refer *PI* 202). The idea that following a religion is a practice secures this distinction. Practices provide the objective criteria for following a religion. A believer's sincere belief that he is following a religion, though necessary, is not sufficient to judge that he is actually following a religion.

It is often wrongly thought that what is essential to religion is carried out in the inner realms and any overt actions are mere symptoms of something deeper and mysterious. The external behaviour, according to this view, gets its religious value only because of the inner – intention, attention, devotion, etc. Without this inner factor, rituals are merely gestures and vocal prayer is only lip-service. The mental is what makes those gestures and word-use part of religious practice. Religion is something inner, according to this pervasive picture. Religion, however, is not restricted exclusively to the inner realms; it is something the believers *do* and what we do is connected with the rest of our lives. Though Wittgenstein's remark that "It is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (*OC* 204)¹⁰ is true about religion, it cannot be restricted to outward behaviour either. It is neither exclusively a spiritual nor a bodily activity. It is something that living human beings ought to *do* involving the whole of their lives. The first commandment, according to the Bible, is "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your

¹⁰*OC* = *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969.

soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”¹¹ This love is shown in various ways in the stream of life.

The crucial problem with the notion of a *private* religion is that whether the *private* religious person can confine his religion as a matter between himself and God *only*. A belief in God is expressed in the behaviour and a belief ought to make a difference in the life of the person. The religious faith informs and transforms the life of the believer. If it does not affect his way of life, it is impossible to judge his belief as religious. A belief is judged by the role it plays in the life of the believer. We may compare it with a person in love. A person in love normally expresses his love in various ways. It is possible, however, that someone might keep it a secret from his lover or from his friends. We would not understand him if he hides it both from his lover and others and avoids all expressions of love. A love without any possible expressions of love is incoherent. Being in love makes a person different. He might hide it for some time for particular reasons. A love that can only be known to the person himself, to his immediate private life is, like the *private* language, incomprehensible. A secret lover is possible logically and empirically; but a *private* lover is incoherent. There is no way to judge whether he loves or not, even for himself. The *private* lover will not be able to keep the important difference between thinking that he is in love and being in love. He needs something independent and objective. Parallels can be drawn between a lover and a believer. A *private* believer has no way to judge whether he is following a religion or not. He cannot keep the important distinction between *seems* and *is*. The notion of belief without corresponding practices, like the love without expressions, is incoherent. Both would lack objectivity.

Secondly, there is *regularity*, meaning, following a religion is a repeatable procedure. In order to describe the phenomenon of religion one has to describe a practice, not a one-time occurrence, whatever it might be (refer *RFM* 335).¹² Like other practices, it is repeatable over time (and place) and across persons; a human action that cannot be logically repeated across time (and place) is incoherent. What is possible for one person to repeat over time cannot be logically impossible for other human beings to

¹¹Mark 12:30.

¹²*RFM* = *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

do. As only one human being cannot follow one rule just once in a lifetime, it cannot be that only *one* human being follows a religion just *once* in his life. One action does not make a practice, religious or not. If I am not justified to judge on the rule-following character of a creature on Mars who looked at something like a signpost, and then walked parallel to it (*NL* 124, 187), I have no justification to judge on its religiosity by observing one action. It must behave in a certain regular way. I need to see the action being repeated a number of times and more importantly its connection with the rest of the Martian's life. Whether I would be able to judge the action of the Martian depends on how much I know about its various forms of life. An action, like a word, can be judged only in the stream of life.

Following a religion involves the mastery of many interrelated practices and a whole web of human behaviour. One cannot just do an action just once and claim that it is a religious act. One may participate in a religious ritual just once; but the person will not be following a religion by that act alone. The whole circumstance would make the point clear, especially what preceded and followed that act. What in a complicated surrounding, we call 'following a religion', we would not call it so if it stood in isolation; it relates to a way of living. Indeed, religious acts will have their significance only in the context of a regular human life. The bedrock of our practices, including following a religion, is the regularity of practice and agreement in judgements. This is something fundamental. Following a religion takes place in the sphere of actual behaviour of living human beings and its foundations are in the stream of our lives. This cannot be restricted to be a matter between God and soul alone. Religion relates to a regular way of living involving God, community, and the world. As in the other cases of practices, we need normative regularity, not just natural regularity. That is our third point, normativity.

Normativity, here, means that regularity is subject to standards of correctness. Following a religion is concerned with how we ought to live rather than stating how we live. The distinction between *is* and *ought* ought to be kept here; there is a correct way of following a religion. Religious practices are not just regularities of behaviour but regularities that have a normative force, ways believers ought to act. 'Following a religion is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way' (refer *PI* 206). It is manifested in a regularity that is normative which presupposes understanding and

judgement from the part of the religious believer. The judgement itself is possible only where an established pattern of behaviour is discernible. It is essential to have such standards of correctness to specify the scope and content of any religious practice. This does not rule out creativity, growth and development in religious belief and practices. As in other practices, we not only inhabit these patterns but also shape them as we go on responsibly and creatively. Believers are active agents living in the world in contact with God, in conversation and collaboration with other fellow human beings.

With regard to empirical and logical practices, the fact that most of us use similar concepts to represent the world means that our judging takes place within the context of an agreed framework such that disagreements are in principle resolvable. "People don't come to blows over it" (*PI* 240), as Wittgenstein remarked. Religious beliefs, however, do not make assertions about the world but propose fundamental ways of living; disagreements about them cannot be resolved by reference to empirical and grammatical facts. In this regard, religious claims have similarities with other value judgements in the fields of aesthetics, ethics, and politics. This does not mean that religious beliefs are arbitrary or that they all have the same status. What differentiates a religious claim from an expression of preference is the claim to general validity, the claim that it is not just one way of being human but the correct way of being human. As in the case of rule-following and linguistic use, normativity is crucial for a religious believer: "How does he know that *he is to make that movement?*" (*PI* 443). It is not the epistemological question of how does the religious believer *know* the matter that matters, but rather the metaphysical question what *makes* an action a correct or incorrect religious behaviour.

In making religious claims believers adopt personal attitudes to the world, community, and God. They are not making opinions that could be independently verified; rather they agree in their judgements about life. The bedrock of the judgements is these fundamental attitudes on the part of the individuals. We learn things by seeing similarities. That is our normal way of learning as Wittgenstein has shown in his example of 'game'. What distinguishes empirical judgements and value judgements is their personal dimension, meaning they are not accepted by all whereas the empirical judgements are accepted by the vast majority of us. Wittgenstein wrote perceptively:

And so instructing in a religious belief would have to be portraying, describing that system of reference & at the same time appealing to the conscience. And these together would have to result finally in the one under instruction himself, of his own accord, passionately taking up that system of reference. It would be as though someone were on the one hand to let me see my hopeless situation, on the other depict the rescue-anchor, until of my own accord, or at any rate not led by the hand by the *instructor*, I were to rush up & seize it (*CV* 73).

Neither do all people see the situation religiously nor do they rush up and seize the rescue-anchor nor do they go to the same rescue-anchor. In answer to the question ‘Why do you find these significant?’ believer typically narrates a personal story. Here giving examples and telling stories do not constitute an indirect means of explaining, in default of a better means. In the end, however, they can only reiterate their reaction and say that it is because they *are* significant. Understanding such a response is similar to understanding a piece of music, according to Wittgenstein.

Why must these bars be played just so? Why do I want to produce just this pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? I would like to say “Because I know what it’s all about”. But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. For explanation I can only translate the musical picture into a picture in another medium and let the one picture throw light on the other (*PG* 41).¹³

One has to understand the music, its characteristics by similarities of one musical note with another, and its relation to other aspects of human life. Finally, one has to listen to the music and understand it. It is possible that there would be human beings who would lack this musical ear. Similarly, after giving various examples to elucidate a religious picture what believers could say further as a final argument against someone who did not want to go that way, would be: “Why, don’t you see...!” – and that is no *argument* (refer *RFM* 50). That is not an argument not because it is something outside the realm of reason, but because it concerns the conditions for the possibility of the operations of reasons in following a religion.¹⁴ But one has to see religious connections in these aspects of life to follow a religion, the way we perceive beauty in aesthetic objects and

¹³*PG* = *Philosophical Grammar*, R. Rhees ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974.

¹⁴M. Luntley, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgement*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, 110.

music in what we hear. As a result of practice, we hear something musical, see something beautiful, and take something religious. What we understand by ‘music’, ‘beauty’, and ‘religion’ transcend what we describe in explaining ‘music’, ‘beauty’, and ‘religion’ and we speak about these phenomena more than what we can systematise. However, as Wittgenstein observes, “Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed,” what we take to be musical, beautiful, and religious.

If, according to Wittgenstein, “a poet too has constantly to ask himself; ‘but is what I am writing really true?’” (CV 40), a believer has to raise the same question: ‘Is what I am believing really true?’ A believer is committed to the truth of what he believes and he cannot be indifferent regarding the truth of what he believes. Though he seeks understanding of what he believes his basic attitude is that of ‘I believe in order that I may understand’ (*credo ut intellegam*). One does not typically come to religious belief through empirical observation and experimentation or philosophical investigations. They may strengthen or weaken his understanding and foster or purify his faith. Philosophical investigations clarify the concepts involved and their meanings as given by synoptic representations of the respective practices in religious forms of life. One’s belief and understanding of them are ultimately shown in one’s life.

A believer, like an artist, is committed to the truth of his practice. This does not mean, of course, that the truth of an aesthetic practice is similar to the truth of a religious practice. Though practices and beliefs are internally related and like other aspects of life, religion is also “characterised by what we can and cannot do” (Z 345),¹⁵ the ultimate source of normativity in religion is God. Religion, though lived within the contingencies of nature, transcends them. In religion, one has to make a leap of faith, involving a personal judgement and passionate commitment. Though a religious believer belongs to a community, he has to make it for himself. He has to make a commitment, a fundamental option in life that affects his whole life. A believer’s ultimate support in this judgement is God. Wittgenstein wrote, “So this can only come about if you no longer support yourself on this earth but suspend yourself from heaven. Then *everything* is different and it is ‘no wonder’ if you can then do what now you cannot do” (CV 39). For a believer the sanction and confirmation

¹⁵Z = *Zettel*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

from God is fundamental. God is the bedrock where all explanations come to rest in religion.

One important problem in understanding religious beliefs is the temptation either to treat them as claims to truth in the same sense as empirical and logical judgements or to dismiss them as incoherent and illusory. The grammatical differences between empirical, logical, and religious judgements show that truth and objectivity cannot mean the same in these categorically different areas of life. With respect to religious beliefs, the correspondence with the facts or with reality is different from that of empirical beliefs. Here, the claim to truth expresses the claim that one way of living or being human is uniquely correct and that the standards embodied in this fundamental attitude are to be recognized by everyone just because this is so. Those who cannot find this religious dimension of human life are like people who hear only noises but not meaningful words or see drawings but not beautiful pictures. They are like people with no sense of humour who can understand the explanation of a joke but cannot laugh. They are blind to certain important aspects of being human. This is not a matter of not having sufficient explanations. We have reached the bedrock of explanations. At the bedrock level, however, the religious beliefs do not stand alone; they are interwoven with other empirical claims and value judgements and held together by what lies around them. They are shown in their lives, in their attitudes to the world, fellow human beings, and God.

4. Religion: Similarities and Differences

Believers deny that there are several equally acceptable ways of living or that one is free to choose as one pleases; instead, they assert that one way of being human is fundamentally correct and ought to be followed by everyone. They typically persuade others to recognize the validity of their claims, but their considerations provide only a framework or a system of reference rather than an independent foundation. They can only persuade others with the need to make a fundamental option that cannot be made on the basis of scientific evidence or philosophical investigations. One can learn this knowledge not by taking a course in it, but through 'experience'. One can also teach others by giving from time to time the right tip. "This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. – What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments" (*PI* 227). The rules here do not form a theoretical system but believers follow them rightly as shown in

their practices and ultimately in their lives. The believers do not agree that all the frameworks have the same validity and it is up to the individuals to decide whether they consider the claim as ridiculous (perhaps dangerous) superstition or profound insight into the correct way of being human. Wittgenstein wrote: “One can freely compare a firmly rooted picture in us with a superstition; but one can also say that one must *always* come to a firm ground, be it now a picture or not so that a picture at the source of all thoughts must be respected and not be treated as superstition” (NL 138, 32b-33a. 20.5.1949).¹⁶ Religious pictures that are at the source of all thoughts and explanations are to be accepted at their face value; they do not stand for something else.

Whether individuals take the picture at the basis as superstition or as truth is a personal judgement, supported by nature and nurture and most importantly by God. Because of the nature of religious beliefs there is no such thing as bringing evidence to demonstrate their correctness or to prove their validity. Evidence may play a role in establishing the nature of the case at issue, but how one should judge the case cannot itself be deduced from any particular evidence. One has to make a judgement and a faith commitment. We make similar judgements in our learning experiences. The teacher can only prepare the ground and persuade the pupil. In explaining the concept of initiating the pupil there comes a point where words run out. “I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on” (PI 208). But the pupil himself has to see the connections and make the judgement. Wittgenstein has successfully shown that there are not sufficient and necessary conditions for calling something a ‘game’ is not an obstacle for calling a game correctly a ‘game’. One has to see similarities and connections – *this* is like *that*; this is something fundamental and lies at the bedrock of all explanations. This is part of our being human; human beings generally see the connections.

In learning about religion and coming to faith similar processes are in place and one has to see ‘This and *similar* things are following a religion’.

¹⁶“*Ein in uns festes Bild kann man freilich dem Aberglauben vergleichen, aber doch auch sagen, daß man immer auf irgendeinen festen Grund kommen muß, sei er nun ein Bild, oder nicht, und also sei ein Bild am Grunde alles Denkens zu respektieren und nicht als ein Aberglaube zu behandeln.*”

If there is an argument, “Its purpose is not to convince positively, or convert, but to remove erroneous notions and prejudices” (WL 32, 63).¹⁷ While there may be ‘proofs’ within a particular religious framework, that framework will itself not be founded; from a logical point of view, it is simply one possibility among others; one may take it as superstitious or true faith. Wittgenstein wrote: “If someone asks: How *could* the surroundings *force* the ethical in someone? – the answer is that he may indeed say, ‘There’s no such thing as must’, but at the same time under such circumstances such & such *will* be done” (NL 173, 17r. 30.3.1950).¹⁸ This is true about religious faith; one cannot force someone to follow a religion. One has to rush up and seize the rescue-anchor on one’s own accord and not led by the hand of the *instructor* (CV 73). This free response believers take as something that they ought to do. The point remains, though many reasons could be offered, that at some stage one has to make a fundamental, personal, and religious judgement. This could be the result of nurture in a religious environment, years of personal study, and search or may be due to a momentous religious experience.

Furthermore, I may be unable to specify the basis of my belief, and yet my belief is not without a basis; indeed, from a religious point of view it has the strongest basis possible. The believer “will treat this belief as extremely well-established, and in another way as not established at all” (LC 54).¹⁹ On the one hand, he may cling to it in the face of evidence which would shake any empirical belief, but on the other, he may recognize that his grounds for so doing are nothing like what we ordinarily call ‘evidence’. Here we don’t talk of probabilities and hypotheses – the game we play is entirely different. The belief forms the basis of our lives, the way in which we see the world. Far from implying that such a belief is arbitrary, Wittgenstein’s stress on bedrock allows us to understand the sense in which religious belief can have a basis, even if this basis cannot be fully articulated. From this perspective, someone who finds certain act religious but can give no theoretical reasons for his judgement is neither

¹⁷WL 32 = Wittgenstein’s *Lectures: Cambridge 1930-32* (From the Notes of John King and Desmond Lee), D. Lee ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.

¹⁸“*Fragt man: Wie könnte die Umgebung den Menschen, das Ethische in ihm zwingen? – so ist die Antwort, daß er zwar sagen mag ‘Kein Mensch muß müssen,’ aber doch unter solchen Umständen so & so handeln wird.*”

¹⁹LC = *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, C. Barrett ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966.

stupid nor irrational nor irresponsible. He reacts in a certain way, but not arbitrarily; what lies behind his reaction may be a lifetime of thought, reflection, and experience. It is, however, a personal judgement and passionate commitment and is shown in the objective, regular, and normative life of the believers.

Though these three elements, objectivity, regularity, and normativity are constitutive of religious practice, they do not make the sufficient and necessary conditions for following a religion. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, they are not elements in the practice but belong to its framework (*RFM* 323; *PI* 240). Our attitudes to the world, fellow human beings and God are fundamental. They are not mere opinions that can be proved right or wrong in further investigations. Attitudes come *before* opinions. They shape the character of the stream of religious life. There is a certain ‘indefiniteness’ and ‘variability’ with regard to human behaviour, including religious practices. As Wittgenstein observed with regard to judging the genuineness of expressions of feelings, it is most difficult here to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words (refer *PI* 227). This is not, however, ignorance, but a fact of life. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, the concept of following a religion is better understood as a family resemblance concept: ‘This and *similar* things are called following a religion’. Like other practices, the background against which we describe a religious practice, it “is the bustle of life. And our concept points to something within this bustle” (*RPP* II, 625).²⁰ It makes sense to talk of understanding and following a religion, only in the context of a stream of life in which a religion is objectively, regularly, and normatively practised.

5. “Like Our Life” (*OC* 559)

Wittgenstein could admit the possibility of a solitary individual like Robinson Crusoe following a religion – objectively, regularly, and normatively – in physical isolation. There are no philosophical problems about solitary or secret followers of a religion. Crusoe could continue to follow and perhaps also modify his religious practices according to the circumstances. An isolated person in a cave, an island or a desert could follow a religion. This is not, however, a *private* religion as it was only

²⁰*RPP* II = *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 2, G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman eds., Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

contingently private, not logically. Had somebody heard him and observed him, he could have learned this religion of the single person. For the beliefs are normally manifest in the person's behaviour. Of course, the observer might go wrong. From a logical point of view, what we insist on following a religion is a certain regularity of practices, which is observable by others and capable of judging such acts as following a religion. That is, "he must *behave* in a certain way" (NL 149, 22). A practice is a procedure that could be taught and learned, even if, in fact, only one person engages in it at a particular time. A person in physical isolation is not *ipso facto* disqualified from following a religion. It does not matter logically that he is not actually living in a community or that he cannot be instructed by others. We could not call an action 'religious', or a person 'religious', however, if we do not have any further knowledge about the action and the person. Crusoe's behaviour is religious only insofar as it could be so understood and followed by other human beings.

A person's sincere belief that he is following a religion is not sufficient, however, to judge that he is actually following it. His actions must be connected with the rest of his life, the stream of his life. What is insisted, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, is that a religious practice cannot be replaced by the appearance of a practice and that it should have resonance in the believer's life. As other human practices, it must be something objective and normative. The notion that one could practise something that no one else could be taught or master is incoherent. In the religious sphere, however, the ultimate source is God. God might teach a single person a practice, or God might enter into an exclusive relation with one person, so that some of his actions have a religious significance for himself whereas others fail to understand this significance. God's demand that Abraham should sacrifice his only son, Isaac, is an example. Ethically expressed such an act is a filicide; religiously expressed, it is a sacrifice. Abraham responded to the divine command supposedly addressed to himself alone and having a content – the killing of his own son. He made a leap of faith. Only for Abraham the act had the religious significance. His relationship to God was of a private nature in the sense that he remained silent. He did not confide in anyone since the paradoxical demand might not be understood even by his nearest. His action was due to his unique relationship to God. He trusted God rather than trying to make himself understood by others.

Others may or may not grasp the religious significance of the sacrifice of Isaac. If others can understand the religious significance, it is not 'private' in Wittgenstein's radical sense. In fact, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and people of different faiths find religious significance in Abraham's readiness to sacrifice even his son. Following Wittgenstein's discussions on rule-following and *private* language what we could point out is that Abraham, however, would not be able to restrict his religious practices just in his intention to sacrifice Isaac. The act gets its religious significance from his other characteristic behaviour, especially his religious behaviour. Without objective, regular, and normative practices, a single act will have no meaning, even for Abraham. What Wittgenstein remarked about words is true about deeds. He wrote: "The words stand in a stream. Only in a *life* they have sense. For the words have meaning only in the stream of life."²¹ It is also true that the religious practices, as other human practices, have meaning only in the stream of life. Abraham's act gets its sense only in its relation with other acts of his life, in the stream of his life. Once an act is connected with the rest of his life, it is not private in the special way the *private* religious person wants to set up his religion. The act becomes knowable and others can follow *that* religion. If others are logically excluded from understanding the act's religious significance, Abraham also cannot have a religious dimension of this act.

This does not mean, however, that following a religion is to participate in a way of living in which many people are engaged. Following a religion does not boil down into human habits and consensus. What is correct, in following a religion, cannot be defined as what it is customary to do. The common agreement in opinions, judgements, actions, and forms of life refers to the framework within which the concept of following a religion has intelligible employment, not to the explanation of what 'following a religion' means. It is also not part of the nature of religious beliefs that they are shared; individuals in physical isolation can follow a religion. Religion is not a human convention. "No one who is concerned with trying to know God and to know God's will, is concerned with human convention. He is concerned with the will of God."²²

²¹"Die Worte stehen in einem Fluß. Nur in einem *Leben* haben sie ihren Sinn. Denn die Wörter haben nur im Fluß des Lebens Bedeutung" (NL 137, 66a. 3.7.1948).

²²D. Z. Phillips, *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (assisted by M. von der Ruhr), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 56.

Believers are not merely imitators, aping what the rest of the community is doing. They are followers. They join in and go on faithfully and freely. Believers are living human beings with reason and will who are passionately committed to what they believe and practise. However, as we have seen, the notion of a practice that is by its very nature not shareable is incoherent. The notion of practice here is concerned with objectivity and the shareable nature of an action, rather than the multiplicity of believers. It need not be, in fact, a shared belief and practice but a shareable one. Even in this qualified reading, religion does not become a matter between a believer and God only. It is not a hocus-pocus that can be performed only by the soul (refer *PI* 454). It is an objective, regular and normative way of human living in the world sustained by God with the logical possibility of being with other believers. Whether this way of living is, in fact, in conversation and collaboration with fellow believers is an empirical question and whether it is sustained by God is not answerable empirically or philosophically. We have reached the bedrock in our philosophical investigations.

6. Conclusion

Following a religion, as we have seen, relates to a fundamental way of living. Religion and life are inseparable, for a believer; it shows the basic character and spirit of believers' living. Therefore, the life of a religious person is categorically different from that of a non-religious person. This is not an empirical difference; it is a difference in the attitude of the person. The whole world looks different to him and his attitude to the world is also significantly different. The world of the religious person is different from one who has no faith. He sees religious significance in the very existence of his life in the world. It is his religious point of view that gives him the ultimate meaning of life. For a believer, it is the way of making sense of his life.

Religious life is not merely a practice of certain techniques to develop certain dispositions, but practices to join in and to go on responsibly and creatively following a religion. Wittgenstein rightly noted: "If you want to stay within the religious sphere you must *struggle*" (*CV* 98). It is a spiritual combat to lead a fundamental way of living. For this personal struggle, a believer needs faith. He wrote:

So this can only be done if you no longer support yourself on this earth, but hang from heaven. Then *everything* is different and it is

‘no wonder’ if you can then do what you cannot do now. (It is obvious that someone who is suspended looks like someone who is standing, but the interplay of forces within him is nevertheless totally different & hence he can act quite differently than one who stands) (NL 120, 108c).²³

I cannot believe and practise a religion as long as I rest my whole weight on nature and nurture. I have to suspend myself from heaven; my ultimate support is from above. In religious circles, faith is often characterised as a grace from God;²⁴ I am supported by God in my struggle to lead a religious life. To believe, I need understanding, though the understanding is characterised by faith and love rather than evidence and logic. As in other aspects of our lives, both reason and passion are involved in making an ongoing commitment to this fundamental way of living, i.e., being a religious person. Religion is a fundamental human way of living in the world in relation to fellow human beings and God; it also shows who we are and how we ought to live. According to Wittgenstein, “... a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence, although it’s belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up this interpretation” (CV 73). This is to be seen as a fact of our natural history and a fundamental way of being human. ‘Natural’ does not mean that it is necessary or that it is biological; it means following a religion is a human form of life, a product of nature, nurture, and grace. It is not possible, however, for a living human being to follow a *private* religion because he cannot have objective and normative practices.

²³“Das kann also nur geschehen, wenn Du dich nicht mehr auf diese Erde stützst, sondern am Himmel hängst. Dann ist alles anders und es ist ‘kein Wunder’, wenn Du dann kannst, was Du jetzt nicht kannst. (Anzusehen ist freilich der Hängende wie der Stehende aber das Kräftespiel in ihm ist ja ein ganz anderes & er kann daher ganz anderes tun als der Stehende).”

²⁴“Es heißt – glaube ich –: ‘Glaubt daran, daß ihr nun ausgesöhnt seid, und sündigtet, hinfort nicht mehr’! – Aber es ist auch klar, daß dieser Glauben eine Gnade ist. Und, ich glaube, die Bedingung für ihn ist, daß wir unser äußerstes tun und sehen, daß es uns zu nichts führt, daß, soviel wir uns auch plagen, wir unversöhnt bleiben. Dann kommt die Versöhnung zu Recht” (MS 183, 220. 20.3.1937).